

HESSIANS: REVOLUTIONARIES IN SERVITUDE

By

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CHAPTER 1

To the workers at the Baron's Estate it was a world of shit. To the cows of Hesse-Cassel it was a world of eating, drinking and defecating. To Baron Johan Karl Fredrick Jungen von Edinger in the Chalet on top of the hill it was an economy of fertilizer. To the workers in the valley below the hill which was made to look like a mountain, it was a world of shit. But to Hans Muller, barely well off enough to have TWO names, the hope that it would be about something else emerged behind his tired, yet still optimistic eyes.

"Saint Stephen's Day," the rapidly aging, smoothed-faced twenty-something peasant said with eyes fixed on the sun as it edged its way up the backside of the mountains that delayed dawn in the morning and stole the magnificence of sunset at the end of the day. "Saint Stephen's Day as we are God's instruments in turning cow droppings into golden manifestations of His Goodness."

"We shovel shit so that the Barons and Barroness' in Berlin can have pretty flowers, get richer, and continue shitting on us," Albert Stein grumbled back. "We were both born to shit, and we will die in shit," he continued with a bitterness far in excess of his two decade-long 'life'.

"But we don't have to BE shit," Hans retorted as he shoveled another pile of manure onto the cart. He pushed it into neat piles with the rusted spade and then his hands, in keeping with the Bergermiester's new rule of keeping the piles compact, shipable and tidy. "If we work hard enough, we too can get to live on the top of the hill one day, God willing."

"Oh, yes, 'God' again," Albert slurred out of a mouth that cursed the bosses from a distance and smiled to them from up close. But not enough to be promoted from shit shoveller to hay bailer, or perhaps even the one who got to drive the cart into town, the highest position reachable for someone born to his station and situation. "God takes care of those who take care of nobody but themselves," he continued. He wanted to scream it, but if his whisper would be heard, it would surely result in another flogging on his back, or in more tender and reproductively valued places.

"Work sets you free," Hans asserted, trying to believe it himself on yet another day of futile labor that led only to more futility, trying to sculpt the square piles of manure into the most perfect statues he could see inside his tortured imagination and ever-evolving intellect. "There is mastery in servitude," he continued. "The greatest honor in the smallest of places...In our imaginations man can be as gods...And in

the noble tasks done in the lowliest of places we are God's instruments in creating the Kingdom of Heaven...and when Don Quixote slew the windmill in defense of an ungrateful whore, he really DID defeat the Devil and caused the Angel inside Dolcinea to emerge into an Eternal magnificence.”

“Maybe in those books that you read,” Albert laughed, loud enough to be heard by all the workers and, IF he was listening, God. “Or had read to you by your mother. That crazy witch who was---“

Albert's well intended muse, and sincerely meant warning was met with a pitchfork to his throat. This time, held by Hans rather than Foreman Richter.

Hans meant it this time, or so he thought he did. Yet Albert saw into Hans' Soul, once again. Hans was too moral, smart or cowardly to follow through with any of the threats he made to his only real friend in the world. Even when Albert insulted the woman who blessed Hans with birth, then cursed him with an intellect that he could not use in the world. Then wound up in an asylum for knowing too much herself.

“Keep your brilliance to yourself, if you have any smarts at all,” Albert warned with his firm yet patient stare as the shit-permeated odor of the air gave way to tension and the aroma of fearful human sweat from his longest living, and perhaps only, friend

“I can't...I know too much..and want to know more,” Hans related in the conversation they had so many, many times before, sometime with words, sometimes with gestures, sometimes with means of communication that seemed mystical and familiar. “I will not die a shit shoveller or as a piece of shit,” Hans continued with a downward glance, the salty taste of terror in his parched throat.

“You will, unless you learn to shit on others,” Albert's silent reply, with an arch in his back that showed off his superior musculature. “Or turn the shit shovel back on the pieces of shit.”

True to his word, Albert opened his mouth, sensing the need to deal with more practical situations. “Foreman Richter, Sir. We were practicing.”

“Practicing what?” the overseer who saw nothing except what the Baron told him to replied.

“Practicing our combat skills,” Albert smiled proudly, not caring if Foreman Richter saw that he neglected to shave his upper lip this week.

“For what purpose?” Richter’s double chin grew even more indentations, his overfed belly bursting over his belt. Said belt contained two loaded pistols that could fire only one shot each, yet it kept twenty workers half his age and twice his size obedient and, when not drunk, civil. “For what purpose do you practice these ‘arts of war’?” he continued, knocking the pitchfork from Hans’ clenched fists with the flick of his hand.

“Why, to fight for the Prince of Hesse-Cassel, Sir, when and as he calls us to service,” Albert’s reply. Albert demonstrated the imaginary ‘drill’ and Aryan skills of warfare with the pitchfork so easily taken from Hans’ sweat soaked palms. A swerving action against an invisible opponent which to the observer seemed very real. Particularly when Albert stabbed him in the chest, then head, then in a ‘gentlemanly’ way, carving up the invisible opponent’s organs of manhood. All the military moves named correctly, though horribly mispronounced.

Albert’s display impressed the twenty dirty poor men working on shit shoveling duty, whose stubble faces had more crap and dirt on them than hair.. It evoked the condescending eye roll from Richter, as he twirled his large mustache, allowed to be had by a man of his station. He knew that no one in the ‘shit brigade’ would ever have the balls or the brains, to actually join the Militia of Mercenaries being raised by the Prince of Hesse-Cassel to fight for King of England in fight to preserve freedom for his loyal subjects across the wide waters. Besides, the Baron’s permission was required, and for the moment, shit was the most valued commodity in the dirt poor province of Hesse-Cassel. But Albert’s skill and pinache did arouse the admiration of one person whose life was not born to shit, those eyes noting his display of courage, skill and bravado in low places from as high a place as one could get to at the ‘Shit Farm’. She was in ‘transit’ today, from one location that everyone in the Shit Brigade knew, to another they could only imagine as she walked to her carriage.

Maria von Edinger had at least five names between the first that reflected her beauty and the last one that indicated her position. She frequently watched the shit shovellers, presumably because she liked cows. But Albert and Hans knew differently

“She likes you,” Hans said to Albert, in the ‘work whisper’ voice they had gotten so accustomed to when they were allowed to return back to their (according to Calvinist

Richter) ‘Soul saving’ labors.

“Yes, but she loves you,” Albert replied to his less muscular, less-colorful and less confident friend.

No more was said, except of course in the private conversation between Maria’s longing eyes as she smiled at Hans, avoiding her father’s watchful stare as they got into their carriage. Only Hans and Maria knew about the private conversations they had when she got ‘lost’ riding on the estate, mind to mind, and heart to heart. Albert knew that each of the two lovers wanted, needed and deserved more. Maria was betrothed, most probably, to someone else. But perhaps that day would be postponed. Perhaps one day Hans would put down his books, take up the goblet of wine or beer which was allowed each worker AFTER labors were done, and get drunk. Lose himself in the elixor which the self-proclaimed-scholar said was the ‘drink with which the people on the top of the hill keep people on the bottom of the hill involved with mischief rather than revolution’. Perhaps he would indulge in the kind of mischief with Countessa Maria that would consummate their love, lust and vitality.

But in a world of shit on the bottom of the hill, and piss coming from the top, ‘possible’ was as good as one could get. It didn’t keep you Alive, but it kept you from dying.

CHAPTER 2

Maria tasted the strudel, allowing her tongue to wrap around the freshness of the apples, the delicate spices, the lightness of the crispy crust. “Yes, it is quite good,” she said to the servant at the Prince Fredrick’s Estate. The food server bowed with what seemed like gratitude. Maria sipped her hot cocoa, feeling the coldness in it, and her surroundings.

As usual, the Ladies and their daughters, sat in the parlor, quietly indulging themselves in talks about marriages, fashions and more vital matters of maintaining domestic tranquility with inuendo after inference. The men talked in the study about affairs that REALLY mattered, with loud voices that any women, who wanted to, could hear. The trick was to pretend to listen to a man’s wife with your eyes, and keep an open ear to what her husband was really talking about in the other room. A skill Maria’s mother, tragically, had learned all too late.

Into Maria’s open ear came the gruff voice of her father, the Baron, the louder ones of the Counts, and the loudest from Prince Fredrick. And, as usual, the louder the voice, the stupider the man from whom it came.

“So, Baron Edinger, you say that you have fifty workers on your estate?” one of the Counts recounted.

“Most of them not worth more than the shit they shovel,” another Baron mumbled, heralding in respectfully-ridiculing laughter from the congregation.

“But these peasants make me the richest fertilizer farm in Hesse-Cassel,” Baron von Edinger retorted. He continued with some figures and numbers that Maria couldn’t follow, nor did she really care about anyway, that backed up his point. Impressive ‘hmmms’ from the Counts. Envious snorts from the other Barons. And a question from the Prince.

“How many of them would be ready for service in General von Heister’s regiments?” he inquired.

“As many as you command, of course,” Baron von Edinger’s reply.

“That is not what I asked you,” the Prince asserted. “How many men?”

“GOOD men, Baron von Edinger” the Prince’s favorite Count added in a military

tone appended by clicking of his heels. “Sir.”

Maria remembered that the Prussians were the big boot clickers. A stupid gesture if you looked at it from the side. Like turning a man into a duck. But Maria also knew that stupidity flowed from high positions down to those in lower positions like water from the top of a mountain, water becoming mud when it hit the bottom. Cruelty passed down like that too, as evidenced by the scars on Maria’s mother’s face she hid so well with Parisian powder or Dutch liniment. Russian lace when she was having a ‘bad sunburn’. Thankfully, Maria never had to deal with a ‘sunburn face’ herself---not yet, anyway.

As for the men’s conversation inside, Maria’s father’s reference said it all. “Thirty military-convertible servants, Sir.”

“Slaves,” Maria noted, silently..

“Whose services you can reliably contribute to the Regiments we are raising?” the Prince inquired.

“With half of their salary going into my father’s pocket,” Maria thought to herself as she pretended to admire Countessa Klauss’ new dress. “And a quarter of that into mine, if I remain his favorite and only daughter,” she said to herself even more silently, and shamefully.

“What about Czarina Katherine in Russia?” another one of the Counts mentioned. “The Russians make good mercenaries. And they will do ANYthing for a loaf of bread.”

“Or a bottle of vodka,” another Count recounted.

From the men, laughter. But not from the Prince, or Baron Edinger.

“Catherine the Great was less than gracious to King George. And though he is King of England, he is a German. One of us, culturally and in all other ways that matter,” Prince Fredrick noted. “And he needs our help in stopping a rebellion in the American colonies.”

“Why are the Americans rebelling?” Baron von Holz inquired. His voice was new to the group. And by the indignant silence that followed his remark, this invitation to the Prince’s Chalet would probably be its last.

“Tell me how many men,” Prince Fredrick asked Edinger.

“I invite your recruiting officers to estate and you can see for yourself, Sir,” Baron von Edinger replied, clicking his heels.

The Prince did the rounds, inquiring about the numbers and qualities of able-bodied men and boys under the ‘protection’ of the other Barons, and Counts. By Maria’s calculation, if the quotas were to be met, it would ‘allow’ one in 20 inhabitants of Hesse-Cassel to be paid to experience the adventure of a lifetime in the New World. Perhaps a new opportunity for those who volunteered or were volunteered, but another fact...only one in five ‘adventurers’ to America came back home. And even fewer wrote letters back home about the way things REALLY were there.

CHAPTER 3

Foreman Richter brought the news to the Shit Platoon like it was a Christmas gift from Martin Luther AND the Pope. He made his announcement at suppertime, each man having been given two pieces of bacon with more meat than fat in them, and a quart of beer cold as a mountain stream and with more kick than any rum they were given at those special times when they made their quota of ‘tastefully packaged’ fertilizer. “For each man who volunteers to fight Prince Fredrick’s honor, an honorable enlistment bonus of ten Hand Gelders!”

“Thirty if you ‘enlist’ though anyone else,” Albert shot back, pretending to be drunk. Everyone else around him was already past any ability to understand anything, except his always and pathologically sober friend Hans, who was stupid enough to always know too much as well.

Richter’s gracious smile turned sour. That sour stare which always preceded taking something away from men who already had nothing, or was a prelude to another beating, which Albert grew to enjoy. Particularly when he refused to admit that the pain really hurt.

“The Prince, Baron and Burgermeister have administrative fees, and transportation costs, isn’t that correct, Herr Richter?” Hans interjected in yet another attempt to stay the forman’s fisthold on the whip in his hand.

“You are a smart man, Herr Muller,” Richter said to Hans.

Even the drunkest member of the Shit Brigade put down his jug of brew, taking notice of the proposition at hand. NO one called ANYone in the Shit Brigade ‘Herr’ ANYthing, except of course Herr Shit, Herr Piss, and Herr Dumpkaf. Half of them didn’t even know Hans’ Surname, and Hans himself hadn’t heard it given voice in months, even from Albert.

“Yes, you are a smart man, Herr...no Private, or perhaps in time, Corporal or perhaps even Seargent Muller,” Richter continued.

The sound of such titles aroused reactions from every manure-covered face, even Albert’s, recent shaved with many deep cuts in it after he dared to grow something to distinguish himself with hair on his upper lip that resembled a mustache. Yet, Hans remained distanced. Fear entered his already freezing bone rather than fired up pride in the imagined future which was being skillfully ‘offered’ men who were denied the

right of imagining anything by accidents of life or positions of birth.

“Come on, Hans,” Richter continued. “You are a God fearing man. Who is never drunk.”

“Or Alive in his belly,” Albert whispered, softly enough to not be heard by the ‘Gift Meister’ but intensely enough to be heard in every corner of Hans’ tortured, and still secret-loaded, Soul.

Richter limped off the wagon with his one and a half gimped legs. He unfurled what looked like a bedroll, revealing to all a blue military coat that glowed with a golden shine as it reflected the setting sun in the Western horizon. It was a perfect military fit, big at the shoulders, slender at the waist. Exactly out of proportion for Richter’s torso, but, as Hans noted, perfect for his own. “Try it on!” Richter suggested, then requested, then ordered.

An order was not to be disobeyed, but some had to be, at all costs. For the first time in his life, ‘mastery in servitude’ had to take a second seat to a higher objective, and a more primal fear. “No, thank you,” Hans said, head bowed, voice humble, hands shaking with terror. He turned his back on Richter, gave his rations of extra meat to Wilhelm, the most starved and starving member of the Shit Brigade, and picked up a shovel.

Hans started in on the next day’s quota of shit shoveling, piling more manure into the wagon than five men twice his size. Singing a Lutheran song of peace, devotion and obedience to the God that even Richter was ordered to pay lip service to. He avoided the devil’s temptations, yet one more time. He watched from the corner of his tearful eyes, hoping that he could still hide what was behind them.

Richter’s face fumed. His grip on the uniform loosened. It was relieved by a firmer grasp from a man who DID know what he wanted. “I’ll take that,” Albert said. The uniform fit like a glove on the rebellious shit shoveller. He knew that Richter had his quota to meet, and was well paid to recruit only the best men available. As soon as Albert put the coat on, his hole-ridden ‘shoes’ marched like an officer who took orders from no one but himself. “I’ll take that, too,” he said of the other ‘bedroll’, hoping it was a sword he could use to show off his ‘fencing’ skills or, if bold enough, give Richter the gelding between the legs that he deserved.

But, alas, it was a hat, tall like a Catholic Bishop’s, furry like a town whore’s ‘unmentionable’ areas. It seemed like a funny thing in Richter’s hands, ridiculous

when he put it on his head, proudly. But when Albert put it on his, invisible hip boots seemed to cover his feet. His walk became a strut, then a march, his every command accepted by his comrades, and enemies, in the Shit Brigade. “Attention, gentlemen!”

Those whose brains were drowned with rum-spiked beer snapped to attention. Those whose spirits were broken into piles of shit that smelled like flowers to their unused brains shuffled into formation. All except Hans, who kept shoveling. Aggressively holding onto his refusal to join in the ‘fight’.

Albert looked at Hans with that ‘last chance, my most trusted and secretive friend’ stare. This time, it was the last time. Hans knew the price of saying ‘no’, and could see the rest of his life in the cow droppings under his blistered feet.

“I need able bodied men!” Richter said. “Men who are---”

“---More man than any of us have been, up till now,” Albert interrupted. No one interrupted Richter without severe consequences, but this time, Richter saw himself in the mirror that the brown-soaked grass shone up at everyone else.

“Seargent Albert” marched up and down the line, pointing, picking choosing. Few seemed able and willing to do the kind of service that Albert knew was ahead of them. He had been in more bar fights, brawls, and jail cells than any of his Comrades combined. He had the talent and curse to see what was in a man’s past, and future, and know what kind of future he could handle. From the half-drunk, half-crippled, half-blind, and all-but-totally broken Shit Brigade, there were only three men who stood a chance of surviving the life of a soldier, or a fighter. ‘Seargent Albert’ sent them over to Richter, who offered them a piece of paper, a pen, and a finger telling them where to sign their ‘X’. One of them could even spell his first name, sort of.

“We need one more, Herr Stein,” Richter instructed Albert.

“You will have him tomorrow,” the cynical new Seargent said, looking hopefully at Hans, a man who now had abandoned all hope himself.

CHAPTER 4

Maria was an expert rider. She knew horses better than people, imagining them to be better than any creature walking on two legs. She also ‘trusted’ them to find their way into the woods and asked them to find the long way home. But tonight, she didn’t have to fear her Governess coming out to save her from the wolves, or her father arriving with the game warden to bring her back to the house because there were sightings of lions in the woods. She had never seen a lion, and neither did the game warden. The moon was full, and her father, inside the Mansion, was boasting about his daughter’s refinement to another Baron’s son, who was as old, socially-established, and ‘reliable’ as he himself was. In the deep, dark and cold woods outside the Mansion, Maria was doing something else.

“Wolfgang, let’s see what kind of grass is on the Western pasture,” Maria told the steed. The horse could only smell grass to eat. Maria could smell something over the Western horizon. Something she read in books, and because it was written so, believed was true in reality. After all, smart men wrote books, and intelligent men never lied to other men, or sincere women.

As Wolfgang trotted through the wildest grasses and least manicured woods on the estate, she thought about his high-stepping gait. He was an animal of selected breeding, as she was. Pedigrees chosen from the best pedigrees available. But still, she looked with envy at the wild dogs and foxes in the woods who found who they did as living mates, on their own terms, knowing only where they were, not where they had come from and where they were ‘bred’ to go. She imagined herself a wild animal, going where only Nature told her to go, or if Nature and God were still on speaking terms, that Creator Who she still really DID trust to make everything Right rather than Correct. But the time clock was ticking on the pocketwatch inside her coat, and she had been given her orders, and requests, accepting them both.

She noted the time and location. Eleven twenty in the middle of the Pines beneath the elm-covered cave. “This is the time, and this is the place,” she said to Wolfgang. She dismounted, allowing the overtrained and all but gelded ‘stallion’ to eat some wild grass out in the chilled air instead of the refined hay in his stall. He seemed to like it, yet again. Connecting to some roots in his past, wild roots and futures that were...open rather than upward. She looked at her watch again, and the note kept firm next to her bussom. The writing was correct, the moonlight reflecting the mis-spelt but boldly written message.

“Midnight at the Cemetery” it had read. The small cross amidst the wild brush was

still there, fresh flowers on it. And a voice from behind her that drove terror into her heart and soul.

“Maria,” Hans noted, in a defeated and fearful voice she didn’t recognize. He looked like a ghost, pale, white, lockes of his long hair held in his hand, cut and tied in what looked like a devotional gift that he was burying just beneath the larger cross which belonged to a close relative Hans never spoke about but always visited. “What are you doing here, Maria?” he inquired, eyes downward.

“You asked me to be here!” the Baronness-in-waiting screamed at Hans’ self-destructing mind, trying to reach his hurting heart. She presented him the note. “Your handwriting, Hans. In colorful grammar, with a lilt to the letters that is very tender.”

“And written by someone else.” Hans continued to dig more holes under the single cross. Four of them, with new crosses made of sticks added to them. One of them read “Captain Albert von Stein.”

“The one who wrote this note, summoning me here,” Maria speculated, noting from the tears about to flow out of Hans’ eyes that she was dead on.

“Albert’s real name, if anyone cares. And the rank he would like to be remembered as by...somebody.” Hans rose to his feet, keeping his distance from Maria, and himself. “I heard that in America, when you die fighting the White AND Red savages there, they eat your body. And most of them can barely put writing on a slab in English, even fewer in a language that Albert’s family will understand.”

Maria knew that Hans was Albert’s only real family. And that though they fought like Frenchmen and Prussians against each other constantly, none would be whole without the other. Hans was in one of his melancholy spells where the only way to get real answers was to ask irrelevant questions. “Who are the other four crosses for?” she inquired.

She tried to stroke his trembling hands but he pulled away, digging into the rocky dirt so hard that his fingers stained the ground red. The sight of red dirt in front of the crosses evolved yet another memory in the tortured genius of the ‘Shit Brigade’. He pulled back, clenching his fists in a cross over his heart. Maria kissed him on the cheek, unloosening the fingernails from his bleeding palms. She stroked his neck, opening his mouth and letting air come into his fear-frozen lungs. Then she laid her head on his shoulder, feeling his head gently fall on hers, feeling the thoughts inside

his brain coming into hers. Yes, this man was more intelligent than she ever imagined. He 'felt' wise, smart and in need of a New Life more than herself, or even her horse, Wolfgang.

"Who are they?" she asked Hans of the three un-named deceased on the smaller crosses.

"Two other members of the 'Shit Brigade' who have signed up today, who will find themselves in the kind of Hell that is worse than any crap they endured here," he related. "And another reserved for...some drunk built like a bear who will 'bravely' enlist to fight King George's war, or be stupid enough to be talked into enlisting in the Regiment by tomorrow."

Maria pondered the matter, with every corner of her brain and every recess of her heart. "I think I know who will be brave and smart enough to take advantage of this opportunity." Maria whipped Hans' potatoe knife out of his pocket and carved the name of the victim, and victor, into the cross. "Herr Hans Muller, Esq" it read in tasteful and bold Bavarian script.

"No," Hans mused. "I don't think so. I am not a 'Herr' and whatever those letters are at the end, I certainly don't think I can ever become a..."

"---Of course you can, and will!" Maria insisted. "You will be the smartest lawyer and disseminator of Truth in America. Or anywhere else you want to go."

"How am I going to do that?" Hans laughed.

"Because you are the smartest, and most well read, and kindest man I have ever known...on top of the hill, or in the Shit Valley below." Maria felt her eyes tearing. "And I will be with you, wherever you go."

"In spirit, you are always with me, Maria. And I with you." Hans said with eyes connected to his Innermost Soul, penetrating into Maria's trembling heart. It was the closest Hans came to saying those words forbidden to men's mouth be they Nobles or Peasant.

"Yes, I love you too," she stated in words that better suited the moment, and the agenda at hand for BOTH of them. She felt Hans body speak to her, felt his arm stop trembling as it embraces her shivering shoulder. But what was she afraid of? Some of it had to do with what she knew she had to say to Hans now. Some of it due to

things her mind never dared tell her heart, or issues that her heart was not ready to hear.

“Though our Souls always dwell in a realm of ideas, our bodies and minds have to live in the a world of facts”, she offered, as was custom in the philosophical discourses which bonded them, dissertations which were forbidden to them by her gender atop the flowered-covered hill, and his station in the manure-laiden put below.

“And such facts are?” Hans added.

“It is a cold night, Hans,” the Countessa noted in the rythm of intellect which became the language of heart between herself and the still-clandestine love of her life in front of her.

“With a clear sky, and brilliant stars, Maria.”

“Reachable from earth only from the tallest of trees. Only two of them.”

“Honor and Virtue?” Hans discovered, and offered.

“The Priesthood, or the military, my...love. The only way for anyone in the Shit Brigade, or the house on top of the hill, to get out of a life of crap. And you, Hans, are on very bad terms with God, even on a good day. Besides, you look horrible in black. And besides...”

Hans knew he was in for another one of Maria’s ‘take a dump or get off the outhouse pot’ speeches, but this time the discourse seemed very final. “My future is to be a Nun, or the husband of a man who loves money and power more than he could love or respect anyone else.”

“Your father can provide you with other options.”

“Yes, such as what happened to my mother,” she said. “And yours.”

Hans knew about Maria’s place of stature with her father, and her mother’s place to be degraded and subjected to the most abusive of deaths. He had to ask the next question. “Are you to be your father’s new wife, or mistress?”

Maria’s silence belied the answer. “Yes,” she said with silent affirmation. “Soon, if

something doesn't change very soon."

"I will not let that happen. That is why I will not leave this place, and you," Hans asserted.

"That is why you MUST leave, and go NOW!" Maria insisted.

"To join the Army?"

"Yes."

"An Army which kills people."

"Everyone kills people. Armies can save lives too."

"No...I can't,"...Hans muttered. "I...can't..." He rose, took the knife from Maria and proceeded to cut more hair off his head, to bury someone else prior to the time of their soul leaving the body.

"You mean you won't!"

"I can't!!!"

"Because you are scared to die!!!"

"NO, because I am afraid I would...would..."

Maria saw the warrior in Hans' eyes. A fighter more noble than any Nordic Kings she had been told about in her Aryan childhood. A man of fire, action and...fascination. But a man who NEEDED to be pushed off the edge of the cliff so he could discover that indeed he could, and must, fly.

"I will be leaving for other places," Maria said coldly and with finality. She mounted Wolfgang, being sure that Hans noted a new saddlebag already packed with the most portable wealth she could steal. Jewels, money and gold. "It is my hope that you make it possible for me to join you, as two Souls with soaring spirits can never become one while they are still crawling on the ground."

Maria wanted to give Hans a kiss goodbye, or a hug of encouragement. But preserving the Aryan spirit in her was hard enough. Weakness of spirit and laziness

of the mind were both contagious conditions, and it was all she could do to hold onto the thread of courage, and intelligence, inside her. Maybe Hans would follow, or maybe he would lead. The alternatives were...unthinkable.

CHAPTER 5

Military life was everything Hans read about in the books. Of course, they were the books written by people rather than soldiers, or generals. Bugle call just before dawn, 'breakfast' of something resembling peas and bacon at first light, fast-step marching drill for an hour, punishment for not drilling correctly thereafter, mostly for those who got 'straw foot' and 'hay foot' mixed up, or who couldn't make left and right move correctly and on time. Then drill with rifle butts and bayonets thereafter, followed by 'invasion' of the other side of the lake on a rocky boat while standing up at attention like a puppet, making perfect targets for the 'opponent' on the other side, hand to hand combat drill with the opposing side upon reaching the shore, assuming that you didn't fall into the water or throw up too much of your 'breakfast'. Then, 'lunch', shared with the other five men assigned to you, the rations entrusted to one man who inevitably found a way to make his share bigger than any of the others. Then, for a change of pace, more drill, followed by another man being made an example of with a flogging of some sort. Then more yelling about what would happen to deserters in America. Sergeant Schmitt gave voice to the threats, and promises. "Those who disobey orders, or who attempt to desert will be shot by us, hung by the British, or captured by savages who are even worse. But if you don't weaken, you will become strong, victorious and rich! Why look at what you have! Full belies! Shoes on your feet that match! Uniforms made of the finest material in Hesse-Cassel! And in those uniforms...money!"

Hans snuck his fingers into the pockets when he was dismissed from formation, and ordered into his group of six, with its own rules to it. As the five men around him cooled their throats with cold beer, he calculated what the pay advance would yield. Enough to buy a book, or maybe a few chapters in a really good one. Or part of a ring with which he could wed Maria, on his economic terms. He caught a glimpse of Albert, two 'stations' away. His face revealed what he considered the first evidence of his newly found freedom, and pride, but a primal need to have another one of their 'whisper' conversations that would be inaudible to the bosses, and their coworkers, adjusting their seating locations and ear lines appropriately.

"They take away our rights to eat, sleep and shit when we want to, or need to, Albert," Hans said. "And they take away our rights to spend our money on the things we WANT to spend them on."

"But they have GIVEN us the right to something we never had at the Shit Farm," Albert added, trying to turn the brown bread and rock-hard pork into something that could be swallowed. He treated himself to a view of himself in the reflection of the

tin cup in his ration kit. There was something just under his nose that he had envisioned for years but never saw in the flesh.

“Yes, that is a very good looking mustache, Seargent Stein,” Hans smiled back at his comrade who was still a private.

“Not as big, or good looking, as yours, Herr Muller,” Albert replied with a noble’s ‘bow’. “Maria will love it too,” he continued.

“How do you know?” Hans challenged.

“She is a woman, and women love our mustaches because it tickles their noses where we kiss them.”

“Yes, I am told so, Albert.”

“I know so, Hans. And I also know that when you kiss them in their private areas, they go into their own worlds of wonderment.”

The other privates laughed as Albert got up and introduced himself to the attack dummy, adjusting the clothing and anatomical parts underneath to convert it to a woman with full breasts, working his way down to the ‘bullseye’ which he located at the junction between the legs, conquering the fairer sex for her own good, and well being.

Hans smiled an ‘I’ve been there many times too’ to keep up appearances. He dared not reveal that his explorations with women were all conducted above the neck, and between the ears. And that he valued love over lust. Satisfaction over happiness. Respect over obedience. And restraint of the spirit rather than its uncontrolled passions. Thankfully, that night’s boasting around the campfire was ended quickly by another bugal call...off key, of course, but the notes clear enough in their meaning.

The next day provided a break in the boredom, but an introduction of another kind of terror. “Herr Shits!” Seargent Schmitt announced to the assembly of enlistees, enlisters and others. “You will now demonstrate your abilities, or inabilities in how to use a weapon specially made for this Regiment.”

“A shit catapult?” Albert whispered out of the side of his hair-covered lips to Hans.

Hans felt his lips move up, in a smile. A laugh he felt from the inside. Covered by a mustache bigger than even Schmitt's. By now, 'Herr Hans' ears had gone deaf with all the noise around him, his arms ready to fall out of the sockets due to exhaustion, and his feet screeching in pain with the third layer of blisters that he could feel growing bigger and bigger as Schmitt marched to the wagon, never walking or turning in curves but in straight lines. Probably laughable to animals, who never moved in straight lines or stopped and turned to the right or left with abrupt movements when changing direction. A joke to the trees whose branches were never at right angles to each other.

Schmitt opened the case on the wagon. A coffin, or so it looked as such. He inspected the contents, then nodded. Drummer boys, those identified as being young on the basis of their height, physique, or inability to grow hair on their upper lips, took the coffins from atop the wagon and laid them down on the ground. Three coffins in all.

"Herr Shits!" he barked out. "You will be issued one item from each coffin! And if any of you causes harm to me, or each other, I will personally see that you are hung by your testicles."

Schmitt wasn't kidding. While marching in formation and mock battle drills with bayonets, several wounds were inflicted on one's own 'comrades'. It was inevitable when someone missed a step or moved his bayoneted broomstick too slowly, or quickly. Sergeant Schmitt said that the cutting of flesh was 'good for training', but he was furious when they tore holes in uniforms. "If you make me look bad in front of the Captain, I will see that you look bad to EVERYONE with scars on your faces and deformities that NO one can hide!"

The sight of what was taken out of the coffins converted the terrified faces of the privates into smiles worthy of the most delighted officer. It drove Hans into terror, evoking a love-hate relationship he had kept hidden from his comrades, and even himself.

"It is called a rifle. Made in Switzerland." Schmitt announced. "Each of you has a rifle, powder and a bag of shot. Now, assuming you are not dumb enough to shoot yourself in the foot, you will all march to the West field where you will be instructed in how to use them correctly."

As Schmitt marched his troop to the field, the men seemed to forget the blisters on their feet or the aching in shoulders. Yes, they were holding on their shoulders

weapons. Real guns. Weapons that could make these peasants kings, in that they now held the power of life and death over another human being in their fingers. Just as a baron could flick his fingers and order the hanging of a peasant, now a peasant could, with the squeeze of his trigger finger, end the life of whoever was in his sights. Or, in wiser moments, the threat to pull the trigger could convince another man to listen to 'reason', the dominant truth behind said reason in the hands of the man whose finger was on the trigger.

Albert felt the empowerment more than the others. Something that disappointed Hans. "Relax," Albert said to Hans in the silent conversation they had on the way to the West field where the targets of Rebels and Indians were being set up. "I'll teach you everything you need to know about these thundersticks. Just watch me, and I will turn you into a god whose lightning will strike down any opponent that stands in our way, Hans!"

"Fuck off," Hans replied, in no uncertain terms. He knew that Albert would be confused. He hoped that the only friend he had left in the world, at least in the world where he was now, would not be offended.

At the West field stood three soldiers, at attention of course. No one in camp just stood. They were clad in green uniforms which blended in with the color of the woods and purple cuffs that revealed hands that bore no blisters. They seemed more like stage actors than soldiers. Schmitt halted the company, saluted the head 'Green men', then stepped aside. "We will now demonstrate the proper way in which one loads and fires a rifle", he announced with dispassionate concentration. "You will watch, then do the same."

The four Jagers loaded their weapons with a skill and action that seemed all too familiar to Hans. Just like the game wardens on the estate who shot pheasants for the Baron, or peasants who tried to shoot something for themselves, or who tried to escape the Estate for other opportunities. They aimed at the straw-man 'American' targets, took aim, and fired on the dummies. Direct hit at the apples placed in the right eye sockets, from 50 yards away! Then another description of the loading process, positioning with one knee on the ground, and the left 'eye' blown out of the skull. Then, for 'humor', another round, loaded, shot from a standing position, into largest apple, between the two legs.

Schmitt seemed to allow, and encourage, the men to smile in delight at the prospect of shooting off a man's testicles. Hans couldn't and wouldn't make himself do it. But he had to pretend. He was pretending to be a soldier so he could earn a salary, a

reputation and a life he could trade in for a position of power and influence in civilian life. Becoming Private, Sergeant, or maybe even Captain Muller was the only way to become Herr Muller, and to make Maria Fraulein Muller.

It looked easy to the eye, particularly to those who never had the power of thunder in their hands. However, the results were less than perfect. Most, even Hans, could load the Swiss made weapons, as it was all by procedure, the movements in 'straight lines', a sequence to everything. But when it came time to fire the first shot, it seemed like the regiment was free of the regimentation that marked military life from that first moment when the promise of freedom through military service was replaced with the jail bars that bracketed the recruits into a new 'special' society from which they could not escape. The men became themselves again when the order to fire came out at them.

"You dumpkoffs!" Schmitt screamed out at the company as the effects of such 'liberation' were evidenced. Half of the troops dropped their rifles. Most of the others had sore shoulders, having experienced recoil of rifle fire for the first time. But there was something else which offended Schmitt even more than rifles in the dirt, soldiers on their asses or birds shot out of trees above. "None of you kept your eyes open!" he barked. "None of you worthless cowards, except one."

Schmitt walked directly in front of Hans. "You, Private Muller. You kept your eyes open."

"Yes, sir. I suppose I did," Hans related, modest beyond a fault.

"And you stood your ground," Schmitt barked again.

"I had good footing?" Hans confessed apologetically.

"And you hit your target," Schmitt said, quietly, and with a respectful tone no one in the regiment had heard since the first 'welcome' speech into the brigade.

"I suppose...I did," Hans said. He looked at the target. A hit in the torso, lower left quadrant, near what would be the 'American Rebel Savage's' hip.

"I suppose that you can hit the target even more effectively, Private Muller," Schmitt pointed to the heart, the location where the apple was placed.

"I don't suppose I could, Sir," Hans said, holding back his secret. Holding back the

memories of that night when his frustration gave way to rage. Holding back the moment of ill fate when the training he had at the hands of his grandfather in the Black Forest gave way to unleashing something on another relative that was necessary, but which could not be taken back. “No, Sir. I don’t suppose I could do better. I just had a lucky shot.”

Hans offered Schmitt the rifle back. Hans knew that if it was not accepted, it would mean a certain beating. Or maybe he himself would be placed on the trees in the field to be target practice. Either way, Hans felt he had to be punished for his sin, and sins. Schmitt seemed angered at first, then confused. Then, the head Jager conferred with him.

Hans spotted Albert’s stare. “You asshole AND idiot, Herr Hans!” he screamed out through his eyes. “You enjoy pain that much! You work against yourself and US? You insult a system which you need to become part of!!! You are a coward, and a....”

Before Albert could finish his ‘description’, or figure out what Hans was really trying to do, or undo, Schmitt gave Hans a loaded rifle. “One shot. You hit that heart on that scarecrow, or...”

“Or what, Sir?” Hans asked.

“Good things will happen for you if you succeed, bad things will happen to those you care about if you fail.”

“Why?” Hans inquired. Such was the only word disallowed a soldier of any rank. A word that Schmitt used in his youth, and wished he could use in his old age, and aging prospects.

“Why?” Schmitt said, admiring the youth in ‘private’. He turned around, addressing the company with renewed threats in his tenor. “Because in war, men must become great for good things to happen to them, and to prevent bad things to happen to those who a man cares about. His brothers, comrades, sisters, friends, dog, women, mistress, whore, lover or...”

Before Schmitt got to whatever category Maria was, Hans backed up twenty yards, then turned around in a curve-like jolt and shot the target. Straight into the heart. Eyes open. Seeing clearly the shot. Seeing clearly the approving nod from Schmitt. Seeing the congratulatory look in Albert’s eyes. Seeing the head Jager planning his

future. An upward mobility which Hans had hoped for, and feared, ever since Maria sent him off to make something of his life, so that she could have one with him.

CHAPTER 6

Everything in camp was scheduled. The drills, the pain, the long periods of boredom, the brief periods of terror, and the justice for activities which were basic survival skills in the world each soldier hoped and prayed he would return to after the war. Albert watched today's example of 'inappropriate behavior' march to the platform. It was Johan Utrecht, a somewhat ugly man in his late twenties most probably with a large nose that stuck out in formation. Fat wrists, skinny fingers, thighs bigger than a draft horse, a penis most probably smaller than a tom cat by the way his uniform sagged around his crotch. Indeed, everything about Utrecht was a violation.

"What is he being punished for this time, Sir?" Albert asked his new instructor, the deafening drum roll making his ears hurt more than any artillery drill.

"We will see, soon enough," Corporal Muller said. "And stop calling me Sir!" Hans insisted.

"If you say so, Sir." Albert replied. "But you were promoted. First put into the Jagers. Then made a Corporal in the Rifleman division."

"Not by choice. I asked why I was promoted again and all they told me was 'marksmanship'. And my aim was no better when I was a private than when I was a..."

Albert snuck a stare at his Hans' insignia. A strange looking mark of distinction that shone in the sunlight. "You must have friends in high places, Corporal Muller" Albert said, looking upward into the Eastern sky. He noted the fear in his comrade's tight lips. "You want to remain an anonymous private, Hans?"

"I wish to remain anonymous, Infantryman Albert Steiner von Dusseldorf," Hans shot back. Again, something in his past he would not share. Hans was the only man who knew the roots of von Dusseldorf. The real name Albert shared only with Hans. Maybe he shouldn't have revealed that aspect of his past to anyone. But, for better or worse, Albert was most concerned about Hans' mixed agenda to be anonymous. As a man who needed to define his future on the basis of his past, Hans would be very bad at being anonymous.

"Maria would never let you be anonymous," Albert offered. "Perhaps it is her good luck that is rubbing off on you."

“Or someone telling the Captain of my Regiment that I am being written to by a Baroness?” Hans speculated.

Albert chuckled. “You will never make anything of yourself by making assertions which are questions.” He sighed. “Maria writes to me, too.”

“About what?”

“You.” Albert’s explanation was mournful, and kind. He hoped that Corporal Hans would not press him for answers to questions he was not ready to ask, or handle. He thanked whatever Diety seemed to be blessing Hans and cursing him that the call to Earthly justice was of more immediate importance.

The company was ordered to full attention when the drums stopped beating. Private Utrecht stood on the wooden platform in front of the entire Regiment. His mis-shapen face was now pale. His breath stuck in his throat. He had been flogged twice before. First offense was for stealing some pleasure from a village whore who sneaked into camp, and not paying her the appropriate fee. Second offense for stealing a loaf of bread from the enlisted man’s ration wagon, the dysentery from its ingestion being far more painful than the laying of whip on flesh. But now, it was about something more ‘military’.

“There are three things which God is offended by. Dishonor to one’s Comrades. Disgrace to one’s family and the Fatherland. And disregard to one’s duty,” a new Officer announced. A uniformed minister, by the looks of him. A representative of the Prince of Peace employed by an Institution of War. It seemed an acceptable contradiction to Albert. He went on as drill instructor Sergeant Schmitt ordered three hooded men to tie the rope, in neat and tidy manner, inspecting the work himself. By their shivering hands, it seemed that the hangmen themselves feared death at the hands of the noose if the ties were not regulation tight, taut and deadly.

Albert could see guilt and accusation in the faces of at least a third of the men around him, even ‘Corporal Hans’, their new drill instructor in the art and science of musketry. Most of these men loved their families, believed in some kind of Goodness they called ‘God’ and would most probably lay down their lives to save one of their Comrades once the REAL bullets started flying through the air in America. But when confronted with the kind of justice that would punish the innocent for not turning in the guilty, said guilt defined by those who were above the law themselves...this was

another matter.

Johan Utrecht was found guilty of desertion, but where did the real guilt lie? Was it in his fellow Hesse-Cassel Shit-shovelers who were around the campfire with him when he got the letter from his wife? Was it his wife, who wrote to him about the feelings she REALLY had for Utrecht's brother at home, and her anger at Johan for leaving her and two now sick children at home to fend for themselves while he was 'experiencing the glory' of being a soldier? Was it the sentry who saw the opportunity for secret 'bonus pay' for turning Johan in to Seargent Schmitt? Or was it Albert himself, picking him out of his own 'brigade' back when they were part of the Shit Brigade at Baron von Edinger's estate?

"The charge is desertion," the Chaplain Captain announced. "But the sin is..." Something in the Chaplain choked up. Yes, he was a man of duty, but still a man. To hang one's own in the service of God still to him seemed very contradictory. He took in a deep breath, opened his Bible, and read, in German, a passage dealing with forgiveness of sins by God if one confesses to the Lord all of one's sins now. The promise that if you say at the time of your passing, "into Your hands, Lord, I commend my Spirit," your last breath on earth will be a prelude to Eternity in Paradise.

"A good way to die," Albert speculated, silently, to himself only. Not even 'consulting' the sometimes God fearing and sometimes God loving Hans on the matter. "You know it's coming. You know that the agony of life here is gone. Nothing to lose. Everything to gain." Having escaped the gallows on more than one occasion himself, Albert contemplated his final turn of bad luck or being turned in by someone concerned with 'justice for the Fatherland and Posterity'. "When it is MY time, I should...no I must...no I WILL..." Albert ran the scene in his head, his accusers in front of him. A hangman with sweat on his hands or money in his pocket behind him, and perhaps, maybe the appearance of that 'Omnipotent Presence' appearing finally in a way that He, or It could be seen.

But before all of that transpired, Johan screamed out a more primal and basic utterance. "Mother! Please, Mother!" he screeched out as the noose was pulled around his neck. When his feet were knocked out from under him he flailed around like a decapitated chicken. Appropriately, his trousers gave way to a stream of urine that stank of fear and regret. He took a few more breaths. Confusion overtook his face. As if he was seeing everything he did, or failed to do.

Seargent Schmitt assigned one in ten men as part of the burial detail. Elevated rank

in the elite Jager Company excluded Hans. Luck, or lack of it, excluded Albert. It would be determined sometime in the future which was the case.

CHAPTER 7

The journey from Training Camp represented the second rite of passage. A March overland to the transport boats in Holland through places few of the recruits had ever seen, or thought they ever would see. Accompanied by cheers of girls in the villages en route along with the envious stares of young boys and old men. Good food offered in their Native language by so many ‘foreigners’. Though Hans had read about the world outside of Hesse-Cassel and even traveled as far as Bayrueth when he was twelve, he had never seen the world drawn on maps and described with regard to its inner anatomy in literature.

Hans now found himself elevated to Seargent, presumably because of the ‘accident’ with the runaway horse that forced him to display his ability to ride such beasts. A skill he learned in private with a woman he never spoke about, reading her letters in private. But only the officers got to ride horses on the march to the riverboats. And leading so many men! By Hans’ count, nearly nine thousand men, from six different German ‘States’, as some books now called them. And most of those number from Hesse-Cassel.

