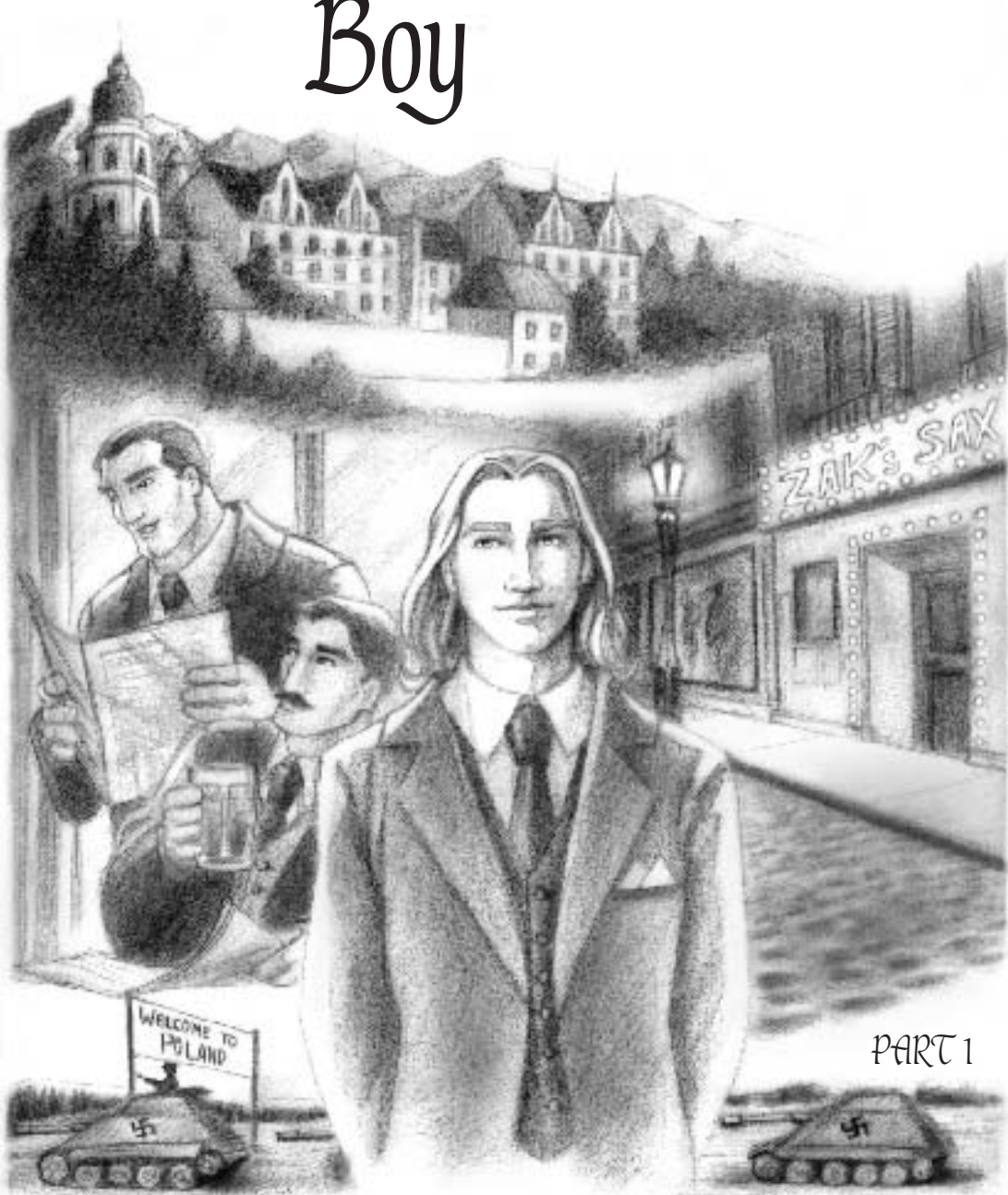


The Shoeshine Boy



PART 1

Note: While this story takes place during the historic era of World War 2, and borrows some of its characters and events, the story itself, along with the principality of Thumbringen and its people, are fictional.*

- 1 -

Thumbringen

Bart Davis, the American steel tycoon*, was sipping his usual power breakfast drink of blended eggs, whey*, and molasses, as he sat on the sun balcony of his New York penthouse. With him, as always, was his muscular friend, bodyguard, and long-time advisor, Max Willie—an ex-prize fighter. At one meter 92*, with a build like a star football tackle*, Max's looks alone were enough to discourage most anybody from harassing his boss. "Hey, boss, look at this!" Max said animatedly, pointing to an article in the newspaper he was reading.

"Just a minute, I'm finishing the comics." Bart laughed to himself, then looked up from his paper reluctantly. "What is it?"

"I think this is the answer you've been looking for—both a cure for your ulcers and a place to hide some of your well-earned cash from the IRS* vultures. Look here."