In every village and town, Hans looked for Maria’s face amidst the crowd of Frauleins desiring a mate, match or magic moment a woman could secretly remember the rest of her life. A “Hessian” soldier, as all the Germans were now being called, was a good catch for a woman, so he was told. A Frau or Fraulein could boast about her husband’s heroism and exploits overseas to her family and friends. She could collect on his death, though most women seemed to mourn more than celebrate their husband’s departures. With each step further West through the celebratory Germans were now somehow united in this military endeavor which bonded them by language, yearnings for the Fatherland settled into nervous, boastful and well-fed bellies of everyone. The Fatherland with so many people! Speakers of a single language, bonded by a single culture, separated politically by Princes and Kings on plots of land which now seemed so much smaller than they ever had before!

Hans yearned to see Maria’s face amidst those of the peasant women lining the streets, or those who chose to view the world from windows above them. “She’ll be at the next village,” Albert kept saying after each day’s march. Hans envied Albert’s ability to find his Soulmate in every woman he met, or who would meet him on his own turf. But, as Hans remembered from the readings and philosophical discourses with Maria in the bush when she was ‘lost’ with Wolfgang, “pain and yearning are diamonds wrapped in rosethorne baskets.”

By the time the riverboats at the shores of the Mainz and Rhine were reached, there was talk about another promotion from the officers, stern silences of indignation from those of Hans' current rank. For what, Hans didn't seem to know, or care anymore. Perhaps he was being considered for another promotion because of his 'administrative skills' in keeping recruits from getting too drunk, or teaching them to shoot their rifles so that the shot ends up in the enemy rather than themselves, or their fellow Germans. Or maybe for using the kind of words in conversation that only those who read books actually used.

Burt there were other matters to be dealt with now. Wet ones. The ocean in front of the Hesse-Cassel, Bayreuth, and other four Hessian Regiments at Bremer was technically the North Sea. But to those who had spent their lives in land-locked Principalities it seemed enormous. Even Albert was stunned by seeing the ocean for the first time, the destination a land somewhere over the horizon. But, thankfully, it would be an easy few weeks coming up. No more having to put one blistered foot in front of the other in order to get where you are going. Someone else put up a sail, another person moved a rudder, and you were on your way. King Neptune served YOU, along with sailors whose job it was to get you from Holland to a Westward destination safely and soundly.

"It is a marvelous view of Infinity," Hans commented to Albert as they both looked Westward on the, thus far, smooth waters that merged into infinity.

"It's a view of nothing," Albert offered with a mouthful of sour grapes. "But if you say it is a view of a marvelous Infinity, Sir---"

"---Albert! Please. These promotions were NOT my idea!"

"Yes," Albert replied, ominously. "I know."

With that, Albert was called down to the 'galley' below to join the other privates in a meal of something he had never heard of. The order went out to go to the starboard side of the boat to obtain blankets and other provisions en route. Better provisions than any of the sailors would ever hope to have. Fresh tunics and leggings. Hand-carved powder horns. Bayonets and knives that shone brightly in the Springtime sunlight. Hans was confused by the sailor's jargon and abruptly-evolving smiles of superiority towards those they were paid to serve. Before Hans could figure out the difference between port, starboard, keel and jib, the clear blue sky gave way to another mood, and tone, which translated onto the waters

below.

The face of the sea seemed to acquire deep wrinkles to it. “Waves” as they seemed to move toward the ship, which bowed to the ocean’s whims and flows. Then, the sound of Sergeant Schmitt spilling his Monday bean and bacon soup, along with the extra large helping of Tuesday beef pudding he had ‘sample tasted’ over the side of the boat. The disorder knew no distinction in rank. Aristocrat Leutenants and shit-shoveller privates both shared in the ‘baptism of barf’, as the sailors referred to it.

Hans didn’t know why he was spared the ‘landlubber’s’ disease. All he knew was that Plymouth, England was only two days away. And America, beyond that point. He had other affairs to think about now. Such as the welfare of the men under him, and the two 300 member Regiment of Regular Infantry who were to be looked after by the company of 20 Reconnaissance Jagers. Such as trying to keep Albert’s self-respect alive, and his body from getting killed. And trying to figure out how to get the knowledge and wisdom of his new rank, and avoid everyone under and over him from finding out who he REALLY was.

CHAPTER 8

It seemed another divine ‘accident’ that the ship carrying Hans and Albert needed to pull in for repairs in Plymouth, England and that someone mis-calculated the amount of supplies needed by the other ships. Another that Hans and Albert were ordered to go ashore to look after the needs of the Hessians they ‘knew so well, in matters internal and external’, according to a source the British commander didn’t reveal. It took only two hours to go to the appropriate shops with their English escorts to order the supplies. But it suited those escorts to let their Commanders think it would take a full day to gather all of those supplies and distribute them appropriately to the Hessians still confined to the ships or the two blocks closest to the docks. Such left Hans and Albert with 22 hours of non-committed time, something which they were not used to, affording them both the opportunity to observe their Allies on their own home turf. The British officers and supply Sergeants seemed gruff in their manners, and language. Their faces looked inferior to their stations, having no hair on their upper lips. And the higher the rank, the more powder seemed to be on their wigs.

“These British must get all the hair for those wigs by shaving off their mustaches,” Albert mused at the archway of a crowded tavern filled with Redcoats.

“Or from them hairy asses,” Hans added with a belly laugh he hadn’t experienced since Foreman Richter tripped on his own whip back at the Shit Farm and fell face first into a mound of fresh cow apples. “Which explains why they have such constipated looks on their faces.”

“Which look like their asses when they sip their tea ‘like prim and proper gentlemen’”. Albert acted out the part of the imperfectly perfect English gentleman to a tea. Hans couldn’t stop himself from laughing out loud, then noticed something around him on the cobblestone streets. The stares from gentlemen, ladies and commoners, and even those of the ‘uncommon’ sexual persuasion. But from the children, a chuckle. Particularly those who had not learned upper level language skills of English.

The street which had been crowded now seemed vacant, the crowds of people hindering the German visitors’ progress now cleared, as if to say ‘move along to somewhere else’, in any language. But there was one language Albert did understand. From a woman whose face looked like your mother, friend, mistress, goddess and, if you grew up in a place of limited breeding potential, first cousin.

Albert stuck out his chest and twirled his mustache, nodding 'yes' back to her with the strength of a Prussian god and the mischief of a Bavarian Prince. The woman unbuttoned her blouse just enough to show her wares, and nodded her head. Another of her kind emerged, her brown eyes and black hair perfectly complimenting the blonde, blue-eyed features of her older 'sister'.

"How much?" Albert asked.

"More than you can afford," Hans looked at his new pocketwatch, another transaction that was part of the 'arrangements' between the British Officers who supplied the weapons for King George's War in America and the German mercenaries who were supposed to fight it for them. "And if you AND I don't back to the ship by---"

"---Hey, you piece of shit! You are worthless scum! I want to steal all your money and turn you out to the dogs!!!" Albert yelled out to the English women with a warm, inviting smile in his Native tongue.

Hans prepared to be beat up by every upstanding man within hearing range. But all the German comment evoked was smiles from the 'ladies'. Each of them caressed their breasts, saying 'yes' with erotic movements of their mouth and tongue. One pointed to Hans.

"Nein," Hans backed away, pointing to his wedding finger. "I am..."

"Engaged to himself!" Albert interjected. "But I, my ladies who are not worthy of dining with swine," he continued with his re-discovered 'charm'.

The ladies 'conferred', looked around to check for local constables, then beckoned Prince Albert to follow them. Hans breathed a sigh of relief, then reached into his pocket.

"So you DO have a hard-on?" Albert inquired.

"No, a soft head," Hans countered, handing his friend two coins.

Albert refused. "No, I cannot take it, First Lieutenant Muller," referring with a strange kind of bitterness at yet another promotion for the man whose only skill at war was with battling himself.

“Please. It’s officer’s pay, Albert.”

“Which I will not need, thank you,” Albert said with a courtly bow. “You see, those women who would normally service me, will now please me.” The women stomped their feet like schoolgirls who were promised a box full of chocolates then offered it slower than they could chew or taste it. Prince Albert acted more like a king. His ‘subjects’ opened up more buttons on their blouse, their breathing indicating that they were now the ones who needed to be pleased most. “Act like an asshole, get treated like a Saint,” Albert concluded as he clicked his heels for the ladies, then drew rifle up like it was a sabre, studding across the street like a rooster into a henhouse full of chickens who hadn’t been laid in years.

Hans celebrated Albert’s good luck, and ability to be genuinely happy. But he could share it with nobody, even in ‘discourse’. As a man who defined himself with words he was lost. All around him, a strange tongue, with meanings he could barely understand. And feelings of which he was mistrustful, fearful or envious. Never before had he been amongst people who didn’t speak his own language. And to make matters worse, he was lost in another way. How to get back to the ship! He couldn’t even say ‘ship’, and even if that were understood, the directions there would be as incomprehensible as the Ancient Greek or Egyptian. By the measurement of his environment, Hans was the least intelligent creature standing, or maybe even crawling. Even the rats could talk to each other in some kind of language.

When all seemed lost, Hans spotted a building which restored his faith in something valid. And it turned out, another ‘accident’ which was working in his favor. He walked towards the building, though to everyone around him it appear to be a military strut. Feared by most, respected by a few, by their stares and tone of their voices heard behind him. But once inside the building, all would be and was fine. He felt connected to the Core of Creation, for the first time in decades.

“Yes, I am back,” he said to the books around him. Stacks of them. The kind of place that his mother talked about. The kind of palace which would never built by any Prince or Baron in Hesse-Cassel, at least not for anyone except other Princes or Barons.

Hans could make out where he was by some of the letters. “Library,” he sounded out in English, attempting to give voice to the language just recently heard by his now recovered ears. He perused the books, lamenting that his Protestant upbringing discouraged any language of Latin, or anything other than the German which Martin

Luther spoke and used to translate the Latin Bible for commoners who would become Lutherans. Maybe there would be one of these books, other than the Bible, that he could open up and understand. And indeed, there was. “Critique of Pure Reason” by Emanuel Kant, gathering dust because it was in the original German.

Hans propped himself at the table like Prometheus after having been freed from his fate of eternal starvation at the hand of crows by Hercules attaining victory over the Cyclops in the Aegean. His mind absorbed the phrases and postulates from Kant like a sun-dried sponge soaking up water from a fresh rain. The intricacies of the Categorical Imperative, a code beyond religion that defined man’s relationship to God in terms that pleased the Faith fueled Soul and the Logic requiring Mind. He found himself uttering the words and concepts in German, hearing the retorts and challenges in his head. The voices of his mother, who read and shared with him Spinoza, Kant, Socrates, Plato and Cervantes like the other mothers in the village shared tales about Mother Goose, Saint Nicholas and the Catholic Saints who seemed to be worshipped more than God Himself, or Itself. Happy and joyous times which turned Hans into the kind of man who could never enjoy simple joy, but required something higher, bigger and deeper. Then, a voice that brought high, big and deep into the ‘real’ world, the only realm in which Hans felt displaced.

“Some say that Jesus was the Savior of mankind, some that Buddha was, some Mohammed, some say that all of the above were, and all of them are right,” she said.

“And if you are Hindu?” Hans challenged the woman, with a warm and relieved smile.

“Then you are God’s favorite challenger, and my favorite shit disturber,” Maria said. She kissed him on the cheek and sat down next to him. “And you look quite distinguished.”

“With my new mustache?” Hans asked. He couldn’t believe his eyes. Finally, Maria was here. Her hair styled like an English woman, her manner of dress more in keeping with a Highlander lass than a baroness. But on the inside, she was still the best product German breeding, intellect and tenacity could produce. And she was alive. And unbeaten. And by the look of her belly, not pregnant with her father’s child or starving because she wouldn’t be the kind of daughter that he commanded. “I grew this catipillar on my upper lip...”

“...specially for me, I know,” the daughter of Hans’ former ‘owner’ said with a tone which was all her own. She caressed his mustache. It felt good. Sensual. He could

feel the warmth and fire in her fingers. Another ‘accident’ on the road from Shit Valley to God, or Emmanuel Kant, could only say where.

“I see you have been promoted,” she continued, keeping her passions in place as the other patrons of the library ‘shhh’ed’ the re-united couple into tender whispers.

“Yes,” Hans noted indication of his newest rank, through what seemed like fresh eyes. “A series of accidents. Accidently having learned to shoot muskets when I was twelve made me accidently the best marksman in the Brigade.”

“Or maybe by no accident, ‘Hawkeye Muller’?”

“Than my ‘way with the men’ earned me another promotion, on the day wanted to kill EVERYone in my command and over it.”

“The humanistic paradox,” Maria said, quoting another one of the books the two of them had written between them based on those written for them. “He who hates people most has the capability to serve humanity most as well.”

“Then the incident with the horse in camp. A half-gelded stallion who got out of its harness when I ‘happened’ to be next to it. Then me finding myself on top of the horse as it was just about to attack a Captain and his favorite ‘niece’,” Hans related.

“The will of God,” Maria noted. “I heard that you spoke to that horse as you did to Wolfgang.”

“Which you rehearsed me in so many times,” Hans related in a cold sweat. “As a prelude to what would be God’s Will?”

“The will of the Human Soul,” she smiled.

Hans leaned back, allowing himself to feel accomplished. “I was able to ride that horse well enough to prevent him from trampling on a herd of infantrymen and officers on trench maneuvers after it nearly killed the Captain. Then I was able to ride him into position and lead a ‘charge’ against the artillery battery who was firing real shells against us.”

“The combined will of horse and rider.”

“Whose will I learned when you taught me to ride Wolfgang when you said you lost

control of him on that windy night two nights after Christmas.” Hans flashed on as another ‘accident’ which was too logical to trust. “Which, so you said, turned me into the best rider on the Estate, or the District, so it seemed.”

“And which kept you from taking that ride with ME, or even by yourself, away from that shithole!” Maria blasted back.

From the other patrons in the Library, more ‘shhhs’ to the crude German visitors. From Hans, another inquiry. “I find it interesting that every time I got a letter from you, I got another promotion soon afterwards.”

“Behind every man of success is the inspiration and trust of a woman who loves him?” she offered, shaking with what seemed like primal fear.

“They say I have good interrogation skills, too.”

“Yes, I suppose you do,” Maria replied, her foot tapping, her stare everywhere else except into Han’s eyes.

“But maybe you’re wrong!” Hans pulled out his sabre, flicking its tip against the silver insignia on his coat, slicing the thread below them with a pendulous motion that caught Maria’s ever fearful eyes. “And maybe I’m wrong, too. I’ll just have to give these lieutenant ‘things’ back. I don’t even know what to call them. I can get them back, I suppose, after another ‘accident’ that doesn’t work out so well...or maybe another...letter?”

Hans stared directly at Maria. This time she couldn’t back down, or make up another lie which sounded like the kind of truth he wanted, or needed, to hear. “I got you...helped you get...promoted because I love you.”

“Or it is beneath your station to be involved with a shit-shoveller private?”

“Or to a corpse!” she blasted out. This time the head librarian walked towards them, his constipated English, hairless mouth saying words that needed no translation. He pointed towards the door. Hans pointed to his lieutenant insignia. The short, stubby spectacle wearing guardian of the place of learning and quiet pursed his lips with the furocity of an English lion. Hans pulled his stare into an apologetic shrug. Maria removed her pearl necklace and put in into the lion’s pocket. He bowed like a satisfied pussycat and went back to his desk, tending to his own reading.

On any other day, Hans would have found out what such a man was reading. But on this one, that subject of reality made its way up from the page and slapped him in the face with a blow that fed his soul and offended his dignity, both at the same time.

“An officer makes more money than an enlisted man, like...let’s see, who do we BOTH know...Albert, yes, Albert,” Hans challenged with the tone and demeanor of an Oxford gentleman.

“And an officer gets to keep his pay, and his life, particularly in America, or any other war, you idiot!” Maria countered with fear and love in her torn asunder heart.

“I don’t understand,” Hans replied.

“You weren’t supposed to,” the Baroness-in-exile from her old life admitted, from the most vulnerable part of herself. “You see, one of the rules of war is that the officers are not to be shot. So I have heard.”

“I haven’t heard this,” Hans blasted back. “Is that because I’m slow, stupid or being protected by another ‘accident’? I didn’t know that the reason why officers were still alive after boldly leading their men into battle was because the men on both sides were ordered to not shoot any officers! But now that I know that men like wise and skillful saps like Albert are expendable pawns in the game, and stupid, bookworm playthings like me are supposed to win the game, the game really seems like fun now,” he blasted out with sarcastic tone he had never heard through his own mouth.

Maria’s eyes swelled with tears. They streamed down her face. “I love you, Hans,” she confessed.

“And I love you, too, God help me.”

“There are other ways to handle this situation,” Maria offered. “We can run away from our present situations, again.”

“I don’t think so,” Hans countered. “You see, I have become too well known. First Lieutenant Hans Muller. And when, by accident, or the will of God, or luck, or Fate, I become a hero in North America, I will be written about in the newspapers, which will be read by the authorities in the Fatherland who will ask questions about my family. And how they died in that hell hole of a ‘hospital’ in the winter of...” Hans stopped, holding his tongue, knowing that the devil had gotten hold of it, or perhaps

it was the hand of God that had just condemned him to his just reward.

“You told me that your family died in a summer storm when they were out on the lake,” Maria said

“You weren’t supposed to know,” Hans muttered. “And maybe you never would have had to.”

Maria contemplated the options left. As did Hans. She gave voice to the third brain between them as the idea formulated. “We can both leave our present situations, yet again. Become who we want to be. I still have some wealth at my disposal, and with your intellect, which you HAVE proven is in keeping with a man far above your station...”

Hans laughed. “Yes, maybe we can do it,” he speculated, assessing her new appearance to the world. “We can both disappear into the Countryside someplace. You can hide away from your father forever as...let’s see...” Hans took hold of her hair, putting a portion of it under her nose. “Yes, Mario, from Italy. I heard that Italians have bigger mustaches than even we do. Bigger than some Russians as well.”

Maria smiled. “Yes, and Hans. Or Hansel. You have a beautiful face in front of that beautiful mind. And with two big potatoes for breasts, a wig that will show off those wondrous eyes and a dress that fits that hot looking ass....You could be the queen of the ball. Say goodbye to your men as they go off to that dreadful war in America which has evolved since you have enlisted, after you rob the officers of the gold they would have wasted on weapons or shit shovels.”

“Someone tried that,” Hans related, dispassionately. “Karl Manhiem, who realized that God didn’t want him to be soldier after his Minister convinced him that it was his God given duty to enlist. He paid one of the pleasure ladies in camp to sell her his dress, burrowed an officer’s wig, then sauntered out of camp through every sentry post available. Karl was one footstep away from being a free man, and God willing, a Minister serving His will, when...”

“His potatoes fell out of his breasts?” Maria asked sardonically.

“One of the sentries wanted to pleasure himself. He never admitted if it was a healthy male attraction or one less acceptable to what a soldier is supposed to desire.” Hans shook, terrified of the memory regarding the event at hand, and those

events he told no one about, even Albert. “Karl was found out for who he was. He was brought to the gallows with his dress on, extra make up put on his lips, the ‘hot dog’ between his legs placed into his mouth just as he was to say his final words. The hanging was slower and more painful than any I have ever...”

Hans’ eyes welled up. Maria edged her fingers tenderly towards his face. Her touch opened the floodgates. Part of him wanted to scream, part wanted to fall apart. But behind Hans’ wet face was the realization that whatever play Maria had set in motion, or he had continued, it had to be played out.

CHAPTER 9

Maria dragged herself up the stairway to her room. It was not quite the accommodations she was used to, spiders in the corners, mice or perhaps even rats under even step. But the “Dorchester Inn” was discreet and suited the purpose at hand. No one there spoke German, so no one could ask her who she was or from whom she was running. She hoped that the men, and women, sent by her father the Baron didn’t have the room next to hers. Such events seemed to happen in Holland. And Baron von Edinger was the kind of man who made things happen. Posing as a Polish Governess, Maria hoped that she would find none of her countrymen. And that no one would discover that she spoke French better than most Parisians and that she could read Latin better than any Jesuit. And that the visitor being escorted to her room would not be spoken about.

“Shhh”, Maria said to Madame Lewinska, as she wished herself to be called. She had followed the Baroness from the library, discretely four steps behind her from the time she ‘lowered’ herself sufficiently to enter the Dorchester facilities. “Shhh” Maria repeated, hoping the woman behind her would keep her footsteps quiet and her agenda discrete.

“Da,” the uncommon commoner posing as Madame Lewinska nodded affirmatively in her best Russian.

Maria inserted the key into the lock. Her fingers fumbled, then broke out in a cold sweat as the lock evaded her attempts at force, manipulation and prayer for it to open.

The veiled Widow Lewinska extended her hand. Maria gave her the key.

“Lock broken, or changed.” Maria said in her best Polish, or in something that she hoped sounded like Polish.

“Da,” Madame Lewinska conceded, smelling the lock. “Da,” she agreed as her fingers guided the tip of the key into it the notches of the lock. “Da,” she bowed when she pulled out the key and peeled away the recently-poured glue-like substance that made it unopenable.

“Shit!” Maria snarled.

“Mouse shit, Madame,” Lewinska said, in German. She bowed, allowing Maria to enter the flea-infested ‘chamber’ first. “My people are well schooled in the art of shit,” the woman in black continued.

“Another one of your talents, ‘Madame Lewinska’?” Maria entered the room. She looked at herself in the half-broken mirror amidst the room in which none of the furnishings matched, and half of them stood on three and a half legs. She looked at herself, a well dressed Baroness according to the view in the mirror. Most of her jewelery was gone now, most of her money paid out in ‘complimentary fees’ to parties who would never report such income to the tax collectors, or their bosses.

“You look...beautiful, Baroness,” Madame Lewinska noted.

“And so do you, Hans.” Maria smiled. “How is it that, with the exception of that mustache, you fill out my clothes better than I do?”

Hans said nothing behind the Widow’s veil. His face tightened as he took off the dress Maria had purchased for her daughter’s ‘Governess’ on the way home. Had Maria insulted Hans’ manhood by devising this disguising scheme for what perhaps would be the only afternoon he had available till he left for America? And could she find her way to the same, as yet to be determined, port where he would be landing, or at least the same Colony in the thousand-mile long coast? But underneath the secretive inhibitions, Hans seemed to enjoy the muse of being Madame Lewinska, the laughter of it, the joke. Did he now connect to the kind of humor that one part of his Soul needed, and the other despised? Or was it just another one of those “Muller family” secrets that Maria was told of but not about.

With dress off, Hans looked at himself in the uniform under it, Maria imagining the splendor of the man underneath the Jager Officer’s uniform. His fingers somehow couldn’t undo the buttons. “They are on tightly. Very tight.”

Maria felt the tightness in Hans’ chest. The shaking of his chin. The smell of sweat

already working its way from cold, clammy skin through the uniform which was designed to make any man appear invincible.

“We can...talk instead,” Maria offered.

“No...we can’t!” Hans barked back, still unable to undress himself. “I and you have been waiting for this for a long time, and this may be the last time we see each other, and---” Finally, one button gave way, then the rest on the tunic. He peeled off the layers of military prestige revealing, at least to Maria, a man who looked better in the uniform that God gave him at birth.

“You look...magnificent!” Maria said, commencing her disrobing process. She had never been naked in front of the man she loved, or hoped she could love in that way in which Baronesses were not supposed to talk about in Proper social circles.

Hans checked the time, once again. And that he had not misplaced the papers which he was ordered to bring back to the ship. In...”Three hours!” he announced, naked, and rigidly at attention. “We have three hours to...”

Maria’s ear heard Hans describing the details about how to Properly and Respectfully love a woman. All his descriptors seem to begin with capital letters, interestingly in keeping with the German language which they both spoke, and which conditioned them more than they ever considered possible. But her eyes saw something else. A message from hell itself. Handwritten to Maria, slipped under the door, with all of her inherited names inscribed on it.

Maria wrapped a blanket around her exposed breasts. “How did he...they find me?”

She trembled as Hans opened the letter. “A letter from your father, the Baron. Requesting your return home at once, or...” he read.

“Or what?” Maria asked.

Hans handed over the letter. The rest of the writing was for Maria to read, and consider. “The innocent where you are, and where you came from will suffer if you do not do your duty,” it said in bold and intimidating font.

“It sounds Biblical,” Hans noted. “Like it is a commandment from God himself.”

“Such is what my father thinks he is,” Maria said with distanced eyes. “A protector

of German Culture, the most Superior in the world. Against the Inferiors everywhere who threaten it.”

“If German culture is the most superior, then why it is necessary to fight for it, or defend it?” Hans found himself speculating. “It’s a contradiction in terms. According to the REAL German philosophers, Kant, Goethe and----“

“---Shut up, shit face!” Maria blasted out, in less-than- German frustration.

“Now I am a shitface?” Hans replied. “Now that your money is running out. And I am no longer a prize you can take home with you, or show off with your girlfriends who you gossip with at the Chalet.”

“I have no girlfriends!” Maria blasted back. “Or manfriends...But...” She started to break down in tears.

“There are men who are NOT your friends who want to be your manfriends, husbands or...” Hans offered, not able to find the word for ‘mistress’ as it pertains to a man. “And your father will not do to you what he did to your mother. You shouldn’t blame yourself for your mother’s death.”

Maria’s tears gave way to shock. “Death? She is...gone?”

Hans walked towards Maria, slowly. “I thought you knew. Albert did. Things servants on the farm tell servants in town, and eventually, it gets to us, the soldiers who serve the German Princes, and now the English King.”

“But how did you...?” Maria felt lost, inadequate. As helpless as a shit shoveler in the middle of a run of diarrhea and a brisk winter wind.

“We both can be idiots,” Hans confessed. “And cowards.” He kissed her, in an assuring way she never felt from him. Maria felt protected by Hans, for some reason. In a way she never felt before. Even in the way that others who she would never tell him protected her.

“I wish I were dead,” Maria smiled. “Because the dead can go anywhere. And no one can do anything do them.”

“Exactly what might work, for both of us,” Hans speculated. He looked at his watch, then at the market down below in the streets. The place where human souls

were less marketable than grain fed pigs. That place where Maria or anyone else split away from earthly wealth could be sold into slavery, or worse. The kind of place through which one could disappear. Hans laughed at the sight of it all.

“What are you laughing at?” Maria asked.

“Another...joke?” Hans smiled back.

Maria wasn't eager to find out the details about the plan Hans was devising in his now-activated mind. But it seemed the only one that would work now, the only 'accident' that would prevent the worst kind of accidents that would befall the innocent, or anyone else within range of the Baron's jurisdiction and influence.

CHAPTER 10

“It is not as simple as that,” the man with the black hands related to Albert in Bavarian German. “You want me to make someone who is living dead?”

“Are most of the living not dead already? In their minds, hearts and pathetically beaten or self mutilated spirits?” still Private Albert Stein shot back at the printer with the bearing of a Military figure well above a Sergeant, or even First Lieutenant.

Hans, his superior in military rank only, agreed.

“Yes, but...” Manheim Rothmann had been the real brains, and balls, behind the only real German newspaper in England for the last ten years. He had been asked to paint Whig politicians in Tory colors, turn ‘understandings’ between estranged married couples into scandals, and most recently, requested ‘in the interest of Civilization’, to describe the American rebellion as a revolt against Goodness and Justice, manipulated from behind the scenes by men who were more concerned with money and political power than the rights of man. By the looks of his shoulder carriage he seemed a man who obeyed the rules or order and law. By the distanced glance over his left eye and the empathy in his right, he sought to serve a higher Agenda.

“What do you need?” Maria asked. She removed her coat, unbuttoning the last of the inner pockets. With her trembling hands she removed the remaining pearls and silver broaches, handing them over to Rothmann.

“These look like they were stolen,” he commented.

“They were acquired, according to the only law that matters!” Hans found himself blasting out.

“Yes,” Maria confessed. “They were my mother’s. And, as I heard it, she wanted me to have them.” Albert noted her eyeline. Straight ahead into space. The kind of fixation of focus of someone whose mind was held hostage by a ghost.

“And your father, Baron von Edinger?” Manheim pressed.

“The kind of man who MADE me love him in ways that no daughter should love her father and who....” Maria couldn’t hold back the tears. She handed over the letter her father had somehow gotten to her demanding that she return to him.

Albert tried to read Manheim's reactions as he read Maria's loving father's ultimatum. If the newspaper owner's choice was to turn Maria in, Albert would have no choice but to use his bayonet for something other than a letter opener. He hoped, and prayed, that Hans, the First Lieutenant who had never killed or even stuck a man, would do the same.

"The innocent will suffer if you, the Baroness, don't come home to take your rightful place, for the good of all?" Manheim read, and put out for consideration. "And who are the innocent?"

"Wolfgang, my horse, to start" Maria blurted through quivering lips. "My father is the kind of man who hates horses but likes the way men look when riding them. When I was a child and asked my father why my mother's face was black and blue, he told me it was from a horse. I told him she was no where near the horses. He told me to go back to my etiquette books or there would be one less horse in the stable to worry about. And that if I kept asking questions about things good girls don't ask about, the stew on Sunday would be from..."

Maria fell into Hans' arms. Albert wished she found comfort in his, but wishes had to take priority over more practical matters. His attention turned to Manheim, the man who could make Maria's disappearance a matter of sorrow rather than anger back in Hesse-Cassel.

"There was a fire someplace in the West End of the city," Albert related in a fable which was about to become published fact. "I smelt it out of the window of..."

"...The window of where, Private?" Manheim asked, putting pen in hand to get the 'details' of the legend about to be fact into print.

"A place where a married man is not supposed to be, and where one isn't is permitted to visit," his reply. Indeed, Albert felt more the warrior than ever. In his world, War was the constant, peace the oddity, and the first real rule of War is that the day goes to the cleverest before the strongest. At least the way War in the civilized world was becoming.

"I need...some more facts," Manheim said.

"It was a horrible fire," Albert recalled in his ever-evolving imagination. "Blazes everywhere inside, the smoke coming out of all windows. The street deserted. The

roof falling down. And a cry inside. The Baroness was walking by when she heard the screams of baby! She had no choice but to rush in and try to save it!”

“Yes, and...” Manheim nodded as he continued writing in a penmanship that got more unreadable with every word.

“And it was the cry of a Tory baby,” Hans offered.

“Whig and Tory babies all sound the same,” Albert shot back. “English babies always sound constipated. But if it were Irish...”

“No one here would care,” Manheim uttered, sardonically. “But no matter. The Baroness slid the baby out a chute, just in time for a policeman to bring it to safety.’ But then the Barroness’ body was engulfed by flames, afterwhich it turned into ashes that no one could retrieve. But, there is one important question. Did the baby live? And did the grateful mother name the child after the Baroness or the policeman? ”

Albert and Hans looked at each other. Manheim’s real sympathies could be trusted. “Hans, you were right about this man,” Albert said of the journalist whose writings had reached Hans’ tired mind on more than one occasion when shit-shoveling in Hesse-Cassel, and on the pieces of parchment in the outhouse and ‘head’ of the boat which most men used before reading. “He does write the facts between the lines.”

“The truth is something which is easily known, and harder to write,” Manheim lamented. “And even if you do tell the people the truth about the Light outside of dark cave they live in, they will either not understand it, or crucify you for bringing their eyes into the light.”

“As was done to Socrates,” Hans related. “The allegory of the Cave, from Plato’s Republic.”

“Which I try to reprint every day, one way of another,” Manheim smiled. “And perhaps you will be fighting for in America?” he asked his two male hosts.

“A war which the British don’t want to fight themselves,” Hans noted, gazing over the scrap notes in the basket about to be burned, putting two and two together and getting a painful five. “By these figures, there are more of us Germans fighting for the freedom of loyal English subjects than Englishmen, or Irishmen.”

“Whig progoganda,” Manheim said with that smile which had a tight lip behind it. “The Tories are in power, and the Whig’s have the obligation to destroy any Tory stand. A two party system which is called democracy. Not the best form of government, but the only one that...”

“Enough!” Maria blasted out. She emerged from the corner. “Will you take these broaches my mother left me or not?”

“As what, Baroness?” Manheim asked. Albert found the stare of the Editor in Chief gazing downward, toward Maria’s now exposed bussom, complimenting her beautiful face and long, brown hair which could distinguish her anywhere.

Hans pulled out his sword. Albert his dagger.

“If this is what you want so you will make this fable into fact, then it is yours,,” Maria impatiently conceded to Manheim, unbuttoning her blouse in front of this newspaper editor who had the real power of life and death in his ink-soaked hands.

“What we want is not what we should have, or partake of, thank God.” Manhiem related.

“Then you will take the broaches, Herr Rothmann?” Maria asserted.

“Someone else who all three of you will have to deal with will,” Rothmann advised, and warned. In a grandfatherly tone which Albert remembered from his early childhood, the man with the wrinkles diving deep into his face, and too-wise for his own happiness soul continued. “You died heroically, saving the baby, Baroness. Giving honor and virtue to the Fatherland.. You refused to leave the building when you could because you thought there was another baby inside, and you ran into the flames of Valhalla to save it, or try to anyway.”

Maria seemed to ponder the image. “Me with a baby?” she said. “Everyone said I would and must have one someday. But I could never imagine such a burdon, and gift. At least not until...now.” Maria’s wishful smile was directed at Hans. Albert knew such things were not possible, though. That Hans had the kind of problem between his head and between his legs that would prevent him from siring any son, or daughter. But did Maria know? Maybe she did, or maybe she didn’t. It was up to Albert to know some things about Maria, and not others. As it was Hans’ duty and right to know some things about the nature of the ‘relationship’ he had with Maria.

Manheim wrote up the lies into something that sounded very much like the truth. It seemed very convincing to Albert. “You were a noble lady.”

“Who left a suicide note on her door before she left her hotel as well, in case this story you gentlemen just wrote does not get into print,” Maria said. She presented the note she had written, speaking the words as they had come out of her trembling hands onto print. “I cannot go on any longer, father. If what awaits me as your ‘loving daughter’ is what you have done to your ‘loving wife’, I have no other choice but to express my love for you by ending my life now. I know all about the atrocities you have done to your workers, your wife, to your animals, and if it matters to you at all, the violations you have inflicted on my Soul. I am shamed by having benefited from them for so long. I am finally redeemed in the eyes of God, I pray, by ending the life you gave to me, and any hope of your name having an heir through my womb. And letting the world know what you have ‘given’ to everyone else.”

Hans and Albert were both awed, and shocked. Maria continued.

“The details of what he has done are in this envelope,” she said. Maria pulled out a rolled-up envelope from the biological pocket that no virtuous man would search. Albert thought it clever of her to hide the evidence in a place so deep, and personal. The pocket between the legs which only the most desperate, or despised, women used as the resting place for their most sacred goods.

After wiping off the fluid on top of the envelope, Rothmann read it. He seemed to feel more than he was supposed to as a journalist, or a man.

“You will print it?” Maria asked. “If this fire story is not believed, or disallowed to go into print for whatever reason? If my body was not burned in a fire, it was drowned in the river after I swallowed arsenic.”

“A man’s life is worth nothing if he doesn’t do what is right,” Rothmann announced, facing the ghost at the other end of the room. “Death is coming to me soon enough anyway. A transition, so I hear.”

Albert was convinced that Rothmann would honor his word, or at least try to. Though Whigs and Tories made a living dissenting from each other in England, so it seemed, no one dissented when Baron von Edinger wanted something. Not until now, anyway. Indeed, it was a rebellion against the Old Order now. Made possible by Albert and his good friend Hans fighting the rebellion in America. The ironies of

it all.

The clock ticked down, the chime announcing 5 pm. Rothmann drew Albert and Hans a map as to how to get back to their ship, a shortcut so they would be on board in time. As for Maria, she looked at herself in the mirror.

“Herr Manhiem?” she asked, looking at the coat he kept next to a small cot which smelled like new sweat and old cheese. “May I borrow this?”

“Yes, Barroness,” he bowed to her.

“And this?” Maria inquired, picking up a sharp, shiny object. Her hands shook. Her eyes went blank.

“I don’t think this is a good idea, Barroness,” Manhiem warned, lurching to grab the scissors from Maria’s hand.

Hans and Albert’s reaction times were equally slow. They had not really seen Maria until now. And now that they were given a deeper look into her Soul, she did what her father and all conventions of her past life forbade. But as soon as she committed the act, she seemed instantly at peace.

Albert knelt down to the floor. On it, the ‘remains’ of Maria’s deed of finality. “Your hair,” Albert gasped, holding onto three feet of her shorn lockes in his hand.

“And more of it to come,” Maria stated, continuing the hack job, with portions cut down to the scalp.

“I’ve heard that cabin boys have lice, and ringworm, and that they lose patches of hair like this, is this right, Herr Rothmann?” she said by way of explanation.

“Yes, that is correct,” the Editor who had the reputation of telling half truths but never a lie commented. “That is correct.”

Hans and Albert both looked at Maria, not recognizing her as she disgarded all of her female attire, trading it with Manheim for clothing more suited for a Hessian boy stowed away on a ship who wanted above all to be a soldier. In a War which both former shit-shovellers knew now to be about far more than obtaining territory for King George and money for them.

CHAPTER 11

The object of loading supplies onto the ship was speed, not finesse. Maria marveled at how many sacks, crates and men could be loaded onto a single vessel. None of them had labels which she could read. She speculated on their contents. Some sounded like grain, other guns, others with wardrobe for the drama to take place on the American stage. Half of the supplies for the soldiers, the other half for the officers, by the looks of where they were placed in the boat..

Albert seemed at home in his temporary rank as Foreman, assigned such by one of the British Officers with the begrudging approval of Albert's superiors, particularly former drill Sergeant Schmitt. It was a job that Albert never could get at home. And he seemed to do a better job at it than Herr Richter did at the Shit Farm in Hesse Cassel. He helped lesser men carry heavy loads, encouraging them to pull together for a common good. Whether that 'good' was real or not didn't matter. Somehow, Albert would make it good.

As for Hans, a look in one of the wood-framed, slightly cracked, mirror owned by a Hessian nobleman laid on the port for better wrapping said it all. He seemed more than a man, more than a first lieutenant, and even more than a General. Put a horse under him and he would out impress any Prince in the Fatherland, or even the fabled 'King Washington' in America. But when he was called away to supervise the loading of the vessel, Maria was left alone, with only herself to look at.

In a strange way, Maria did look more beautiful in an oversized man's shirt and britches than she ever did in the layered petticoats and dresses designed to infer what a woman's shape was rather than revealing it, or so she hoped Hans would notice. Her hair fell over her ears,, blowing in the wind in a style that looked like 'freedom', the cut in mathematically 'incorrect' layers rather than in a symmetrical line. The only 'freedom flaws' were the spots she had cut down to the scalp to simulate ringworm for her new role, but as she had read, everyone in America who was anyone showed off one of their flaws, be it a rip in a coat or a scar on the face, as a display of his, or her, individualistic perfection.

Maria smiled as she combed the hair from the side of her head over the clipped sort-of-circle to the left of the crown. "A monk's initiation, as the Catholics do it," she mused to herself in German.. "For a newly born woman of God, and man, and men...and women, and..."

Her discourse of the heart was rudely interrupted by barking in a tongue that

sounded as vicious as uninterpretable. By his insignia, he was a Major in the British Army. By his smell, a man who had just emerged from a house of ill repute with perfume around his neck in an attempt to camouflage the foul odor of the rest of his body. By his face, a clean shaven man whose life was anything but clean beneath the surface. The kind of man who she hoped, and prayed, was behind her now.

The Major read the note written by Lt. Muller, translated into English by Manheim Rothman stating that ‘the lad is a stowaway who presents with much potential as a recruit’. The British Major, stroked his chin and hairless upper lip, then gave Maria a thorough ‘inspection’, starting with her teeth, then down her legs, then back at her forehead. Then a ‘request’ to turn around for a ‘hand’ inspection.

Thankfully, only Maria’s external anatomy was being assessed. Places where there were supposed to be muscle. The Major seemed disappointed in those on the arms. Impressed with those on the calf and thigh, built up, Maria realized, by her changing to riding NON-sidesaddle with Wolfgang when not being admired by ‘respectable’ men at the Chalet, or inspected by her father. It seemed to convince the Major that she was who the note said she was. She thanked God for Wolfgang, and for that extra storage pocket which a woman’s anatomy afforded relative to a man’s. A storage port for whatever wealth she still had left.

But the Major seemed persistent, and curious. After Maria passed ‘inspection’, he looked into her eyes, then stroked her face. First the cheeks, then the upper lip. He smiled. “No stubble,” he said, in German.

Maria froze in terror. Thankfully, she was the kind of woman who froze when terrified rather than shaking. At least this time. But even she could smell the sweat of fear on her skin, an odor the Major seemed to be well attuned to. He smirked, in cue with each of Maria’s inner ‘defense’ postures which she thought private. Indeed, nothing to this ‘civilized’ man seemed private, including his examination of the anatomy between the legs, which he proceeded to undertake with his white gloves until----

Hans cleared his throat in the manner of a military aristocrat. “This one be mine!!?” he asserted, in English, carrying with him an extra Hessian uniform that Albert had stolen, putting it on Maria as quickly as he could.

“This one IS mine, you mean, Hun,” the English gentleman replied in the same way that Prussians who spoke High German on top of the hill corrected Bavarian ‘Untermench’ peasants when they attempted to lodge a complaint in dialects which

were not spoken in Hoch Deutch.

“Ya. Ist mine.” Hans demonstrated his point by ordering Maria to stand at attention next to him. “Mein Freund”.

The Major smirked again, ignoring a request from his Seargent to give him orders as to where to load another round of supplies on what seemed to be a ‘mother’ ship in what seemed like a fleet rather than just a collection of boats. “Was ist das ‘Freund?’” he inquired again, his diction intentionally poor.

It was a question that Hans and Maria asked so many times of each other, and themselves. “What is friend? What is friendship? What is love? Can we ever have love?”

The Seargent yelled at his men as yet another crate broke open, its contents spilling into the harbor. The men didn’t seem to care. And the Seargent didn’t either. Not so with the Huns, who, according to scattered English accounts, were only concerned with drinking, fornicating and stuffing their bellies with the bodies of their vanquished foes after the battle was over. Every Hessian within diving distance dove into the water and brought the box of supplies back to the surface, then onto dry dock. Somehow, the Huns aboard the seemingly inferior ship with more barnacles on the hull than any other in the fleet, were well on their way to completing the loading task with everything else as well on their section of the ship. Good news for the Huns. Bad news for Maria, who had to explain herself to the Major.

“Soldier,” she said, recalling whatever English she knew, pointing to herself. Being sure to drive the point home, she took Han’s sword in hand and commenced to March Prussian style. Upright, erect, proud and above all else, obedient to a duty bigger than herself or those of her ‘men’. A noble Calling, she pondered. “Soldier,” she said again.

The Major seemed to be impressed. Then gave her a command. “Halt!” he barked out. Hans stepped in front of the British ‘gentleman’ as he took off his glove and was about to inspect her face again. The reply to that protest was given with a single finger, and in keeping with Military courtesy. The Major pointed to his clusters, then to Hans’ lieutenant insignia. Hans stepped aside, at attention with his body. At the ready, Maria hoped, with the pistol under his belt.

“Soldier?” the Major asked again, running his fingers over Maria’s upper lip.

“Ya.” Hans’ reply. “Soldier.”

“Nein,” the Major shook his head. He took the sword from Maria, and gave her something else. A drum with two sticks. He said something that sounded like a rank in English, and gave her a salute.

“But---“ Hans screamed back.

The Major repeated his command, firmly, and with what seemed like the kind of compassion a father would feel more for a son than a daughter.

“But, Sir“ Hans protested again, respectfully, in English.

The Major demonstrated his point with a flick of Han’s mustache, and pointing, from a distance, at the lack of hair on Maria’s upper lip.

“Yes, Sir,” Hans said, in English, backing down and accepting the inevitable.

“Sehr Gutt,” the Major replied.

Maria was suprised that the English Officer actually lowered himself to speak German, and with an attempt to get the diction right. She felt relieved, perhaps vindicated. The Major put on his gloves and inspected her head. His touch felt like concern, in a warped, but perhaps, under the right circumstances, trustable way.

“Was ist das?” the Major asked, noting the hairless spots on three portions of her head. He continued in English, imitating different kinds of insects with his fingers.

Hans was at a loss for words in English. “Yes Sir,” he kept saying to the words that he couldn’t understand but had to pretend to know.

The English Sargent sent his Corporal over to fetch the Officer. The Corporal seemed apologetic and remorseful, and seemed to know he would be in for a beating for something someone else did, or didn’t do. The universal language of Europe and ‘Great’ Britain, Maria pondered.

Maria didn’t understand much of the interchange between the Major and his inferiors, but Hans knew very well what he commanded on the way back to his ship. Her beloved seemed to smile, from a very strange place.

“What did he say?” Maria asked Hans in a whisper, feeling his shoulders stronger and firmer than ever.

“Since you are too young to grow a mustache, you are too young to carry a gun. So you will be a drummer boy, or a fife player” he related.

“Who will play symphonies at your side,” Maria smiled.

“And you are to be my personal assistant, if I should require one,” Hans continued.

“We assist each other,” Maria asserted.

“And that before joining the Army, you must be cleaned up,” Hans continued, eyes turned away to the Western horizon.

“A bath before a Baptism of freedom,” Maria smiled widely, smelling on herself the odor of labour rather than work. “Wash away the sweat of fear, sorrow, and...”

Maria found herself staring into Han’s face. It was all about business. The kind that he didn’t want to do, or perhaps the kind he was always afraid to accomplish.

But...other difficulties were afoot. In particular, the appearance on the ship of Countess Else von Rueter coming aboard the ship, Maria’s ‘parlor’ girlfriend with whom she dreamed about ruling their own kingdoms, like Catherine the Great. ‘Empress Else’ was now new wife to Major von Westphal, or so the Prussian Colonel wanted, or seemed to order, the men around him to think. Else had that ‘look’ to her. That she had ‘made it’ to the top of the ladder, but was still at the bottom of the gutter. Not scars on the cheek, but many wounds behind the eyes, some inflicted by her new ‘husband’, and some inflicted by herself.

Within an hour the ship set sail, the entire event seeming brief and final. From her position amongst many tall and well muscled enlisted Infantryman Hessians, Maria could already feel the wants and needs of the men around her. They seemed plain relative to Lt. Hans, his Jager uniform, sword and Swiss made rifle all distinguishing him from the Infantrymen and their officers. He came amongst the men on the deck of the ship, inspecting them all with a stern stare, or pretending to anyway in front of the Captains and Majors. Maria’s eyes spotted Albert on the other side of the deck,

but he did not return her gaze. An ‘order’ from somewhere, she surmised. Of course, the men under Hans’ command pretended to be afraid of him. It was a game the shit-shovellers played to keep the officers off their backs, by necessity. But there was one game that was for real...Where would Maria be staying for the trip across ‘the pond’, and who would look after her when there? Albert was assigned, by an officer directly under Major von Westphal’s command, to be transferred to another ship, with some more shit-shovellers. Maybe the Countess Else had something to do with it, or maybe it was just dumb luck. Officers of course were to be quartered with other officers, despite Hans’ trying to negotiate otherwise with his superiors. All he could tell Maria by way of explanation was a discreet shrug of the shoulders saying ‘I tried, really I did’.

On board the ship carrying the ‘Huns’ there were many treasures to be had. Pleasures of the palate were not lacking for the officers, or those of lesser rank who were bold or clever enough to ‘burrow’ from them their crates. Bread that was NOT overloaded with salt, real mutton, roast ham, fresh apples and even Russian caviar sent from one of Catherine the Great’s ministers, on the condition that his identity would be kept secret. Books were valued by those who could read, as long as they weren’t military manuals or Bibles. Rum, beer or any other liquid containing fermented firewater were the most universally sought pleasure, as were letters from the Fatherland. But even more valued was privacy, the desire for such shared by men and rats alike.

Maria lingered on deck, hiding within her clothes as her ‘older brother’ Hans took care of duties elsewhere. Her oversized Infantryman’s jacket was much like Albert’s. Her mind observed her heart swell with a sudden learning to see Albert, then she did. A wave from the adjacent ship, a madman atop one of the mainsails. She waved back to the exuberant Private Albert, smiled then heard from behind her. “Come, now...please,” in a whisper.

Lieutenant Hans shuttled Maria down a staircase more suited for midgets or children than fully grown men, or women. Down below, everything was small, stuffy and crowded. Men packed in as densely as possible, each enlisted man seeming to claim and keep the two feet of ‘sovereign territory’ around him with all manners of stares, postures and display of weaponry. But there was sharing too, in this underlit, under ventilated community ‘hotel’. Letters, rations, and stories became communal property amongst these men, making them freer and more ‘kingly’ than most of the officers who commanded them.

Maria wanted to see Hans in his element. Witness the accounts of how the men

admired, respected and even liked him. But that was for later.

He knocked on a door barely bigger than a grandfather clock. No answer. He opened it, and motioned for Maria to enter. Though a miniature version of anything she imagined an ocean going ship to be, it felt like a palace from inside. A chair, a table, and even a bed. And you could stand upright. And in the middle of the floor, a tub of water. More like a large bucket, but still, it was water. And no one had been in it yet, by its appearance.

“Sit, please,” Hans said. “And take off your tunic, please.” Maria complied, imagining what fresh water over her body would feel like. She closed her eyes, thinking about what a tingling face would feel like. How ‘clean’ would smell. Anticipating what other items of clothing Lt. Muller would ‘order’ her to remove in the service of her man, and their mutual love. The frontier opening up for her in a room barely the size of a her horse Wolfgang’s stall. She listened for the sound of freedom, and bondship, then heard something metallic. She turned around.

“The British Major ordered me to clean you up,” Hans said apologetically, a clipper in his shaking hand. “And that woman with Major von Westphal seemed to recognize you.”

“Her name is Else,” Maria admitted. “A friend of...”

“Your father’s?”

“And others who we have to leave behind us now,” Maria said, feeling sorrow as much as liberation as she was about to be ‘cleaned up’ for the journey to a new place and what would have to be an even more different new identity. She smelled the water. More disinfectant than water. What one dips pigs in more than what one uses to bath people.

“All hands who have lice or ringworm must be appropriately groomed and cleaned, in the interest of keeping the ship and its crew clean,” Hans related.

A good washing would have done the job, but such didn’t matter, and there were already more lice, fungus and other kinds of vermin on board the ship than on anyone’s head, beard or crotch. Were the officers and their ‘ladies’ required to surrender their hair to the ocean in the interest of keeping the lice on their heads away from their fellow passengers? It didn’t matter anyway. Maria pondered the situation, took a deep breath, then grabbed hold of the shoulder length hair she had

just learned to love. “You know, my father told me that if I was a disrespectful girl, I would not find a proper suiter as a woman, and be sent to the Catholic Nuns. Where they would tear up all your dresses, and...and...” She couldn’t say it.

“It will grow back when we get to America,” Hans assured her.

“I suppose it will,” Maria affirmed. “And since I am ‘dead’, it is a time for a resurrection, don’t you think? A new renewal. A...”

Hans sensed someone outside, then looked at his watch. He shhhd Maria, then requested that she bow her head. There was a sense of urgency in his hands as he shaved a wide strip of hair from the back of Maria’s sweat-soaked neck to her stone cold forehead. A sense of irony to his mustached face as he cropped all but stubble from the right side of Maria’s head. And a sense of something more frightening when she held onto his thigh as he finished the job. A third leg, hard, and pumping. Something he never was able to display for Maria when she was Maria. Then again, Maria was now to be someone else for a while. And as for Hans, he was already on his way to becoming everything Maria dreamed he would become, which she sensed now may be the cause of so many nightmares.

CHAPTER 12

Albert received five lashes on the back for climbing the mast to wave ‘goodbye to Europe, hello to America for all of us’ at Maria. Had he not told the British Commander of the vessel that the man he was waving to was his brother, who he had just found out had enlisted, it would have been ten lashes at least. But it was worth every slash. Maria had looked so boyishly beautiful in the fife and drummer boy’s hat which she was issued. And Hans seemed regal, and in his own kingdom, in his Lieutenant’s uniform. Shit-shoveller Hans who had claimed he was unable to do any military service was already legendary for using his powers of logic and reason to keep unreasonable men from killing each other in camp. By the sight of things from the the deck of Albert’s ship, Lieutenant Hans had stopped the Hessians and English from killing each other in more than one dispute. Both armies were short on supplies, tempers, and communication skills. And by all reports and observations, Lt Muller kept peace and order without ordering the lash to be put on ANYone. A top grade marksman with a rifle, a natural leader with a sword, a man whose legs could think on a horse faster than the animal beneath him did. Lieutenant Muller was a natural soldier, except for one thing.

“The only thing Lt. Muller has shot with his rifle are tree stumps and bottle caps,” Albert confessed to a British soldier next to him. “He’ll run for cover, or pray to God when the first shots are fired,” he continued, with a big smile, and an offer of rum without seaweed in the bottle, stolen from the officer’s mess. “Or try to negotiate with General Washington while his rebel American Majors and Sergeants move in behind us and fuck us in the ass.”

Corporal O’Malley smiled, then said something in English that was as un-interpretable as Albert’s German was to him. “Right, Private Stein,” was all Albert could make sense of. All that he needed to know, anyway.

O’Malley spoke English with a bit of a difference relative to his comrades. From what Albert could make sense of, it was Irish English, which had to it a musicality he had never sensed in the recruits from Liverpool or London. And certainly not from the officers. And contrary to what he was told, the Irish English could not hold their liquor better than the English English or the Scottish English could, or even the Welsh English, who spoke a language completely their own, understood by none of the English except themselves. Was this was America to be? Communicating with your friends through smiles, hand gestures and pretended sentiments? And communicating with your enemies through shot, knives or the butt of your musket?

But Albert had money in his pocket now, 'bonus' as he recalled the English word. He didn't recognize the currency, but it was just as impressive to the eye as any he had seen anywhere else. Portraits of constipated people, he noted. The only constancy with money. Along with the constancy that whoever had to most portraits on paper or coin defined the rules, be they earned, burrowed, stolen or taken.

CHAPTER 13

The journey had gone into its first week. Measured not by the calendar, but by the dwindling of supplies in the hold of the ship, the heaviness of the buckets used to collect human excrement, and the stench of the people who produced it. But there was one thing that the stench of the close quarters did do in the service of those who produced it.

“I can smell fresh mutton and onions with a sprinkle of garlic and peppermint,” the Bavarian gentleman next to Maria said with a sardonic smile as he was handed the evening meal of rock hard zwieback ‘bread’ soaked in rancid pork fat which was more salt than pork, its odor repugnant to the nose not desensitized with the stench of a crowded ship at sea. “A delicacy to be enjoyed slowly,” the middle-aged private continued, biting into the ‘biscuit delight’ gently so he would not break any more of his teeth.

The over-educated and under-experienced Maria smiled at him, playing her role as Drummer Boy in the role, while her Lieutenant Hans was off having strategy meetings dining with the officers, and of course, Countessa Else. Every time Maria asked Hans about what happened at those meetings, he would give her less details, and interject another word of English into the ‘non-communication’. Indeed he was moving up the ranks, and well on his way to becoming one of the most important elements in King George’s war. A man who could keep the four thousand English enlisted to serve their King this War from killing the seven thousand Germans who were hired to assist them in this sacred duty. Maria remembered something of history, about the Romans. The mark of the fall of the Empire, so she recalled, was when there were more Gauls, Egyptians and Germans in the Roman Legions than Romans. Paradoxically, her new ‘boy cut’ hair doo made her look very much like a Roman centurion, and slave. Still frightening to the eye, and the touch.

She looked looked around the hold of the ship, once again trying to make sense of it all. Some men seemed to become stronger the further they were from home. Some seemed weaker, more terrified, or more vulnerable. But the Bavarian gentleman next to her never changed. The elderly private’s face seemed familiar. It also seemed wise. Indeed, he seemed to be a survivor who knew more about books than he did about people. He seemed to be an expert in the people with whom Maria was now in company. Indeed, the only thing that separated Maria from them was the wealth she wore around her waist in the money belt issued by Major Westphal in the ‘treasury chest’ between her legs issued by the Creator. Still, the world was evolving, the new political, social and Spiritual experience for those who sought to

seek it...Freedom.

“Where are you from?” Maria asked the Bavarian gentleman in her gruffest ‘Drummerboy’ voice.

“Everywhere,” the Elder Soldier Sage mused, crunching another bit of the bread best suited for musketshot than the human stomach.

“Everywhere?” Maria inquired, offering him her cup of beer. He chose to drink from her brandy flask instead, the one given to her by Hans for medicinal purposes only.

“I am from Bavarian, Munich, Bonn, Hesse-Cassel, Bayreuth, and some other places you or no one in this floating cesspool will ever know about,” he replied. “I suppose now you want to ask me my name.”

“And if I do?” Maria noted that this man of many places could read. He seemed especially interested in the Latin inscription on the flask, an intimate sentiment from Hans translating into the words he couldn’t or wouldn’t say in German, or English. The seemingly illiterate Bavarian private’s eyes read it as if he understood its meaning, subtext and secrets.

“I will tell you my name is Private Bloomenstom, if you like,” he smirked.

“And if I don’t like?” Maria challenged.

“Then I will tell you my name is Private Ingrim, Neidermesser, Housemann, or something with a von in it, Private whatever you choose to be called, or have to be called,” he replied, giving back the flask to Maria.

Maria placed it back in her belt. The boat rocked back and forth, yet another rounds. Another three men vomiting. Another horse in a distant hole whinneying, thankfully not appended by the sound of a gunshot as was so often the case with strong steeds from land who didn’t get their sea legs quickly enough.

“By what name do you wish to be called when you become a defender of British Liberty in the New World, a hero back in the fatherland, or a corpse somewhere in between?” the Bavarian sage pressed.

“Muller,” Maria replied once complexion came back to her face, composure to her

aching head. "I wish to be called Muller."

"The lieutenant's name," the Sage smiled. "Who you assist in every way possible?"

Maria fumed with anger, not so much at the inuendo or accusation, or her stupidity at openly expressing her wish to be known by Hans' name, but the reality of her present situation. The requirement for Hans to be discreet and distanced in a ship with the possibility of so many rumors that could lead to the wrong people on the ship, and back home in Hesse-Cassel, finding out the real facts. "I eat here in the hole. Sleep where I must. And Lieutenant Muller is my---"

"---Commanding officer, I know, lad," the Bavarian said in a fatherly tone. He snuck something from his pocket. Sausage, flavored with more meat than salt and held together by animal products rather than sawdust.

"To...who we are, and who we will become," he 'toasted'.

Maria knew better, but had to ask. "How did you get that..."

"Enlistment bonus," he said.

Maria noted something else about him as she allowed her tongue to taste real food for the first time in what seemed like weeks. The Bavarian's waist, and the bulging around it. It jingled of riches rather than smelt of more contraband sausage.

"Enlistment bonuses?" Maria inquired.

"Yes, you see, my lad, only a stupid soldier collects money from one place. We owe it to our mothers, fathers, sons and daughters and the Fatherland, to collect our money from many places when in strange places."

"I see," Maria noted. "But not from stealing from our fellow soldiers, I hope."

"No," the Bavarian laughed. "This would dishonorable, risky, and stupid."

"Dishonorable because..." Maria felt like old times were afoot. She sensed Scholar Hans inside this aging man who seemed to have no family except the wisdom within his head, and the experience in his kindly wrinkled face. "Why is it dishonorable to steal from fellow soldiers?" she continued.

"We watch each other's backs when we meet the enemy, or should, Private Muller."

“An answer that serves God, man and the demon of practicality.”

“Practicality is not a demon,” the flatulent scholar continued. “It is an angel in disguise.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” Maria continued, feeling to be the inquisitor in Plato’s Republic while being taught by Socrates himself. Sensing that she was part of the question, answer and solution. “But what manner of practicality and honor comes with freedom?”

“Freedom to devise your own honor, and practicality.”

“Honor is absolute. It never changes. Or does it?”

“Honor is to serve the ones we care about, ya?”

“Yes.”

“And without money, you can’t serve anyone, Private Muller.”

“Yes, but Jesus---”

“---Ate bread to keep His body alive because someone patched up a roof when he was delivering a Sermon, or someone was collecting contributions from people who came to listen to the Sermon.”

“I suppose so,” Maria admitted. “A very unnatural situation.”

“Exactly, my lad. And in the New World, there is more Nature than people. And many people who have more than what they need.”

“Which means?”

“That we have the right, and obligation, to take what we need, and want, from those in America who have too much, or who have taken too much from Nature around them.” The Bavarian Socrates offered Maria a drink from his own flask.

The writing on it said it all. “Turkish,” she noted. “From a nobleman?”

“Who was acting like an asshole when fighting the Russians. So, I was allowed to take it as a reward for my labors in the Dardenelles,” he smirked.

“Looting,” Maria surmised. “Stealing from the enemy after you’ve beat him is immoral and dishonorable.”

“And killing him during battle is a gift of kindness?” the Bavarian challenged, pain in his heart. His face revealed the scars of what seemed like a hundred battles won at costs that were too much for any man to bear. “They can kill us, or we can kill them. And while the officers collect the glory, we, who bleed for their victories, deserve some kind of compensation!” he blasted back.

“Yes, I suppose, so,” Maria said.

“And are entitled to food that feeds our bellies rather than empties them,” he continued.

“Indeed, yes,” she agreed, remembering all those ‘meals’ that resulted in more coming up the throat than going down.

“And as many enlistment bonuses as we can get,” the Bavarian mercenary continued. “I myself have gotten ten when I enlisted to fight for King George,” he whispered.

“But everyone gets only one enlistment bonus,” Maria recalled, accurately so she thought.

“That depends on how many times you enlist,” the nameless and multi-named Sage smiled. “Private ‘Muller’.”

With that the Bavarian went to sleep. His snore was even louder than his farts, or his belches. As the sun set over the never-changing watery horizon in the West, Maria put it together, some if it anyway. Enlist as one man, desert and enlist someplace else as another. A workable way to earn a living if you are the kind of man who is known only to himself. Or the kind who knows how not to get caught. Why had the nameless Bavarian trusted her? Maria seemed perplexed. Maybe he needed a family, or even a friend, who he could tell his story to. Everyone did, in the end. Now Maria was a woman, or man, with no one to tell her story to. At least until she had earned or lived one. And America was about freedom.

It looked like for yet another night, the private quarters for junior officers was occupied by senior officers. “Goodnight, Hans, my beloved,” she whispered to the front end of the ship. “Goodnight, my friend Albert,” she sent across the right, or was it starboard, bow to the adjacent ships. “Hello, Freedom!” she smiled at the Western horizon.

Daylight came early, and hit hard. Though the seas were silent and calm, the blast from atop deck was loud, and deafening. “All hands on deck!” the pre-dawn alarm rang out. With German efficiency, some from the inside and some enforced from the outside, the Hessians gathered their gear for formation, arriving on deck in battle-ready formation while the British enlisted men on the other side of the boat stumbled to become upright in their formations.

“We have a situation here!” the British Commander barked out, and Lieutenant Muller translated, or seemed to. Muller was instructed to point to one of the lifeboats, now gone. Then to an open chest that looked like it contained something valuable, an angry Countessa Else staring accusingly at every man on board. Subcommanders were instructed to walk up and down formation, sizing up their men. The command to strip down was given in English and German. The British soldiers complied. The Germans obeyed. Each side accused the other of the crime in whatever grumbles, yells, or accusing stares they could emit.

Maria saw birds above her, the sliver of something other than water in the distance. Indeed, America was close at hand. But once the hands of the Subcommander reached Maria, she would certainly be found out. So near, and so far, and so far, Hans’ duties as negotiator elsewhere prevented him from coming to the rescue. Maria felt her heart pound, her stomach grumble, and then a lightness around her waist, and more private parts. Whatever was in her money belt was gone, as was the secret ‘stash’ inside her more private parts.

How could it have happened? How could her Bavarian Socrates be so Machevellian? What was really in the sausage she ate so voraciously? How could a woman of her superior intelligence be stolen from, and perhaps even violated by a man she trusted so much? The Bavarian gentleman, absent from formation, seemed like a friend, or worse, a father. By her manner of speech and inquiry, he must have figured out that Maria was at the very least, a well-stocked person of breeding and wealth. One of those people who stole from the peasants for centuries, and in this new age of Equality and Freedom, had the obligation to give something back, or be stolen from. He couldn’t have known her real identity, though her gender was

certainly discovered.

Finally, Hans convinced his Jager Superior to call off the duel of 'honor' with a British officer of the same rank. He walked as quickly as he could toward now TWO Sergeants, one Hessian and one English, continuing the inspection of the Hessian troops, edging their way toward the Drummerboys. Maria felt naked in a pair of 'longjohns', the hole that had been cut between the legs now letting in the biting wind. A single coin shaking in it crotch. A whore's wages, she calculated. A stupid whore, as she noted Hans' stare always on the job at hand, and, out of required courtesy, at Countessa Else. Then---a whistle blew, the remnants of the lifeboat spotted then pulled in just as she was about to be searched .

"Justice" Maria felt herself gritting in a distorted kind of gratitude noting the Bavarian Sage's lifeless face on the mutilated corpse demolished by shark's teeth. The kind of gratitude where the loss of someone else's good fortune is celebrated as your own. The definition of War, she surmised. A legally sanctioned series of crimes in which people are separated from their morals, perspectives, consciences, and loved ones.

"We will be alright," she heard in a whisper behind her. She turned around. It was Hans, addressing the men with his eyes, and his still, he hoped, beloved, with his heart. For better or worse, Hans' ability to be a model and effective soldier was the only way Maria, Hans and Albert would survive in this strange new existence. Even Albert, who escaped the hangmen's noose for criminal offenses so many times in the Fatherland, seemed an amateur by English standards at this business of making a living at war and the looting which was part of a soldier's calculated salary. And this was an English War, in which so many Germans were now a part, whether they calculated such or not.

CHAPTER 14

On the map, it was Sandy Hook, Staten Island, an appreciably-sized land mass nestled between the small island of Manhattan and the colony of New Jersey. A safe island according to the British Generals. The 22nd of August in 1776, a day everyone who had one wrote in his diary. An event that Hans ingrained in his head. An experience he hoped Maria, finally allowed to be by his side as his personal assistant, was sharing with him.

“A hot day,” Hans noted to Maria, feeling the sweat building up beneath his tunic, a persistent species of insect called a misquito buzzing around his neck. “Not like summer I remember back home.”

“You have to learn to see and feel with your nose, Hans,” Maria said, pointing his attention to the sky, and the wooded roof Nature provided to view it through.

The lips under Hans’ overgrown and freshly waxed mustache broke out into a smile, as large as it was warm. “Yes, cedar trees, sassafrass, and so many other trees from home.”

Maria snuck her small arms under Hans’ elbows as discreetly and passionately as possible. “Like the woods we hid out in at my father’s Estate were brought here, personally, for us.”

Hans contemplated the proposition, from his intellect, and his heart. Indeed, maybe Maria was right. Maybe America was a place where you could start fresh. More accurately, a place where you could rebuild what you had as home, but with you on top of the shitpile, or fertilizer farm, instead of at the bottom. Indeed, maybe America was a place where shit did smell like flowers. And when they both returned home to the Fatherland, it would be by their own choice, and on their own terms.

“Interesting how the British camps are in all those open fields, and ours are to be near the woods,” Maria commented regarding the assignment given by the resident Scottish Sergeants, who had their orders from English General Howe himself. “Maybe that’s because there is more sunshine on the fields.”

“Or the British are afraid of the forest,” Hans mused. “Maybe that is why their island back home has so many trees that have been cut down.”

Hans and Maria knew that the deforestation of Britain was a product of many

historical events that did not occur in the German portions of Europe. But it was fun to fantasize about their allies, who seemed to act so superior to everyone else. Maybe that was why the British posted more sentries between themselves and the ‘Hessians’, as they now called all the German-speaking soldiers, than between themselves and the woods where it was rumored that there were rebels or, worse, renegade Red Indians working for them.

As the boats offloaded their supply of goods, Maria assisted Hans in his counting of supplies. “More men and guns than food to feed them,” she noted as the end point of the arithmetic. “Which is maybe why God, or General Howe, or both, have placed us next to the forest.” Maria’s eye spotted a flock of ducks flying above, her nose smelling other game on the ground no more than a hundred yards away. “He who has the money in Europe makes the rules. He who brings more game to the table here rules the Rulers,” she smiled.

“Yes,” Hans noted. He knew that Maria was well aware of his skills as a hunter, and a marksman. And the sense of it was that America was a place where one could fill one’s pocket with gold and belly with food to the extent that one could take what you needed, or wanted, rather than beg for it or request it. But Hans had not killed anything in the woods for at least ten years. The consequences of poaching game on the von Edinger estate were quite severe. The consequences for pulling the trigger and ending the life of another creature by his own hand were something even worse.

But this was a day where the shit-producing, shit-poor province of Hesse-Cassel was being honored. The name ‘Hessian’ was being applied to enlisted men and officers alike from Brunswick, Anspach, Waldeck, Bayreuth and even Anhal-Zerbst. Indeed, the leader of the Hessians from Hesse-Cassel, Leopold Phillip General von Heister, a man who only had two names before his ‘von’, boasted nearly seven thousand men from his province, with another four thousand to come on the next ships. Indeed, there seemed to be more Hessians from Hesse-Cassel than British soldiers from Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales combined.

But there was another cause for celebration. “Children?” Maria smiled, pointing Hans’ already overwhelmed eyes to German families preparing their evening meal, interspersed between the regular soldiers.

“Yes,” Hans said, apologetically. “I personally put in a request to General von Heister to bring my family here. But my rank was not yet high enough.”

“I should have made you a Lieutenant earlier,” Maria let slip.

“And only one in hundred men were permitted to bring their wives,” Hans fumed. “Or children, or---“

Countessa Else, now Major von Westphal’s ‘wife’, sauntered by, winking flirtatiously at Hans as he observed the progress of setting up Camp. Baron von Edinger’s ‘adopted’ daughter didn’t seem to recognize her girlhood friend and co-dreamer, Maria. A fact which seemed to relief Maria, but also hurt her.

Hans could read the feelings on both sides of her face. Hans did his best to be gracious to the Countessa, and nothing more. To be less so would incur the wrath of the dejected ‘Lady Else’ and the greatest of hardships on his men, so the most reliable of rumors said.

“Lieutenant Muller,” Major von Westphal blasted out from the side of his triple-chinned jaw. “What is that you have on your arm?”

Hans froze. Indeed, the Major did have eyes in the back of his head. And ones that could see beyond the surface as well. Hans discretely removed Maria’s hold from his arm, and acted ‘officerly’. “A freshly polished silver insignia, Sir!” he boldly proclaimed, hoping and praying that Major Westphal was referring to the insignia on his uniform and not the Drummerboy holding onto the arm under it.

“Take it off,” the order.

“But Sir, I---“ Hans found slip from his mouth. Thankfully he didn’t ask the question that Americans asked of each other, so he was told. And which Germans never asked their superiors. “Why.”

“Recommendations from General Howe, orders from me,” Major von Westphal continued, taking count of armaments, men and artillery being moved from the boats into camp. “Silver attracts attention from rebels and Indians in the woods, Leutenant. The Red and White savages in those woods kill officers with the highest and most impressive rank first.”

Indeed, von Westphal did believe the British observation. He himself had striped his uniform of all but the internally known indicators of rank. He moved on, his carriage and authoritative manner in which he held his riding crop letting all who had been in Europe know that he was king, general and, when necessary, executioner. Else carried on with him, according to her new rank and station.

“He seems to care about us,” Maria noted of the Elderly Officer when he and his ‘escort’ were out of hearing range.

“Which is why there is talk about him being replaced,” Hans replied. While taking off his Officer’s insignia, he felt Maria’s stomach turn. Partly out of fear, partly out of ironic regret for spending her fortune to make him the first target for a rebel bullet or Indian arrow, and partly out of something more basic, and practical.

“I will get us something to eat,” Hans said, placing his assuring arm on her shivering shoulder.

“Something for ALL of us, please?” she added, pointing to the multitude of men from so many parts of the Fatherland now bound by a common language, a common Cause, and uncommon opportunities for betterment or hardship never experienced at home.

CHAPTER 15

To the kilted Scots who were the eyes of the English General, it was a reconnaissance drill. To the hand-picked Jagers under Lieutenant Hans Muller's command, it was a food gathering detail. To the game that would become that food it would be a surprise of a lifetime. Yet another varied viewpoint affair in Hans' mind as he instructed his men to spread out in the woods, signaling with 'cookoos' from beneath their heavily mustached noses in the event that they spotted any game worth taking.

But whatever the design of the hunt, it turned into a very individual affair as the woods turned deep, the distances between hunters large, and the sounds of the varied creatures in the forest seemed to get louder and louder, dampening, perhaps, any cookoo from one's fellow soldiers. As Hans' feet relished in the brush of the thick grass under the low-lying brush, he pondered the backgrounds and fate of the men who he now commanded, by accident of love and generous bribes from lover. These Jagers, now under his command, were well seasoned game keepers, their eyes attuned to animals who would fulfill their God-given duty by becoming food or hides, their noses honed in on any trespassing two legged creatures who were to be shot for violating laws of property. Most had drawn human blood as well as animal blood in their career. And here was Hans, more than once wounded as a poacher, in the woods to talk with the animals about his relationship with humans, and God. And the son of a hunter himself.

The woods became both a paradise and a nightmare. The sight of the sassafras and cedar reminded Hans of his days as a boy. He felt himself seeing worlds that had existed in his past, in a homeland he was sure he would never see again, and prayed he never had to. For reasons he could not help, he invited the devil and Saint Stephen alike into the memory which was taking his sense of smell, hearing, and touch, but not yet sight. He seemed to need both of their voices to hear his own, and the voice of a God he hoped still existed, or cared. By fate, or accident, a deer from the 'real' world of the present popped in in front of Hans, barely around 75 yards away according to his best perceptions. The animal stood there, frozen. Exposing his head, or heart, as a target.

"Go for the heart," Hans heard from the back of his aching head with one of the a voice from his childhood that revisited him in his adulthood. "Blow the creature's brains out if you can, but take careful aim this time. Hit him between the eyes, not in the jaw like last time."

“I can’t. If I miss again...” young Hans said through the mouth of the mustached Yager holding the rifle. “If I wound him, he will---”

“---Be an easier target, son.” The god-like demon with the gruff face and sour lips pulled the trigger and shot, a nick that barely scratched the skin.

Young Hans smiled as he saw the deer dance through the woods, oblivious to the shot. Then felt a slap across his ‘inner’ face as the memory became a reality once again.

“Aim that rifle I worked a year for you to get! Aim it, and shoot, or I will shoot YOU,” the voice inside his aching head commanded.

“With your aim, you would miss me,” young Hans mused silently as the deer in the woods in front of his father and himself danced in and out of the gunsights. “Run Rudolf, run!” the boy screamed to the animal Hans had been stalking and secretly feeding for the three days of ‘stalking’ drill. The companion Hans had been talking to when his father was busy making shot or shooting his mouth off about how stupid or crazy his wife was. The animal that still hovered within range of being shot, when good sense said that another 30 yard distance from the two hunters would afford him the better part of the interspecies relationship.

“You shoot him or I will,” the man who Hans never addressed as anything except ‘Sir’ commanded. He handed the lad a freshly loaded rifle, his own, and felt something vulnerable from “Sir”. “Your eyes see the world more clearly than mine ever did, or will.”

“Perhaps, Sir.” Hans said to his father, and joked with Rudolf.

“No!” ‘Sir’ asserted. “Your eyes see that it is a world where the strong survive and MUST dominate the weak. Man over animals. Germans over other men.”

“And German men with guns over German women with books?” Hans asked.

Another slap across the face, then a shot. This time from ‘Sir’s’ other gun. Into Rudolf’s left hind leg. His dance stopped, his singing turning into a squeaking moan which deafened young Hans’ ears.

“Now!” ‘Sir’ announced. “You will shoot that animal in the head or the heart.”

“I can’t...” Hans stuttered. “I...”

“Alright then, I will...” ‘Sir’ announced, his ‘accidental’ aim hitting the other leg, in kneecap, the place where any bullet is most painful. “You see, Son. I am a bad shot. It is up to you to be a better marksman than I am. To be a better man than I am. To make something of our name!”

Hans took rifle in hand, cocked the hammer and looked into Rudolf’s eyes. Tears poured down his face. “I am sorry, my friend.”

“Sorrier if you don’t do your duty, you stupid little girl!”

‘Sir’ had triggered the part in young Hans that would turn him into the kind of man his father wanted. Young Hans felt anger coming to his face, shame to his heart, an eye looking into the secrets of his past explorations, encounters and yearnings which could only be vindicated by one action.

Hans fired the shot, a direct hit.

“You blew his brains out!” ‘Sir’ commended.

“Yes, Sir,” Hans muttered, the bullet that had silenced Rudolf’s pain having shot him squarely in the Soul.

“And with your eyes open!” ‘Sir’ exclaimed with pride, breaking out a bottle of rum, offering it to the lad..

“That is the way you taught me to shoot, Sir,” Hans replied, accepting a drink from the hurting and cruel man who he felt he had to love, for some reason he couldn’t find in his ‘crazy’ mother’s eyes or books. The rum tasted good to the tongue, and light to the head. A good potion to neutralize the disease of compassion, the disorder of caring. So it felt like, as he remembered....But what would he do at home that night? How would dinner be with the ‘wife’ at home? And who would be the real game at that table?

A gunshot from the real world woke Lieutenant Muller up from his restless walking slumber. Followed by a ‘cookoo’. Then two more cookoos and two more shots. Meanwhile, Hans took aim at the Rudolf in front of his sights. “Cookoo” he said, again and again. “We are both ‘cookoo’!” he repeated loud enough for the seemingly deaf, or perhaps overcaring deer. “Cookoo” he screamed yet again. He

walked up to the deer, edging his way in. A closer shot, he thought. A direct hit to the brain which seemed defective enough to deserve killing, rather than the heart, he postulated. "A cleaner death for you, a more impressive kill for me, and more venison on the table for hungry children who have GROWING brains!" he found himself screaming through a whisper.

But the deer stood still. Deaf, dumb and perhaps even blind, he speculated. And underfed as well. Perhaps by doing his manly duty as a soldier, provider and keeper of the forest, he was doing this Rudolf a favor. He took aim, then closed his eyes for the secret prayer he devised and used more times than any one knew about. "God forgive me for the duty I must do in Your service."

Hans opened his eyes to hear a shot, and see the deer go down. His inner eye was looking for 'Sir', the ever-present ghost who left his body nearly ten years ago under circumstances never made public, and visited his nightmares each night, legally sanctioned, so it seemed, by God Himself. But neither Sir nor the boy who was to become the man Hans never became were present. Only a deer, dead on the ground---which had been killed, thankfully, by the hand of another stalker in the woods.

Hans didn't recognize the uniform, if indeed it was a uniform. Something blue, not quite like the ones worn by the Hessian Regulars or the Yagers. Nothing like the British uniforms he had seen or had been told to instruct his men to recognize. It was a uniform of a different kind, the manner of individualistic leather and fringe delineating his alliance. And with others around him, lurking around and communicating in the same manner as the Yagers did. Their faces seemed red, white and sort of green. Their most valued cargo seemed to be bags filled with papers.

"Red. White and blue Americans." Hans postulated as he ducked into the brush and watched the lesser members of the 'company' bring the deer out of the woods, the more senior 'savage' pull out a map. "Like the 'Indians' at the Boston Tea Party," he recalled regarding the White, money-hungry, ingrate rebels who masqueraded as Redskins to dump British tea off the ships in Boston protesting the tax the King had to levy upon them in order to pay for the War with the French back in 1763 to make the English Colonies safe from Indian attacks. Or so was the talk and claim around the dining table in the Officer's mess back at the ship. Translated to Hans by Countessa Else as well as the British-assigned military translator on board.

Hans looked, listened and smelled around the woods for his own men. By the sound

of the diminishing ‘cookoos’, he surmised that each of them had gone back to camp with enough game to feed the troops and enough re-connection with their forest roots to make them feel at home again. Hans’ English was certainly not up to any official translator’s standards, or even that of the allegedly London-schooled Countessa Else. The dialect and manner of speech was very similar to those of British soldiers. Indeed, these were Englishmen, but who spoke their Mother Country’s tongue with a freedom of expression and high regard for grammatical mistakes. Or so it seemed.

But there was something else about them. A willingness to be cruel. A willingness to disobey the rule of law, and perhaps honor. With them were three Redcoat captives, two enlisted men and one British Officer. All were restrained with ropes, gags in their mouths. The Officer was afforded the least amount of honor, and comfort, his ‘interrogation’ when looking at the map involving slaps, punches, and the threat of a knife to the eye if he did not see the logic of Rebel ‘reason’. Then a boat slithered in behind them. A signal from the boatman to come aboard, the rapid evacuation of all hands to get on board. The Officer blindfolded, taken on board as a ‘guest’, the two enlisted men set free. The one with a face resembling a bulldog was referred to by his liberators as ‘Houndface’.

Hans made his way back through the ‘safe’ woods of Staten Island slowly. He thanked God that he was not spotted. He thanked General von Westphal for ordering him to remove his shiny officer’s insignia. He even found himself thanking Rudolf the deer for teaching him the art of ‘becoming like the trees’ when there are hunters about. Especially when there was no shortage of two and four legged hunters roaming about.

The trail back to camp was one Hans had blazed himself. If there was one difference between the American Forest and the woodlands of the Fatherland it was that more often than not, if you set foot in the woods, no other man had been there before. At least no other White man. Hans had heard about Indians, as everyone else who boarded a ship for America had. Red skinned, half-naked savages who worshipped Pagan gods, gave themselves animal names, and who indulged in health-destructive habits such as washing themselves in rivers or lakes nearly every day. But according to the reports, most of the Indians hated the Rebels more than the British. Or was that another untruth? So many seemed to materialize, or be on the horizon.

One truth did materialize, two long hours later. Hans found himself in the woods just outside the British camp. There, on the ground, was ‘Houndface’, the Redcoat

Private's pockets filled with the kind of coin that enlisted men only obtained when stealing from officers, or when they were intending to desert. His face was barely recognizable, his hair scalped. His left arm hanging onto the body by a thread, the meat on his other appendages scooped out by something more savage than anything Hans had ever seen in Germany. Perhaps it was that bear or cougar which Hans had been eluding for the last hour, by crude estimate of time. Or perhaps it was an animal more fierce, devious, or both. One of those feelings that came from being the product of a mother too intelligent for the world she had to live in, and a father who saw cruelty as the only option for survival.

CHAPTER 16

“New World, Old Rules,” Albert said to himself when he was called to formation to observe another punishment. This time it was a Seargent Ranselhoff, one who had tasted blood, according to his reputation and temperament.

“The charge is dessertion,” very English Major Jenkin announced as the Hessian Seargent whose job to ‘toughen up’ the troops sobbed on his way to the platform beneath the hanging tree. First to be stripped were his stripes, then his tunic, then his trousers.

“I did it for my family!” Ranselhoff pleaded, directing his attention to the Hessian officers who had wives and children with them, and to those children themselves, who were also ‘requested’ to watch.

Jenkin held up an English translation of the parchment which looked identical to the papers carried to the island by the presumably illiterate rebels in the woods. Jenkins and read from it, the official military translator relating the text as it appeared on the page in German. “German soldiers. This is not your War. You are being hired to fight a War against God fearing and freedom loving Englishmen which Englishmen themselves refuse to fight. The enemy is King George, and most importantly, tyranny itself. You are fighting this War to feed your families, as are we. Should you be reasonable and wise enough to depart from your ranks and join us, 40 acres of free land will be yours along with money to make good use of it, or to return home to the Fatherland as honorable men who have honored the Cause of Liberty, Equality and Justice.”

Albert looked around him. Every Hessian, be he from Hesse-Cassel, or the other provinces of the Fatherland, knew about Justice, more by the lack of it where they were from, and the paucity of it where they were now. Liberty was something dreamed about, used in small doses by those men brave enough to access it. Equality was something else, but considering that ‘all men are created equal’ made prince and pauper alike feel very challenged by the proposition. An impossibility, but maybe with liberty, when applied with justice, it could work.

“You all think that this is a real offer from the Rebels, yes?” Jenkin related to the troops. Even Albert seemed convinced of his sincerity. Certainly Maria appeared to be, as she nudged a cynical Hans with an optimistic smile on her boyish, yet still beautiful, face.

“But I tell you, that this is a lie!” the British Major continued. “The rebels here are savages, with no respect for rank or mercy. You have only to witness those who have been too close to the woods, or who have wandered too far from their posts. Dead enlisted men, AND officers, shot from men who hide behind trees, then run away like cowards.”

The Major related the accounts of events which were well documented facts in the Hessian rumor mill as well as the English one. Even Albert, who secretly admired the Americans for standing up for their rights against the most powerful army in the world, thought it dishonorable to shoot a man in the back, or anywhere else, while hiding behind bushes. And though he hated officers in the English and Hessian camp equally, he lamented at their having lost their arms, eyes and lives as the first victims of this police action. Particularly the ones who had wives and children who were now stuck in America.

“These Rebels are half savages themselves, dressing as Savages, smelling like Savages, and behaving as Savage Redskins,” Jenkin continued. “Is that not right, Lieutenant Muller?”

All eyes went to the fledgling Commoner who had become respected by enlisted men as well as officers. “Yes, Sir,” Hans affirmed. To Albert’s inner eye he seemed to be telling the truth, or at least the relevant part of it. To everyone else, he was the dissolver of all doubt.

“And when these ‘Sons of Freedom’ greet you into their camp, you will find yourself at their dining table. After they have killed you, and eaten you like the cannibalistic disloyal savages they are.” Jenkins continued. “Is that not so, Lieutenant Muller?”

“Yes,” Hans said, eyes turned down.

Albert saw the entire camp believe the claim instantly. Maybe Hans did too. The secret conversation they had regarding the possibility that the British may have ‘cannibalized’ a deserter of their own to keep their own Army intact seemed irrelevant now. Or if it was a lie, it was one of those military necessities the officers told their men in the service of those pathetic and servile souls. Enlisted men were not required to know certain things so that they would be kept alive. Officers lead them into battle, and take the first bullets into their own chests in defense of their men and their Cause. A lie that turned out to be all too true here in the New World. Cruelty of drill Sergeants in training toughened men up for real battle. Such would

be the fate now of drill Sergeant Ranselhoff at the hands of the British high command.

But then the English released their most effective weapon against their allies, the Hessians. “This man by German law must be hung for desertion,” Jenkin announced. “But by with the authority of British mercy, I set him free.”

Hushes came over enlisted men and officers alike. Even Albert seemed shocked when Jenkins himself cut the ropes around Sergeant Ranselhoff’s shaking hands, then embraced him in ‘good fellowship’ as the English called it. Amidst the clamor of gratitude and the extra ration of mind-numbing whiskey brought in by a group of Scottish Regulars who had just finished practicing their combat skills in a drunken brawl with the Bayreuth Regiment, Hans made his way towards his surprisingly sober friend Albert.

“Sincerity,” Hans commented. “If you can sell that.”

“And you are the most honest liar I have ever met, God damn and help you,” Albert speculated prophetically.

“That claim is absurd, Private Stein,” Hans replied, holding back more half truths.

Albert knew better than to question Hans when he was in such a resolved mood, believing things that sane men never would. But maybe Hans did believe the stories about the cannibalizing American rebels. Maybe he had seen things, by accident or intent, that only his eyes were to see. In any case, as War was a series of mistrusts and deceptions, the only thing that kept a man alive was to believe in something, or someone.

“You know, my friend,” Albert related with a drink in his hand, offered to and accepted by Hans. “Friendship between Comrades is the only thing that never changes in War.”

“Or love?” Hans asked, and proposed, smiling with mixed emotions at Maria.

The celebration was brief, as was the dialogue. Both men, just a year ago boys, now knew that the only way to preserve their honor, lives and families was to become the savage ‘Huns’ they were hired to be. It was the only merciful and practical option left.