Max started to read out loud in his lower Bronx* accent:

Surrounded by Fascism*, Tax-free Country Flourishes

Buried in Europe's stronghold of fascism is a community where people think and write and speak as they please, without supervi-

**principality: the territory of a reigning prince*

**tycoon: a wealthy and powerful industrial leader or businessman*

**whey: the watery part of curdled milk*

**1.92 meters = six feet four inches*

**football tackle: in American football, one of the players who lines up directly in front of the opposite team; often a large and fairly heavy-set person*

**IRS: Internal Revenue Service, tax collection agency of the US government*

**Bronx: a district of New York City.*

**Fascism: a system of dictatorial government, often combined with extreme nationalism and actively suppressing any opposition; during World War II, the Axis Powers consisted of the three strongest Fascist governments of the time: Germany under Hitler, Italy under Mussolini, and Japan under General Tojo*

Illustrations by Sabine

Recommended age: 9 years and up. (May be read by younger children at parents' discretion.)

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sion, free of censorship, and the fascists' prying eyes. The benevolent Prince Kurtis Martin III is ruler of the tiny autonomous* domain that lies snugly nestled between the borders of Switzerland and Germany. He has guaranteed his people peace, plenty, employment, and health care. It seems impossible that such a small German-speaking country could maintain its sovereignty* on the very border of Hitler's Third Reich*—yet it thrives in peace.

The principality, only some fifty square miles*, and just marginally smaller than its more well-known counterpart, Liechtenstein, is perhaps one of the world's oldest and smallest independent countries. It boasts a fertile Alpine valley, as well as several impressive slopes. Zinstadt, its capital and only city of note, rests squarely beneath the hilltop fortress that is the ruling prince's official residence.

"This is the part you're going to love," Max continued.

Taxes are almost nonexistent. The annual tax on a six-room house is thirty-four cents! The government receives income enough from its four industries—cattle raising, wine, masonry, and tourism—to run itself.

"But isn't Europe on the brink of war?" asked Bart.

"They were, but last I heard this Munich Deal*, or whatever it was, changed all that."

"Perhaps, but I thought I heard something about Hitler having annexed some other Czechoslovakian territories."

"I don't know, boss, but this country sounds like it's safe enough, and it's so small Hitler probably doesn't even know it exists. I mean, we wouldn't have known about it if I hadn't have happened to see this article."

"Well then, don't waste time, Willie! Book us the next flight there you can. Let's check this 'haven' out."

"Uh ... there is one problem, boss."

***autonomous:** independent, self-governing; not subject to the rules of any outside authority

***sovereignty:** the authority wielded by a supreme and independent ruler or ruling body

***Hitler's Third Reich:** See page 15 for more on Hitler and the history of the Third Reich.

***fifty square miles** = about 130 square kilometers

***Munich Pact:** In 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, along with representatives from France and Italy, signed the Munich Pact with German leader Adolf Hitler. The pact agreed to Hitler's demands for the return of the Sudetenland—a German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia—to Germany. Chamberlain announced afterward that there would be "peace in our time," but the agreement prevented war only temporarily. For many Western nations the agreement became a symbol of the dangers of compromising with the enemy.

“What’s that?”

“No airport.”

“What about getting there by train?”

“No train station. But leave it to me, boss. I think I can arrange something.”

* * *

“Heinrich Martin, have you completed your essay on Poland?” asked Mr. Schmidt, looking up from his bifocals. He was young Prince Heinrich’s personal tutor.

“Almost,” Heinrich replied, running his hands through his shoulder-length, dark blonde hair. “Give me one more day, Mr. Schmidt.”

“May I remind you that it was due yesterday,” Mr. Schmidt said sternly.

Heinrich sighed. “Why do I need to write these long essays? I see no point.”

“If you are to rule Thumbringen one day, you must know about your close and distant neighbors,” Mr. Schmidt replied.

“But I am bored with all this book learning. I’m seventeen years old. I’ve lived all of my life within these walls. I rarely go out, except to special functions.”

“And you know why that is, don’t you?”

“*Ja, Ja**, you’ve told me a hundred times. We live in dangerous times. Our country has escaped war for hundreds of years by being wise and prudent. The enemies of our country’s freedom would give anything to get their hands on me and use me to force their demands on our people.”

“Isn’t that a good enough reason?”

“Sometimes I think my greatest enemy is this classroom.”

“There you are wrong.” Mr. Schmidt shook his index finger once for effect. “The things you learn here will help you to govern wisely when you become ruler. Don’t be too quick to desire release.”

The tutor pointed to Heinrich’s zoology experiment in the corner, and his pet Labrador Retriever who was sleeping on the floor. He continued, “Look at your guinea pig chewing on his cage trying to gain his freedom. The dog is watching below, earnestly hoping the guinea pig will succeed and become his next meal.”