CHAPTER 17

Of all the emotions the human soul was possible of feeling, boredom was the one Maria hated most. And there had been no shortage of it in September as Staten Island become overloaded with even more soldiers from the Fatherland, and more British soldiers who thought they had a right to tell them what to do. Drills would take place twice daily, brawls between drunken enlisted men at night and, so the rumors said, a few duels of 'honor' in the woods between dishonorable officers. But it was all 'practice', as Hans told Maria. As were her extended duties as a Drummer Boy while Hans tended to his reconnaissance duties on the surrounding islands, reporting rebel troop numbers and positions he shared only with the High Command. Countessa Else continued to wink at him flirtatiously. Hans nodded back dispassionately with distanced and gentlemanly protocol which he was learning fast. Hans was also learning other things very fast, the most important of which was "there are two emotions you feel in battle, fear and numbness."

They were concepts Hans seemed to know from other battles he had fought in his youth, the details unknown to Maria. But he now spoke them with a new authority, and with a churning stomach that even the deafest of Artillery men could hear. Most officers proclaimed that battle would be an opportunity for glory and advancement in rank. The blood-tested Corporals and Seargents whispered about enhancing one's own wealth by less official means after the battle was over. Stuffing one's pockets with Yankee silver and one's belly with hot meal cooked by the promiscuous Yankee women who knew how to keep a man satisfied, in more ways than one. Adventures to experience that would turn into legend they could tell around the fireplace in the Fatherland by next Fall's harvest.

It was an adventure of deception as well. Maria remembered Hans saying that his mother told him that the ability to read in a world that embraces ignorance is a curse. She wished she didn't read the German newspaper used to wipe your bottom that arrived from London. The accounts of a new composer in Vienna who composed his first symphony at the age of six with the same name as her horse, Wolfgang. The news about the 'people's Czarina' Catherine the Great putting down another revolution because it would destroy the Russian people before freeing them. And the news about a publisher of a German newspaper in London who was found dead in a fire while trying to save a baby, the blaze, according to the account, having been set by a mad Baroness-to-be from Hesse-Cassel. And the death of her mother by her daughter's hand.

How had Maria's father known about her 'death' in the fire? Baron von Edinger was as vicious as he was practical. Maria had a price on her, thankfully cropped, head. Just as the signers of the Declaration of Independence had a price on theirs. Both were payable to any commoner or common soldier who could deliver.

October came on as cold as it did suddenly, and Maria found herself amongst a row of Drummer Boys and Fife players, shoulder to shoulder, playing the prelude to facing General Washington's band of Savages, Rebels and Thieves surrounded by woods that didn't smell like Staten Island or Hesse-Cassel. They were still a shimmering mirage across the field, an entire row of dirty-looking men whose weapons were all different. As were most of their clothing, more Indian than White, particularly the men who had the longest rifles. General Washington was a tall man, at least six feet, made to seem even larger on his white horse, an animal which he rode with more skill than any horseman, or woman, Maria had ever seen. For every man on the field, she could sense three in the woods. Four if she let the nausea in her stomach move up to her head. She imagined herself captured, scalped of the little hair she still had on her cropped head, then violated in ways that no respectable woman would put in her diary. She sweated a thin, cold fluid that smelled like nothing she ever had experienced. She felt her hands drop one of her drumsticks. Then felt the bayonet tip of the 'orchestra conductor' behind her in the small of her back. He picked it up, handed it to her.

"The tighter we march, the faster they run, son," the veteran, one armed, 'Bandmeister' assured her. "The louder you beat the drum, the tighter we march!" he proclaimed to the other lads in the line.

Maria advanced forward with her Comrades, boys barely fifteen years old. The men old enough to grow mustaches marched ahead of the percussion and flute 'orchestra', in tight formation, officers on horseback along their ranks or in the rear.

General Washington rode in front of his troops, but seemed to still sabre-bearing mounted men with shadowed faces in the rear 'encouraging' those on foot to move forward. And Yankee drummer boys behind such 'morale' officers.

Maria looked for Albert amongst her own troops, but he was somewhere in the advancing lines, The Hessian movements were being choreographed to look more like puppets in a ballet than men about to meet their Maker, or themselves.

"What you imagine, you will become," Maria remembered from one of the

instructional orders Hans had delivered to the troops before he himself took his men into the woods in an attempt to drive whatever enemy was in the woods out into the open. A blast of American artillery blasted into the middle of Hessian troops, a volcano of dirt clouding the sky. Maria imagined it was the accompanying theatrics to Handel's "Water Music", music composed by a German to impress English audiences. Not as heartfelt as Johan Sebastian Bach, the organist who never left home and whose music didn't seem to move very much further. But Handel was the right music now to play between the ears that felt numb after the first round of American artillery subsided.

Indeed, the self deception did numb her fear. The 'puppet procession' ahead of her advanced, without missing a step. Still in rhythm to the drum and fife. Still inspired by something that they saw, or didn't see, in front of them. "Order always wins over chaos," she said to herself. Maybe the one armed Bandmeister who seemed to adopt all the boys under his command was right when he explained that their job as drumbeaters and flute players really did keep the Army together. "We play fear into the enemy's heads while our fellow soldiers put bayonets into their bellies!" he proclaimed, once more. "Play us to victory!"

Maria felt herself being a woman again, somehow, in that she was once again watching the affairs of men, unable to directly participate in events which she had initiated, or made possible. From the safe distance beyond artillery and musket range, she watched.

She watched as the rebels knelt down or stood at General Washington's command and fired, from a distance far greater than 50 yards. Several Hessians fell, some screaming, some too injured to say anything. A yelp of victory from most of the rebels as those with guns reloaded, smirks on their faces.

"Play our men forward, for the Fatherland!" the Bandmeister blasted out, taking the drum from the catatonic boy next to Maria who smelled of urine, feces and fear.

Maria watched again as the line of Hessians moved forward, just as in the drills. Albert seemed to be amongst them, his voice leading them forward from the ranks. Hans and a few Jagers joined them from the side, having pushed three times their number of Americans out of the woods.

"It's a turkey shoot, boys!" one of the rebels proclaimed in English, then in--- German.

With that, another round of rifle fire, loud boisterous and against the command of their General. His Excellency George Washington seemed frustrated, as there seemed to be several generals on their field amidst his ranks. Indeed, each of the Americans seemed to be his own general. They smirked as they advanced forward, spreading out, taking aim and showing their numbers. Like rabid cattle about to slaughter the herdsmen. Hans and his riflemen took aim from prone positions, commanded into formation. Some rabid bulls fell, but the herd kept coming.

More Hessians fell, but the columns kept advancing, not firing a shot. The rebels swarmed in, each shot from their long rifles putting Maria into a shattering terror. Closing in on 100 yards, then 50, then from behind her a bugle call, more like a Roman trumpet.

Indeed, it was very Roman, British and German. In the manner of the Romans in Gaul, the Hessians formed in threes, moved ahead as a geometrical unit. A spearheaded four-rowed triangle halted to take a first round of shots. Then advanced as the lead men stepped back to the rear to reload and rest as the line behind them moved forward. The volley was orchestrated, in unison and effective.

The smoke cleared from the first round of gunfire from the short-ranged muskets, revealing a line of rebels on the ground, moaning, cursing, crying. Calling for their officers, Comrades or mothers. All of which were nervously trying to make sense of what was going on, or looking for an escape route.

The column moved forward again, to the beat of Maria's drum, and those around her. Another round of fire heralded a contagious fear amidst the rebels and an every man for himself retreat, or if one were still able to think, regrouping behind whatever cover was available. Even the mounted 'morale' officers in the rear guard abandoned their posts, galloping off into the woods on their wounded and lame horses. But still General Washington stayed on the field, his steed galloping around terrified men, dodging bullets, instructing those who stayed to keep firing, beating those who were fleeing with his whip.

Maria watched the rest of it happen faster than her brain could record it. The Hessian line advanced with bayonets drawn, the four line defense moved forward, spreading out in orderly and deadly attack. The rebels fled as the 'Huns' advanced, bayoneting those who chose to take up the sword against them, or the stick. It seemed cruel, but then again, these starving AND greedy rebels would, and did, stab you in the back in the dead of night, take you into the woods, then eat you. According to the most reliable reports

available to the Baroness hiding out from the father who, rightly or wrongly, was responsible for everything she had ever become.

Everything Maria had read in books about war seemed to vanish. With every rebel Savage she saw fall, or retreat. With every Hessian she saw advance forward. And with every scream of agony and regret from the fallen, no matter what uniform they wore.

When the smoke cleared, the rebels had fled into the woods. The order to pursue them was halted. The orchestra instructed to cease its performance. “We will finish them off another day, as they finish themselves off,” the final explanation given to the men by their officers, who now felt an obligation to answer the question of ‘why’ which was forbidden to be asked in Germany, and officially disallowed in America. As for Maria, ‘why’ didn’t make sense anymore. ‘How’ was the operative question.

How would she ever have a ‘civilized adventure’ with Hans in a war that was consuming her as much as him. How would she keep her sanity and perspectives intact in a War designed to separate one’s soul from both. And how would she explain how a drummerboy’s belly fed according to meager rations was becoming larger by the day? For reasons that she feared dealt more with her female anatomy, as a result of her relationship with a man whose identity she had to keep very, very secret.

CHAPTER 18

By November, the American Army was on the run yet again. Their still esteemed leader, His Excellency General Washington, had not been scratched by bullet, sword or bayonet. But Washington was a master of deception, escaping capture at Kipps Bay, White Plains and slipping into New Jersey. As was Reconnaissance Yager Hans Muller a master of deception, blessed with the ability to turn conflicting self-interests amongst the ‘allied’ Loyalist forces into common agendas. He seemed to be gifted with the ability to know what Washington was going to do before he even did it, and cursed with the knowledge that whenever he was right, or listened to by his superiors, people on both sides got killed. He had not fired a single shot into an enemy soldier, a fact he still had kept from his men, but not from the smartest man under his command.

“So, you think you will become a General without doing a private’s dirty work?” Albert asked his Comrade and temporary aid as they walked the streets of lower New York, now securely in British hands.

“You are good at what you do, I seem to be good at what I do, Seargent Stein,” Hans replied.

“But not good enough to make me a Luetenant, Leutenant Muller,” Albert pressed, with a smile.

“Wait till he becomes a Captain,” the voice of youth echoed from the ‘third person’ between them. The drummer boy with breast under her tunic smiled at Albert, then at her betrothed.

Hans wanted to kiss Maria. Or give her a display of his love, affection and respect. But they were still being watched, and nothing seemed more ‘watchable’ in General Howe’s very British New York than a Yager Lieutenant, an insolent Infantry Hessian Seargent and a drummer boy who seemed very comfortable between them walking down the streets as if they were family on the very best of terms with each other. Had it been a civilian Reality in Vienna, Prague or even Bonn, Maria would have one arm held by Hans and the other by Albert. Her mind fueled by Hans’ intellectual discourse, her primal passions unexpectedly aroused by now Seargent ‘wildman’ Albert’s military exploits.

New York City seemed to have everything an inquiring mind and adventurous spirit desired, to Hans anyway. A concentration of humanity packed into narrow streets at

the end of an island which you could walk across in an hour, ride across in less time than that. A place where the frontiers were of the mind rather than the world that could be seen, touched and felt. The kind of place that Hans' mother told him about, from books she had read, memorized and, when she could, sneak into his room before they were used for firewood.

The rapid manner of argument here which frenetic, intense and respectful, even under the loud insults. Hans imagined the commoners of this uncommon city speaking ideas worthy of Plato rattled off in English too rapid for him to understand and other languages he didn't recognize at all. Postulates about the meaning of life which would have amazed Spinoza. And economic discourses about the real nature of man and his Creator that could, and should, have taken place between Martin Luther and the Pope. Or even more unlikely, the Pope in Rome and the Christian Orthodox Archbishop in Greece. But there was one topic no one spoke about freely---Freedom.

Hans noted a scarecrow propped up in a garden of weeds at the intersection of three streets. It was dressed in the manner of General George Washington, riding his horse, facing the animal's ass with his eyes, his non-sword hand firmly in the anal cavity of the beast. Next to it, an American flag being burned. "That is disrespectful, and dishonorable," Hans proclaimed loudly enough for only his two companions to hear him.

"And the only strategy we have to draw out rebel snipers and spies," Albert replied. "We burn their flag so they get angry enough to shoot at us, and then we shoot at them."

"Yes, everyone shooting at each other," Hans lamented.

"That's what war is, or is supposed to be, Lieutenant Hans, Sir," the now-veteran Sergeant with forty kills 'in the face of severe adversity' to his credit shot back. "Is that not right, Maria?"

"That is...correct," Maria replied, choosing her words very carefully.

Hans noted that she was in pain. Another 'stomach ache', as she kept saying. That stomach ache had escalated into a belly requiring a man sized belt which she wore very loosely. Still, she remained tight lipped about the details. That same tight lip that reminded him of another time. From a blind woman in a blue dress being led down the street by her son, already an old man at the age of twelve.

Han's mind took his eyes and consciousness back to a time and place before he knew anything about America, or Maria, or even shoveling shit.

"So, you like my blue dress, Hans?" Hans recalled from that place he visited in every nightmare since he was sold to the Shit Farm in Hesse-Cassel. "The man in the store said it was blue, once," said the bedridden woman wearing the garment which had been washed by rain, snow and tears so many times that it was now a ghostlike white. Gretchen's eyes were red beads, the cuts in her eyelids and corneas now healed into a thick scar. Her body was bruised, her legs all but wasted. Her mind turned into pea pudding by the drunkard who 'disciplined' her, or the concoction he gave her to 'soothe her nerves'. "Read me a story, son" Gretchen begged.

Young Hans picked up a book. Don Quiote, the book his mother Gretchen had read to him when his eyes could not yet decipher print. The German translation of the Spanish novel about a deluded man who saw dragons in windmills, angels within whores, and Holy Causes to fight amongst the most mundane or earthly duties. Gretchen smiled at the heroism of the deluded old man's attempt to slay the dragon in the windmill, and his heroic exploits to go on to free the oppressed in the village nearby with his faithful friend, Sancho Panza. She asked Hans to stop reading when he got to the part when Don Quiote had to look into a mirror and realize that he was a deluded old man, humored and cared for by his male nurse, Senior Panza. "I need a heroine's exit from this madness," Gretchen said by way of explanation, holding onto the last vestige of who she was, should have been, and might have been. "I want to go home. To be loved, to be with the man I once loved, or wanted to."

Young Hans grabbed hold of her hand. "Is that you, Tristan?" she asked.

Hans recognized the name. His mother's lover before she met her father, and some say, for a short time afterward. Others rumored for a longer time. Tristan had died in one of the wars that kings fought to keep Princes in line. Gretchen believed that it was a heroic death, and that it was necessary. "Tristan, you promised that when it was my turn to go the that place you can see only with your mind, and heart, that you would come to me," she said.

"I'm here," Hans said, the grief in his throat holding his voice hostage.

"I knew you were, Tristan," she smiled, her mind and heart half way to that 'land beyond the mountains, where fog, snow and wind merge into pure Light' which she

spoke about so often when telling tales of the Ancient Nordic legends which kept present German aspirations Alive. "I knew you would come back to me, Tristan."

Young Hans felt his mother's caress on his neck. Then her lips on his cheek, then on his lips. Then, as the madness took over, he felt himself pulled into the blissful hell which was her exit dance. Gretchen's arms stripped down his clothing, then pulled open her own. Her fingers and toes had turned cold, but she was determined to be alive yet one more time with what she had left. Those parts which Hans only saw when he put dressings on her wounds, the two breasts which he thought were muscles until explained to him otherwise, and the place between her legs from which she came, and where she wanted to make her final statement.

"Sing to me, Tristan! Please!" she pleaded. "I want to die knowing that we are united!" she slurred out with a mouth gone dry, a face now pale. And a passion which she would not allow to be unfulfilled.

Young Hans didn't feel like a "Tristan", but maybe, in these last moments on earth, Gretchen believed that he was. His concern was for her now, her pleasure, her joy, her final and perhaps only moment of true bliss. Somehow this most dirty of acts seemed clean, or at least necessary. He was merely a puppet, allowing the angel who had been his mother to merge with the Divine Father above. "Forgive me, God, the duty I do in Your service," Young Hans whispered to himself, again and again, as he allowed himself to be his mother's Tristan. Perhaps the man who was his father. Perhaps in her last smile, Gretchen did reach perfection.

Then, a knock on the door. A large figure entered, loaded down with medical supplies, his breath heavy from a long trip from town. A smile on his face. "So, she is finally gone," Hans' father, otherwise known as 'Sir', noted. "She is free from the madness now, thank God," he continued as he knelt next to her.

'Sir' seemed to be sincere. As was his final request, not having said anything about the torn clothing on his wife and son. He stroked Gretchen's long, blonde hair, and looked into her smiling face. "Did she die happy?"

"I think so," Hans replied, finding that he neglected to append it with 'Sir'.

'Sir' pulled out a shiny hundred year old knife from the belt that has been worn down by mud and by its use as a tool to strip off living animal, and as he realized all too late human, flesh. "We have a tradition in my side of the family, son," he said. "And a matter of practicality. Funeral and medical expenses to pay for as well," 'Sir'

noted. He grabbed hold of his dead wife's three-foot-long mane and commenced the procedure, cutting the strands slowly, below the scalp.

"No!" Hans commanded as the first trickle of blood poured from Gretchen's forehead over her eyes. "I will do it."

'Sir' mused at the very idea. "You will do a crappy job of it, Like you have made a crappy job out of your life, hers and mine!"

"I will not do a crappy job, Sir." Hans shot back. With that he proceeded to 'skin' the 'head hide' attached to his mother's hair according to the way he was taught in the woods to do on 'other weakling lower creatures', as 'Sir' referred to the four legged animals with whom Hans felt an inner connection.

"Good boy, Hans!" 'Sir' said proudly.

"Thank you, Sir," Hans replied, saying his final farewell to the only women he ever loved, at least in the ways that mattered. He wielded 'Sir's' knife in a scalping that was clean, effective, and 'manly', the procedure bloodless, with the exception of the blood between Han's teeth in his clenched jaw. And underneath the pain, and grief, something more frightening. Young Hans seemed to enjoy the 'head hide skinning' process.

"Good man, Hans," 'Sir' noted, offering his son a drink. Hans remembered drinking the brew, going to the village and selling his mother's hair, collecting the money, paying the undertaker for a proper and dignified burial, and not much else about that day, or week.

A passing horse on a very vocal and displeased rider woke Hans up from his journey into the past. He now felt far older after re-living the nightmare of his youth. He gazed at Maria's head, grateful that he had not taken the hair below the scalp. It was certainly possible for him to do so, once the gates to expressive love and hate were opened. He owed a debt of thanks for those gates remaining closed in a War that opened them both up for nearly everybody else. And as was in keeping with another 'accident', the location for giving such thanks was just around the corner.

"A church," Albert noted with his eyes.

"Yes, where German is being spoken," Hans observed with his ears.

“And sung!” Maria smiled “‘Jesu, joy of man’s desire’,” she noted, putting voice to the words with harmony that Johan Sebastian Bach wrote into the libretto while the civilian population inside did their best to merely sing the melody.

“Your voice!” Hans warned.

“Is very beautiful,” Albert smiled.

“And if it is recognized as being from a woman, rather than a boy, or young man,” Hans ‘loud-whispered’.

Maria lowered the volume of her voice, then attempted to turn it into an alto so it would be able to find full expression, but to no avail. She was still all-woman no matter how many tightly she tried to wrap her breasts or how widely she tried to smile at the ‘man’ jokes shared amongst men who needed women more than they ever admitted to each other, or themselves.

Meanwhile, Albert’s attention was soon drawn by ladies on the street who were definitely not the churchgoing kind of women. “Yes, Maria does sing as beautifully as my friends here are beautiful to the eyes. ”

“Are they Wiggs or Tories?” Hans inquired regarding the ‘pleasure women’ who carried themselves as Ladies. . “Friend or foe?”

“Neutrals,” Albert speculated. “Like at least a third of the colonists here.”

“And you know this, Seargent, because...”

“I listen to the people rather than the politicians, Lieutenant, ‘Sir’” Seargent Albert saluted back to the women who knew no German except ‘ya’ to the question most central to Albert’s most valued vice. He accepted the woman’s bows and winks, and listened for them to ask ‘how much do you have’ in the manner that such women always asked such questions. He twirled his mustache and threw them a kiss. It seemed to be acceptable enough currency and went on his way to join them.

Maria didn’t seem insulted, or hurt. She just kept singing, not caring who heard her. It evoked the attention and approval of a kindly and musical Clergyman on his way to the German House of Worship. His face seemed very fatherly, much like Baron von Edinger himself back in Hesse Cassel.

Hans pushed out his chest in protectorial pose, putting his hand out in an ‘officerly’ way, informing the civilian Clergyman that he was under orders to keep his distance, and entered the Church.

Discretely, Hans pointed to Maria’s enlarged belly, giving voice to what he suspected, and feared for the last two months. “We have to think of what to do with this,” he whispered from the side of his mouth.

“It’s not a ‘this’!” Maria blasted back through her angriest whisper.

“God will forgive you if you...”

“If I what?” Maria challenged.

“It is no sin to dispose of a ‘life’ which is from a deserting thief who was no man at all.”

“The man who stole my money and jewels on ship did not do this!” Maria asserted. “I am too far along in my...” she grunted in pain which she tried to hide as discomfort.

“Then that leaves a man on the other side of the ocean, who really DID violate you in ways that a father should never---“ Hans blasted back.

Tears poured down Maria’s cheek. Hans’ words were helpless to stop them. As were his actions.

At no time did seem more vulnerable, and alone. And at no other time did she pull away from him so abruptly, and with such a sense of painful certainty.

“I must have this baby,” she said, looking at her very fertile womb.

“You mean, WE must have this baby,” Hans assured her. He tried to hug her, but everything about it, and her, felt so unnatural.

“Thank you, Hans,” she replied, taking him into her arms.

Hans felt it all, hate, love, regret, promise, hope and despair.

“We can ask Him to help us,” she said, pointing to the Church.

The Musical Minister came out of the Church and invited the Jager Lieutenant and his Drummer Boy assistant inside with a warm smile that seemed genuine. It seemed an invitation that was too accidental, rejected only by fools and drunkards, and though Hans didn't know what he was, he aspired to be neither of such.

CHAPTER 19

It was a deal that no sane man would refuse, and no honorable one would accept, delivered at a dimly-lit table of a tavern where only officers were allowed to drink, eat or make merry with the local lassies, or lads. “You want me to transport who to where?” Hans asked his superior, neglecting to keep an even temper in his voice and not appending the clarification request with ‘Sir’.

“Your promotion is dependent on it, Captain Muller” Major Westphal replied with a respectful bow, then the kind of cough old men in the New World emitted soon before they became dead men for burial back home. “Your instinct to detect rebels in the woods and your skill in evading fruitless skirmishes with them has become legendary.”

“Yes, indeed,” Countessa Else added with an aristocratic composure in her voice, a wink in her eye when her ailing husband wasn’t looking. “A legend who was born this day, how many years ago?”

“I have already lost count,” Hans noted, and lamented. He looked around the Liberty Tavern, now converted into a command center for Loyalist Forces, be they Colonial, English or German in origin. Each had converted their section of the once lively establishment into home, complete with flags denoting their alliances, paintings displaying the leaders they were fighting for, satirical prints of those they were fighting against, and drinking receptacles bearing engravings of the place they called home.

Hans turned his attention to the brew on the table, inside the hand-carved beer stein from Hesse-Cassel, the design and feel of the kind that Baron von Edinger had at the ‘big house’. He remembered his birthday just last year, which now seemed like it was decades ago. When Maria had snuck out of the dinner party on top of the hill with mugs ‘burrowed’ from the dining room. Filled with apple cider, unfermented according to Hans’ mandate. Imbibed with mutual joy at each of them having accomplished another year of survival, pledging to spend the next year celebrating life instead. Now, he found himself being invited to drink from glasses filled with rum strong enough to erode barnacles off a ship, or strip the restraint off even the most disciplined minds.

How ironic that he was now ‘celebrating’ his birthday in the New World with a woman from the Old one who always seemed to know one more thing about him than he thought was knowable to anyone. And one he wanted to know nothing

about, save what he had to. How desirous Else seemed for a New Adventure in this land of possibilities. How much sense it would make to accept the offer.

“So, Major,” Hans bowed as he pretended to drink from the glass placed in his hand by ‘Lady’ Else. “I am to be promoted to Captain for how many battles I have NOT fought?” he inquired.

“Indeed,” Westphal smiled, but with a sadness that belied more wisdom than vitality. “The other Yager companies in my command, as well as your friend Albert, come back to camp with dead Hessian bodies, blood-soaked American supplies, and, when encouraged by our friends the British, scalps of slain or captured rebels.”

“Yes, Sir,” Hans noted, hoping his downturned eyes would hide his own innate ability to separate forelocks from heads.

“But you come back with extremely useful information, and all of your men intact, even after the skirmishes you have to engage in,” Westphal commented, though coughs converted into grunts by a bottle of something medical which Else retrieved from a draw and insist he take.

“We have been lucky, Sir,” Hans replied, praying that line of questioning would go elsewhere.

“And when you do have to engage the enemy, your own rifle shoots them in places they will always remember. Your aim is true, and you fire every round with your eyes wide open,” Countessa Else added.

Hans looked at his rifle. The emitter of molten lead which he hated and loved, both at the same time. The instrument that he knew how to use better than any man around him. And the one that, to his best recollection, had landed bullets into men that they did not kill. Incapacitated temporarily, but not crippled, to the best of his accounting and checking afterwards. The rifle that had knocked off more rebel hats than he could count, but hat not grazed a single scalp.

The Countessa rose out of her chair, sauntering around the room with the grace of a swan. With every movement she seemed to be perfect elegance. A lady of breeding and, in her own way, culture. And by the look of the books on the shelves bearing her signature as owner, a woman of highly advanced culture as well. She opened up a book. Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, reasonably enough, the one which was the basis for so much discussion, and bondship, between himself and Maria in the past,

and far less frequently in the present.

“Captain Muller,” she said, causing the hairs on Hans mustache to stand up with pride. “If a principality of evil were to attack a principality of good, would you use a method which was considered evil to stop it?”

“I was a shit shoveller back in the Fatherland,” Hans smiled as sincerely as he could. “I’m just a woodsman and rifleman here, Sir.” He turned to Major Westphal, seated at his desk, holding papers in his hand, staring out the window at something beyond the Matters of men, women, or political revolutions. The once vibrant senior officer’s face was now gaunt as the incoming sunlight hit his face. Noting the time, and the presence of his men outside the window, the veteran Major shut the shades, then turned to a bottle of elixir bearing an English Doctor’s instructions, considering the benefits and drawbacks of assessing its contents.

“Doctor’s orders, my dear,” Else kneeled at his side, taking his stubby, scarred and spotted hand into her wrinkleless, slender white fingers. “His orders are to make you feel better. Yours are to get better, for your men, and...us, my dear.”

“Yes, orders,” Westphal smiled as he allowed Else to retrieve an eyedropper full of medicine from the bottle and insert it under his tongue, kissing him lightly on his tight lips after he swallowed it.

“I follow orders, too, Sir,” Hans said, feeling a fork in his life’s road about to wack him in the face. “For the sake of the common good, Sir.”

“And by that you do what is necessary for the cause of good when it is attacked by evil?” Elsa shot Hans’ way as Westphal seemed to breath more quietly, and hopefully more comfortably in a slumber which the old veteran who cared about his men more than the King he was contracted to fight for deserved to enjoy.

“I do what is necessary, Madame,” Hans slurred out the side of his mouth to the Countessa who had been Maria’s only allowable friend in childhood. Her rival, to the best of his inference, when they both became adults.

“As do I, Captain Muller,” Else added, putting her shawl over the Major, fanning her bussom underneath as she strolled around his oversized desk. “As did I and Maria, your former employer’s daughter, when were children. We fought a lot, but we were still good friends. The best friends always fight a lot, don’t they?”

“Yes, they do, I suppose,” Hans confessed.

“I’m sure Albert Stein would agree,” Else smiled, helping herself to a seat in front of an oversized portrait of herself, recently commissioned by the smell of it. “And that drummer boy both of you look after so much, what is her name?”

“His name is Wilhelm, Madam!” Hans asserted, hoping and praying the bluff would work, keeping his stare straight and ‘true’. “His mother asked that I look after him.”

“And your relationship with his mother is...”

“My aunt, Madam,” Hans bowed. “Wilhelm is a ‘special’ boy.”

“Who loves the way Spartan boys were ordered to love the Spartan men assigned to look after their training and development, Captain Muller?”

“No, Madam,” he continued, maintaining a dignified bow.

“Or the way Spartan girls were perhaps encouraged to love other Spartan girls while the men were away at war?” she mused. “Or the lengths the fathers of those girls, and drummer boys, will go to in order to get them back home.”

Hans raised his head, staring Else straight into her sadistic and seemingly all knowing eyes. This ‘Lady’ who seemed more like a sewer rat than a lady born to high breeding knew how to manipulate every truth into a lie, and lies into truths that served her. She handed him an envelope sealed by the soundly-slumbering Major, bearing his seal, addressed to Captain Hans Muller.

“A smart soldier is a thinking soldier,” Hans remembered yet again from the Jesuit writers forbidden to him by the Lutheran ministers back home and the Protestant British and German Chaplans in America. But then again, there was a higher duty at stake here, for everyone’s sake.

He ripped the envelope open and read its contents, clarifying the Mission at hand. It was a longer escort mission than he had originally anticipated, starting from New York, across possibly-rebel-held New Jersey, to her winter headquarters in Trenton with ‘the most precious cargo I have entrusted to anyone in my military career’, according to the writing.

“That would be me,” Else smiled, in a way that made her seem sincere, and in a

way, vulnerable. “The Enlightenment talks about freeing men, not women,” she said in a way that sounded more like Maria than the girlhood villainous she was portrayed to have been. “A strong woman who wants her independence has to use her brains, and when she does, and succeeds, she is called a witch, bitch, or worse.” A tear fell down Else’s cheek.

“But, Madam, the War...” Hans pleaded, knowing how useful he had been when he was the heels of Washington’s Army, reporting their strengths, and firing at them from hidden places in the woods, herding them like sheep into escape routes where they could be dealt with by British and Hessian regulars. The once 20,000 strong American army had fled Long Island, then New York City, then White Plains, and now were 3,000 or less scared and disillusioned rabble floundering around New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania looking for a place to hide. And enlistments were up on the American side by January first.

“The War in America will be over soon,” Else interjected in the middle of Hans’ cerebral and silent discourse with himself. “And if you end it with a Captain’s rank, pay and after this mission, with the assurance that you and your new family will be safe, secure and secret.” Else kissed Hans on the cheek, then the lips.

It was not altogether a displeasing experience to Hans. And, if the ‘understanding’ was to be kept discreet, an evil act in the service of good. But one other party had to be consulted, or at least informed. “God, forgive me the sin I do in your service,” he said, in Latin.

“That sounds like something profound,” the Countessa whispered with an inviting smile. “And seductive, my love?” She poured two glasses of Scotch whiskey into Bavarian sized mugs.

“On one condition,” Hans affirmed. “That a certain Sergeant is also promoted, for the sake of rank, and pay.”

“Albert the drunkard?” she inquired, offering Hans his mug in the bargain toast.

Major Westphal woke up, renewed, revitalized, very much in command of his senses and purpose. “Please excuse my cat nap there, Lieutenant Muller.”

“Captain, Sir,” Hans said with a respectful Prussian clicking of his heels to the only officer he really respected and liked. One that seemed happy with Else, loyal to her, and most certainly more trusting of her than anyone else. Maybe for the right

reasons, maybe for the wrong ones, but ones that seemed to work for him,

CHAPTER 20

It seemed strange for Albert to walk the streets of New York, or anywhere, as an officer. Even though he had dreamed about it since he was a child, he never thought it would happen. Emerging from his new, and now private, quarters he noted two pretty Colonial young ladies smiling his way, their adulation escalated to lust by two Hessian privates and one English Corporal who had the obligation to salute him. “A dessert I will enjoy later,” he thought to himself as he spotted a main course he could not resist.

Seargent Schmitt, Albert’s old drill Seargent in Hesse-Cassel, walked out of doorway from a ‘host house’ in which he had been given ‘hospitality lodgings’. Of the nine children saying good bye to him, three sent him on his way as a hero, three as an enemy invader, and three as just another boarder in the rooming house which they called home. The usual breakdown of loyalties amongst the Colonials, but there was something unusual in this chance meeting.

“Seargent Schmitt!” now-Lieutenant Stein yelled out. “You are drunk!”

“I am not, Sir!” Schmitt turned around, terrified, and very sober. “And if I were,” he continued, with a blasting tone. “I would not be in as much trouble as YOU are in wearing that uniform, you shit shoveling, insolent butcher, Corporal Stein!” He turned to the two privates and the English Corporal, still instructed to stand at attention. “Gentleman! Behold a sadistic drunken bastard who is now pretending to be a Lieutenant. A man who almost got his own men killed when fighting the rebels in Long Island, then who massacred rebels trying to surrender in White Plains. Who he killed, then stole from, then did unthinkable things to their families, according to the prisoners who he DID let live.”

Albert contemplated the matter. Most of it was true. As a Corporal, Albert had ordered his men to fight effectively and viciously against the rebels. And to extract what they could from them afterwards. It was a victor’s privilege, and place, to do so. Particularly because to not be a victim in the fight against the rebels would most certainly be to be killed, tortured and eaten by them. And the cruel fact was that a man with empty pockets in the new world was a man who would be killed by the elements, much fiercer in America than they ever were in the Fatherland. And the fact that as Corporal, he was responsible for taking care of his men, his new family, and that a real man does whatever it takes to take care of his family. Particularly when they were so far away from home, paid wages which would not feed a churchmouse, and left to their own devices for shelter as a brisk autumn gave was

giving way to a cold winter ahead.

But one part of Seargent Schmitt's rant was neither true, nor justified. Though he did not know from what source they came, Albert had earned his new rank as Lieutenant. And as for being a bastard, this was something that was between Albert and the parents he had, somewhere, who he remembered as being bastards themselves.

Schmitt ranted on about the atrocities Albert had committed in the Cause of serving the King George and taking care of his German-speaking men. All were allowable excesses in a War which already had progressed beyond either side giving or accepting quarter. The rebels rotting on the prison ships in New York harbor, many of whom Albert had caught himself, could attest to that. As could the Hessian and British soldiers who wandered too far into the woods beyond the Camp perimeter at night and never came back at all, or returned lame, crippled, or blind. And the Loyalist soldiers who sought, and sometimes even paid for, lodging in houses thought to belong to neutrals, going to sleep at night and waking up as corpses, or worse, the next day.

Yes, Albert was guilty of much on the battlefield, and some transgressions of the heart with which he never spoke about. But Schmitt had overstepped the line when he accused Albert of being a false lieutenant, a bastard, and the kind of man who does unnatural acts with those of his own gender. A reference to the latter was silenced with a slap on Seargent Schmitt's face, delivered as an officer.

"Pistols at dawn, 'Sir'?" Schmitt smirked.

"Or sabres right now, Seargent." Albert pulled out his sabre, holding it at Schmitt's throat. "You are under arrest!"

"Lieutenant! What is going on?" Hans interrupted, coming in from what seemed to be nowhere.

"Some disciplinary action, Captain Muller." Albert said to Hans, only mildly surprised at his new rank. "We have a Seargent who wishes to become a private."

Hans looked the man over. "Seargent Schmidt?" He shook his hand. "Great to see you. What you did for our men in Hesse-Cassel has kept them alive, and will keep them alive here until they are ready to return to the Fatherland. I see by your uniform that you are from the newly arrived company. How was your passage across the

ocean?”

“Fair, Sir,” Schmitt related, not believing his eyes. “And longer than expected.”

Albert lowered his sword, noting something different about Hans. The silent conversations between them had become more like brief communications. Nothing came from Hans’ mind, or heart. Made all the more ominous by the Captain’s uninterpretable brand of smiling.

“So, Sergeant Schmitt,” Hans grinned, not showing his teeth or his thoughts.

“So, Captain Muller,” Schmitt replied, impressed at the success of the shit-shoveller he had trained, angered that his own life was still as a shit-distributing Sergeant.

“The ‘legendary’ Captain Muller.”

“Who will buy you, and all of these other good fellows standing at attention here a drink, Come. Please.” With that Hans motioned the German and British bystanders, and his old drill Sergeant to join him at the Liberty Tavern. But not before leaving a letter with Albert that spelt out all too clearly what was his new agenda, mission and hope.

CHAPTER 21

Maria's new lodgings had belonged to a schoolteacher who had joined the rebels, and was now with Washington's Army, someplace across the Hudson River, by the best accounts. Hans had made special arrangements with someone high up to insure that it was paid for honestly and fairly, and that no one would disturb her, or the life inside her womb. The fireplace was of adequate size to keep the one all-purpose room warm, and thankfully none of the books on the shelf had been used for firewood. Maybe those books were one of the reasons why the schoolteacher did not burn the house, which was the custom and order of the day for rebels who abandoned their dwellings as the British advanced into them. But it was a letter which kept Maria's interest that cold, sunlit morning, not the books written in Europe and published in Philadelphia. Maria's eyes read the letter, but her heart could not believe it. "Hans is going on a Secret Mission, that he cannot tell me, or even you about?"

"For, as he says, 'mutual benefit of all,'" Albert shrugged while polishing his new sword.

"And who is all?" Maria inquired, taking stock of her new environment, and new role of 'demoted' to civilian, and further lowered in rank to being a member of her own natural gender, her cropped hair covered by a bonnet. "And who is 'all' who are being served by Hans leaving me like this!" she screamed

Albert pointed to tip of his sabre at Maria's belly, swollen now to a point where she would be requiring yet another dress to keep appropriately clothed, and covered.

"But...but...but..."

Maria accepted Albert's embrace. There was no other choice. It was only him and her now, and a baby due very quickly. A child who was to never know her real father, yet who needed a father. If it was a 'her'. And if it was a 'him', only one wish surfaced from her lips.

"I want him to be named Albert Hans, or Hans Albert," she said to the man who understood her heart, rather than the one who seemed to understand her mind.

"He will be a very confused boy," Albert said.

"And a safe one, Lieutenant Stein?" Maria's hug became stronger, and more

desperate.

“We will do our best to be who we have to be, and do what we have to do,” Albert replied.

Maria smiled. She never felt more distanced from the world or men than at that moment. She had always considered herself more of a man than a woman, in the way that the world defined such roles. She looked at herself in the mirror, a large and clear piece of furniture in the ‘neutral’ house which was found through Minister Hollenbruck and paid for by wages from, she surmised, Captain Hans. Or was it now to be Lieutenant Albert? Maria had become a woman who could only believe in what she saw, and what she saw in the mirror was something that resembled a woman, even less so when she dared to take off the bonnet which now covered her head during all waking, and even sleeping hours.

“I see an ugly monster!” she screamed at herself, rubbing her belly with her left hand, running her shaking fingers on her right through what was still un-grown hair atop her cropped head. “I, and maybe the world, used to be...so beautiful.”

“As you are, and shall be,” Albert said, taking a bag out of his pocket.

Maria couldn’t believe what she saw. “My...my---”

“---Hair,” Albert said of the mane which she herself had chopped off in England before getting on the boat, which he had saved for her, and pulled out of his satchel, in a significantly-improved form. He had it fashioned in a wig, to the best ability as could be fashioned in Colonial New York, one that to Maria’s sense of it had twice as much hair than she remembered cutting off. He put it on Maria’s head, turning her regretful grimace into something that felt like a smile from the inside, which did indeed become on the outside as she saw herself in the mirror as a woman of hope and possibility again, and a mother.

“Hans saved your hair,” Albert related, keeping his distance.

“As if he had other plans for it?” Maria mused, primping her dress beneath the three-foot lockes that flowed over her shoulders once again. Feeling to be herself again, according to the way SHE wanted to define whoever that was.

“Yes, Hans would have other plans for the hair I saved, perhaps.” Albert said, but without a smile of any kind, his back turned, his head down, his hands held in prayer.

Maria felt herself 'warned'. Another one of Hans' secrets she would never know about, she envisioned. Or thankfully one of the secrets her baby, would never have to be told, or know about. Maria felt the need, and want, to get closer to Albert. With an inviting smile, he said 'yes' to that primal and heart-felt yearning.

It was time to write it all down, what had happened, what was happening, and perhaps lay down what was to come. "To my son, or daughter," the first entry. As for the rest of the first page of his diary, Hans looked into the flames of the campfire as his men slept soundly around it. It was Captain Muller's turn at watch on the assigned Mission of looking after Major Westphal's 'niece, aka 'Lady' Else, and the auxiliary assignment within that 'order' to observe any unexpected rebel activity in what was still, hopefully more Loyalist than 'patriate'. As for that overused word, Hans reflected on the sleeping patriates wearing Hessian uniforms who he felt fortunate to also call friends under the mirky New Jersey moonlight in the German campground carved into the American woods as a prelude to immortalizing their very mortal lives in print by his own hand. It seemed odd to Hans that the very unhappily-married Major Westphal would allow Else, a woman he seemed to care for more than he cared for himself, to go to Philadelphia through Separatist and Loyalist counties to visit with her sister. But maybe there was a military purpose to this as well as a personal one. In any case, Hans' orders from the only officer he really respected were clear---'Take care of my Else as you would your own family.' To assist in that detail, and honor, Hans chose four of his best men.

Corporal Wilhelm Brecht was wise, and cynical, beyond his forty years, his mis-shapen body built for physical function rather than any kind of visual or artistic aesthetics. The veteran of three European Wars owed no alliance except to himself, and his own sense of right, wrong and 'effective'. Activating that latter modality required that he was never addressed in the imperative tense. "We need to do" this, or "can you do this?" or, when required, "we really appreciate your doing that yesterday, so can you repeat your magic today?" How the always potentially insolent Corporal ever survived military life was a tribute to his tenacity. But he always got through the thickest brush and up the steepest hills faster than any man half his age. Brecht also knew the lowest aspects of the human creature, an invaluable resource to have around when trying to figure out how the low-lives fighting for the rebel cause were thinking.

Gustaf Osterhause greeted every day with a smile, even the worst ones. Twenty-two years young and a century 'stupid' some would say, particularly Wilhelm Brecht. 'Goofy Gustaf' was in America to support his wife and children in Hesse-Cassel, sending back every Crown, Colonial dollar or Handgelder to them. He constantly told stories about how wonderful his wife was, even when Brecht tried to make him see, or at least consider, that her loyalty to him was directly proportional to how much money he sent home that month. But as far as being soldier was concerned, Gustaf always addressed Hans as Sir, twice as much as anyone else, perhaps because Brecht never did so himself.

Seargent Franz Holzmann was one of those non-incidental junior non-commissioned officers who always followed orders. It was his world, and without it, he was lost. The chain of command, and creulty, was what he lived by. He obeyed orders without question, a model soldier. But as for being a thinking soldier, that was another matter. Brecht once told him that orders from above was to wear the underpants on the outside of the breaches, so that the officers could see how clean the enlisted men shitted. It bought Holzmann a week on quarter rations and three lashes on his buttocks for showing up for inspection with his breaches worn over his trousers. But one area where Franz was king was when the skirmishes would begin. The honor of firing the first shot always went to him, at Hans' personal command, as it would always hit its mark. Particularly when Holzmann was in possession of the Kentucky long rifle captured from the rebels in Brooklyn. Far better than anything made in Switzerland or England, deadly if more of the Colonials got their hands on them and had the balls to use it.

Leopold Weiss' Herclean appearance made him seem the model of the self-made man who made his own plans and designed his own destiny. He always was with others, talking about things small, or big, or boasting about how he swindled a bottle of whisky from the British troops in exchange for a bottle of mare piss which he labeled 'Brandenburg Wine'. It passed the time, and got him in good favor with the fellow Germans who shared the Scotch whiskey. Weiss missed Brandenburg, and all the four legged memories there. When signing up for the American 'police action', the gamekeeper of five estates was told that it was a land of open space for the taking and wild horses for the taming. Until being assigned to Muller's command, the closest Leopold got to a horse was when a mounted British Officer came over to inspect him, or the infantry-oriented Hessian artillery units used them as beasts of burdon. But now, things were different, he hoped.. Wiess vowed that he would never go back home as a keeper of grounds owned by someone else, but a man who owned land of his own. With each day of looking at the vast yet familiar,

and for the most part un-owned, woods and mountains around him, the location of that land seemed to not matter that much.

They were the best men who could be bought, or stolen, from the regular ranks of the elite Jagers, considered by most to be more important in the War than the Infantry officers, who always seemed to have horses doing their walking for them. “So,” Hans said to one of the horses ‘stolen by Indians’ from General Howe’s general staff. “Are you enjoying your vacation?”

Apparently they were. Gone were the saddle-sores on their backs, and they were keeping their weight. It was against official orders to have Jagers patrol the countryside on horseback, another one of those things ‘just not done’, but this was a land where what is ‘just not done’ was not only doable, but necessary. Those who learned quickly were soon rewarded, and Hans’ ‘four horseman of the new Apocalypse’ had learned the art and science of horsemanship very well from Hans, who learned it from Maria, who learned it from her own horse back in Hesse-Cassel.

Hans found himself thinking about Wolfgang, Maria’s steed back in the Old Country who taught him to ride horses of different breeding and temperaments . The more cynical part of him envisioned that Baron von Edinger had already turned Maria’s favorite horse into stew meat, preparing the hide of the beast into a blanket upon which he hoped to consummate, once again, the ‘special’ carnal relationship he had with his daughter. Hans’ thoughts went to Maria again, as they always had. How could she allow herself to be forced into such a despicable act? What manner of weakness did she have? Or more accurately, what manner of manipulative cruelty did the Baron have to force her into betraying everything she stood for and was Inside? But Maria did leave, and after Washington would be forced into surrender by Christmas, Hans would retrieve her and either buy them both a kingdom of their own West of the Appalachian Mountains, or buy the right Magistrate back home to see that the Baron pays for his crimes against humanity, and humans, and all other innocent creatures. Or maybe Hans and her Lordship Maria and their child would come home as heroes, greeted by Wolfgang at the front gate of the Shit Farm in Hesse-Cassel, with the Baron on his knees in the manure begging for forgiveness for all he had done, or threatened to do.

Hans felt the outer margins of his heavily mustached lips turn upward at seeing him and Maria united on both sides of the Atlantic, reading to the child who would never need to know his real father, then watching that child write his own books soon afterward when a frigid hand on his shoulder froze him back into reality.

“Captain?” the ghost asked with a haunting echo. “I am impressed.”

“Yes, I am sure you are,” he said to the face that seemed to look like his own mother, then Maria, then someone even more haunting to see at this point in his tortured imaginings.

“Captain Muller,” Countess Elsa smiled. “You are seeing rebels and Indians in the woods ahead, with that third eye in the back of your head?”

“Yes, my Lady,” Hans said, waking up from his daily-visited nightmare, or bowing his head to Elsa.

“My lady! My God!” Elsa’s fingers moved across Hans’ sweat soaked face and trembling body. “You are shaking.”

“Yes, My Lady. It is...cold.”

Else nuzzled up to Hans, slithering under his blanket. “Now, not so cold?”

“If you say so, My Lady,” from his quivering lips

“I told you not to call me ‘My Lady’, Hans.”

“I know...My...My...”

“Else?” she smiled.

“If you say so,” Hans’ only retort given the necessities of all the situations at hand.

“After what we did last night together, alone, in the carriage, with the blinds drawn, writing our own play and symphony that Major Westphal, my new and very, very old husband, would never understand?” she said stroking his left shoulder. “With what I did with you in the heat of passion, and will do for and with you tonight, you call me ‘My Lady’?” she continues, caressing his face. ‘My Else’ is what you must call me, ‘My Hans’,” she went on whispering her way to his ears, licking them with her tongue. Hans avoided a kiss on the lips by turning his head, but was nailed with a kiss on the cheek. Which did not feel that dis-pleasant. He dared not share that sentiment with his mind, as Lady Else was so good at reading a man’s eyes, and mind.

“So, you had some problems,” she commented regarding the penile portions of his anatomy that, for the moment anyway, did not ‘stand up at attention’. “They will subside when you are less afraid,” she continued.

“There is much to be afraid of here, My Lady---“

“My Else,,,my Else...My Else!,” she repeated again and again, caressing his lips, face and eyes, making herself into every woman he ever wanted, or ‘had’ in such a way. Even the one who he never told Maria about. “My Hans, my brave love, who is not be afraid of anything, and who uses his brains to get what he wants, and needs, for those he is responsible for, and when he stops crucifying himself, for himself too.”

Hans let his body loosen but kept his mind alert. Let ‘Lady Else’ have her way, for now, with the former while his mind deals with the real matters at hand. And in the middle of the New Jersey woods, there were many matters at hand.

“My men spotted armed and underfed Colonials alongside the road that your coach is destined to travel. Osterhaus said they were hunting for venison. Brecht said they were after Redcoat or Hessian meat.”

“Oh yes,” Else retorted in the manner of a British Officer. “These rebels are like Indians. They rape their enemies, kill them, then eat them.”

“Many of my men have gone missing,” Hans lamented.

“Not as many as the rebels have lost their man,” Else said. “For every one of us they get, we get ten of them. This is good, and acceptable.”

“No, this is not good, or acceptable” Hans fumed. The indignant fire in his mind thundered into his legs. He sprang up. “NONE of this is acceptable. Not one man who dies in the woods, or on the field of battle! Not one man who comes home without an eye, or eyes! Or who limps home on one leg, or crawls home on none. And for what!??? This!” Hans reached into his pocket, feeling the heaviness of the coins in his hand. They seemed like heavy rocks now, dragging his Soul to the depths of hell. In a journey with no return with ‘sights’ along the sides of the road downward. Sights of mutilated bellies with exposed intestines ripped open by bayonets. Smells of gangrenous limbs that made even the most hardened surgeons peuk. Sounds of men screaming for their mothers or Makers at the moment of dying and being greeted by neither, at least to his perceptions of such.

“All of this is for nothing!” Hans ranted on.

“What about liberty? Freedom.” Else challenged.

“A rebel dream which will never happen, God help us,” Hans lamented. “And which never really existed anyway.”

“The pursuit of happiness?” the Lady offered in the manner of an enlightened Commoner.

“Pursuit of it...even Don Quixote got worn out chasing windmills.”

“Then life...for man, women, children and...” Else waited and seemed to know just when to deliver the next word. “Child.”

“And family?” Hans challenged.

Else smiled, tickling Hans's family jewels. “You make me happy, and liberated on our way to Trenton, and I assure you that there will be life, liberty and the rest for both of your families.”

Hans resigned himself to the facts again. Fact was that one in three Colonials were rebels. Fact was that they all knew the country better than any foreigner could. Fact was that their cause was doomed, but would not end without a hard, bitter and bloody fight. And fact was that Else knew more facts about the men around her than even the all-knowing Corporal Brecht could imagine possible. And fact was that Maria and child in New York needed food in their bellies, and very discreet roofs over their heads with the oncoming winter, cold already and getting colder by the day.

CHAPTER 22

The man was a nobody at home, a somebody amongst his peers away from his township, a person of great import and knowledge where he was now. “So, how many troops does Washington still have, where are they, and how many of them have the arms and balls to keep fighting?” now-Lieutenant Albert Stein asked the rebel German-born prisoner yet one more time in his Native language.

“No Sprechen Sie Dutchie,” the emaciated young man with the patchy beard that had never seen a razor repeated. “N- Sprechen Sie---“

Albert slapped the lad in the face. He had heard him speak German to another man in his command, as part of a bribe for his escape which didn't materialize. Perhaps because the teacher turned soldier didn't know the economics of bribery, or the protocol which had evolved so quickly for everyone in the conflict. Hiding identities was another strategy, well known to now Lt. Albert Stein. Indeed everyone in this War was posing as someone else. Former Baroness Maria was posing as a Bavarian schoolteacher and widowed mother-to-be. Former shit-shoveller scholar Hans was passing himself off as a military negotiator and scout. Gentleman farmer George Washington was playing ‘liberator’ in this Revolutionary Play as an ‘His Excellency’ General leading men in a War which would abolish ‘His Excellency’ titles, at least according to the pamphlets he ordered his men to read, or be read from.

But what was the German-speaking rebel Peter Stone posing as or trying to be? His roots were probably Prussian. His name perhaps Stein before he signed his X on his enlistment papers. His tolerance for pain was quite high, according to the Hessian doctors who patched up his ripped open belly and the arm that was not quite ready to be cut off. No, Albert had to adapt another kind of strategy was needed to enlist this boy-turned-man into giving out information that was accurate, and trustable.

“So,” Albert continued, dismissing his men and sending them out the door. He poured a large glass of beer, specially mixed with Irish Whiskey. He tasted it himself in the manner of a Prussian Officer, then offered it ‘Corporal Stone’, as he called himself, who gulped it down like a water-starved pig. “You like to drink?” Albert smirked with his best English, untying one of his hands.

“When I'm thirsty, Sir,” the reply from the man who was tied to a heavy chair, in German this time. He had been given no water and no way to evacuate the fluid inside himself except through his own britches, which smelled like the most putrid

kind of shit Albert had ever shoveled.

Hans acknowledged and enjoyed being called Sir by the enemy almost as much as being called such by the men and ladies in his own Camp. He had put in his dues as a shit shoveller, latrine digger and ground soldier, doing the dirty work for the senior officers, politicians and bankers on top. Now that he was on top, and on his way even further up given the number of rebels he had killed, or worse, he liked being called 'Sir'. There was a sense of justice to it. Particularly as Hans waltzed his way into such positions without so much as getting his hands dirty.

Peter pointed to a sausage on the Patriot-built, elegantly carved table which was now Albert's personal desk. Finally, the prisoner who was seen with Washington conferring over a map just before his capture revealed his human rather than heroic needs.

"So, you want something to eat?" Albert inquired with an arch in his back. He lifted up the sausage and held it over Peter's mouth like a dog. "You have to answer one question for me first."

Peter's head shook, wavering between a 'yes' and a 'no'. Stuck in that intersection between being a man fighting for his life in this world, or a place as a hero in the next. Drink or being close to death made many men face that dilemma, and no one could predict if a man what would do at the moments of truth on the battlefield, or in captivity afterward. As the rebels followed their own orders more than any given to them, their inner Natures were far more manifested on the battlefield than the Hessians who were paid to fight as soldiers, or the British who were ordered to.

"What kind of soldier are YOU?" Albert pressed on, the sausage swinging like a pendulum from the tip of his sword, just out of range of the rebel 'hound's' reach. "The kind that ducks and shoots back just enough to stay fighting, or make those around them think they are? The kind that runs away when the bullets and bayonets come your way? The kind who charges an artillery unit with a sword and pistol, perhaps leading others into following? The kind that shoot themselves when the enemy charges to save yourself the pain and surprise of it all? Or the kind that..."

Peter revealed his hand, finally. His body froze, with a catonia Albert had seen so many times before. Yes, Corporal Peter Stone probably froze on the battlefield, ignored by his own men and shot like a frigid and sleeping duck by stray bullets. Stabbed for good measure. It was a safe enough way to deny what was going on around you and not participate in the killing, or dying. Probably something

‘Captain Hans’ would do in his moments of doubt, if indeed he ever had the balls to be in the thick of a hand to hand battle rather than the ‘special duties’ he was always assigned.

Albert patted Peter on the shoulder in a fatherly tone. Or so he wanted it to be believed as such. Or maybe Lt. Albert did believe it. Albert himself feared that one day his courage, or stupidity, would run out, and he would behave in ways that would get himself or those around him killed. But as long as there were fellow men to kill for, the closest thing Albert knew as family, it wouldn’t happen. As long as his senses were kept drunk with whiskey, and his perspectives kept focused with a full stomach.

The interrogation could now proceed effectively, but only after Albert got truthful answers to two questions of his own. He shook the prisoner out of his state of frozen shame, then woke him to consciousness with the smell of sausage directly under his nose, but still out of reach. The patriot hound scratched off bits of the wiener as it passed into reach of his mouth.

“Do you know what kind of meat this is?” Albert asked. “Smells like chicken, but isn’t. Not dark meat or white meat but...yellow meat. Coward meat. Prisoner number...”

Peter stopped eating, spitting out the morsels he had eaten.

Albert let the volcanic anger inside him fume out, whipping the prisoner raw on his back. “You thought nothing of killing and eating my friend Otto, my drinking buddy Heinrick, my Seargent Klause, and the laundry ladies after they have been scalped who got lost in the woods and never---“

“---We don’t scalp, eat, or mutilate you!” Peter insisted, again and again.

“I don’t believe you!” Albert countered, beating more flesh off the prisoner with each counter-claim.

“For the sake of my family...Please...please...believe me. We don’t scalp, eat or mutilate you!”

Albert’s whip took possession of his brain, and soul. He felt something in him snap, then go cold. In the service of his own family, his fellow Hessians, Maria, and even his now estranged friend Hans, Peter had been dehumanized into being less than

human. Less than a man. Less than a dog. His life and suffering were expendable now. Albert felt nothing when he saw the whip wielded by his own hand tear off the prisoner's skin. Then the muscle underneath. Then the layers of bone clearly visible on his blood soaked body. Then... nothing when Peter Stone breathed his last, calling out for God rather than his mother. Even less when Albert went through Prisoner Stone's hole-ridden pockets and retrieved a letter from his wife and children that, prior to his promotion to Lt, would have made even Albert feel empathy.

After it was all done with, the only feeling Albert pondered was a soul-numbing question---what to do next? The prisoner had been his responsibility. Maybe if he refined his technique, he could get the information he needed from him in time to trap the rebel Army before it got a chance to find Winter quarters and the snows would inhibit the final pursuit. Killing Peter Stone in the line of duty was stupid, Albert thought. But in its own way, for Albert's own training and evolution of military perspectives, necessary. In any case, the dogs would eat well tonight on 'rebel sausage', as well as the well-deserving Hessians who did their duty on the battlefield.

CHAPTER 23

It was an unusually cold night outside of the warm room in New York City, but the sky seemed to want to make amends for it by making the stars shine brighter than usual. Maria combed the hair on the wig fashioned from her own hair, and perhaps from others, which Albert had given her. She listened in once again for anything the life inside her womb wanted to say to her in the continuing dialogue they had, but never shared with anyone. “So, what did they say?” she asked the familiar and always welcomed visitor to her door bearing fresh fruit, vegetables and meat, wishing it was Hans, but not surprised that it wasn’t, yet again.

“The rebels told me that Washington is somewhere in New Jersey, running like a wounded dog,” Albert smirked as he kicked caked ice off the bottom of his boots and shook off the snow from his hat.

“Wounded dogs are very dangerous, Albert,” Maria warned, turning her maternal and protective instincts on her assigned protector with a warm caress, as she found herself now feeling far more than sisterly love for him. “Please, send someone else after them. You have the authority to that now,” she begged ‘Lt. Albert’.

“And the responsibility not to,” Albert said as he looked out the window at the New York streets. Secure, safe for British Loyalists, thanks to Hessian soldiers.

Indeed, from where Maria saw things, and heard them from the house that had been vacated by a patriot schoolmaster, New York felt more like home than home ever did. The food was a bit less in volume, somewhat more coarse to the teeth when chewing it, and served on clay plates rather than China, but it sustained the belly and the palate better than any dinner at her father’s Chalet in Hesse-Cassel. And the talk about the town was more about preparing for the oncoming winter rather than invading Patriots. With the exception of the occasional Colonial being brought in for questioning by the local Constables, and the more often seen brawls between the bored Hessian and restless British troops in the taverns she now frequented, it felt like there was no War at all going on.

So why did Albert have that distant look in his eye? Particularly when Maria felt the intensity of the life in her womb? Yes, he would leave too, but not without seeing fit that she was well provisioned. That is what men did, ‘provision’ their women rather than love them. It was easier to die for a man to slaying dragons for their women than to live with them at home.

“I have to leave in the morning,” Albert related in a way that showed that he indeed still did care, though this time with a Soul that was corrupted in ways she would never be told about.

“I know that you have to go away,” her reply, delivered with a sorrowful yet appreciative smile.

“I will see to it that you and the child are taken care of,” he continued in a way even more basic, and true to the fatherly nature still left in him.

“I know that, too.” she continued, conferring with her unborn child, who she prayed would never know about the manner in which he, or she, was conceived.

“And I will see that we all get a home that we deserve one day soon,” Albert’s final pledge, his signature on the agreement made with a firmer and, in a strange way, life affirming embrace. After letting go before Maria wanted him to, he put on his hat and left, with as aristocratic aire as with which he entered.

Maria kept her mind and mouth silent as her Soul agonized over the question of ‘all’ that Albert was referring to. Who would be in that ‘all’? Would and could Hans still be in that family, and in her life? He was somewhere else doing what he had said ‘was necessary for all of us’, under some kind of orders to say nothing about what he was doing. And trusting those who gave him orders rather than those who gave him love! As to the ‘where’s’ those orders were being carried out, such was in God’s hands now, and those who would thankfully end this bloody conflict over ideals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness quickly. But as to ‘the home we deserve’ one day, that was another matter entirely. In her nobility, fear and quest for enlightened adventure Maria had committed many sins, most not confessed to God or man. She prayed that she, and her child, would not have to pay for them.

CHAPTER 24

Hans felt at home on the formerly abused light brown-steed from General Howe's stable and re-named him 'Promethius'. The 'burrowed without official permission' British Army horse seemed to enjoy Hans' company and companionship. The New World seemed even newer as seen from atop a saddle. The bigness of the land was the most predominant feature, making New Jersey seem far bigger to the eye than it ever seemed to be on a map. Though it and its people seemed similar to the Fatherland, everything about it was intensified relative to home. Including the potential for being killed for your convictions, or political affiliations. Thus, it was necessary for everyone in the detachment of Hessians to wear civilian overcoats, keeping their uniforms on under them so that if caught, they would not be hung as spies. Such was another rule of this New World, and this new kind of war, in which Hans and the men under him identified more with the civilian coats they were wearing than the uniforms under them. Besides, brightly colored European uniforms stood out against the more subtly colored North American landscape louder than a drunken Evangelistic Lutheran at a solemn Catholic Mass.

As for the landscape, Hans was now able to see the woods, mountains and vast meadows of wild grasses through the eyes of the former game keepers and hunters from Hesse-Cassel. To Leopold Weiss, it seemed to be the land of opportunity for those bold or smart enough to grab a parcel of land and make it their own. Franz Holzmann seemed terrified at it all, as there was so much opportunity and no one to tell you what to do with it. Brecht considered it odd to see the Colonials smiling so much as they worked the land harder than any shit-shoveler back home, with an intensity that rivaled any he had seen on any battlefield. Osterhaus surmised that the diligence and success of these 'commoner' farmers was because the crops and land were owned by them. Brecht had his own ideas about the reasons for American ingenuity, and the failure that it could produce. According to this theory, the Indians fed the White settlers 'crazy corn' that made their minds go mad enough to work their bodies to death for no purpose at all. Osterhouse didn't seem to believe the ever-cynical Brecht with regard to his 'fatherly advise', but the young optimist did refuse to eat the corn cakes at the taverns along the way which seemed so delicious to the nose, and appealing to the growling stomach.

But did Osterhouse, or for that matter, anyone else in the Hessian Army still believe that the Colonial rebels were as savage as Indians, scalping, raping and eating any soldier captured by them? It was hard to say who believed the story which could be traced to the British in response to the rebel pamphlets offering the Hessians 50 acres of free land if they deserted and an enlistment bonus. Indeed, the rebels were

generally a sorry lot, hungry, undisciplined, and unable to stand their ground when facing the enemy in the open. But like a wounded dog, the rebels got smarter and more vicious with each defeat, and each successful retreat. Washington's 'Army', and its sympathizers, were now inventing new ways of inflicting pain upon their enemies, most particularly Colonials who freely chose to not fight for the Cause of Liberty as defined by the Continental Congress. Such were the intelligence reports that came into general headquarters, and the observable facts from the perspective of the most illiterate private who came into a village or town which the patriots had just evacuated. Even if one were to discount most of the stories of the Loyalists and their widows, the faces on the hung and mutilated bodies left in the streets as a greeting for the oncoming Army sent by King George revealed the horror and cruelty with which they died. But were the British any more merciful? Thousands of captured rebels was rotting away in chains on rat-infested, claustrophobic prison ships harbored in New York. And as for those who had information to be extracted, God knew what kind of torture awaited them at the hands of the British, whose justice system had always been cruelest on its own citizens for being traitorous than for any enemy who sought to invade their shores.

Hans found himself praying every night that the rebel soldiers and sympathizers captured by the British would be 'interviewed' by the Hessians, the so called 'Huns from Hell', who still, out of discipline or practicality, considered mercy a valid fighting strategy. Perhaps the luckiest prisoners would be handed over to Albert, who Hans knew would treat them fairly, honorably and with a universal kindness.

A rider came in from the woods, his horse drenched with sweat and covered with burs. Lt. Holzman galloped up to the entourage, bowing to a smiling Lady Else in the carriage made to look like a commoner's coach, then saluting a frustrated Hans. "All safe in the Western perimeter, Captain Muller, Sir," he proclaimed with an arched back and stiff lip.

"Remember where we are, please, Lieutenant." Hans related through gritted teeth, and a harsh whisper.

"Yes," Holzman recanted apologetically. "Rebel territory where officers are not to be identified."

"Because they will be shot first, your Excellency," the wrinkle-faced, half-deformed Corporal Brecht interjected loudly, bowing to handsome young Lieutenant Holzman.

Osterhaus seemed to find the joke funny, probably because Brecht did. Weiss had his eye fixed on the Western horizon in that way that the 'missing' did before they became unaccounted for. Else seemed amused by it all, allowing and therefore commanding her own personal escorts atop the coach and inside to laugh along with it.

"Could we please have some perspective here!" Hans requested as discretely as possible, reverting to their Christian names in an attempt to not only hide the rank which was under their coats, but reach a part of them which was more about the Fatherland than America. "Wilhelm, Franz, Leopold, Otto... Can we please have some perspective here?"

Hans could see Else doing a mock imitation of him, but dared not say anything. It would only make matters worse and make any rebel or bandit gang along the side of the road take notice. The man who only a year ago was responsible for nothing more than moving shit from one pile to another was now in charge of gathering advanced warning about enemy troop strength, the safety of the men under his immediate command and the well-being of a Countess who didn't seem to value anything, even the welfare of her husband who did seem to love her.

"What is ahead of us, Leopold?" Hans asked Weiss, his eyes still fixed on that home he was building in his mind beyond the Western mountains. "To the South! Our horses need water, food and rest."

"A farm house, Sir, eh...I mean, Hans," the reply, Weiss still being uneasy with addressing his commander by his first name. But it was an order and, thus far, Weiss' purposes were served best by following orders and, for the moment, remaining a loyal Hessian soldier.

"What kind of farm house?" Else inquired.

"A safe one, My Else," Weiss related, with a playful smile and a gentlemanly bow.

Hans fumed again. Else had 'requested' three of his men to address her as such, and now the always independent Weiss had joined their ranks. But he couldn't blame them for trying to avoid his order to avoid her request. Where else on EITHER continent would commoners such as these men have the opportunity to call a woman as attractive as Else by her first name, and with 'my' attached to it? To be on familiar terms with a Countess? To be ordered by her to never address her in formal tense but always familiar one? Indeed, German was a language designed to

distinguish the formal 'you' from the familiar reference. When you say 'you' in English, there is not distinction of social rank in the words. One 'you' for everyone.

Hans glanced again at 'Common Sense', the patriot propaganda document written by an expatriate Englishman to inspire treason against the King in service of one's countrymen. Good sense told him that it was wise to not let anyone below or above him to know that he had it. Sound reason dictated that he use it to learn American English as well as British English, as an intelligence gathering soldier had to be as fluent as possible in both.

Upon reaching the farm house, it was a modest dwelling by European standards, a mansion by American ones. A cabin with at three rooms on the floor, one on top, a roof that seemed to keep out the snow, a barn large enough to hold up to six horses. Hay enough to maintain a small herd of cows, the smell of pigs permeating the air. And a family greeting them as all Colonials living alone greeted friends and strangers alike.

"Howdy there," a Scottish-sounding man in his mid forties said with a wide smile, a torn deerskin coat, and a Kentucky long rifle 'conveniently' carried under his shoulder, a butcher knife under his belt with two pistols.

"Howdy-doo,doo," Countess Else said, mockingly imitating the pigs which seemed to own the yard of the establishment as much as the people.

Hans dismounted, extending his hand to the gentleman. "My name is Hans, Hans Muller, and you be----?"

"----Isaac. Isaac McFarland."

"Driver! Move on!" Else commanded. The driver of the coach obeyed. Hans didn't.

"Halt" he commanded the driver, whispered to the horses, and requested of the Countess.

"This is a farmhouse? It looks like a shithouse!" Else said with a smile to the owner, in her native tongue. Surmising that she didn't understand German, she continued. "I see now, in America all man, pigs and sheep are created equal. They talk alike,

think alike, and smell alike!” The coachmen pretended to laugh along. Hans’ Four Horseman didn’t join in this time, though seemed tempted to.

Isaac seemed confused. “That yappin be Dutchie?”

“German,” Hans replied in English, using his pocket dictionary to continue with such. “Spoken poorly, by a crazy woman. Who I take to Philadelphia.”

“Why?” the frontiersman who seemed to answer only to the Orders of Nature inquired.

Hans contemplated again such a simple and frightening word. “Why?” The most underused word in the German or British Army, or perhaps in any Army.

“Them uniforms. Who are you?” the frontiersman asked, noting the green colors under their coats.

“Private guards.” Hans said, refusing to say which side he was fighting for. “Hired to take woman who needs to go to Philadelphia. To see family.”

“That’s it?” the gatekeeper to the warm stalls and hay asked, and perhaps a shelter from the oncoming bitter night continued. “That’s all who you are?”

“We are what you see,” Hans added, his back turned to the ranting Countessa who wanted an ‘adventure’ but only if the new experiences fit into her twisted agenda.

“You look haggard out,” Isaac noted, lowering his rifle.

“I look like what?” Hans replied, finding no entry of such in his dictionary.

“Haggard ouutt” he repeated slowly, with a bit of a condescending aire.

“Yes, haggard out,” Hans noted as he incorporated another invented idiom into the dictionary in his head. “Tired out. Can we get some...some....”

“Sleep? Schlaf?”

“Yes, Yes. ‘Suppose so,.’” Hans replied, trying his best to make his German English sound ‘homey’.

“And some...eh....”

“Rabbit stew inside fer your men, hay for them horses in the barn,” Isaac continued.

Hans bowed in appreciation. It seemed odd to Isaac that men should bow to each other, the gesture causing him to laugh.

“All you Dutchies bow to each other like that?”

“Nein. Not all of us,” Hans said, gazing at the Countessa, still on her rant in German about how insolent the ‘commoners’ were.

“What she yammin’ about, Hans?” the host of the Wilderness Chalet inquired with genuine curiosity, his untrimmed beard blowing in the oncoming wind.

“Bullshit,” Hans smiled, feeling a very sharable joke about to emerge. “No... Cow-shit!” With that, Hans instructed his men to unhitch the horses.

McFarland chuckled, put away his rifle and tied up his coat, a collection of patches put together for function rather than fashion.. “Horses”, he said, pointing to the barn. “Grub”, he continued, motioning to the door leading to the cabin. “Private place for the ‘lady’ upstairs,” he continued, with compassion in his voice, pointing to the upstairs attic.

Hans instructed his men to take Else’s wares off the wagon and bring them upstairs, something the Countess protested in the most foul language and tone to the commoners under Hans’ command. “But I have orders, My Else,” “It is for your own good, My Else.” “It will be fun, My Else” came from the Four Horsemen’s mouths as they attempted to talk reason into the Countessa. It calmed her down, for now.

Finally, Else stepped out of her coach and promenaded up to the log house, next to Hans. She waited, then cleared her throat. “Oh yes, forgive me, my Else,” Hans said, in formal tense, taking off his coat, placing it on the muddy log ‘steps’ so that she would not get her shoes dirty. Something she saw inside the house seemed to be to her liking. She kissed Hans on the cheek and stroked his neck. “After dinner, My Hans,” she whispered. “Fresh cream and two apples,” she continued, caressing his crotch.

“Yeah. You be doin’ the righteous thing, bringin’ her to Philadelphia. Fer ‘medical’ treatment,” McFarland said to Hans as the four horsemen with their ever-evolving individual agendas assisted her upstairs, in the service of each other, for now. “My wife was ‘special’ like that, too. Maybe if I got her to a doctor at a crazy house in time, she wouldn’t have....”

The rough and ready pioneer froze, tears coming down his cheeks. The wrinkles on his face seemed like canyons, his clear eyes glazed over with grief, and regret. It made clear all of the English words that Hans was having trouble understanding.

Hans looked around the cabin. Four places set for dinner, a mute woman shuffling in with five more, humming a song to herself that was part angelic and part demonic. Her downturned, intelligent eyes and sorrowful soul reminded Hans of his own mother, in times that he never shared with guests either.

“My wife’s sister,” McFarland related by way of explanation as he faked an ‘all is well’ smile to the woman inside with the bobbing face and eyes that seemed to be living somewhere ‘happy’, for now. “Can’t talk...Won’t talk. Runs in her family. Man’s gotta take care of his family, and his family’s family if he can.”

“Yes,” Hans said through a lump coming to his throat. “But before I forget...”

Hans reached into his pocket, handing placing three denomination of coins into McFarland’s firm and still steady hands. Some spendable in Loyalist establishments, some in those territories held by rebels, some accepted in both places.

“This ain’t necessary, Hans.”

“Yes, it is,” Hans said to McFarland. What he didn’t say was that most Hessians and British took what they wanted for their lodgings as payment for ‘protective services’ rendered in battle. What he didn’t even think was the fear that the other three places at the dinner table were for those who would be spying on him, his men and the other men wearing Hessian and British uniforms he was serving. What he looked forward to sharing were dreams about setting up a home such as this for his own wife and child once the war seemed a thousand miles away was finally over.

On one side of the dinner table that doubled for many other purposes were Israel,

Ichmeal and Ignatious, all of them too young to grow mustaches, but old enough to want to. At the head of the table sat their father Isaac. On the other side sat Hans and the four horsemen, the two coachmen having been requested to take their dinner in the barn so they could tend to the horses by Else and Hans. In the kitchen, rocking back and forth while holding a spoon like a sword, the crazy cook who never was introduced, nor who introduced herself. At the end of the table occupied in better times by her sister sat Countessa Else.

There was something in the rabbit stew that made this place feel like home to Hans. Sassafras, to the best of his gustatory recollection. The spice that his mother put into the stew made from game his father had shot. His father hated sassafras, but since Hans liked it, somehow it made its way into his plate of stew. Until the day when there was no sassafras anymore, and his mother rocked back and forth in the kitchen, holding up her broom like it a Viking spear. In the same way that Don Quixote used his broomstick to fight dragons with windmills. And in the same way the crazy cook in the kitchen was battling her own demons with her trusty wooden spoon.

Though in ways biological, he was still a virgin with regard to his relationship to Maria, Hans imagined himself as a father to her child. Telling him tales about Don Quixote slaying Real dragons, ignorance, stagnation and cruelty. And defeating the most feared and unrecognized demon of them all---Lifelessness. Yet, it was worth 'indulging' in a transgression with Else invited by her with winks she delivered both directly and discretely. Numerous women throughout the ages submitted their bodies to the enemy so that their children could eat. The worst sin would be to let the child inside Maria's womb be returned to his sadistic father in Germany. Or to be tortured and killed here. Else would see to that if she were not satisfied, with or without the Major's approval.

The main course stew was topped off with what seemed like an apple, berry and nut cobbler, a pie if you imagined it to be. "We have to eat fast, children," she said to the four horsemen, then Hans. "A special treat awaits the man who comes up to my room to eat it with me, or on me." With that, Else loosened her blouse, then patted the 'pioneer pastry' between her breasts and under her neck. "Gentlemen, I will be waiting," she said to each horseman with her eyes, in ways that were barely noticeable to all of them at once. She waltzed upstairs, leaving jaws dropped in her wake by all, except for Isaac and Hans.

Isaac held up his hand to his sons, insisting that they finish their meal and mind their manners, tending to his own hard-earned food at a slow pace which he insisted be followed. Hans cleared his throat, the signal for 'please behave gentlemen' which

was always understood, and up till now, accepted.

Never did Hans see men behave so badly as boys, gobbling up their food, then racing up the narrow stairway leading to the attic, viciously pushing each other aside with no regard to rank, courtesy or respect. “Gentlemen!” Hans asserted as the elder Brecht kicked young Osterhous in the stomach, then the naïve always serving young lad. kicked the old Corporal in the groin. Weiss stepped in to break it up, trying to appear to be a hero to his Lady upstairs. Holzmann snuck his way around the three-way struggle, only to slip on the top step and fall directly in the middle of it.

“Gentlemen!” Hans yelled out.

“Up here...one or all of you. Schnell! Now!” Else sung in an alluring tone.

Isaac’s two younger sons seemed perplexed. Their father Isaac insisted that they continued eating. “Small bites, boys,” he said in a calm voice. “No one respects a hungry man who gulps down his food, now. And your Mother wanted you to be respectable men,” he seemed to say, and mean.

Hans pulled out two pistols. “Gentlemen!” he screamed, aiming them at his love-crazed men. But before he was able to demonstrate his willingness to use the thunderstick, Hans’ eyes noticed Isaac signaling his sons to duck. Then, into Hans’ ears came the sound of something outside the window. Then, a barrage of rebel shots coming through the window from the North and West woods coming from citizen-soldiers in blue coats.

.Perhaps they were told about Hans’ ‘green coats’ by elder son Ignatious who looked very suspiciously at the tunics under Hans’ men’s brown coats. Or perhaps it was the absent coachman who seemed to be reading Hans’ copy of ‘Common Sense’ with more interest in its separatist political message than representation of American English, or who was caught taking a crap in the woods unexpectedly, selling out his bretherin to save his exposed ass .

Hans and his men thought with the same mind as they took their defensive positions against the invading detachment of Yankees, who seemed to be interested more in the people inside the cabin than the wagon and horses outside. But before the first shot could be fired, Hans’ fellow combatants were immobilized by a cannon ball that blazed through the south wall.

The four horsemen lay wounded on the floor, the ladder to the attic pressing down on

them all. The Countessa remained upstairs, unharmed, commenting in German about how lovely the fireworks were.

Hans grabbed whatever loaded weapons he could get a hold of, crashed through the window and fired at the raiders, wounding three of them in the leg. Painful injuries that, according to his best estimate, would incapacitate rather than kill. As he predicted, the other three raiders abandoned their mini-cannon, and took to the task of rescuing their fallen comrades. Hans threw his voice out into the sky in as many tones and tenor as possible, then pulled out the small fuse-connected 'thunderballs' he kept in his pocket. Throwing out his voice and many small flashes of 'boom' into the woods in different directions had fooled many rebel platoons into thinking that there was a battalion about to attack them. And it seemed to do so again. Brains beat brawn, or bravado. But just as the Yankees ran back into the woods, Hans heard gunshots fired at his men from INSIDE the cabin.

"My God!" Hans screamed upon his return, moans and screams of his men now silenced by bullets, their bodies lifeless. He grabbed the gunman responsible for it by the collar, aiming the pistol into his throat. "Do you know what you just did!" Hans screamed at 'Innkeeper' Isaac in his native tongue, whipping out his knife and holding it to his throat.

"No doctor could have saved them. Injun or White," the man who smelled like pigs, deer and moose replied calmly, in German. "Something I learned it from the last War you Europeans brought over here with ya," Isaac continued, delivered with a depth of experience and not a whiff of insincerity.

When stripped down, Isaac had the look of a veteran, complete with scars on his chest, arms and neck which could not have been inflicted by any animal. None of them seemed to have been healed from the inside or the outside.

"Whose side are you on?" Hans pressed.

"Theirs," the veteran of the French and Indian War replied, referring to his youngest sons, who came out of hiding under the debris of what had been the South wall of the cabin. "Boys. This is what happens when you go to War," he said to them. "ANYone's War."

Two 'friendlies', at least from Hans' perspective, suddenly rode to the cabin, dismounting as quickly as they galloped in. "Was ist los?" they inquired rushing into the cabin, muskets loaded and aimed.

“Where the hell were you!” Hans screamed at the rest of the Countessa’s protection detachment..

“In the woods, chasing rebels. They tried to steal our horses, Sir,” one of the coachmen said.

“But we did get them back,” the other boasted.

“Which means we must be on our way,” Countessa Else mused as she sauntered down the stairs. “What happened to them?” she asked when seeing the four horsemen laying on top of each other. “I was so looking forward to seeing them suffer before they died like the Major will, very, very soon. Particularly after I put in his food, well...things that...hmm...You boys hungry?” she said, showing off her naked breasts.

Finally it all fit together in Hans’ head. Why the Major was so sick most of the time, particularly after he and Else dined together. And why she seemed so insistant on telling him that she loved him because of his Soul, and not his money. And why the compliments she gave him, that no one else did, seemed to keep his ailing body going yet another day, pushing onward yet another day with ever-increasing belly-aches so that the Germans under his command would be treated with respect by their British employers. The Major was the closest thing that Hans had as father, or even an uncle. As he was to everyone under his command. Who else would have insisted that there would be a bonus paid out to every soldier in every rank if the War against King George’s rebels and traitors ended by New Years. It was a perfect match for the Major, a hard working masochist, to be in love with a manipulative sadist such as Lady Else, who, according to Maria anyway, had dubious genetic background justifying her noble titles.

“You, bitch!” Hans grunted at Else’s smiling face and gloating eyes, recalling that the Major, his boss, and now friend, would do anything for Else and finally realizing that, she was capable of doing anything to him. He grabbed Else by the hair and slapped her, then threw her to the ground. He watched himself punch her in the chest, kick her in the ground, then hold his knife against her throat, scalp, then eyes. “Give me one reason why I shouldn’t put you out of all of our misery!!!”

“Because she is what she is, and you are what you are,” Isaac related, calmly.

“She is crazy! And dangerous! And evil, you pig smelling son of a bitch!” Albert

shot back.

“And you were on your way to taking her to the crazy house, in... Trenton, as I remember you sayin’?”

“Or someplace closer,” Hans grunted as his mind moved a million miles an hour to places he never thought possible, or necessary.. “More discreet. After some minor modifications,” he said while moving th knife closer to her mad eyes, seeing the devil himself in them.

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CHAPTER 25

“It’s got a solid roof, a hot meal three times a day that I am assured are never cold, and custodians who are sure that no one does harm to each other, or themselves,” the letter read. Maria pictured the images between the lines of Hans’ words, and the smells. Vomit that fermented on the unfortunates who emitted them. Urine and feces that fell mostly on the floor rather than in the pots. And that red foamy aroma on the skin, the sweat summoned out through the mind by fear, the blood oozing from limbs bruised by self-mutilation. “Yes, Maria, it is a place that I would not put a rabid dog, but the bitch deserved it, and I had no other option,” the conclusion as to why Hans had placed Else in an insane asylum under an assumed name, with no explanation as to what he would tell Major Westphal as to why he failed in his Mission. That is IF he would report back to Westphal at all. “Saving Major Westphal from a lifetime of misery from Lady Else, or death by her hands, is a Cause I will accept as noble right now,” he wrote by way of explanation. “I hope that you will understand why I did what I had to do.”

Maria had no problem accepting this as the explanation as to why her girlhood ‘friend’ was now incarcerated in an asylum under an assumed name with a shorn head that perhaps was partially scalped, or perhaps not. The once-beautiful Else always had found a way to make up games to play with Maria in which she would be the winner and Maria the loser throughout their childhoods. And when Maria did win the game, the rules would all of a sudden change to invert her victories into defeats. From the horse races which started out as who would get back to the barn fastest, then got changed into who brought Maria’s father’s horses back with less sweat on their necks. To the contests as to who would cook the best tarts for the Baron. Else always found a way to have Maria accidentally put generous portions of salt into the fruit filling rather than sugar. And of course those dinners where they were courting the same man, and presumably ate the same food. Maria would have to excuse herself for flatulence at the table and be indisposed for the rest of the night because of having to emit the remainder of her meal back up her mouth.

“Yes, my father’s second daughter,” Maria fumed under her breath. “You deserve each other, ‘Lady Else’. And whatever you did in the bedroom with him, while my mother was dying in hers...” The memory came back to Maria like it was yesterday. Along with her being summoned into the Baron’s bedchamber as well, being given a tonic, as she recalled, and...not recalling much after that except having to take several long baths.

Maria poured herself another cup of tea. From the East Indian Tea Company. A

pekoe flavored concoction similar to that thrown off the ships in Boston Harbor which, by some accounts, gave severe indigestion to the fish. But it was a time for celebration. Else was officially ‘captured by the Indians, mostly by her own choosing’, according to the report Hans had filed. She had denounced the Crown, and the Fatherland, and was working with the enemy now, according to the rest of his report.

“Hans is the most honest liar I know,” Maria announced to the newly arrived male visitor in her bedchamber. “You will be meeting him, too. Very, very, soon,” she continued, nuzzling his nose, tickling his chin, laughing with his smile.

Wolfgang didn’t see what Maria was thinking, and displayed interest only in himself. His needs, his wants, his desire. He was hungry in the most primal ways, and didn’t hold back. He opened his mouth and screamed out a cry, pointing to Maria’s breasts.

The former Baroness-to-be embraced her newborn child, feeling herself fed three fold for every swallow of milk young Wolfgang extracted from her breasts. His birth had cost her much blood, and many hours of pain. But as a New World wife, it was her responsibility to take care of his needs, and wants. She was happy, fulfilled, and wanting for nothing except for just ONE of the men who pledged to be his father to be there with her now. Both Albert and Hans were gone, doing what men did in War. It was up to her to now do what women had to do in such an endeavor.

CHAPTER 26

Lieutenant Albert Stein sent the Sergeants out to get water for the privates and corporals. Unless, of course, the privates and corporals had been insolent to him in the past, or were getting too full of themselves as 'victors' in the present. Today it was Seargent Schmitt's job to fetch the water from the river, but he came back with more ice than water in the buckets.

"Three inch thick ice," Albert noted. "An inch thicker than yesterday."

"And two inches thicker than the day before, Sir," Schmitt replied, shivering in his coat, but smiling. "You know what this means, Sir, I hope."

Albert had been counting the days till Christmas as much as any other man. It was a season of celebration not only because of the undeclared truce which Christian armies always extended to each other, but because Old Man Winter put a freeze on fighting for everyone by the time the thick ice came to the rivers and the deep snow covered the farm fields. The winner come Spring would be the side that had extracted the most harvest from those fields before the snows, and which side controlled the rivers after they thawed.

But Albert was not content to let Winter fight his battles for him. Profit in this War would be to the Commander who got victories fastest, no matter how many of the enemy he mutilated, or how many of his own men he lost. Dispatchers sent word to Albert that the beloved and respected Major Westphal was being relieved, due to ailing health. To Albert's way of thinking, the news was welcomed. Westphal was an old man, and a married one. Better that he retire to family life and leave the glory hunting to younger men, particularly those such as Albert who rose up the ranks by merit rather than birth, or pay-offs by 'anonymous' Countesses. Whatever promotions Albert DID acquire by 'incidental associations' with Hans or Maria, he deserved them. It was he who was in the thick of each battle, fiercely fighting hand to hand, standing his ground until the fear in the enemy's eyes made his opponent run away first. It was Albert who stood ground while his fellow soldiers around him considered the option of fleeing when confronting enemy troops and patriate civilian mobs. And when placed in positions of command, it was Albert who had arranged for a special squad in the rear of the line to discretely shoot any of his own troops who were about to retreat without orders to do so. A dirty job that no history books or General's diary would record, but one which had kept General Washington and his rebels on the run, and promised to bring the Hessians home in time for Easter next Spring.

Seated at a warm desk in his winter quarters in Trenton, Albert opened up a map and invited Seargent Schmitt to sit down on the special guest chair in front of him, several inches lower than his own. Schmitt gulped down the locally-produced, and forcibly acquired, hot cider and warm cornbread stew into his frigid throat. It was somewhere in mid-New Jersey when the British supply lines ran thin, leaving Redcoat and Hessian Units to extract what they needed from the local citizens. Some transactions were amicable, some were not.

But as for the map, Albert had ideas of his own. “Seargent, what would our chances be if we and a few of our most trustable men were to locate Washington, visit him in his tent, privately, and offer him an invitation to be a guest at our Christmas party, then a guest at the Tower of London in the Spring? How many men would it take to enforce this invitation on his Excellency General Washington?”

“As many men as can wear wings that would not freeze,” Schmitt laughed, throwing a slab of ice from the Delaware upon Albert’s desk, then opening up the window and inviting the wind to affirm his claim.

“So,” Albert concluded. “The War will not be over till Spring?”

“Not for Washington,” Schmitt related, helping himself to another bowl of stew simmering on Albert’s warm, wooden stove. “If what those prisoners said was right, their enlistments are up by New Years Day.”

“Information which you shared with our British allies?” Albert fumed.

“Bosses, Sir,” Schmitt continued, placing his feet up on the desk. “The British pay your salary, and mine, Sir.”

The limitations of Schmitt’s usefulness to Albert seemed all too apparent. This Seargent would always be a Seargent, collecting his pay from whatever Army hired him, perhaps with a few extra coins or favors from the enemy. Whatever looting he would do was within acceptable regulations, whatever profit gained from the rules of Lutheran Christian economics. Another ‘for King and God’ puppet posing as a ‘Hun from Hell’ to the Colonials.

It would be Spring before Albert would collect on the sufferings he had endured at the hands of the greedy Upper Classes since his birth. Twenty years of payback, with an added consideration.

Albert ordered Schmitt to put another log into the fire in his warm quarters, then ordered him to retire to his own lodgings, which Albert saw fit to be on half rations with regard to firewood. "Let this keep you warm!" he said, throwing him a bottle of whiskey pilfered from a Yankee distillery that was 'destroyed by cannon fire', according to what he had written in his report to the British generals. "Merry Christmas," 'Santa' Albert said to the 'good soldier' who went on his way.

With Schmitt out of the room, Albert tended to the REAL business at hand. He glanced at the the letter on his desk, opened but read only once. Once was enough. It was from New York, from Wilma Tannenbaum, otherwise known as his best friend's lover, perhaps, or perhaps not.

CHAPTER 27

To the squirrels in the woods, it was the season to eat nuts and berries at their winter quarters inside frozen tree trunks in preparation for Spring. To what was left of Washington's 'army' on the other side of the Delaware, it was time to find out what they were fighting for and why. To the Hessians at Trenton, it was a time to celebrate their efficiency at quenching a rebellion the British could never have contained by themselves. To Hans, it was the opportunity to finally look into a face he could trust on the most meaningful holiday of the year for all sides.

Albert poured the drinks into two beer steins, hand carved in Brandywine by a Bayreuth-born Loyalist, saved especially for this occasion. "Soft cider," he said with a slight bow of gentlemanly respect that fit his official rank..

"With cinnamon on top?" Hans replied, with another, more expressive bow.

"Which we will share with Maria, once she is able to travel,," Albert added, the flexion of his waist now nearly as complete as it could get.

"And the child, Sir?" the inquiry from Hans even more extraverted bow, smelling the brew. "Assuming this is soft cider and not hard cider made to taste soft with some cinnamon on top."

Albert opened up his coat, the smile under his overgrown waxed mustache visible to a blind man. "Hans! It would be unChristian of me to trick a non-drinking scholar-soldier into getting drunk!"

"Yes, and you are not a Christian," Hans countered, twirling his own mustache, recalling that such a thing was wearable only to those above both of their stations back on the Shit Farm in Hesse-Cassel. "But as it is Christmas, I suppose that it is a day when even non-Christian men are Christians."

"Indeed yes!" Albert proclaimed with brotherly love and comradeship. "To....the Fatherland!" he announced with pride in himself, his comrades, his Cause and his home.

"And to...fathers?" Hans winced, considering the terms and biology regarding Maria's new child, and what Surname Wolfgang would to acquire some day, and whether he would or should be told that his grandfather and father were the same man, biologically. Hans felt intense guilt. Guilt for not being there for Maria when

Wolfgang was being born, perhaps. Guilt for dragging her here to the New World instead of fighting for her honor, and welfare, in the Old one. Guilt for not having ejected his own semen into her when he had the chance so her father's seed would not have a chance to take seed in her womb . Guilt for those private nights Hans endured, and perhaps enjoyed, with 'Lady Else' to insure that she would not have Maria and her son dragged back to Europe to face the wrath of Baron von Edinger. Guilt for something Hans did right, or wrong, which he would pay for. And have to make a life changing decision to fix.

“Something wrong?” Albert asked as he noted Hans' his sips of cider turning into gulps.

“Happy Christmas, and a peaceful and prosperous New Year for all of us,” Hans smiled back, sadly but 'victoriously' somehow. As Albert read into Hans mind, a faculty he still maintained, it seemed that Hans was imagining the feel of the January winds on his ride back to New York after Washington's surrender. Smelling the scent of Maria's skin, be it sweaty as it was, now his most favorite perfume. Hearing the laughter of her son while being read Plato's Republic by his mother and the English version of Don Quixote by him. Then was awakened by the sound of a human fist slapping flesh, perhaps bone.

“Idiots, assholes, and morons,” Albert sighed. “We give the men brandy to stay warm, and feel happy, not to act like idiots to each other.” He put down his drink, opened the draw on his desk, and slapped two pistols under his belt as the brawl between his two fattest and now drunkest enlisted men outside got louder and cruder. “You know what we need to keep peace in this camp? An enemy in the woods!!!”

“Or Scottish Highlanders and English Redcoats to make fun of, so they hit us first and take a lashing for it?” Hans offered. It was sufficient to make the men come to their senses and go back to considering each other allies rather than adversaries.

“Yes, indeed, you know how to unite feuding soldiers against the enemy rather than each other . Which is why you are a Captain, Hans.”

“And a civilian soon, God willing, Major Albert Stein, Sir.”

Would Albert remain in the Army after this War was over? It seemed a moot point now. But as he strutted out the door, he seemed to be a man of duty, effectiveness

and, in his own way, honor. Far more so than the men who had elected to fight each other because they had run out of rebels and Englishmen upon which to practice their combative skills and instincts.

Into Han's ears came a song, from another part of Camp. He looked at the Calendar, letting his eyes feast on the affirmation of it all. "December 25th," he noted. The day when even his father had declared a truce with regard to the war he had waged all year long against his mother, young Hans, and himself. Fueled by drink, but based in something deeper that Hans never understood, and which his mother ultimately suffered most from. But for a few hours on December 24th, all was peaceful at home, even on the worst years.

"Silent Night," Hans noted of the song outside bellowed out by the soldiers dreaming about becoming civilians again in the upcoming year. "Sung so loudly, proudly and..."

Hans' private celebration crashed as quickly as it rose. There, on the floor was the letter from Maria. Its first words read 'My dear, dearest Albert'. Valor told Hans to not read the rest. Wisdom required him to read the rest. Practicality required that he share it with an old friend. "Well," he said, looking at the bottles of alcohol-enriched firewater on Albert's shelf. "It's been a long time, but... maybe it is time that we got re-acquainted."

It was the first time Hans had been AWOL, drunk and released from the obligation to see the better part of human nature. For his entire life, so it seemed, he had controlled his reaction to other people's anger, but at the expense of losing contact with his own Inner Passion. A Passion which was now betrayed, and inverted by that phenomenon called the Truth could tear apart the most carefully and soundly put together philosophy of how one SHOULD live.

As he sat in the frigid woods beyond the perimeter of camp, the moon shone light on the subject at hand that could not be kept in the shadows anymore. No matter how many times Hans read the letter that accidentally fell into his satchel along with official military papers from Albert's desk, the same words from Maria's pen flashed into his eyes and penetrated into his tortured Soul.

"I remember that night like it is was yesterday, today and all my tomorrows, my dear

Albert. To the best of my feelings, and calculations, that was the night when our love produced the love of my life, the one who is with me now, waiting for you and his adopted father Hans to come home. Was it a sin to express our love to each other, my dear Albert, in ways that Hans never could, would or perhaps should have? I think not, and pray not. Will we know each other again in the intimate way we did ten months ago? The truest part of me hopes so, God help me. I ask one thing of you, Albert. Please see that you AND Hans come back to me and our child well in body, mind and Spirit. Though I am sure is is of your blood, the child is of Hans' heart., and my son needs you both. I DO love you and Hans, but in ways that I am only beginning to understand. Maybe our son will be able to explain it to us some day.... Maria.”

How would THIS day be entered in Hans Muller's diary? He had recorded each experience religiously in the account of his travels, and developments. The dedication in the dairy was still the same. “For my son or daughter, and their sons and daughters.” But as for the other players in the drama which was being played out in the Theater Americana, anger held Han's pen and ability to even speak any words hostage.

A coyote with the face of a companion dog approached Hans from the woods as he raised yet another bottle to his shaking lips. “Leave me alone!” he screamed at the creature, shooting his pistol at the animal, not looking back to see if the animal ran back into the woods. He didn't care if the half-wild, half-domestic half-breed hound was wounded. Hans found himself just caring anymore. Not for his old friend Albert, or his true love Maria, or even his men in Camp, who were fighting for their own brand of liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness. Maybe he still cared for the child Maria had ‘spawned’. Maybe he still could value something. The alternative was worse than death.

“People who value nothing are less than human, and less than dead,” he heard from the voice inside his head, in a voice distinctively female, and wise, her face given form within the tree trunks across the frozen stream..

“I'm not listening to you now!” he screamed back at the ghost about to inhabit his consciousness. “I am getting drunk. Drunk enough so I don't even care about you, mother. Or ANY child.”

Hans gulped down more firewater, but the frigid night spoke back even louder. “You made a miscalculation, a mistake,” Hans' mother replied through an echoing wind, taking on the form of an angel with an oncoming winter fog. “You are who

you are, my dear son. I forgive you.”

“I don’t forgive myself!!” Hans whipped out his sword as she came closer, appearing as woman young and beautiful enough to be embraced, and loved, by her beloved son. “Get away from me, or I’ll...I’ll...”

“You’ll do what, Hans?” she challenged, arms materializing on her body, held to her hips in a stance of maternal assertion, and love. “If I don’t go away you’ll do what, Hans?”

Hans had no words to answer her. The memory what he did with her, for her, and what he couldn’t do for the first real woman, and friend could not be extinguished. But it could be covered, perhaps smothered out of existence. In the manner that his father, another man who learned to value nothing, extinguished such memories.

“To...you, my dear Mother!” Hans slurred angrily out of his angry mouth, raising another bottle of mind-numbing elixir to his lips. “Go away! Go away! Go...”

Finally, the whiskey had its way. Gone was the sight of the angel in the fog. Gone was caring about anyone else. Death was now welcomed, but something worse than that came upon him.

Christmas night had passed without incident, or memory, the daylight of December 26th burning into his eyes like a bolt of lightning. With the sound of movement across the stream. Beating drums, Colonial fife tunes and worse than that, the sound of jubilant celebration. “Christmas in America, for yet another fucking day!” Hans growled. His head felt a pounding he had never experienced before, even the first time he joined his father in ‘celebration’ of having killed his first deer, or something else that he remembered was a marker of his ‘evolving’ manhood. On the ground lay bottles of firewater. In between his legs, fresh urine containing water which had been within the jugs taken out to the woods. In the stream, fragments of the letter which resurfaced no matter how many hard he tried to sink them to the bottom. On the other side of the stream, something that couldn’t be ignored.

There he was, the old man who refused to die, or be forgotten. George Washington, mounted on his horse. Giving Christmas greetings to his troops, a ragged bunch of commoners who now seemed to be soldiers. With every Hessian in Camp lined up in formation, their surrendered weapons laid up on a pile in front of their shocked faces.

How could it have happened? Where did they come from? And where were they going? The Delaware was uncrossable, yet the American 'army' had crossed it, apparently, and were preparing to go somewhere else now. But who was there to report this to? And, more importantly, why? When considering the political options of it all, Hans imagined Lieutenant Albert in formation, more angry than any of his men, looking like a shit shoveller again, stripped of everything except the rank on his uniform.

"Now, Albert, you are a Lieutenant of NOTHING!" Hans growled out to the illusion in front of his eyes. "In a War which is about NOTHING!"

From the woods, the rustle of feet brought Hans back into 'reality', or perhaps a nightmare that would replace reality permanently. An army of rebels were now holding their guns, poised to fire, from positions where victory would be assured without even having to fire a shot.

Hans considered the options as to what to do. Report the event to British Headquarters elsewhere that he was the only survivor of the most humiliating defeat imaginable for the Hessian Army because he was drunk, away from his post, or perhaps worse, someone who led the rebel Army into the Camp?

Option two, surrender himself to the rebels, losing the wages he still had in his money belt which Albert's son probably needed to be kept alive, or be 'bought' from his mother?

Or, option three...declare himself a 'neutral' in this war. Drop out of it and everyone he knew in or connected to it. Such made sense as there would be more than seven circles of Hell to pay if Major Westphal found out that he had stashed his beloved 'Lady' Else into an insane asylum, even if it was for the Major's own good, and Else's.

The third option required some external modifications beyond merely putting on a civilian overcoat or burning his Hessian uniform. He whipped out his hunting knife, which had cut into nothing except dead animal meat. Such could not be said for anyone else in the Hessian Army. But it was time that fresh blood from a warm body be shed on the cold steel. The most effective intelligence officer in the Hessian army had still not killed anyone, not directly anyway.

The hair and blood from Hans' upper lip fell to the ground, as did any indication of

rank or political affiliation on his uniform. The silvery, bloody and hairy debris from Hans' upper lip attracted the coyote. He stood in front of the clean 'slashed' Hans and asked him the question everyone was asking everyone else, after all the bullshit was done with?

"Which side am I on?" Hans inquired of the hound who he, out of weakness or surviving wisdom, found himself befriending? "My own!" he declared. "Hans Muller, no Henry Miller," he went on and on, in Colonial 'American' English, hoping that his military training and German accent would go unnoticed.

"I am Henry Miller, free man!" he proclaimed to the sky, more terrified with each level of realization that now he belonged to no one, and nothing. Except, perhaps, the child he would claim as his own one day. And this coyote who seemed to need someone as well, the alliance solidified with a piece of dried sausage, perhaps contingent on more dried sausage, or perhaps not.

CHAPTER 28

Albert had never seen the enemy this close, and in this way, as he observed General Washington's Army capture every Hessian in Trenton with the expenditure of minimal firepower. This American 'army' had more generals than privates, so it seemed, and what commanders did have official rank were better at chewing tobacco than chewing out subordinates who were insubordinate. Indeed, the loudest protests came from captured Hessian officers who demanded that they be treated better than the enlisted men under them. "Savages and Pagans!" Albert sneered at the Colonial Army officers and men in his Native language as his sword, sidearm and hunting knife was taken from him. "Stupid ones at that!" he further informed his captors,, noting that he and everyone else in what was one of the most efficient and victorious regiments of the Hessian Army were allowed to keep their money and, by the lack of the bruises and whippings on their back, their honor. The only thing the Hessians enlisted men lacked now were their weapons, and the obligation to obey their Hessian or British officers. But they still possessed their fear.

"Where are they taking us, Sir?" a terrified private who Albert knew by his Christian name three battles and ten interrogations ago asked his angry commander as the column of Hessians were being relocated to an unknown location by Washington's troops, who looked more like half-starved beggars than soldiers.

"I don't know, son," Albert's reply to the boy who snuck into the ranks as a man because by some freak of Nature he was able to grow a mustache before pubic hair..

"Will it be prison ships like the ones that the rebel prisoners were put in after we captured them in White Plains and Kipps Bay, Sir?" 'Son' inquired.

"I don't think so. The only boats the rebels have are the ones they stole to get across the Delaware last night," Albert's assured the boy.

"So, we are going to be paroled. Sent on a boat back home?"

"As I told you! The rebels don't have a navy," Albert sneered. "But they may give each of us a lifeboat and let us make a swim for it ourselves, Son."

'Son', believed it.

"Or maybe they will send us into the woods, and let the Indians eat us," Albert continued, calculating how many food wagons the rebels had, and noting how many

of them had tightened their belts to the last notch.

“Did we just lose the War, Sir?” ‘Son’ asked.

Albert could not answer with any degree of authority. Maybe Washington’s surprise Christmas visit was a coordinated effort which had taken place everywhere else as well. Maybe General Howe was stomping his feet in anger in a New York brothel which was a new detention center for captured English troops. Maybe Maria was being forced to dance to Yankee victory tunes from Major Benedict Arnold and the rabble who tried to invade Canada, then slipped into the woods and hid out in the swamps of Brooklyn before embarking on Manhattan during Christmas night celebrations. Maybe Hans knew what was really going on. Maybe Hans was a special guest of Washington now, who had been invited to spill his guts regarding Hessian troops in Trenton and British soldiers in other areas of New Jersey.

Albert pondered what kind of man Hans really was, and surmised that such was very possible. Hans was talking more and more about freedom and less about loyalty, and he had a low threshold to pain. It would not take much to make the ‘charmed’, still-not-wounded, perhaps cowardly, ‘Wonder Captain’ talk. The only real pain Hans had experienced in this War were a few blisters on his feet and memory-driven headaches between his ears.

“Sir, did we lose the War, Sir?” ‘Son’ demanded to know, as did the ‘Sons’ around him.

“The winner of this War will be the one who stays on the battlefield longest, or creates one wherever he is,” Albert announced to his men, and to himself. “You just have to put your own order into the chaos.”

The order to halt came from the front of the column in an echoing chain of commands. The American guards were called out of their ranks, spoken to by a rider atop one of the Belgium draft horses who had only hours ago bore a Hessian Army brand. “Forward”, the next command. As the march continued, it was at a slower pace, a leisurely stroll, so it seemed, said gait exemplified by several of the guards placing their muskets along the back of their shoulders in the manner of farmers rather than soldiers. And a Yankee drummer boy distributing loafs of bread and literature, in German, to the enlisted men first, then the officers.

“Fifty acres of land if we join them?” ‘Son’ read.

“Dishonor on your families if you do! And to be hung by the British in New York! And the appropriate authorities at home!” Albert intuited, and warned.

He notices the braver soldiers in the ranks looking toward the woods, the guards literally turning their eyes away from the speculations incubating behind their eyes.

“This is a country of force. And without guns, or money you can spend, you will be eaten by the wolves, winter and the Indians, my Comrades,” Albert said to his men, sincerely, in German. He looked at the guard, smiling his way. “And if this son of a whore with the face of a dog who is about to be shot by an arrow from one of those Indians behind him knows anything, he will take cover, NOW!”

The guard nodded back having understood nothing.

“But if we catch the enemy when THEY are sleeping tonight, like they caught us...” Albert informed his men.

The rebels seemed to be cordial ‘hosts’ to their Hessian prisoners once it was decided where they would be moved to. Albert found himself amongst a group of Hessians at a campground which seemed well stocked. Of course it supplied by wagonloads of supplies that the rebels had stolen from the Hessians at Trenton. Such was expected. But was not expected was the mannerisms of the captors towards each other.

Their laughter and storytelling of the those were not Generals or Colonels seemed exactly like what the shit-shovelers in Hesse-Cassel talked about after another day of drudgery in service of their own bellies and those who decided how much food was allowed to go into them. Some of the conversation was even in German, but a diction that Albert had not heard before. Gone was the use of formal tense, and the inventors of this new ‘tongue’ seemed to make up their own rules about grammar. It seemed incomprehensible at times. Perhaps it would made sense if you were one of the speakers who made up the idioms and expressions as you went along. Speak your own inaccuracies loud enough and they will become law. Such was the way of America.

Taking that credo to Core, Albert assessed the situation and did the accounting as. When leaving Trenton, one Colonial guarded twenty men. Now it was down to one

rebel for maybe fifty Hessians, the Colonials more interested in duties other than guarding prisoners. And no shackles on the Hessians, even the ones that yelled the biggest fuss about being taken prisoner. But as for sentries in the bush and in the trees waiting to shoot any Hessian who even thought about escaping, this was a real possibility.

“Gentlemen,” Albert inquired of a group of Hessian enlisted men who he had referred to by forms of address far less dignified prior to the raid on the morning of Dec 26. “I am in need of some more asswipe,” he continued, snatching patriot literature which was being read with some serious consideration, and by Seargent Schmitt. And observing a sleeping American soldier leaning against a supply wagon. “If we can get to the back of that cart, by my calculations of what is n there, we can each take enough three days of supplies to keep us fed, some weapons we can use to acquire some more sustenance from the woods or the Colonial civilians, and make our way to New York.”

“Why, Sir?” ‘Son’ inquired.

Albert fumed. He slapped his face with the kind of indignation that not even Forman Richter had displayed to him back at the Shit Farm. “Because we must.”

“But why, Lieutenant? Why must we follow you, or anyone else, into the woods, or anywhere?” Schmitt inquired, his mouth filled with sausage that had been reserved for Hessian officer only, his voice warm, the ‘you’ terminology he used in the familiar rather than formal tense.

At least they were calling him ‘Sir’ and ‘Lieutenant’, for now. As Albert saw his bold and brave Hessian comrades now, they were dogs dressed up as men. Buyable with sausage and a warm place to sleep, and by the looks the Yankee Camp women were giving them. And a comfortable place to fuck the women as an enlistment bonus, if the men decided to shun their Hessian uniforms and adopt American rebel ones. Indeed, they were not dogs who could pledge loyalty to the master who had the biggest bone with the most meat on it. A year ago, Albert was the same kind of dog. But now he had become a son of a bitch, a man who wanted and deserved more. A smart man who looked after himself, his family if he had one, and who was sure to be on the side of this War that would win.

His Excellency George Washington walked across the campground, catching Albert’s eye, as well as that of the rest of his men. The six foot tall legend seemed even bigger when on his own feet rather than on a horse. Everyone looked up to

him, in all ways. He nodded an autocratic ‘Good evening Gentlemen’ to all of his men, making all of them feel special, keeping each at a safe distance. His tailored uniform made him seem bigger than life. But Albert could smell his Achilles heel. The noble General who legend had it never told a lie was lying through his wooden teeth every time he opened up his mouth. The German rebels under his command seemed to be talking about going home in five days, the relaxed mood of the rest of the troops consistent with that agenda. Washington seemed more terrified than anyone else, including the Hessians who still believed they may be killed and eaten by their rebel hosts.

It now seemed imperative to Albert to get back to New York and inform General Howe, or whoever else was in command of the Loyalist Cause, that Washington’s Army was smaller and weaker than it seemed. And that, according to the best he could hear, they were heading to Pennsylvania. With a fast horse and some ‘desertion’ supplies he could make it. He would be a hero, his military honor restored after being one of the officers who surrendered Trenton virtually without firing a shot. But the most effective way to achieve military honor is to use deceit.

Albert rose, a big smile on his face. He hummed along with a rebel song of celebration coming from the South end of Camp and wandered over to the ‘unguarded’ supply wagon loaded with Yankee literature, featuring “Common Sense” and the “Declaration of Independence” in English, German and French. “Allas men are created equal?” he read to the best of his ability and vocalized in his best English. “I like...I like...”, he nodded as he pretended to read on, his inner eye sneering at the peachfuzzed-face rebel Corporal who would soon be relieved of his gun, his knife, his horse, and if Albert was in a merciful mood, his life.

CHAPTER 29

Maria served up the Yorkshire pudding, made from scratch. It was the first time she had tried the OLD York English recipe with ingredients available in New York, and it didn't taste too bad coming out of the wood-burning stove. She wasn't very hungry, but the dinner table was set for two, featuring roasted Brooklyn venison with Long Island potatoes.

Her guest seemed to appreciate the meal, though he said nothing about its flavor. Or anything else. Her resident 'roommate' did have something to say. A cry requesting fresh milk served the way he was not used to obtaining it.

"There, you go, Wolfgang," she smiled at her infant son as she unbuttoned the second hand dress that felt more natural and beautiful than any that had been bought for her by her father the Baron, her mother the Saint, or her companion adventurers, Hans and Albert. It felt good to breast feed the baby she now valued more than any man, woman or ideal. After the first few swallows, Wolfgang emitted a 'laugh cry', and grabbed hold of the hair on Maria's wig which was getting thinner by the day. "So, you want a song?" she asked in a girlish voice she never experienced or shared as a child herself. "Let's see, we have---"

"Silence, please," her dinner guest interrupted, his stare still on the food, his mind someplace beyond anything Maria was thinking, or feeling. "I will eat my dinner in peace, please," Albert continued. "And if you do sing to him, it will be a song that strengthens his Spirit, not one that weakens his mind. Isn't that what your Greek Philosopher Plato said?"

"Yes, he did. But your son wants to---"

"---be a man who men will look up to. Not one that sings songs with women, or secretly wants to be one himself," Albert's reply. "You sing my son songs of strength. Teach him to become a lion. Or he will be eaten like a sheep."

"Like what sheep?" Maria challenged, sensing a 'who' behind the 'whats'.

"The man who wasn't man enough to biologically father his own child," Albert continued, not missing a beat in the 'drill' of cutting another bit of venison, dipping it into the gravy, then putting a pre-measured ration of Yorkshire pudding onto it. Clearly Albert came home a changed man. A richer one in money, and in rank, his insignia now indicating his promotion to Captain, presumably because of the

heroism of his escape from flesh eating rebels. But he was poorer in the ways that Maria had valued, and which he hoped Wolfgang, his stepson, might value as well some day.

“There are many ways to be a man, Albert,” Maria offered. “Many kinds of strengths.”

“Oh, yes, like Hans running away from me, his Comrades, you and his own son, just before His Excellency George Washington found his way through our lines,” he grunted. “And how he was not found afterwards amongst the wounded or the dead, or amongst us as we endured hardship beyond measure at the hands of the rebel captives.”

“He...must have had those nightmares again,” Maria uttered, hoping the better part of the truth could explain all of the facts. “He gets lost sometimes, and wanders off.”

“And stayed wandered off,” Albert replied. “Without a word to you, or me, or even his own son about where he was, when he was coming home, or if he gave a shit about either of you.”

Maria’s mind seemed convinced of the facts, and speculations. But as for the reasons for Hans having deserted his own family, that was another matter. If he had been captured, some word of his whereabouts would have been reported by now. Or maybe he did decide to sell himself to the rebels. Or maybe it was another secret mission for God knows which side. She hoped hers, and Wolfgang, and not Countessa Else’s. In keeping with her gender, she ascertained all too clearly the responsibility for what had happened, or not happened to him.

“I drove Hans to whatever fate he is enduring now,” she fumed. “Or endured in his passing,” she allowed herself to speculate, and tried to believe.

“You will tell our son that his Uncle Hans died a hero,” Albert commanded, rather than asked. He rose from the table, strutted towards Wolfgang and offered one of his shaking fingers to his son with a fearful grin.

“Yes, this would serve a productive purpose,” Maria smiled in agreement, and fact. “And Hans did live as a hero, most of the days of his life.”

“You will also tell our son that he will be a great man some day himself,” he smiled as the boy grabbed hold of his finger.

“Yes, we will.” Maria kissed Albert on the cheek. He embraced her. She felt a tenderness inside him. The boy inside the man, that Hans had once said did exist, for the right woman. A woman who would understand that boy, and not laugh at him, scold him or try to make him feel like anything except a man.

“Now, tell me about YOUR day, and days,” she asked. “And those many days you were away from us. And, if you want to, tell Wolfgang about how you outwitted Washington’s troops and made a gallant escape from captivity of the harshest and cruelest conditions.”

Albert turned away from mother and child. He stared out the window, unresponsive to anything. Even the waves of the local ‘pleasure ladies’ with whom Maria had clearly indicated he was allowed to pleasure himself with as needed, or wanted. Their ‘come out an play, my brave Captain’ was most painful to Albert.

Maria put Wolfgang in his crib, then approached the man who he would call ‘father’, until the lad was old enough to understand the many potential meanings of the word. She kept her distance, held back her touch, having been too well trained in the complexity of the ‘simple’ gender though Hans. But maybe reason would work this time.

“It is not your fault that Washington caught you sleeping in Trenton, Albert. Or that he defeated the Hessian and British garrisons nearby afterwards, in open battle. Or that he found the money to keep his Army intact. Or that he is enlisting more men, and women, in his service in New Jersey every day. Or that some of those men used to be ours.”

“Mine!” Hans growled. “And when I get my hands on them!”

“You will end the War,” Maria offered, trying to prevent the lion from eating his own brains and perspective. “So we can all go home,” she continued, feeling the Passion of his rage converting into decisive action. “Or so we can make our own, here?” she asked.

“Yes. This would be a productive thing,” Albert concluded.

Maria placed her arm around Han’s waist, allowing him to wrap his around hers. The how’s didn’t matter. They were a family now. Maria smiled, her love for Albert finally allowed to become manifested in something allowable. Finally, the

warm memory of the night they consummated a life together could be remembered with fondness, and re-enacted every day of their now new lives together.

“But there is one thing which I insist on,” Albert asserted, turning to Maria, flicking the fabric over her breasts. “That dress. It must come off.”

“Why, of course,” Maria smiled, girlish, sexy and legitimate with it all. She eased the buttons off with a grace she thought not possible of herself, or any woman. “Of course I will take this dress off.”

“Tomorrow!” Albert commanded. “When I will get you a better one.”

“But, I like this one, and thought you would too,” Maria offered, confused as to what was between the lines.

“And as for the meal you made tonight,” he burped.

“You seemed to like it,” she said.

“I did,” he smiled. “But I will like it better if someone else cooks for you, and me, and my son. I will make the arrangements, but as for now, the hour is getting late, and I must be going.” With that, Hans clicked his heels like a Prussian aristocrat, kissed Maria’s hand like a Prince, shook Wolfgang’s hand again like a Commanding officer, and strutted out the door like...

“A Baron, my dear Wolfgang,” Maria concluded, hearing Wolfgang crying. “The man who was thankfully not your father,” she related to him while trying to rock, then nurse the confusion out of the only friend Maria had left in the world. “A Baron who you shall never know,” she assured the child. Her gaze caught a mirror, her face seeming ten years older than it had been a mere two hours ago. She saw the bruises she had been spared, and some she hadn’t been spared, during those times with ‘dear father’ that her mother never knew about. And those bruises which had been inflicted upon her mother, who had to remain silent for the safety of her daughter. “The chain of cruelty ends here,” she pledged to Wolfgang, hoping that she had the brains, tenacity and luck to deliver on that promise.

CHAPTER 30

The least intelligent people talk about other people, indulging in the 'blame fest' of who did what to who and who knows about it. Those more developed converse about events, politics and evaluation of other administrative structures. Those blessed, or cursed, with the highest intellect are concerned with ideas, and on optimistic days, ideals. For better or worse, Hans felt himself banished to this most 'enlightened' category of humans.

The world of people had failed him, and perhaps he had failed them as well. As for evaluating the rights and wrongs of those in political power, or who wanted to be in such, no one was right, or wrong. Anger, jealousy and greed, in one form or another, drove most of the Passions of this Revolution, fear keeping people in line when the cannonballs started firing. But, a man who is not prepared to die for a Cause bigger than himself is less than a man, less than dead. But what Causes were left? Maybe one could be found, or created. Such was the hope, and prayer, Hans said every day when he opened up the diary he first started to set the historical records straight. He now continued it in the hope that he could figure out where history should go, and provide some solutions to the problems that most of those around him had not even tried to define.

Time didn't seem to matter to the lone, now-neutral man who, for better or worse, was unable to kill himself or let Nature feed him to the wolves. Hans' beard had now grown below his neck, the ability of the brain on top of it developing instincts to find out where people weren't, and how to pay for what he needed with the British coins still in his money belt and if such was unwelcomed or irrelevant, his service as a hunter, tree faller or horse trainer. The welfare of someone bigger than himself, and for the moment, any Cause he could define, depended on the success of these non-literary endeavors.

Who he was didn't seem to matter. Nor what he was did. He was now owned by the wilderness, most particularly a wilderness 'mutt' who was as alone as he was. The hound with the breeding which Hans did not recognize resembled something like a wolf to the eye, but to the heart he was the kind of animal who lived for people rather than himself. A family-less canine, who still had the remnants of a leather collar around his neck.

He would sit, come, beg, howl and even sing at Hans' command. 'Plato', as Hans now called him, consistently performed those tasks even more enthusiastically if he was asked. He was also a very good listener, particularly at the end of the days'

hunt for shelter and food and the avoidance of people was at an end. “So, what shall we write about tonight?” Hans inquired of the hound as they shared a supper partially taken from the woods, and partially purchased in absentia from what appeared to be a well off settler who was out hunting himself. “Shall I relate what you saw today, or what I did? Or what we PERCEIVED that we did, Plato?” he inquired, ready to go into another discourse which the dog felt but never understood, perhaps. “Freedom,” Hans said, allowing his mind’s thoughts to connect to his mouth, then his pen. “The ultimate bondage, which requires us to be of maximal service to God, man and, of course, dog.”

He was thinking ‘children’ as well, hoping so anyway. Perhaps he would serve one child in particular one day. Maybe even her mother. It was a dream, perhaps attainable, perhaps not. As he looked into the crackling campfire, he let his mind wander into Maria’s room in New York. Let his eye rest upon the wonderment of the son who she bore. Hoped that she and Wolfgang, were alright.

“Of course they will be,” he told Plato, then himself, then wrote into the diary which he hoped one day would become literature in the eyes of the world of which he was now irrelevant. “Albert is a man of the world. A man of the world rather than a philosopher of the Beyond who can provide Maria with the wealth, comfort and intimacy which she wants, and deserves.”

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CHAPTER 31

Many things disturbed Maria about the Junior Officer's ball. But most particularly it was the overspending on Russian caviar, liver-stuffed pheasant and mouthwatering Parisian pastries when men on both sides of the conflict didn't have bread, and civilians caught in the middle didn't have much grain left after they had been visited. The mistresses who were always more attractive than any wife present. The Black servants who were dressed as European Royalty, but who were still slaves. And the manner of her introduction.

"Gentlemen," Albert said to his powder-wigged British hosts, with the aid of a translator. "Please meet my wife, Baroness Maria von Edinger."

Maria smiled and curtsied, but thought very deeply about the honor being bestowed upon her by the English Lords and Ladies. Why was Albert going public with a secret he and Hans worked very hard to keep secret ever since they left England? Was 'Captain Albert' trying to elevate himself to Major or higher as a result of showing off his new Upper Class German bride? Was he showing off to his former boss, the Baron in Hesse-Cassel, how far he had come? Or was he perhaps baiting him? Or, worse,... seeking to be in his employment again, but this time as someone who shovels the shit on others rather than a shit shoveler who is shat upon.

But it was a moot point, as Maria noted the ostentious surroundings. The music played by the string quartet, was pure and perfect Handel as anyone could get, even in England, the German ex-patriate composer's new home. But she found herself yearning to hear the music of Bach, a man who never travelled far from home and whose compositions were far more humble, deep and thought provoking. To smell the scent of wild sassafras in the woods rather than black market Parisian perfume. And to see a face in the mirror that didn't have any bruises on it.

The slap on her right cheek which was well hidden under her make up was a warning, Albert said. After he apologized, he explained that his new job required that he 'use the devil's Fire in the Cause of serving God and country'. As for the specifics of that job, it took a smart woman to not ask that question. Wolfgang's safety, and well being, depended on Maria being very smart, and vigilant. And to 'see with her half-deaf ears', a playful trick she had learned when a little girl with her father, a necessary survival skill as she became a young woman .

As predicted, Albert was called away to talk with the men while Maria was left to gossip with the women. With her left ear, she pretended to care about who was

wearing what, and who said what about who, and who was engaged to whoever. With her right, she honed in on what Albert was talking about with his new superiors, with the aid of a very good pair of translators.

Albert smiled Maria's way during one of the translations, winking the virtuous side of his face while planning the most vicious of agendas with the other. Yes, he had imitated Maria's father Baron von Edinger very well. And was smart enough to know just what her ears were not able to hear. To insure that Maria could not read the British General's eyes, or intuit anything from Lord Hamilton, the civilian banker to whom he was clearly subservient, or Doctor Whiteman, surgeon who seemed more like an extractor of power rather than a healer of flesh. Albert encouraged the group to look at a painting at the far wall.

The man in the portrait in front of Maria stared back at her. He was mounted atop a black horse, whose body resembled her steed Wolfgang back home, but whose eyes were perverted into an instrument of evil rather than a path to Enlightenment. Everything about the rider said 'silence, woman' to any thought Maria dare to think, or imagine. But in a gentlemanly way, of course. After all, Maria was now a lady again. As close to a queen as any German could be in what was still a very British America. Ruled by order, law and a tradition of democracy that claimed to have its roots as far back as the Magna Carta. It beat being ruled by the Patriot mob which claimed Freedom as their battlecry but left anarchy in its wake. Or maybe not.

CHAPTER 32

Winter winds gave way to Spring breezes, then Summer ‘stagnations’, but each season seemed to provide its own purposes, and opportunities. So it seemed to Hans who had spent the Winter fighting Nature, negotiating a peace with it by the time the white snow gave way to warm, green ground. As ‘Henry Miller’, itinerant teacher, tree faller, hunter and farm hand, he learned to smell out, seek and even laugh with ‘the neutrals’. Some spoke German, some English, some languages he had never heard before. Many spoke about doing what they could for the King when the British were winning victories around their farms. Those same people spoke about enlisting in Washington’s Army, or supplying it by staying at home and tending to the crops, when the rebels stood their ground or gained more territory. But the neutrals who could be trusted were those who found fault, flaw or folly, in both sides. Some of this enlightened mass were white, the majority of such being red-skinned.

No one in the tribe that had a name known only to itself seemed to care who Henry Miller was, or gave a shit about who Hans Muller had been. To them, he was a White man who came to the campfires with more than he took away, and who never bartered with or for scalps. As for communicating the specifics of how many hides a knife is worth, or what a musket cost relative to a horse, or the river-worthiness of a river craft re-built by Hans’ hands, broken French had to do as a language of communication.

“Three hides and one horse?” Hans asked, confirming the deal with the chief for the canoe he had just completed building, and was still using. He looked over the waters of the river that by European standards was an ocean, remembering how water could be your worst enemy when there was ice over it, your best friend if you could figure out where it went. “No, Chief, not for sale,” Hans said regarding the canoe.

“I not tell him that,” Pierre, the half-breed resident translator said. “Cheif wants boat.”

“I need boat,” Hans continued. “To bring him more....more...” Hans demonstrated his point by running his fingers through the shiny metal objects from the world of his people, some functional, some not. The Chief saw value in the pots, knives and axes. He was amused by the mirrors, combs and the strange carvings of a naked man on a cross who was smiling, and enquired as to why.

“Not know,” Hans replied, wondering about the dilemma himself. “Pain and pleasure same thing?” he speculated.

Pierre related the observation. The Chief said something. Everyone laughed. Plato, Hans’ now very domesticated and currently wet dog, howled in agreement.

“Pain and pleasure only same thing when naked with woman,” the Half-breed trader with the Roman nose and French mustache translated in words and gestures, grabbing a scantily clad maiden as she passed by with a basket of berries. “You pleasure her?” Pierre said by way of offer that everyone seemed to be okay with.

Hans was tempted, and the young woman was curious. She sized him up with her eyes, moved closer in towards him, then sniffed his skin. “No” she seemed to say with her shaking head, going about her way with her nimble fingers closing her nose closed, offended by the smell. She said something to the men, and women, that made them all laugh, in a way that caused no one to be ridiculed.

Hans took a whiff of himself, sensing that he was quite odorous, his clothes reeking of sweat, toil and various farm products which were made by man rather than Nature. Now he understood why the Chief and his men were keeping their physical distance.

“At least I don’t smell of shit,” he said, and tried to convey to Pierre.

“Smelly European,” the man who at one time in his life as a boy had spoken fluent French said. “Unhealthy to smell.” Pierre pointed to the river, encouraging Hans to jump in.

“But...unhealthy to wash so much,” Hans said again and again. “Unhealthy to...”

While trying to somehow come up with the words to explain the scientific theories which said over-washing depleted the body of natural oils and protection from pestilence, Hans felt himself being stripped naked by women who were nearly naked themselves, tossed in the water, and given a baptism of Love, and laughter. Plato jumped in as well. As did Pierre, then the men around the Chief, then the Chief himself.

It was the happiest bath Hans had ever experienced. The Wars between the mother country and its freedom-seeking colony, and the one between his present and now buried past seemed oceans away, each wave of water coming over him washing

away another layer of 'barrier' which kept him from the Inner Soul inside. The Core which was the Source and Finale of every life. The Essence which was...God, but the One beyond the Word, concept or images. A good day not only to die, but to live. Suddenly shattered by thunder.

From the woods came a barrage of gunfire. Yelps more savage than any Indian Hans had ever heard. Hatred in their voices which was very personal. A cloud of smoke that in its wake left Hans naked, and the others around him dead, the clear water around him now thick, red blood.

Their leader emerged from the woods, dirt on his face, a feather in his three cornered hat. His gun toasting, whiskey-breathed 'associates' smelling and acting like dirty Europeans, with some kind of uniform as part of their wardrobe. "You with these Injuns!" he barked.

"Not anymore," Hans blasted out between gritted teeth, his mind thankfully still able to think rather than react. "Where's my..."

"Clothes, Mister?" one of the intruders sneered, picking up Hans' clothes and throwing them to him. "These Injuns were about to scalp ya, ya know."

"And you know this because," Hans said, looking out the corner of his eye for any survivors of his being 'saved'.

"Injuns in these parts fight with English lobsterbacks, and them Dutchie Hessians," the 'commander' informed Hans. "Huns from hell. Smell any of them around here, friend?"

Hans pretended to sniff. "No...don't think so," he smiled and retorted in his best 'down home' illiterate English. "I had a dog here who..."

Plato emerged from the woods, jumping on the commander's throat.

"Get him off a me!" he screamed. "Shoot it!" he commanded his men.

"Any of you try it and it will be your hide on my table," Hans shot back with his mouth, a loaded pistol in his left hand, a musket under his left arm, aimed at each of the eight men around him in appropriate turn.

Plato continued to subdue the commander. "Get this dog off me!" the commander

screamed like a scared schoolgirl as the hound naved away at his crotch, tearing apart the clothes covering his manhood.

“Your men put down their guns first!” Hans asserted, not hiding his German roots. “Schnell!”

“That means ‘now’, Rangers.” the commander screeched out to his ‘fearless’ associates

The Rangers put down their guns. Hans called off Plato, complimenting him on the job he did extracting a washcloth from the commander’s trousers, thanking him for merely licking his testicles and not biting them. “I see that you have a hard on under those torn trousers,” Hans noted, with a smile.

“Yes, he does” a voice rang out from behind Hans. “Very good job, Captain Muller,” he continued, holding Hans diary in his hand.

The officer in charge of the expedition, was, by the means of the various forms of address, Ulysses Horatio Jackson. The local rebel had a reputation of being effective in warfare, and letting the most expendable of his men encounter the enemy first.

Hans turned his guns on Jackson himself, Plato next to him. “I have three guns here, one in my right hand, one in my left, and one who will bite off your testicles if you don’t let us go on our way, please.”

“Please?” Jackson laughed. “Please?” he said to the band of ten regulars emerging from the woods behind him, all armed with rifles they knew how to used.

Jackson reached down to pet Plato. The hound seemed to accept him. “Yer dawg’s a better judge of human character than you are, Captain.”

“We just want be left alone, please,” Hans pleaded, still holding his guns.

“That’s why all of us are fighting this war, friend,” Jackson continued. “And we’ll all be left alone, soon as this War is over.”

Plato ‘asked’ Hans to lay down his weapons, or so Hans believed he did.

“Back to camp, boys,” Jackson said. “This man keeps his wares, and these dead

Injuns keep their scalps today.”

Hans handed his weapons over to Jackson, asking for his diary in return.

“Information, friend. You give us what we need, we give you what you seem to need.” With that Jackson led his men away, Hans between his most trusted regulars, with ropes tied behind his back as tight as possible by the irregular ‘commander’ who tugged on Hans’ testicles sneering a Scottish curse of revenge.

CHAPTER 33

To the caretakers of the former Mansion it was one of those sounds you had to get used to.. To the residents it was something they did to prevent from getting worse. To Albert, it had become music to his ears.

“They are in pain, you know,” the Scottish physician said to him in his best broken German, smoking Virginia-picked tobacco from a Scottish cherry-wood pipe in his study. “The kind that stays between their ears until...”

“...They cut their wrists, or put rope around their own neck?” Albert shot back with a sadistic grin, in English, tinted with as much of a Highland roll as his Germanic tongue could muster. He glanced out the window of the asylum’s doctor’s quarters at the inmates in the fenced yard outside who had been ‘good’ the night before, therefore allowed access to sunlight. Some slobbered, some moaned, all of them squinted their eyes at the brightness of the sun as it shone through the re-enforced wall built to keep them from the dangers of the world outside, and the world from the dangers of the demons possessing their minds, and perhaps Souls . “I hear some happy, some maybe cured.”

“And as I hear now, Captain Stein, your English is getting far better than you let your commanding officers know about,” Doctor Whiteman replied. “You’ve learned much since we last spoke, through your interpreter, at the ball in New York after your harrowing escape from Washington’s troops who, as you noted in your report, tortured every one of his captives without mercy.”

“Ya,” Albert replied, trying to match his eyes and gestures to the official story that he related upon his arrival in New York, stroking the cuts on his arms and neck which he allowed to become scars. “The rebels guard us closely, guns to throats. Starve and beat us. Interrogate my Comrades, Wilhelm, Hienrick, Johan, and others. Mit thumb screws, racks, und wood under nails. Try same to me, but I get loose. Free five others. They get shot, get hung. I get back. Fight for King George, with my...vas is das?”

“Head,” Whitehall replied, sensing that Albert had exhausted his knowledge of English yet again. Maybe it was true. Maybe Albert had become a man who had lied so long and so intensely that he didn’t know when he was lying himself anymore. But assessing his own ability to objectively look at himself was for later. Dealing with the proposition at hand now was most important to Whitehall, and why Captain Stein came to the Prescott Mansion.

Albert rose from his chair and helped himself to another look at the books in Whiteman's very private medical collection, the sketches of the victims in his medical books telling the story more effectively than any words in English or German.

"A horrible affliction," Whitehall commented, with the professional detachment of a scientist rather than a physician. "When it hits, the living envy the dead. 'Irish Fever'."

"Makes potato farmers drink whisky grinded made from piss and shit?" Albert mused.

"The last weapon of the dying against those who are still alive, or victorious," the Physician-Scientist's terse reply.

Albert knew better than to ask any more questions, particularly because of the footsteps in the hallway outside the door, which was perhaps locked, or perhaps not. He moved on to the other agenda which brought him to Prescott Manor. "My wife, Maria is in need of your services."

"The Baron von Edinger's daughter? When I last examined her in New York, she was in excellent health," Whiteman noted. "An intelligent woman, as I best as could ascertain, as well."

"She still speak little English and is...nicht gut, not good, above das neck," Albert sighed. "She suffers from..."

"...Melancholia, Sir?"

"She needs...rest," Albert related, allowing his eyes to tear up, pushing his throat into a choke position.

"Melancholia is an affliction which affects many people of intelligence, particularly women," Whiteman replied, instantly opens some drawers and retrieves a handful of bottles. He took out his knife and measuring scoops, he set in to formulating the medication with a confidence that startled and frightened Albert. "I have been working on this variation on a treatment which has worked in women such as the Baroness."

“And if not?” the Hessian Captain pressed. “If she get sicker when she is alone?”

“We will get a nurse for her,” the Physician prescribed.

“One that speaks German?” Albert inquired.

“Aye, and who can take care of your lass, Wolfgang as well,.” The half Scot, half-Massachussetian, and all-Loyalist Doctor continued, writing the instruction lists for the bottles of elixor in his most poetic handwriting. “I’ve got some Nurses here who can Sprechen Deutch. Some better than others.”

Whiteman invited Albert to look at the ledger of names in log of medical records. One in five had German names, but there was one name which seemed right for the job. “Racheal Crawford?” he read, remembering the name from another letter sent to Maria by the person who admitted her, “Henry ‘Hans’ Miller”.

“Ah yes, the Countessa,” Whiteman noted. “Lady Else, as she demanded to be called until we found the right medications for her. With the elixers she is on now, she has become an obedient patient.”

“And a contented one?” Albert inquired, figuring his options and opportunities.

“She will answer to whatever you say she is, or should be,” Whiteman said, taking out a list of other names.

“In perfect German?”

“Yes, but you don’t want a patient to take care of YOUR patient?”

“My wife Maria speaks perfect German and deserves a Nurse who can do the same, as does my son,” Albert pressed.

Whiteman considered the matter, stroking his chin whiskers with his hand. Albert filled his pocket with currency good in both rebel and Loyalist territories. The Physician prepared another box of elixers for Miss Rachel. Albert helped himself to another look at the accounts of Irish Fever, taking note of the small print, the numbers of patients whose deaths were still not reported by the newspapers, and how to turn their death into the kind of life he wanted, and deserved.

CHAPTER 34

There Hans stood, his blindfold finally removed, in front of 'General George', escorted in by Captain Jackson and his band of 'Swamp Rats' clad in green fringed uniform of their own design. "By the writin in his diary, he used to be Captain Muller. He claims he's just plain Henry Miller now. What do y'all want us to do with him, Genral?" Ulysses Horatio Jackson requested. "I asked him how he wanted the War to turn out, and he kept sayin' 'ta be done with.'"

"As do I," His Excellency General Washington confessed to Hans, seeing through him and liking what he saw. The number one target of every British soldier who still had not even been grazed by schratnel dismissed Captain' Jackson and his men, then his Black Man servant who seemed more like a younger brother to His Excellency than a slave.

Washington rose from his chair, took out his sword and cut the tight leather restraints around Hans' wrists. As 'General George' pace around the room with his own hands held aristocratically behind his back, he seemed every inch the general, scholar and soldier his men and the Patriot newspapers said about him. A man who chose intellect over force, reason over insanity and who was fighting this war for one reason. "The most effective way to win this War is to end conflict between your men first, then between your men and the enemy, Captain Muller,"

"Yes, Sir," Hans said with a warm but cautious smile, remaining at rigid attention.

"And you are a man who avoids more battles than he fights, and who keeps opposing enemies from fighting each other," Washington continued. "You are a peacemaker who keeps his own men from killing each other, according to the Hessians who I have talked to. And a strategist who has minimized loses of my men and yours when our armies are about to anhilate each others, so my Colonels and Majors tell me."

"Everyone has to have a hobby, Your Excellency," Hand replied, allowing his legs to relax, but keeping his backbone tight.

The General-Supreme Elder of the American Cause who never allowed not even his closest confidants to call him George seemed as vibrant as ever with his wide shoulders, Herclean musculature and distinctive chin. But his eyes seemed tired. He walked over to the large map on the table of his tented headquarters, looking at the outlay of the land. He stared at as if he had done so a thousand times, hoping that this time would reveal to him the solution to end the long, bloody War that

Patriot, Loyalist and spectator alike though would be finished with within six months after it started back in the 'golden days' of 1775.

“So, we finally meet.” Washington noted. “You were rumored to have been the best marksman in the Jager Regiments, the smartest Reconnaissance Officer in the Hessian Army, and the wisest negotiator in the Loyalist forces, Captain Hans Muller.”

“My name is Henry now, Sir,” he said, bowing. “Just Henry.”

“Ah, yes, you are neutral,.” Washington smirked sardonically. “Which is why you were found with a tribe of Indians who have aligned themselves with General Howe?”

“I was with a woman, and some others who were Indian, who were NOT fighting with the British! Or the Hessians! Or anyone else! Who are like almost half of everyone else! Who just want to be left alone to enjoy or sell their freedom in Peace, Your Excellency,” he concluded with a bow.

Washington silenced Hans' respectful protest with a lifting of his hand, followed by a Silence which was deafening to the ears. He opened up Hans' diary, captured the item having been placed on his desk before the 'visit'. “I see that you are man of books too, Sir.”

Hans didn't know that Washington could read German. He seemed to be able to do everything else better well, from sneaking off in the dead of night with thousands of soldiers to riding a horse better than anyone else he had seen atop a steed, even Maria.

“Who are you writing this book for?” the General asked.

“My son, Sir,” Washington was staring directly at the dedication on the first page, the dedication written as clearly in German as John Hancock's English signature was evident on the Declaration of Independence. “Who I have never seen, but I care about more than myself,” he continued, feeling confident but not quite superior to his counterpart in deception, and, in some way he could not define, new friend. Indeed the General seemed to need all the real friends he could get. Though he was clearly beloved by the men under him, he seemed very much alone.

“So, Captain Muller, which side are you on in this War?” ‘General George asked,

offering him a drink.

“The side that doesn’t let liquor or brandy go to my head, Sir?” Hans answered, recalling how his Christmas Eve indulgence in hard apple cider with Albert led to his accidental ‘desertion’ as well as discovery that the child in Maria’s womb may not have been his. “

“That is a question, not an answer, Sir,” Washington pressed.

Hans took in a deep breath, hoping the answer would come in from a Divine source through his nostrils and into innermost brain. “I am on the side that wants it ended, Sir. With no more bloodshed,” he asserted.

“As are we all, Sir,” the General fumed. “But as a free man, or a slave of King George?”

“A slave to no one but Freedom, Sir,” Hans bowed, keeping his head down, his eyes hidden.

The General paced, pondered and thought about the matter, then sat down on his chair. He folded his hands around his rapidly wrinkling face. “Did you have any friends who betrayed you in your Cause, while that Cause was King George’s?” he asked.

“Yes,” Hans replied. “Two of them in particular,” he continued, recalling Maria and Albert, who had opened his heart then abruptly closed it so tight that it could never open again. “They were once my closest friends.”

“Yes, I had a close friend who betrayed me as well. One who was as close to my son as I will ever have,” Washington said. The General invited Hans to sit at his table. ‘General George’, and offered him regulation-ration hard tack and salted pork, served on faded silver-coated trays bearing his Mount Vernon seal. “Maybe your friends knew him from another perspective.”

“His name, Sir?” Hans asked, respectfully, sitting down to dine with the most dangerous man in America, according to his British and German comrades anyway.

“Benedict Arnold,” His Excellency related, fuming with anger, boiling with regret under it. “The hero of Saratoga who did all the dirty work while General Gates took the credit.”

“Which you allowed him to have, Sir?” Hans challenged, then felt obliged to pull back. “I’m sorry, Sir I didn’t mean to...”

“---yes you did, and you should have, Sir,” His Excellency continued. “I need men who tell me the truth as they see it, and not the facts as they think I want them to know them.”

Hans listened to Washington’s silent grief. The father of the fledgling country who never sired an offspring himself had indeed lost his closest son when General Arnold turned against the American Cause. Few seemed to know why, and fewer were allowed to ask. But as this was supposed to a land of Freedom, Hans was obliged by that contract to say the word which violated everything he grew up with.

“Why, Sir?” Hans asked. “Why did General Arnold betray you?”

Washington gave it a moment’s pause. “The writers of the history books will record that it was for money, power or because he was tempted by the devil. But the reality, should it be of any relevance, is that it was probably his wife, a greedy rich woman pretending to be a ‘lady for the people’, who tricked Benedict’s mind into thinking that what is black is white, and what it red is blue,” the General lamented.

“Yes, Sir,” Hans agreed, in ways that made him evaluate his own life decisions, and perspectives.

“Women,” Washington smiled in with the kind of humor he was said to privately have, but rarely show to his men. “They trick us so well into being honest and sincere men.”

“Yes, Sir,” Hans smiled back, feeling at one with the man who seemed instantly to be his new boss, father, and, behind the backs of the rest of the men, close friend.

“Which brings me to what to do with you,” His Excellency replied a distanced aristocratic aire that made you respect more than you could ever like him. “As I have been told, and have has been related to me this diary...by my best translators...you have become the kind of man who refuses to fire a musket or carry a sword.”

“Yes, Sir.” Hans knew from the General’s tone that he indeed had been read the contents of the diary which were most relevant to his Purposes.

“You are not a doctor, not a Chaplan, and not a Quaker,” he continued.

“Yes, Sir.”

“But you want to fight for the Cause of Freedom, Captain Muller.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“For us?” Washington challenged.

“Yes, Sir,” came out of Hans’ without him even realizing it. Something inside of him made Hans commit to the personal pledge, inviting God to be his sole and only witness. “I will fight with you Americans for a country dedicated to Freedom. With all my mind, body and soul.”

“With what weapon, son?” Washington asked in a manner more fatherly than General.

“This,” Hans affirmed, pointing to his head.

Washington smiled, this time wide enough to reveal a mouthful of wooden teeth that made him seem all the more human, and as a result of such, dignified. The man behind the myth had emerged, for a moment. But what was the price?

“I have an idea,” Washington proposed. “Something that the history books may record, but only after we are both dead.”

“It sounds like the best kind of idea,” Hans replied. “And I hope the most effective kind of idea, Sir.”

“That depends on you, Hans,” Washington warned. “And how willing you are to use the devil’s fire of serving God in the Cause of Freedom.”

“I will be your sword, Sir.”

“I want you to be my eyes, ears and...”

“And what, Sir...?”

The boring muffle of camp life was disrupted by gunfire. Washington pursed his lips, buttoned his tunic and prepared to deal with it. He peered out through the one way hole in his tent, his eyes focused on the chaos on the camp perimeter which he was already putting into order in his overworked mind.

“There is one question I must ask you first, Hans,” General George asked. “You seem a man whose footsteps are firm, resolute and in their own way, very predicatable.

“Yes, Sir.”

“How well can those feet dance?” the question.

CHAPTER 35

Was it the words of Thomas Paine in ‘Common Sense’? The lyrical flow of the Declaration of Independence? An inner calculation of the rebels’ previously underestimated strength and abilities? Hatred Hans felt for Albert and ANY army he was fighting for or with? Or something about General Washington that made you want to follow him to your own destiny? Or the well being of the wilderness-mutt Plato, who was now ‘safe and sound’ in Patriot hands, eating better than any wolf in the woods or hound at home as a gesture of ‘trust’? Maybe all of them had turned Hans from a Mercenary hired to fight for King George into a soldier who joined the ranks of the Patriots, who he now called them. But what kind of soldier was he? Certainly not one who could have a portrait of himself done in his new uniform to send home to anyone as he was to embark on his first, and apparently critical, Mission.

The pointed boots felt tight, the heel more elevated than anything he had worn since his initiation into military life. The blouse larger and more frilly than anything in the Prussian or British uniform racks. The ‘kilt’ virgin white, extending down to the calf. The tightened undergarments around his waist tucked in his well-fed belly, pushing flesh upward to make his chest larger, downward to accentuate the hips. And the bath that washed away every layer of sweat and dirt, along with the remnants of every shaven hair on his body except for that on the top of his head and the slivers left as eyebrows.

“Yer a looker alright, Miss Hansela,” Jackson commented to Hans as he led him away from camp through his men, who bowed their hats to the new lady in their midst, some advancing more direct gestures of their appreciation for her anatomy. Not recognizing him at all, apparently.

“Yes,” Hans said with a softened voice, adjusting the hair added to his own from sources he asked about, but were told were ‘top secret’ from the ‘uniform seamstresses’ who never showed how much, or little, hair they had under their own bonnets. Hans noted that the Americans had more female Camp followers than the British did, certainly more than the Hessians. Whole families seemed to go to War together in this Army, complete with the kind of women who discretely kept families together by offering intimate services to men which they needed, rather than merely wanted. Such intimate services provided after rather than before the battles.

“Where are we going?” ‘Hansela’ asked with his arm safely tucked under Jackson’s.

“Once I see, and you see, that no one in this camp knows who or what you really are, back to General George.” ‘Colonel’ Ulysses continued as he got jeers of ‘you got lucky tonight’ from every one of his men, and a few of the laundrywomen and cooks. They all seemed convinced as Jackson opened the door of his tent to Hansela, allowing her first entry.

Hans found himself looking at the faces which were admiring the visiting Lady, lingering in the adoration of it all. Ignoring, for now, the memories that had become nightmares about the last time he had ‘passed’ as a woman, back home, told to no one except the pages of his diary in the language of third person theoreticals.

“I got a brother who was an actor,” Ulysses said with downward turned eyes. “Said that what you’re feelin’ right now ain’t so strange, nor unusual.”

“Where is your brother now?” Hans smiled as his new identity, with a voice which, interestingly, was NOT his mother’s.

“Rotting in a prison ship docked off New York somewhere, last I heard,” Ulysses growled. “Put there by Hessians after he stood up for the Cause in Kipps Bay.”

“I’m...sorry,” Hans related from his innermost Core, remembering how he skillfully he captured rebels in Kipps Bay, and was assured by his British and Hessian Commanders that they were to be treated humanely because they fought so valiantly.

“Yeah, we all is ‘sorry’, Dutchy’,” Jackson sneered. He snuck a thumbs up into the tent, then slipped away into the night, requesting in a gentlemanly manner that Hansel walk right in, or be killed on the spot.

Inside stood a woman, gowned as a laundress and cook, sharpening the knife pulled from the holster built into her boot. Her other boot held a pistol, her breasts securing another. She pulled paper out of her bussom, a map drawn with intricate details, more so than any made by European or British hands.

“Where you’re goin’,” the very female Camp Follower who seemed more like a leader in her own right spat out, pointing to a map.

“Which makes sense if I know where we are,” Hans offered, as Hansela. “I was taken here blindfolded, you know,” he continued with gestures of a woman from proper breeding. “This map says where I’m supposed to be, but where am I now?”

“It’s like THIS. I give you the orders and you follow them,” the low born woman who looked up to no one said, demonstrating the handmotions in an action that seemed frighteningly convincing. “And soften that voice!” she barked. “Or better, shut the hell up when yer with the Hessian gentlemen. Let THEM do the talking, you do the listening.”

“Why isn’t Washington sending YOU to spy on the Hessians?” Hans challenged.

“Cause I been made, and had, there. Too many times,” she sighed, showing the scars of her intimate relationships there, one of them a slash on the side of her face, the other a branding burn on her left arm that no amount of creams would cover, or heal. “And I don’t Sprechen Su Dutchie. Neither does any woman in this Camp. Or any man who has your special skills of knowledge and observation, so I’m told.” She retrieved Han’s diary from somewhere under her layered undergarments, gazing through it. There was extra writing in it, in English. “Seems that you’re an author now, too. Who will be published in two languages, once I get this to a translator in Ben Franklin’s old publishing house in Philadelphia, after you help us win the War, my dear Hansela.”

“I am honored, but can I have the...” Hans challenged, reaching for the record of his accomplishments, miscalculations, observations and failures.

The woman with no name placed the book between her breasts, closing her blouse over it. “I’ll keep the secrets in it close to my heart,” she said with a Virginia Lady’s soft voice and steel cold eyes. “Until your return.”

“To this location, which is...where?” Hans asked, as himself. “If General Washington needs to know where the British and Hessians are, I need to know where he is!”

Hans watched the woman’s mind through her shifting eyes. She had been away from home as long as General George had been, and to the best of his intuitions, she yearned to be his Martha while he was away from his beloved wife. The only home Washington and the other real rebels had were their tents, their saddles, and each other. Hans felt ashamed and stupid. The Master of Stealth would never say where he was, or where he was going. Unlike the Old World, nothing in this new one was permanent. Movement was the only constant, and you only found real rest in motion itself.

The woman with no name except 'Defiance' Hans pointed to a spot on the map.
"We're here, for now."

"And the Hessians still fighting for King George are where?" Hans asked.

"That, my Lady, you will find out," With that, the whore-turned-patriot, or patriot-turned-whore went through her chest to see what would fit Hans best. Everything was provided for the Mission at hand, razors, cosmetics, perfumes, tastefully decorated spy glasses, and wigs. And one dagger, which 'Defiance' grabbed back as soon as Hans saw it. "This you get when I get back to Camp, My Lady," she smiled with a no-turning-back agenda the 'never tell a lie' General Washington had never told him about, and perhaps never intended to.

CHAPTER 36

Making soup was simple. Put something with meat and some kind of vegetable on it into the pot, put water in the pot, put the pot on the stove, cover pot, and take it off the stove before eating it. The instructions seemed simple enough, and were well written in Albert's best handwriting, posted on the wall of Maria's newly-upgraded house nestled in the woods of Northern Manhattan.

"You are sure you understand, Rachel?" Maria asked the woman who had been Else before Doctor Whiteman's elixers and his other special treatments turned her into someone very different, 'safe' enough now to be relocated from the asylum cells into accommodations more civilized.

"Yes, Fraulein Maria, I understand," former Countess Elsa, now 'Rachel', said with a subservient bow. Barely two years ago she had bowed to no one. Thanks to modern mind-correcting medications, she had been conditioned into not having made eye contact with any of her superiors, which at this point included most everyone. "I will prepare the soup, clean the clothes, wash the floor and feed your child, sing to him afterward, as instructed, Fraulein Maria."

With that the transformed ex-Countess and social climbing barracuda shuffled into the kitchen and proceeded to begin another day's work as instructed by the man who wrote out the details of what her day would be like. And she did it well. Never had potato and turkey soup been so flavorful, the house immaculate, and young Wolfgang so contented in matters of belly and brain. And Maria had time to read anything she wanted now, with access to any books money could purchase. But as for using the information in those books to change her world around her, she was more helpless than ever. A showpiece for Albert when he needed one to advance his military and political standing. An instrument to advance the inner agendas of men who seemed more like demons than people. And a 'nurse' to 'Lady Else' who, according to Doctor Whiteman's reports, was happier and more controllable as Rachel Crawford. An easy deception to maintain as long as she received her daily 'arthritis' medicine along with another set of letters from her 'family' who died at the hands of the Indians in Western Pennsylvania that reminded her of who she was. A necessary one so that Else would not remember who she really was, contact her friends who knew Maria's father, and have her sent home as a 'ready to rape' present to him, with son Wolfgang as someone to be brought up in his own image.

Maria sat down in the study to read Don Quixote, a translation which seemed to capture the accuracy and voice of the original author. A book which she recalled

that Hans remembered from his childhood, with not a lot of accuracy with respect to the words but an inner clarity for the story. Having exhausted herself of hatred for his absence, for the moment anyway, and feeling loneliness herself now, she wondered what life would have been like with Hans. She heard that he went 'Native' on everyone, living like a madman in the woods in places where no White Man or woman would go.

Sitting in her expensive chair in her expensive dress in an expensive house, Maria wondered now what it would be like to not dine on turkey and potato soup off bone china, but to be chewing on dried deer meat in the woods. And how she and Hans would be inventing their own stories and telling them to each other due to the absence of books they could read there. And how perhaps he could explain why he never so much as wrote to her why he left, and never revealed his whereabouts. "If he is in trouble with the Army as a deserter, I could have it explained to the appropriate authorities," she thought. "And if Hans told Washington where to find his Hessian Comrades in Trenton and helped him get across the river and through the sentries, I would even forgive him that, too. But I will NOT forgive him leaving me and the son who was supposed to be his with...with!!!!!"

As if ordered in by command, 'Rachel', came into the house library with a fresh bowl of soup, putting it in front of Maria. She adjusted the picture on the wall, seeing that it was not framed quite right, then left, giving Maria a full view of the man who had given her another kind of heartbreak and frustration.

There he stood, in front of her. Albert, in full color, the portrait of himself which he had commissioned, and be placed in the library. He looked so noble in oils, the brushstrokes portraying his eyes with so much depth and sincerity. So dedicated to saving the world from itself. "As the world will remember you," Maria said to herself. "And as I try each day to believe myself," she continued in thoughts she shared with no one, even in Wolfgang, who was gleefully laughing on 'Nurse Rachel's' knee, calling her 'Mama'. Laughing far more than he had with his biological mother, perhaps because of something Nurse Rachel had become, or what Maria had stopped being. And there seemed to be nothing the once-free-thinking Maria could do about it, as 'loving husband and caring father' Albert had found ways of torturing and controlling her that her father didn't. A kind of 'learned helplessness', she noted regarding the affliction that now seemed to become her life. Maria had come to America to escape tyranny, but unless there was a boat through the Northwest Passage to China, there was nowhere to go now except the 'here', 'now', which felt like 'forever'.

CHAPTER 37

Music filled the air, accompanied by the aroma of succulent ham, but those smelling with the inner eye detected bullshit. Though the order of the day was levity and optimism, every British officer at the ball had considered as reality the speculation that the rebels may kick them out New York and the New World by the coming of the next snows. And every Hessian was counting the pay given by the British, seeing, at best, another ‘Winter of Foraging’ ahead with regard to their own survival in the conflict that was supposed to be over within six months after their landing in Staten Island. And there was real talk going around about the French joining in the fight along with the Spanish, escalating the skirmish to keep thirteen sparsely populated British Colonies into yet another European-wide war.

With the help of his ‘patriot whore’ Defiance, re-named with her new code name ‘Martha’, Hans had established himself as Hansela Gertenstein-Kewalski, the sister of an Eastern European businessman. Amongst the English, Hansela spoke German. Amongst the Germans, she spoke a mock Polish, understandable only between herself and Martha. Both elevated Hansel’s reputation and status, allowing Martha to do whatever she did as the kind of woman who was most effective when noticed by nobody.

“If you want to know what is in a man’s heart, feel him when he is dancing. If you want to know what is in a man’s mind, listen to him talk afterwards,” Hans recalled as Hansela came into the room in a newly purchased dress and waited to be propositioned to dance. The ladies looked at her with envy, somehow. The men, with fascination. Some looked familiar, some didn’t. As for the men on the top, there were even more replacement Generals for the Hessians. The Hesse-Cassel Regiments now under command of a third successor whose name and temperament Hans didn’t recognize. He seemed a sterner man, more practical, and more base. As did his general staff. The head of the British command seemed to be on his way to being replaced soon as well by the way he was allowing the drink to go to his head, the carriage of back more like a beaten horse rather than a proud stallion.

Women, even those of high birth, were to be seen, admired, boasted about, copulated with, but never heard, Hansela walked ‘her’ way around the small groups of men muttering things in public that were supposed to be private. Though the lobes of his recently-pierced ears still hurt, he heard talk about troop movements, armament inventory, juggling of personnel in the General Staff, and all manner of wagers from the aristocrats fresh off the boat regarding who would bring Yankee Doodle Dandy Washington into London in chains first. All registered in Hans’ mind, which he

hoped would remember the details. But as for specifics, the ‘conference wing’ seemed to be where all of those secrets were kept. It was guarded by well-clad servants who looked more like soldiers. Men entered in confident and optimistic, and emerged ‘informed’, somehow. A few ladies found their way into the conference wing, but only on the arms of men with big smiles on their faces.

“Martha, where are you?” Hansela muttered under his breath, hoping that he could enlist her for the kind of work and sacrifice worthy only of a real woman. “Come on, I...”

“Bonnie Lass, let’s shake a wicked hoof!” a high ranking Highlander in a bright red uniform offered and announced to Hansela, gently pulling her hand, then shaking body, into the dance floor.

Hansela smiled, allowing the body to move with the music, hoping that the padding in her chest would not be noticed as such. And that the tape around the male portions of her anatomy would stay tight and secure. Then, as the Highlander gently took Hansela’s hand and the music started to play for the first time in Hans and Hansela’s life, his feet COULD dance, with those appendages actually stepping up from the floor while doing so.

“My name is Peter,” the Scot with the Irish whiskey smelling breath announced. “Der ya kin how bonnie ya be to all these dour pusses, here...”

Neither Hansela nor Hans understood what the Colonel was bantered about, the reply given in German. “Was ist ...who?”

“Me Peter,” he smiled as he pointed to himself, enjoying the fact that his partner was not versant in his native tongue. “You?” he continued, staring at Hansel’s face, then, thankfully, at her breasts.

“Hansela...Hansela Gertenstein-Kewalski,” Hansel smiled as the music picked up, calling for a more kinetic and less intimate relationship of the dancers.

With Peter’s eyes on her breasts, and ass, Hansela helped herself to a view of the room again. Nothing new, nothing eventful, at least not yet. Making the rounds around the small groups of men gossiping around the war would provide gossip Hans could take back to Washington, hopefully through Martha, assuming that her non-arrival to the ball was intentional and not her last miscalculation as a spy. Getting into the conference wing seemed more vital with each ticking of the clock.

Then, emerging from the conference room, a very familiar face.

“Albert!” flowed out of Hans’ painted red lips, hopefully as Hansela.

“Nay!” the Colonel slurred out. “My name is Peter. But if ye fancies ta call me ‘Albert’ like that, I’ll be anything ya wish I be, even a rabid bampot, me duckie.” With that, the Colonel moved in for a kiss, on the lips.

Hansela moved her face to the left just in time for the gesture of affection to land on her cheek. “Oh my Gott!” she hushed.

“Aye, my lips on yer puss makes me feel bonnie ‘Gott’ too!” Peter replied, a wide smile on his battleweary face.

But as for Hansela, and Hans, attention was on someone else. Entering the room, greeted by all as royalty, was Maria, introduced as the Baroness von Edinger by her hand-maiden, Else, who Maria introduced as Rachel Crawford, a commoner, to be treated as such.

Maria dismissed Rachel as instantly as she came into the room, giving her a vial of medicinals which was taken as instructed. ‘Rachel’ and child were summoned into the kitchen by one of the Colored Servants, and given an apron which she put on with utmost civility. What scared Hans about it wasn’t so much the apron, but what was under it. A belly which had enlarged due to carnal rather than culinary excesses.

Maria seemed well fed, but empty inside, particularly when she smiled. She seemed to be admired and envied by everyone, except Albert, who seemed to confer a lot with a British physician who seemed to be far more intelligent than his social rank. Doctor Whiteman, as he was called, showed Albert something from one of his books, a black Biblical cover with a cross that looked like it was made with blood rather than ink. After grins of optimism and projected success were exchanged, the book was closed, and sent by one of Albert’s very Prussian junior officers into the conference wing.

Finally, the dance ended, the thud of white gloves clapping summoning the quartet to take a bow.

“So, darlin’,” Peter said with a throat replenished with three glasses of whisky taken from the servants’ tray. “You and me in the...” He pointed to a door leading to the

conference wing which was now not locked, nor guarded. By Hans' calculations, any romantic advances made to Hansela by the now rubbery-legged, well-past drunk Colonel would be halted by his passing out into a happy sleep. By his inner estimations, it would be a matter of time till Maria, Albert or Rachel would find out his real identity. And by his historical time clock, it was essential to get into the Conference wing, even if Peter had to be given some extra perks in exchange for the passage. It was just about flesh touching flesh, and some body fluids being expelled onto the sheets if it came to that. Martha had sacrificed such 'indiscretions' for a higher Cause, as did Hans when he pleased Lady Else to save Maria, the woman he thought he loved, and maybe still did, along with the son who he could call his own, and in his deepest hopes, still did. But as Hansela, Hans was in a different situation now.

The nightmare flashed back in front of Hans' eyes as Peter escorted Hansela into the conference wing, past rooms with maps, desks overloaded with what looked like vital military information, and on top of them, the 'bible' with the blood red cross on top. "God forgive me the sin I do in your service," Hans prayed as Hansela let Peter carry her across the 'threshold' of an unused room in the former Patriot mansion, slipping his hand under her dress, caressing the back of her thighs and under her knees, licking her ears, neck and thankfully-freshly-shaven face. "God forgive me for the sin I do in your service," Hans continued to himself as he smelled the whiskey on Colonel Peter's breath, seeing him now as his own father, making love to the dolled up twelve year old son he allowed himself to think was his mother in younger times in exchange for sparing the life of Hans' real mother. "God forgive me for the sin that I didn't do in your service," Hans continued to pray, silently, as he grabbed hold of the dagger Martha had placed in his 'breasts' in the event that any assailant discovered that they were merely pillow casings and cotton. Hans held the blade to Peter's throat, preparing himself to do what had to be done, to end the War which had taken too many lives already. "This time, I will kill you!" he sneered, as he revisited the twelve year old boy inside of him.

But this time, the 'loving father' didn't fight back. Didn't laugh at him. Didn't throw him against the wall, calling him a disgrace to manhood. This time, Peter was sleeping, in his own dreams, or perhaps demented nightmares. And Hans' hairless hands were still virgin. Still white. Still not stained with any blood that he had shed by his own hand, at least directly by his own hand. God bless, and curse him.

Then, a knock on the door. A voice that felt like Albert. "Peter. Are you finished with her?" he asked, in English, a tongue that Albert claimed he would never stoop low enough to learn. "Peter? Peter?"

Thankfully, Peter snored loudly enough to be heard. “Twenty minutes, sleeping beauties,” Albert mused, followed by slow and very military departure.

“Twenty minutes to stop the war,” Hans thought, ‘Hanseling’ himself up as quickly as he could, then acting ‘lost’ while accidentally walking into the biggest desk with what he hoped would contain the most important papers, noting that the guards who were supposed to be looking after it were drunk, on brew which, smelled very familiar to what Martha was distilling in her tent back in Washington’s camp. Seizing the opportunity, Hans opened up a Bible with Doctor Whiteman’s name on it first. By the smell and feel of it, the red cross on the cover was blood, with an ominous number 7 written as the volume number. The inside was even more horrifying, making Hans wonder if it was wiser to steal that volume, or get Hansela’s white-clothed gloves on numbers one to six first.

CHAPTER 38

The next morning, Hansela sipped her tea in the boarding house parlor rented by Martha, recounting everything could be recalled from the night before. Martha wrote down everything Hans told her, and some things he didn't tell her, about his excursion into the Lobster Backs' hornet net as Hansela. "You have a good memory," she noted regarding Hans' recalling troop movements, their strengths, and conversations between their commanders about small things that reflected the reality of bigger ones to come..

"I have a good memory for only for what I hear, and read," he mused, taking off the dress, undergarments, and finally the corset which transformed him into the most effective spy the Rebels had, according to Martha. With a memory and power of observation he never had as Hans, and a courage that the 'man' inside himself never knew, or seemed to have.

"You have the kind of mind that we can use," Martha continued. "And the kind of body that..." eyeing the male anatomy which was hidden so well under his other identity.

"The kind of body that what?" Hans inquired as he felt himself getting the once-over, once again, from someone who seemed to know more about Washington and his Army than even he did.

Hans grabbed hold of his civilian attire, the coat which smelled of sassafras leaves, the moccasins which reeked of swamp muck, and the leather shirt which reeked of the companion he wanted to see more than anything else right now. "I trust that Plato is safe," he asked.

"Only if the Irish Fever doesn't get him, or us, or anyone else," Martha interjected, her stare determined, her eyes terrified. She approached the woman who was now clearly a man. "You are sure about the number of dead listed in Doctor Whitman's journal."

"The dates, too. And the causes of death..." Hans replied regarding the medical records that had been stored in a Whitman's personal Bible.

"And the place?" Martha asked.

"Yes," Hans recalled. "The Prison ships in the harbor. Some prisoners recovered,

or at least survived. Such as there survival is now...The living most certainly are envying the dead.”

“Was there anything besides elixer 12 which made those prisoners survive?” Martha pressed. “Like those anonymous men you remember by name! William Bennett, Tom Wilson, Ebinezer Elseworth and....!”

Hans noted that it was the third time Ebinezer Elseworth was mentioned amongst the forty other names he had provided. Putting together the way Martha felt when saying his name and the “E” on some of her personal belongings, he was possibly a brother, husband, or perhaps even son before his capture, old enough to carry water for the Patriates and therefore old enough to die in a British Prison ship. But was there something in the ‘elixer 12’ ingredient list that wasn’t in elixers 10, 11 or 13? Hans couldn’t remember what he had seen through the new eyes he had only acquired recently.

“Think, Hansela Try to remember!” Martha pleaded, her arms holding onto his rigidly locked shoulders.

“I don’t know...I don’t remember...I...” Hans felt himself forget what he had just told Martha. Back in his own body, gender, and role as a ‘neutral’, he felt a tightness in his chest again, Fire exiting his brain, Vision leaving his inner eye. “I don’t...I just want to get Plato and go into the woods and be forgotten!”

“Hansela would want something better than that,” the ‘Liberty Whore’ countered, folding her arms, staring at Hans like another woman in his life who never left him.

“You are not my mother!” Hans blasted back. “Why don’t YOU or someone else sneak into General Cornwallis’ study and look at his plans. Or put talking potions into his brandy. Or get into his bed! I am through. I am----”

“----A smart woman who can save millions of lives, or a blood thirsty man who we can use for....less effective, but still useful purposes?” she offered.

Hans looked at himself in the mirror. Though a man who seemed the model soldier and warrior, he had still not drawn blood by his own hand, at least not directly. His father had taught him to kill like a man, but such was a lesson he never learned. Even when his life and those he cared about were dependent on it. And Martha seemed to know it too, perhaps from reading the translation of his diary, or reading

his mind, more transparent than ever since he had signed his own discharge papers from service with the Hessian and Loyalist Forces.

“Hansela?” Martha asked, getting into Hans’ mind, once again. “What is your answer?”

It was the kind of insight you couldn’t put into a diary, or perhaps even a novel. Why was a portion of the brain and Soul entrusted to Hans open to Hansela and not Hans? Why did putting her on feel so natural, and why were her insights so effective? And why did God answer his prayers with regard to a weapon he could use to end the War for everyone with a woman inside him who he had kept silent for nearly 20 years?

“A weapon is a weapon,” Martha smiled, throwing Hans the corset which seemed to push the brains in his gut into his head, and the fire in the belly down into a place where he could access it so easily.

“Yes,” he answered, as Hansela, feeling Hans go away again, perhaps to never return again this time as he watched his hands take off his coat, trousers and shirt, throwing them into the fire, then taking into hand a sharp razor, scraping off the stubble on his face and arms. At least it wasn’t being used to cut his wrists, or anyone else’s throat. Not yet, anyway.

CHAPTER 39

“This is a hospital ship!” the officer on deck with the cloth over his face announced to the supply-carrying unannounced visitor and her errand boy escort who seemed very well documented. “And no place for a lady, Miss ‘Gertenstrum-Kelalskoff?’” he continued, doing his best to read the script on the documentation passed up to him from the rowboat loaded with supplies.

“She likes to be called Gertrude, Sir. And that there be General Howe’s signature on it sayin’ she accepts full responsibility for whatever she do or gets done to her when on board, Sir,” the rowing boy replied, bowing his head as low as possible to avoid being asked to take it off.

“I don’t know, Miss,” the officer, a Major by his well hidden insignia, continued as he continued to examine what Hans was told was the most authentic forgery of the new British General’s signature available, taken from an original which he has stolen by Hansel’s hand,. “I’ll have to get this confirmed with someone of a higher rank,” the officer on deck said while pursing his lips in confusion usually reserved for those of a lower rank.

The Major walked past the coffin-covered deck of the ship to Whiteman, who was in conference with three military men of power and influence, all in thick gloves, blood-soaked hospital gowns and facemasks. Whiteman wore nothing on his mouth except his meticulously trimmed beard, and a grin of prideful confidence. He showed them something from another bible with a blood cross on its cover, and ‘lectured’ them about something else. After the lesson was ended, the men lowered their face masks, and seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. One had a thick mustache, a relieved smile under it. He stopped by one of the coffins, kicked it, and seemed to hear something inside. He smiled even wider.

“Albert!” Hans uttered from Hansela’s lips, from a place of primal male and female fear.

“Cough, and they won’t let you on board,” Martha whispered from under man-sized boy’s hat which she hoped would not be looked at, or under it. As a small framed woman with a naturally deep voice, it was easy for her to pass as the Loyalist rowboat boy who now was being ‘re-educated’ in locked rooms in the Free Negro quarters of Manhattan.

Albert took out his pistol and shot into the coffin. “One thirty three B!” he

announced, crossing himself with a concerned look for the Major, who showed him the paperwork for the visitors.

Whiteman made another tick in his book. Cloth covered laborers emptied the contents of the coffins into the ocean, retaining some assorted body parts in brown burlap bags, some in white sacs, and some in what looked like pots.

“I wonder who they are cooking for dinner,” Martha grunted.

Hans looked at the narrow slots on the three-layered ship below the open deck. Designed to let some sunlight in, but certainly not the human eye. Both he and Hansela smelled death inside, and lots of it. The faint odor of rotted and rotting flesh, covered over by the aroma of ‘science’, chemicals used for purposes which perhaps were designed to alleviate suffering. But in this case, seemingly to enhance it. Another one of those gut feel things Hansel felt which Hans was hoping to be a corset which was too tight.

“Cough and they won’t let you come aboard,” Martha warned again, as the Major seemed to acquire permission for the rowboat to offload its cargo and passengers. “If your friend Albert is on board, maybe this mission IS too risky.”

“Only to me,” Hansela replied as the Major ordered the crew to lower the rope ladders.

“Watch your step, my Lady,” he said to Hans as he placed Hansela’s feet into the rungs of the ladder and the rest of the supplies were being loaded aboard.

“And watch those supplies, please,” Hansela said in a voice which was authentic, convincing and seemed to impress even Martha. “My boy in the boat has done his best to secure Bibles and other things these mislead rebels need,” Hansela insisted.

“And your men do too, Sir,” Martha added in her best baritone voice, followed by a cough which came out, apparently by accident. The loading process halted immediately.

“The rowboat boy will be going ashore, I will not be,” Hansela insisted. The Major consulted with Whiteman, who smiled at Hansel, the kind of gesture which said that she looked familiar, or wanted to tell her he did. Three swallows of fear later, Martha the rowboat boy, was sent on her way, Hansela ‘the Countess’ allowed on board as an invited guest for the all-male crew on deck.

“Why are you here?” Whiteman inquired of Hansela.

“To assist you in your work,” Hansela smiled. “And to see that these men’s souls are saved,” she continued, as the crew opened the boxes containing Bibles. “Perhaps your men also?”

“This is a hospital ship, Madame,” Whiteman replied, with a gentlemanly bow. “There is much dying here,”

“And much need for Salvation as well,” she pressed. “If you teach a man to turn to the Lord at the time of dying, he lives forever. And is the Lord’s servant for as many days as he has on this, the world He created. And if these rebels beg the Lord for forgiveness for their transgressions against King George, who God has deemed to be King of England and all of its colonies...” she announced as the other two crates were opened.

“A woman on board, tempting men with these?” Whiteman speculated, retrieving an apple out of one of the crates. “You will be an angel saving their souls, or an Eve to give them, or some others, perhaps, more earthly pleasures?”

Hans allowed the speculation to percolate. Perhaps as a the ship ‘whore’, he could be mother, friend, confidant and many other roles to the men who he had to extract information from. It almost worked with the Scottish Major at the Ball. Maybe it could work here, too, if Hansela was allowed the privacy she was entitled to as a Lady of breeding, and the right to say ‘no’ to what most men claimed, at least in public, what they craved more than food, drink or breath itself. The Bibles verified where the ‘no’ lines were, perhaps. Or perhaps as ‘Christian fruit’, Hansela was considered forbidden fruit, the best and ultimately most accessible kind. But then there was the matter of what was in the other box, about to be opened by a large man with a heavy crowbar who was more brawn than brains.

“Be careful with that!” Hansela blasted out, opening the box herself.

“Ah, yes, what do we have here?” Whiteman said as he inspected the contents.

“Nursing and medical supplies,” Hansela continued as she carefully packed items were laid out on deck for inspection by hands with finer dexterity. “A gift from my father. To be administered by myself with gifts I learned from my mother.”

“Including books and pens?” the challenge, directed at what Hans needed for his own bookkeeping, in a language and script he would be sure would not be readable by anyone.

“What these rebels write to their loved ones soothes their own souls, and when we read them, they inform us about them, their leaders, and how to best see that they are brought to the King’s justice,” Hansela spat out from someplace inside her Hans never knew about. “And the King’s mercy, I trust,” she continued. “As a fellow healer, I am sure you agree, Doctor.”

“Of course, Madame. We save lives,” he continued. From below, a moan that escalated into excruciating pain, then a gunshot. “When we can,” he continued, with a look that seemed concerned.

The good doctor was called away for another conference with Albert. A small rowboat containing what looked like important people lay on the port side of the boat, two empty seats being prepared. “Sincerity....a great gift,” Hans thought to himself. “And if you can fake that,” he continued, as Hansela was escorted to her quarters by Whiteman, thankfully on the other side of the ship than his own, for now.

After a private lunch of roast pig, carrots, potatoes, peas and what seemed to be an American version of apple strudel which they called ‘pie’, Hansela was escorted down below to Minister to the Souls. And at the discession of the orderlies, to help treat the bodies of the ‘patients’, as she was instructed to call the prisoners chained to their cots. The never ending lines of ‘patients’ suffered from various ailments, some of them even wounds encountered in battle. The skill with which those wounds were repaired seemed remarkable, the best Hans had observed in any field or city-based hospital he had inspected or encountered. The predominant symptom was boiled down into two words. Irish Fever, a name no one spoke but which he recognized from the volume seven of the ‘holy book’ she gazed at and memorized while at the Officer’s Ball in New York. Dry cough, followed by blood in the sputum. Open sores on the chest, armpits and neck which festered into pus, then blood. Fever which dried the throat and burned the lungs into ash. Yellow eyes with a greenish-yellow complexion to the temples. Then, dysentery, first runny, then with straw like material, then beet red blood. Death came within a month of initial exposure, a week earlier in those who came in ‘feeble, a week or two later in those who came in with healthy wills and strong survival instincts.

One of the strictest mandates was to give no medications which were not prescribed by Doctor Whiteman. To be sure that this was carried out, Hansela found her medical supplies missing, tossed overboard while she was in the privy. Whiteman prescribed numbered potions for numbered patients, in what seemed to be a very effective, and German, way of doing medicine on an English ship. Scientific, sound, and calculated, and some patients did seem to survive Irish Fever. One in five, as Hansel observed with the aid of the record put on paper on the top of their cots. But as for the one in five that did survive beyond their one or two month 'holiday' in the hold of the ship, they seemed to be condemned men, talking about nothing, for fear that if they did, death would come to others besides themselves. And those with the boldest spirits seemed to have tongues missing, or part of a finger, arm or eye. These were the men who seemed most resolved to die for their country, and Cause. They did not need to have anything to say to the Lord in Heaven, or their families on earth.

Hans noticed others amongst the wounded rebel prisoners. Loyalists, some British and some Hessians. Men who he himself fought with in battle who had long since lost ability to remember who they were, and why they should even try to survive. One of them Hans knew by name and Spirit. "Johan!" he screamed out in a hushed Hansel voice. "Johan Schmitt!" he continued to the drill Seargent who he outranked, and tried to never outclass, though justice demanded that someone put him in his place. His 'place' now was to die, the anticipated time of his passing in less than an hour according to his paper hung on the nail above his urine stench, blood-stained cot, his body infested with wounds that could never have been encountered in battles or bar brawls, his mouth unable to do anything but groan out a death rattle. "Wake up, Seargent Schmitt!" Hans, as himself, whispered into the man who made him a soldier, or tried to. "It's me! Hans! Without my mustache! Without my uniform. And, as far as anyone else knows, without my balls

"Shut up, I'm trying to die here!" Hans heard from the prisoner next to him, clad in rags which used to be a Revolutionary Army uniform, a purple heart in his hands. Fresh in, according to the paper identifying him by arrival date and number. A superficial wound made deeper by something planted into it, and sewed in place. Shivering under a blanket which reeked of the same 'death odor' that every other one on the deck hidden from view of the sun seemed to have.

He was ready to die, able to talk and still defiant behind the eyes. And young, skin as fair as a young boy, in need of nurturing. A roundish face, and soft eyes held hostage by terror, holding onto three Purple Heart metals still attached to his chest.

Hans edged in with a maternal smile and offered him a fresh apple. “From the tree, or that bush between your legs, pervert!”

The prisoner grabbed the apple and bit into it with his white, brown and missing teeth. Hans did a discreet once over on his crotch to check the restraints on his natural genitalia.

“Not that I’d hold it against ya,” the prisoner continued in a voice that didn’t seem to fit his rank, uniform, or gender. “Guess we’re winning the war if you King’s ‘men’ hide out in dresses so you don’t have to get drummed into uniforms and face us in the field. Maybe you sissy-boys are smart men, alive men. More brains than balls.”

“And you’re all balls and no brains, but...?” Hans continued, as himself.

Before any philosophical retort could get established, Hans felt himself pulled into the prisoner with his one good arm, a sharpened edge of the Purple Heart medals at his throat.

“You tell ANYone what I am, and you won’t survive to tell your wife, husband or boyfriend, anything!” the nameless prisoner threatened with the last ounce of his dwindling strength. “My name is Robert Preston,” he continued, coughed up sputum mixed with more blood than saliva from a head now boiling with fever. “Decorated hero of the Revolution.”

“Related to a sister who likes to call herself Martha, Robert?” Hans inquired, throwing a wet rag over Robert’s forehead, wrists and ankles, or more notably ‘Roberta’ with a closer look and confirmatory feel of the breasts under the well-guarded shirt.

“What are you looking at? And feeling!” the female Rebel prisoner grunted back in her best male voice.

“I don’t know,” Hans replied, in his own voice but with Hansel’s perspective. “You know, when anyone else here cuts off this shirt...”

“They’ll have their bellies open first!” Roberta sneered, displaying her determination with a free hand clenching a sharp scrap of metal that had already cut into her own palm. “Now you take that rag off my head, and move on. I want to die like a man.”

“And to die like a woman is to die without courage, or honor?” Hans challenged with a smile that felt feminine, and strong.

“What the fuck do YOU know about honor, or courage, Dutchie Duchess?” Roberta growled through another cough, more life breath than death rattle behind it. “King George came to wherever you lived, said he needed men to fight for something important. Everyone else joined up, like they was honor bound to do. You hid in your mother’s closet, put on her favorite dress to avoid getting shot---“

“---Or shooting anyone else!” Hans found himself shooting back.

“Then you decide to contribute to the Cause, come in here with wet rags, bibles, and a few mouthfuls of eats to keep us ‘traitors’ alive for the King’s fucking men who you’ll probably be kissin’, huggin’ and fuckin’ tonight---“

“Not tonight or any other night!” Hans blasted back, sticking an apple into Roberta’s mouth. “And whatever I do, as...her...is in the line of duty. The ‘Lady’ does not lust after men or woman. And serves them all, somehow. Better than any gentleman, or man of honor did, or could. And...and...look at YOU, trying to pass yourself off as a man.”

“Because I have balls under these britches. Balls enough to fight for a Cause I believe in!” Private Roberta blasted back after spiting out the apple.

“And men can’t pass themselves off as women because they have the brains NOT to fight?” Hans countered, calmly, but with an affirmation fueled by the flash of discovery. “Under the breasts, and balls, we are all human. More human than male, or female, hopefully. And an intelligent man, or woman, knows that we should be as compassionate to a stranger than to a friend, or even family member. A person of intelligence knows that Wars start and continue because we consider our family and friends as special, and everyone else as expendable.”

Roberta replied with a wad of spit, delivered straight onto Hansel’s breasts. More accurately, and thankfully, given its ominously rancid odor, onto the clothing covering them.

Hans found himself shaking in Hansel’s body. Thinking it was due to the cold, an Orderly put a blanket over her shoulders. “No, thank you,” Hansela replied from a place of ‘knowing’ that Hans was grateful to access. Maybe it the honor of enduring the cold, damp air like a ‘real woman’. Or the smell on the blanket, present on the

prisoners who was days, or hours, away from death.

Roberta turned her head, crunched her teeth, and muttered phrases that were incoherent and intervening expressions which were clearly foul..

“We need to examine this one, Miss,” the Orderly with the tray covered with a fresh, white cloth said to Hansela.

“He has been examined already, and received his medications,” Hansela ‘noted’.
“He is in prayer now. The most important medicine for the living, and the dying,” she asserted with head held high under the scarf hiding Hans’ Adam’s apple.

Hansela opened her Bible and read a passage that seemed, at least to the Orderly, to be appropriate medications for the prisoner’s Soul.

“I will come back later,” the Orderly who seemed to obey all of Doctor Whiteman’s orders bowed. By his voice, he would most certainly check the records to affirm Hansel’s claim. But for now, Roberta was spared whatever medicine, or perhaps slow acting poison, which lay under the cloth-covered tray.

“Food for the sharks?” the Orderly was asked when he returned to the dispensing station in reference to the latest corpse brought to him. He examined the body, made a few notes, then contemplated the matter. “No”, he nodded discretely, and with a professional desensitization that made him seem more dead than the dying.

CHAPTER 40

“Superb!” Doctor Whiteman said when his teeth met the meat served to him at the table at Maria’s Northern Manhattan ‘cottage’, now guarded by more men than ever, not letting anyone come or leave without Albert’s specific instruction, for the safety of Maria’s child of course, as if he was kidnapped, the rebels could extract a high ransom indeed. “Yes, a superbly cooked roast,” White man repeated.

“Yes, excellent indeed!” Albert confirmed. “Chicken?” he asked the cook.

“Capon, Sir,” the servant girl bowed with civility, her eyes fixed on the painless emptiness behind the sockets. “Spiced with basil, pepper and apple, Sirs.”

“I have never tasted capon like this!” Maria threw down her fork. “Not here at MY home, or my table, Else,” she blasted out with pent up rage regarding the servant girl whose duties to Albert involved far more than cooking, cleaning and taking care of his son.

“Her name is Rachel Maria,,” Albert affirmed, calmly.

“Yes,” Whitman continued, looking at the pallor of the Colonial patient he had so successfully cured of believing that she was a Countessa from Prussia. “She seems to have been given her medication today. And she is now treated from her mental afflictions? Healthy and happy?”

“As surely as this delicious meat is Capon, Doctor,” Maria smiled back, sniffing it once again, considering whether to eat it, having developed a keen smell for human flesh that found its way into Albert’s kitchen.

Albert motioned for “Rachel” to go back into the kitchen, as did Whiteman. Maria grabbed hold of her cold, shaking hand, begging her to stay in the dining room. But with a force of a thousand demons pulling on her soul, “Rachel” pulled away her arm from Maria, put an extra helping of meat on her plate and went off to the kitchen with head bowed with a steady gait.

Albert looked at Maria with that kind of fatherly assurance which Maria had tasted so often back in Hesse-Cassel as the sole heir of her father’s estate. “You are thin as a rail, my dear,” he said with a warm smile on his face. “And if you don’t eat...”

“...I will die, which has it’s advantages,” Maria replied, feeling the weakness.

“Not for Wolfgang,” Whiteman noted. “Do you want your son to grow up without a mother?”

Maria contemplated the matter. Though she had mothered the child, Albert’s testicular material had fathered him. He was growing up in his father’s image now. His first word, ‘kill’. His first toy, a wooden sword. Though perhaps Maria could convert his Warrior training into a scholar’s instincts. He did enjoy being read to. By his private ‘nurse’ Rachel, and by herself as well.

She glanced at the doors to the other rooms of house, new locks on them. After having been given an extra drop of elixer by the good Doctor, Rachel gave those locks a fresh polishing with her cleaning cloth and tongue. Three chambers of the house which were now forbidden for her to enter. But, there were others available to her, and Wolfgang. For now.

“I want to go away with Wolfgang!” Maria found herself insisting rather than asking.

“Where?” Albert laughed. “And with what money?” the Major who seemed to be as rich as a General or King continued.

“We will manage.” Maria excused herself from the Lord and Lady’s banquet table in a non-ladylike manner and grabbed hold of Wolfgang. “We will manage, right?” she assured the child, and hopefully herself.

“The rebels are dangerous, you know,” Albert replied in German which had acquired a British arrogance to its cadence, giving her the courtesy of getting up from the table this time. “They are in the business of kidnapping women and children of men of influence, and demanding high ransoms, my love.”

“Which you, your Excellency Major Stein, and the good doctor can easily afford to pay with the extra money you are being paid from---“ Maria asserted, calmly, with a smile reeking of irony.

Maria’s courteously-worded protest was answered with a cras punch across the face from Albert’s fist, then a kick in the belly. She prayed that was barren, and that Albert’s seed did not find fertile ground in her womb so that he could show off another offspring to the world.

“Please, Albert,” she begged with as much dignity as she could muster. “I am thinking of my child....Our child.” Finally he stopped the beating. Whiteman inspected the damage.

“No breaks, thankfully,” Doctor Whiteman noted with his healer’s eyes.

“And no scars...again?” Maria smirked back.

She watched Albert fume under his beet red military Lobster Back coat. Saw Rachel returned to the parlor, licking up the ‘Capon’ Maria had split on the floor while the former Lady Else sang her ‘happy song’ louder than ever. Heard Wolfgang cry in the nearby room for someone to hold him.. Smelled death on ‘Uncle Doctor Whiteman’ who lifted him into his arms and assured the lad that everything would be alright, putting the boy into a contented sleep with a lick of his ‘magical fingers’.

One word, concept and dream from days gone by that seemed like a forever ago came into Maria’s throbbing head and terrified mind. “Hans.... forgive me the sins I have done in your service, and mine.”

CHAPTER 41

Securely alone as Hansela in her cabin, Hans spent the night writing in his diary, recording the details of what Hansela had seen and spied a look at that day in a language and penmanship that only he could read. It was a three-jars-of-oil night for the lantern, a sleepless one for him, made even more restless by Martha's failing to appear with more Bibles and apples, as she had pledged. Between the facts he tried to find and record the meaning of it all, for this generation and the next ones. 'Irish Fever' was something invented by an Englishman, he surmised. Introduced into prisoner-patients by needles inserted into wounds already opened up by swords, bayonets or musketballs. A putridly-smelling sweet odor from the source point, like rotted cinnamon. Though in some patients, that smell was present all over the skin, and in the blankets they wore for their internment as prisoners and then corpses.

As for treatment, five elixers, all numbered as such, seemed to be used. Three seemed to have no effect, one mercifully put those afflicted to death faster, and one, number 4, seemed to be the medication given to patients whose welts appeared to be healing. Such was the arithmetic calculated in Hans' head from the flashes of images Hansela provided him though looking at the paper records above the prisoners and the book at the medications dispensing station which was expanding by ten new pages a day. Volume nine about to go to the bindery.

Thankfully, Whiteman wrote many of his medical notes in Latin. And thank God, Hans had learned that Roman Catholic tongue from his Protestant mother so he could appreciate the classics of literature. Being trained in the pathology of the human soul rather than the human body, Hans couldn't make sense of the medicalese within the Latin formularies. But one elixer did look familiar amongst Whiteman's pharmacological recipes.

"Lativa suprasola" Hans whispered to himself in Hansela's private quarters as he watched the pre-dawn breath in front of his face form clouds of what was materializing into an idea. "The elixer that can turn even Satan's twisted tongue into telling the truth about how he tempted Eve to give the apple to Adam," he recalled from a chilling bedtime story told to him by his mother. The tale of the good witch who de-possessed the devil in the service of humanity, then was burnt at the stake for her trouble, kept young Hans up for a week afterwards with nightmares about good, evil and everything in between. But was this medication real? Did it unloosen tongues sworn to secrecy? And could it make liars speak the truth? Ominously, fate was delivering the Devil to his doorstep. The splashing of oars in the water below carried Doctor Whiteman and several fresh boxes of supplies, most

notably warm-looking blankets and a crate of well-guarded thick jars bearing a skull and crossbones protected by slabs of wood. And, of course, Whiteman's personal journal, all eight volumes of it.

Hans looked into the mirror, felt the stubble on his face, and whipped out the strap razor once again, shaving the hairs as close as he could beneath the skin and around his widening eyebrows. "Extra thin today, I think," he told himself as Hansela plotted the rest.

With Whiteman on deck, Hansela moved fast. Lativa suprasola was easy to make, the three ingredients clearly labeled and kept in the treatment station. For now, each in different locations.

"What shall I request the cook to make you for breakfast??" the Orderly inquired of Hansel in a cockney accent as he knocked on the door, which he still kept closed.

"Something for my...headache," she said, noting the Orderly occupying himself with the shelves she wanted access to. "And cramps..." she continued, feeling a pain in the belly, for real. And falling toward the door which had now opened, from the outside.

"Womanly cramps, Miss?" the Orderly smiled with a mouth filled with mismatched teeth more black than white.

"I am a woman," Hansela related with an upper class eye-roll expected of a woman of her station and purpose.

The Orderly excused himself with an apologetic bow to retrieve the elixers requested, and closed the door behind him. Hans didn't know how much time he could buy with womanly cramps, which felt very real. He grabbed hold of the three ingredients required to make lativa suprasola, placed them into small sacs which he had stolen and inserted between his breasts, then replaced the missing ingredients with tea which had been provided for drinking purposes in Hansela's cabin. The colors didn't match, but the appearances of the bottles did. Then, something else. Thick jars marked with skulls and crossbones, all empty.

Hansela dared a ladylike sniff. Yes, rotten cinnamen aroma emanated from the jars. Strong enough for even a man whose olfactory senses had been dulled by shit shoveling to discern.

Footsteps approached, and Hansela put on her smile again. “There ya go, Miss,” the Orderly bowed, handing her the elixer requested. “Two drops under the tongue every four hours, Doctor Whiteman’s special recipe.”

Hansela didn’t risk speaking again, excusing herself to go to her quarters for a womanly rest. There was too much going on in her head. Like how she would prepare her own special recipe for Whiteman in order to find out the where’s and who’s behind his.

By mid-morning, Martha has still not arrived with fresh supplies, or another forged letter from some Higher Up in the British or Hessian Military requesting Lady Gertrude-Kewalsi’s presence elsewhere. Though worried about his ‘sister in arms’, Hans concerned himself with more pressing matters as he worked his way into the ‘kitchen’, which doubled as a laboratory, having promised the officers a ‘home cooked meal with motherly love’ in it rather than regulation ‘British Navy’ cookery. Such required recently-learned chemistry and recollection of old world culinary skills. Cooking was something women learned because they had to prepare food for someone else, but thankfully, Hans had such a ‘position’ after he discharged himself from the Army following his drunken desertion in Trenton. Plato, his canine companion, enjoyed eating from Hans pot over the campfire and in order to make that good dog’s gustatory experiences great, Hans experimented for many months with what could be foraged from the woods or bartered for with homesteaders. And as luck would have it, Plato’s favorite dish was being brought on board by a supply ship. Mutton, from real sheep. With an assortment of fresh vegetables shuttled to the door of the officer’s mess as the more ‘seasoned’ and putrid portions were allocated for the crew and ‘patients’.

Entry into the empty galley was easy. Taking charge of it was a bit more difficult as the cook stomped in, cleaning his hands with his own spit, drying them off on an apron that was stained in so many layers that no amount of cleaning would make it white again. Behind him, the bearers of the supplies, reeking of sweat and other bodily exressions which men usually emit in the company of women.

“I will be in charge of cooking dinner tonight,” Hansela smiled, taking up a knife with one hand, a cutting board with another, and chopping up whatever she could grab into a saucepan . “My special recipe.”

“I be the cook, Miss,” the overfed baritone-voiced man asserted, sneaking a peak into the intruder’s bussoms.

Hans noticed that Hansela’s cleavage had become larger and a bit distorted by the ingredients for the special sauce which would go in last, and secretly.

“I AM the cook, Sir,” she said in the manner of a schoolteacher, mother and whore. “And you ARE entitled to a day of rest and relaxation, and a home cooked meal, gentlemen.” She pointed to the wares on the backs of the men who had not been called gentlemen, or Sir, for a long, long time, if at all. The smile she gave to each seemed to be custom fashioned, and accepted as such. Each of them felt special, relieved of their labors and appreciated for their inner worth. Even the head Cook’s heart was touched, though the ‘accidental’ placement of his hand on the Guest Baroness’ ass indicated that there would be a ‘special dessert’ due to him for use of his facility after dinner.

The dosage levels were the same in Hans’ mother’s legendary fairy tale and Whitman’s medical formulary. “One spoonful eases the muscles, two lowers the neck, three opens the mouth to the truth behind the lies.”

Thankfully, Hans’ culinary skills made Hansela the perfect hostess, evoking praises of wonderment from the Officers and Crew after the soup, slurry smiles of delight with the main course, and a dessert that was eaten more like lazy dogs than battle-ready men. By the time everyone in a position of authority, or potential authority, had finished the evening meal, they were asleep, or confessing their sins and secrets to whatever or whoever was in front of them. However, one man was silent.

“What did you...eh...put into this wondrous meal, Countess?” he inquired as she took a second bottle of whiskey up to his lips. He rose from the table, grabbed a knife, wielded it as sword, and cut the cloth atop Hansel’s breasts.

Hans panicked, each escalation in terror feeding Whiteman’s drunken confidence as he grabbed hold of Hansel’s breasts, exposing three packs of herbs and feeling flat human flesh under the padding. “So, ‘Miss’, you want to play? So, do...I!” He announced, beginning the chase around the galley.

Hans tried his best to stay in character, but he felt more like a boy than a woman. The boy who was chased by a man he knew in his past, the man who fathered him

then decided to make him pose as his mother. An event that Hans' father insisted be replay even after his mother's death, at first using force as a motivation for the naïve lad who was service rather than profit oriented, then pity. Then as a 'mercy fuck', as a last request before he died himself, made and honored on many occasions from the remorseful drunk who claimed to be blind. Until one night, the young boy realized that he would not become any kind of man until he....

The nightmare stopped when Hans decided to use his head to attack with rather than hide behind Hansela's skirt. Grabbing hold of Whiteman's collar, Hans pushed what remained of the lativa suprasona down his throat and made him eat it. "Good medicine, for the 'good doctor', " Hans blasted through gritted teeth, not caring about the knife in the Professor Doctor's hand which he still was wielding like a skilled soldier. "Eat up! Swallow it like seasoned semen from my dick. Or yours. Here, I'll cut it off for you, and stick it in your mouth."

As the extra dose of herb took effect, Hans grabbed hold of Whiteman's knife, cut open his britches and proceeded to do what he had done on that last night before he left home. "Your turn to be the whore, father. Your turn to be the eunic who----"

"---Irish Fever" Whiteman slurred from his mouth just as the knife in Han's hands cut through the first layer of pubic hair and skin. "The weapon the loser can use against the winner, and still win," he smirked in a stupor coming from a place inside him which seemed truthful to his inner nature purpose.

Hans could feel Whiteman's pulse diminishing, the redness in his cheeks going white. The look in his eye he had seen all too often in War in America, and his own private wars back home.

"Yes, I am dying...I think..." Whiteman continued, resolved, then terrified, nuzzling himself against Hans' exposed breasts, hugging him for dear life. "Am I...going to hell, mother?"

"Not if you tell me about Irish Fever," Hans assured the dying 'boy' in her arms. "The medical facts about Irish Fever....how it's spread, "

Whiteman pointed to his personal chest behind him, all seven volumes of his notes intact. He then coughed up phlegm. Blood stained and, ironically, reeking of putrid cinammen.

"The treatment...Elixer four?" Hans inquired.

“For when the fever has to be stopped. It works...I think....I hope...I...pray. I get paid well for making elixers that work for diseases I created. And I deserve to be paid. Because I am a good doctor, a good doctor who needs money to do good work...good work....needed work...” With that Whiteman sobbed with the kind of cry Hans had heard before. From his father when he had poisoned his headstrong mother with ‘obedience potion’ for her own good, slowly, till the day he gave her too much with contaminants that took away her sight as well as her Inner Vision and purpose.

“I’ll go get some...” Hans said. “You rest here.”

“No! Don’t go!” Whiteman screamed out, grabbing hold of Hans’s hand. “It’s too late.” On the good doctor’s arm a bad open wound, remnants of glass on it, a broken jar on the floor with three rather than just one set of skull and crossbones on it which had been broken in the after dinner ‘fox hunt’.

Whiteman started to pray, begging Hans to join him as he stepped toe by toe towards death’s door, the death rattle inside him as loud as thunder. One more question could be asked, and had to be answered.

“Albert Stein, my son.” Hans inquired as the Heavenly Mother Whiteman sought at death and seemed to never have met in life. “Where is Major Albert Stein?”

“The White Horse Tavern tomorrow night, to get more money....”

.”Money, from who!” Hans yelled, and screamed into Whiteman’s body which turned pale, cold then lifeless.

Hans felt alone, and indeed he was. He couldn’t even see or feel Hansela anymore. Everyone in positions of authority on board the anchored ship was successfully drugged, for now. By his best calculations, he had half an hour to gather the evidence aboard the ship as discretely and effectively as possible, get ashore. Then there was the matter of the prisoners below.

Merging immediate and long term agendas as best as possible, Hans raced below, shackling, gagging or restraining any men in authority. Distributing elixer 4 to as many prisoners as he could, saving one large jar for General Washington. Hoping that it would work and that the prisoners still able to avail themselves of freedom would seize the chance to use it. Praying that the last link in the chain of Irish Fever

would end with Albert. Grateful that he had still not yet directly killed any men in the New World after having killed his last one in the Old World. Sensing that God, in His infinite wisdom and sadistic way of 'loving' his Creation, would force him to commit another primal sin in His service, details to be revealed after he committed the deed.

CHAPTER 42

The woman gasped as she looked into the mirror, clad in a dress in keeping with her former station and self-appointed profession. “Is this...me?” she uttered with quivering lips, her cold, sweat-soaked, shaking hands running her fingers around the pearl necklace hanging on her bruised neck.

“Yes, Countessa Else,” Maria affirmed. “It is, or...was.”

Maria’s bravery had produced a miracle, somehow. Specific instructions from Doctor Whiteman were to see that ‘Lady Else’ be given three drops of her formulated tonic under the tongue once in the morning and once at night. It would prevent shakes, fits and delusions that she was anyone but Rachel. But contented as Rachel was being Whiteman’s ‘wonder patient’, Albert’s personal slave, Wolfgang’s surrogate mother and Maria’s valet, she was still someone else deep inside.

“You are Else von Klausenberg, daughter of Bergermeister von Klausenberg, who played with me when we were children together,” Maria informed the patient who given apple cider for her last three rounds of medications. “Our fathers said we were best friends.”

“Were we...was I...a good friend?” Else asked as the girl inside the woman emerged, the emerging memories taking on taken conscious form slowly.

“You are now,” Maria replied with a reunion hug that forgave all the transgressions Else did in the name of ‘fun’ when growing up. All the times that Maria had been blamed for Else’s mischievous deeds. And even the way Lady Else blackmailed Maria into hiding out as a drummer boy so that her father and Else’s ‘loving uncle’ would not drag her back to Hesse-Cassel in chains, or a straight-jacket. And was instrumental into Hans becoming her ‘loving escort’ in an expedition that led to his leaving her, and the military career Maria had sacrificed so much to initiate and maintain.

Else noted something under Maria’s long hair. “The hair under your hair. It is...”

“Short,” Maria noted.

“Like mine,” Else noted, taking off her wig, and noting the ugliness of the sight in the mirror for the first time since she had been sheared when she was delivered to the

asylum by Hans, to insure that she would not be recognized. “Do you remember who did it?”

“The same man who styled mine,” Maria smiled sardonically.

“Your father, the Baron?” Else inquired.

Maria wanted to tell Else that it was Hans, the gentleman officer who had never put sword to flesh in battle and who saw victory as ending of the war with minimal blood loss, no matter whose flag flew highest at the surrender ceremony. It was too much for Else to understand now, the shakes getting stronger. English Tea and German strudel with each other while Else played with young Wolfgang was in order now. The elixer of understanding, and forgiveness. Questions about Maria’s father, the deals he had made with Else for Maria and Wolfgang’s return, and even Hans had to be asked gently, and answered slowly or Else would crack, not even being able to find her way back to being Rachel.

Maria flashed on something as she noted Wolfgang’s innocence bringing out something in Else which she had never noticed. Kindness, that quality in all human beings which was always possible, in some form or another. “Tell me, Else,” she pressed, gently. “Why does Albert keep me and you and Wolfgang locked away and safely ‘guarded’ in this house when he is away?”

“Because he wants us to be together, I think,” Else smiled, eyes on Wolfgang as the child spawned by Albert’s lustful seed laughed with delight and wisdom worthy of the baby Jesus Himself.

Maria contemplated matters past. In that night when Albert and she had committed the transgression behind Hans’ back, it was love. It felt that way to Maria, and she felt the same coming from Albert as well. Perhaps it is a man’s intent at the time of conception that makes the child who he is, and will be. She wondered what the seed growing in Else’s belly would grow up to be. Else had been a whore, a bitch, a master manipulator and an opportunist according to the traditions of her own family. Everything she and her family had accomplished was by means considered legal by some, unethical by everyone else. Was this Hans’ child inside Else? Albert’s? The Baron’s? Doctor Whiteman’s? And if so, what to tell the child? Albert no doubt would have his own story the world and “Rachel” would believe. But did she even know she was pregnant?

“Else,” Maria gently said. “Did you know that you have a child in you now?”

Else felt the emerging lump under her dress. “Doctor Whiteman said it was a tumor in my stomach. And that Major Albert paid him to take it out when it needs to come out.”

“And serve it to you and me as chicken, seasoned special herbs, or elixers,” Maria concluded, and snarled.

“Not anymore,” a voice rang out from behind her. The man’s face was brown, his coat more rag than cloth, his voice ominous, but the odor painfully familiar.

“Hans?” Maria realized after sniffing the manure covering the intruder’s face as he closed the window behind him, being sure the guards had not taken note of his entrance. “You look like...”

“Shit?” Hans smelled his elbows, boldly showing off his appearance, ironically identical to when he was a shit-shoveler in Hesse-Cassel.

Maria embraced Hans with a renewed joy for life and connection to It. His detritus-smelling coat felt like soft silk, his sweat-soaked hands like fine soap, the fire in his belly merging with the awakened warmth in hers. “Where the...how did you...Why didn’t you,” she bellowed out in delight.

“Shhh.” Hans replied. “We have little time.”

“Hans?” Else said, with no Rachel left in it this time. Her Rachel wig on her head, the Else dress Maria had given her making her look by every count, the Countessa she had been, or perhaps still was. “Is that you?”

Else approached, her head up this time. Walking erect. She extended her hand to the shit-covered intruder, dabbing a portion of it and putting it up to her now upturned nose. “Yes, it is you.”

“And is this you, ‘Lady Else’?” Hans challenged.

Maria could see a knife inside Hans’ coat. His hand was firmly on its handle, his eyes clearly indicating that he would use it if he had to. Something new, frightening and, for the short term, reassuring.

Else waltzed around Hans, smiled a few times, waved hello to the guards outside,

and stared into the shit-shoveler's face. She extended her hand again, in a handshake. Courteous, kind and shaking. The more kindness came into her, the more violent the shakes got.

“Who am I? What am I? Who are....you?” Else stuttered on her way to the mirror, where she halted in a catatonic stare. “Oh my God!” she exclaimed as her eyes penetrated into seeing the depths of her soul, for the first time, so it seemed.

“What do we do now, my...my love?” Maria asked Hans, desperation in her voice and tone.

“Work fast,” Hans replied, pulling out a pair of wire cutters and opening up the locks on the doors. The sound awoke Wolfgang, crying coming from the boy's bed. “And work effectively,” the shit-shoveller who seemed to have dug up a secret that had to be stopped now continued.

CHAPTER 43

The Whitehorse had been built as a barn by the Dutch, converted to a tavern by the English, then nearly demolished by the rebel mob to extract firewood to burn King George in effigy. It was the mandate of General Howe to restore the establishment to its former glory. It was the fate of Albert to meet people who were more concerned with power than glory in that place of pleasure and business. As for which was which, both had merged into the same entity for Albert. He sipped the brandy given to him by the barmaid he gazed outside at the ladies who sought to seek a man's more common desires. This time, their nods and winks meant nothing to him. Indeed, they were nothing in Albert's mind now. As was anyone who stood in his way, or prevented him from acquiring what was always on his list... 'more'. More money, more power, more control over the world that had for nearly three decades controlled him. It was his right, and obligation to do whatever was required to obtain and achieve 'more'.

The 'more' this time was through the well-dressed civilian gentleman seated across from him at the table. "You agree to the terms of the bargain?" he asked in a language Albert understood very, very well.

"Your German is quite good," Albert replied as he reviewed the terms of the arrangement as written on the paper which would be kept for a while, then burned at the right time. "As if you really are from Hesse-Cassel, Herr Hesse," he smiled, turning to the personal assistant he brought to the meeting. "Don't you think so, my dear?"

The woman next to him nodded her head 'yes', her face kept hidden, her voice silent, the crotch between her legs very open.

"You were supposed to come alone," Herr Hesse noted, his accent becoming aristocratic Prussian. "Nobody was supposed to come with you except---"

"---She is nobody, now," the rags-to-riches Hessian Major replied, pulling on the collar around her neck. "Tell Herr Hesse that you are nothing. Like you tell all my business associates that you are nothing," he commanded, instructing the woman to bow her head down, slither under the table on all fours, bark like a dog, then munch on the weiner between Hesse's legs. "She was a Countess once," Albert boasted. "But now with certain secret elixers we have she is..."

"No..." Hesse gently told the woman, sending her off to a corner of the tavern

where she began hitting herself with a clenched fist.

“We can make George Washington and the Continental Congress do the same thing,” Albert boasted.

Hesse seemed impressed, but dis-satisfied. “We are interested in Irish Fever, Sir.”

“And ‘we’ is who, Sir?” Albert inquired, sipping his brandy, pushing his luck.

“The people who made it possible for you to come to this Continent, Major Shit-shoveller,” Hesse shot back.

“And the people who would like to make a profit by keeping this War going as long as possible, so that more Germans can be hired by King George to fight his own subjects, ‘Sir’,” the former shit-shoveller threw back at the man who reminded him of Foreman Richter, Baron von Edinger and every other crap-faced bureaucrat he remembered from back home. “Irish Fever. A disease that kills people, and a treatment which will save those who are....important, Sir. Much cleaner and more selective than the small-pox-infested blankets which the British and French gave to the Indians. I can deliver such a modern miracle and politically-manipulative tool to you.”

“You mean Doctor Whiteman can,” Hesse asserted, as Albert felt caught, and threatened. “Who was supposed to be here an hour ago,” he continued as the ever-punctual banker representing parties he never named gazed at his pocket watch.

“He was delayed,” Albert stuttered. “With patients. But he gave me complete authority to negotiate on his behalf, and to sign whatever needs to be signed, Sir.”

“And you have a signed letter documenting this fact, Major?” Herr Hesse pressed.

Albert put on his best all is well grin and rummaged through his pockets, then stopped, pulling out shreads of paper. He turned to the ‘Countessa’, grabbed her by the collar and pulled out a gold-handled dagger. “Rachel! You ate my papers again! This time I will cut ALL your hair off, below the scalp! And your breasts!”

“Not necessary, Sir,” a voice rang out behind him, the figure emerging from the shadows behind him, having been there since before he arrived, so it seemed. “I am Doctor Whiteman, Sir,” the visitor said with a bow, delivering all seven of his medical diaries on the table.

Albert felt like he saw a ghost as the man he thought dead, his ex-partner, made notes on the terms of agreement in handwriting that matched that on the diaries. “Hans!” he growled through gritted teeth as Hesse seemed to be pleased with the ghost’s appearance, convinced of his claim.

“You speak good German, Doctor Whiteman,” Hesse complimented the English Physician-Scientist who seemed to be better at German than he had heard. “You don’t seem to need a translator, as I have been informed that you did.”

“I listen to others, then try to speak to them in their own language,” Hans said with mannerisms which matched Whiteman’s actions as much as the clothes which matched his normal and distinctively-light brown attire. He turned to Albert, speaking in Anglicized German. “Major Stein, please tell our business associate where we store and produce the goods that he desires.”

“But...but...” Albert stuttered, noting a change in people in the tavern. Less Redcoats, more plain coats, the ladies of pleasure fleeing the streets outside. “This is not our usual business practice, Doctor,” he said, looking around the room with suspicion, and terror.

“As is breaking into a cold sweat which smells of fear, and deceit, Sir?” Hesse inquired, rising from his chair, getting up and taking with him the valise filled with what sounded like gold coins, and walking out the door. As he walked towards the door, Albert’s bitch stopped beating herself, and looked into his face. “Maria!” Albert uttered in sheer disbelief, turning around to the good ‘Doctor’. “And you! Hans Muller! You traitor! Coward! ‘Man’ who helped Washington capture his own men at Trenton!” Then, remembering his face from somewhere else after his disappearance, “And pervert ‘girlie man’ who---”

Hans countered with a very manly slap on Albert’s face, just as the Hessian Major had turned the apparently still-Loyalist patrons in the room against him. Albert replied with a boyish smile, and two broken teeth. “Well, Miss whatever you were, or are...I suppose we should settle this like the kind of men who we really are.”

With that, Albert pulled out his sword and slashed off Maria’s dress, the blade firmly on Hans neck, his spare piston on Maria’s head. “Tell her what you did with the Countessa Else What you really did!”

“What was necessary,” Hans admitted.

Albert smiled as Maria's mouth dropped to the floor, . "Details...Details! How you sucked her flesh. Kissed her bussom."

"I did what was necessary," Hans repeated, but from a place Albert hardly recognized. "As what I do now is necessary."

Hans pulled a pistol out of her coat, aiming it at Albert's heart. The Major laughed, as Hans' hands shook. . "Your eyes say 'yes', but your hands say 'no', and your pathetic soul will not let you live with yourself if you do it."

Albert was right. Hans didn't fire, though he could have. And should have. "I will kill this woman, the bitch who was stupid enough to love you, if you don't kill me! Or at least try to. You coward. Disgrace to your uniform, your countrymen, and your manhood."

Still, Hans couldn't do it. Albert felt himself talking with Hans again as they had spoken without words in the 'good old' days of shoveling shit in Hesse Cassel. "Go home, the rest of you cowards!" he announced to the patrons of the tavern. "That is an order!"

Albert shot into the air. The patrons fled the room, all save one. A woman in a white dress with a smile as cold as his. "Ah, Lady Else! We are partners again, yes?"

She nodded 'no', and pulled a double barrel pistol out of her petticoat. The bullet found its way into Albert's back, landing him on the floor. Unable to move his arms, or legs, but still alive. She turned around to a mirror, took a look at the reflection and said. "The Baron von Edinger is dead. I remember now, I paid someone to make him dead, and he died. Many months ago. As I will be dead soon too." With that, the second barrel went into her skull, falling onto Albert's chest.

"I can't move my legs or arms. Kill me, someone, please!" Albert pleaded.

The tables were turned to Hans now, as he weighed the options, and pulled out another pistol from under his coat. Hans knelt next to his fallen former comrade. "Herr Hesse?" he inquired.

"The papers in my right breast pocket," he replied. Maria retrieved the documents, looked at them, shock in her face. "Bankers who own other bankers, and kings."

“The location where Irish Fever spores are kept, and the treatments which cure it?” Hans pressed as he waved the limbs Albert couldn’t feel like dolls in front of his tortured face.

“A medical miracle,” Albert related. “Whiteman was a brilliant doctor. But a bad business man.”

“Which are located...where?” Maria growled, pounding Hans in the face. “Where? Where?” she grunted as Hans watched.

“Right breast pocket!” Albert screamed. Hans retrieved the document, a map which seemed in order and in all details correct. And something else....a letter written to Maria.

“Read it at my funeral, Hans,” Albert pleaded, moving his eyes towards his sword. “Please?”

Hans and Maria read the letter, considered its contents, and noted the date when it was written.

“Please!” its writer pleaded from a voice he still could recall as he hoped to breath his last. “Do the right thing! The honest thing! Live by the sword, die by the----“

Albert’s ghost completed the Biblical passage as Hans’ hand wielded the sword and separated head from body. It rolled down in between the now-dead ‘Lady Else’s’ legs, an event that would wind up in Hans’ diary or maybe not. For now, other matters had to be tended to.

CHAPTER 44

The honor of lighting the torch to the barn went to Martha, still alive somehow, but with injuries under her dress that she didn't want talked about, or mentioned, in Hans' diary. Watching the ceremony was 'Private Roberta', her identity found out by General Washington, who dismissed her from the Army, the papers reading 'Robert' as the recipient of the distinguished discharge. As was now rebel Sergeant Schmitt, Hans' Hessian drill instructor who found himself under Albert's command then thrown in with the other expendable Hessians and British soldiers whose fate it was to die in Rebel uniforms with falsified names of a disease that didn't exist on any legally-sanctioned military report. Plato, Hans' faithful and happily overfed mongrel dog, seemed fascinated with the way the flames burst open bottles inside, barking boldly with each new spark they emitted.

"You know that this barn burning and the destruction of all of its contents never happened, Major Miller," General Washington said to Hans, handing him back the diary which he has kept for 'safe keeping' while on special assignment.

"Herr Muller, if you must," the grateful reply. "Hans, if your position allows you to, George."

No one in Washington's command called him by his Christian name, but Hans felt entitled. He had just saved the American Army and its civilian supporters from the kind of attack that no musket, sword or bayonet could defeat. And he knew things that Washington wanted to be kept from everyone. "In generations to come, biological warfare will be as common as artillery. The world is not ready for weapons that destroy so many innocent people."

"And which can backfire and kill the victors in such a War, General?" Hans answered, knowing that Washington's compassion was based in pragmatism as much as his advanced intellect.

His Excellency looked again at Dr. Whiteman's medical diaries. "Were you able to find out who was willing to pay for this 'service' your friend Albert and the good doctor was offering to the British Army?"

"No, General," Hans confessed, head lowered in shame and regret. "But Herr Hesse seemed to be more concerned with money than power, or glory."

"A tallish gentleman with one blue eye and one green one?" Washington inquired.

“Yes how did you know?” Hans gasped.

His Excellency put his hand on the shit-shoveller turned Hessian officer, turned mountain man, turned American spy, turned...whatever he was now. “Accept my unofficial commission as a Major in my Army, Hans, and I will tell you how I know.”

It was an offer that couldn't be refused. One that would insure Maria and now Hans' adopted son Wolfgang a good living in the short term, an honored place in the new America if this Washington's now swelled ranks of new recruits were as effective in battle as they were eager to join up. Talk about the French coming into the fight for the New Republic was now more than talk. But as this Revolution was about freedom, new recruits were allowed to ask questions before they consented to obey orders.

“You hesitate,” Washington pressed. “Why?”

“Killing. After a killing which was...necessary...when I was a boy, I was terrified. After cutting Albert's throat, I felt...accomplished, in a way I never want to feel accomplished again,” Hans asserted from a voice that connected to all of his faculties and the deepest of his inner perspectives.

“This new country needs your brain, not your brawn, Hans,” Washington asserted. “Your adaptability to get information from people, and about people.”

“And the way I can shake a wicked hoof on the dance-floor, or in the bedroom?” Hans continued, with a ‘Hansela’ smile, pursing his lips seductively to Washington.

The General seemed taken aback, something in himself awakened which was best kept sound asleep.

“Just kidding, George, General, your Excellency, Sir...” Hans said less progressively less playfully to the man who seemed to be suppressing every part of him that was playful, humorous or perhaps human, in the Cause of making himself a better servant of Humanity.

A rider clad in buckskins and a hat that was more holes than cloth galloped in with an envelope. A uniformed Captain looked at the letter, assessed its validity, then delivered it to the General, who opened it and read its contents, alone. General

George turned more aloof, his sense of military urgency put back into high alert. But something that seemed handleable. After a thirty second private conference with his intellect, his conscience, and God, he summoned the Captain, gave him a set of instructions, and mounted his horse.

Washington rode into the woods to the right with his mounted Negro aid, both riders showing off their horsemanship by means of necessity of the terrain as well as practical matters of military morale. The troops who had come with him, or who had been brought to join him, marched down the road to the left, led by the Captain.

Hans remained at the bonfire with Plato, sat down on a log, and wrote in the diary that he hoped would become a book, which would be read by mothers to their ideal-seeking young sons, or aging sons to their ailing mothers. As for joining Washington, the General made one more appeal to Hans, written on the margins of the first page.

“The price of liberty is eternal vigilance. A mind infused by Inner Passion must always be thinking, a heart opened to the needs of others must always give, or destroy itself. Your friend, George Washington,” Hans read. “An offer we can’t refuse,” He said to Plato, and to himself. “And a fact that we can never ignore.”

With that, Hans and Plato followed the troops, but walking rather than marching. Someone had to keep the drummers beating to the beat of freedom, an obligation that left the Enlightened receivers of such more responsibility than choice.