Heinrich moaned. “I’m not feeling too well. I would like to rest.”

The tutor threw up his hands. “All right, then, but tomorrow you will have that essay on my desk!”

“Of course I will,” Heinrich replied.

“Of course you will, my diligent student,” Mr. Schmidt replied. He then turned and left the room.

Heinrich lay down on his sofa and his mind started to wander. *I’m so bored in this stuffy old palace full of dusty books, shadowy canvases and ancient armor. The whole world is crashing headlong towards war and here I am studying about Polish history. Soon I might be the reigning prince, and then what? More restrictions, and ministers planning my day for me.*

He picked up the *Thumbringer Zeitung**, which was lying on the coffee table, and read:

**Ja*: “Yes”

**Thumbringer Zeitung*: “Thumbringer Times”; a local newspaper

Zak's Sax—Zurich's hottest swing band club. For the coolest cats in town. Blow your wig and dance till dawn.

This is it, Heinrich thought. A way to escape this palace. ... Zurich is just two hours from here—not too far. But how am I going to get there? My father would never let me go.

Heinrich glanced up at the smiling portrait of his father, Kurtis Martin III, that hung on the wall. The portrait was a familiar decoration on many walls in Thumbringen. The tall ruler sported a wispy mustache. His startling blue eyes were set firmly amid the creases of his wizened face, and the steady gaze of the portrait exuded a certain calmness and serenity that seemed to rest over his entire domain.

As the reigning Fürst*, his full name and title was Prince Kurtis Martin Maria Alex Alfonso Johannes Karl Ignatius Gerhacus Heinrich Michael Georg Benedictus Majella von Thumbringen, Duke of Zinstadt and Truppendorf. He probably was the ruler with the longest name, though he governed one of the smallest countries. His subjects just called him Prince Martin. They thought of him as a wise and kind father, for he had protected them many times from adversities, and resisted the kind of lavish luxuries and pomp and cer-

emony that other monarchs of Europe seemed to enjoy surrounding themselves with. To the best of his ability, he made himself available to anyone who needed help.

Heinrich's thoughts were suddenly interrupted when his father strode lightly into the room.

“*Wie geht's**?” Prince Martin asked cheerily, his hands resting casually in the belt loops of his lederhosen*.

“*Ganz gut**,” Heinrich replied, a bit unconvincingly.

“*Wirklich**?” Are you going to come to the performance at the castle tonight? It might entertain you. It's a story of knights from the days of the minnesingers*.”

“I don't think so. Knights don't have much relevance for us today.”

“You'd be surprised how much history repeats itself. There is a reason that these stories have lived on for hundreds of years. I think you will enjoy this story. The hero reminds me of you.”

“How depressing,” Heinrich murmured.

“Cheer up! Don't be so glum, my son. Things could be worse, and they probably will be. But why dull your life by worrying about it now?” Prince Martin chuckled. “Seriously, the play will help take your mind off your troubles.”

“Well,” Heinrich finally replied, “I don't have anything else to do. Why not?”

**Fürst*: Prince

**wie geht's*: “how's it going”

**lederhosen*: traditional leather pants native to some Alpine regions.

**ganz gut*: “all's well” or “pretty good”

**wirklich*: “really”

**minnesingers*: the minstrels of the 14th century

The Lost Knight

Heinrich sat next to his father in the outdoor auditorium especially designed for summer performances. The weekly castle-hall pageant was a major tourist attraction.

The lights dimmed. The orchestra set the mood with a mysterious, haunting melody. The open stage was set with a forest scene. Soon Heinrich was swept up into another world and time.

A knight returns from his search for the Holy Grail*. He leads his horse by the reins. The sun has almost set. He is lost. The owls are hooting. Luminous eyes of unknown creatures peer out from the branches. The knight speaks:

“The wished-for path that leads me homeward has vanished from me. I wander ceaselessly, driven onward by my ladylove who waits for me. Countless distresses, battles and troubles have driven me far from the pathway. I thought I knew the way, but now despair overtakes me. Alas, I lie down to die.”

Heinrich’s father looked over to his son to see if he was enjoying the play.

Heinrich was visibly moved. *I feel lost too sometimes, but where is my ladylove? What am I seeking for?*

**Holy Grail: in stories, the cup that Jesus drank from at the last supper, and which became the focus of many fictional tales that told of a quest to find this mythical cup, and of the powers or miracles that would come to the person who found it*

The knight lies down. A light appears on one side of the stage, but the knight remains sleeping. The luminescent circle settles on the stage and dims, revealing an angel. Her flowing white dress is radiant. Her long blonde hair blows about her supple body enticingly.



Black smoke rises from the ground on the other side. From it a dark figure slithers out.

“I have come for the life of this knight,” the dark figure demands.

“He is under my protection,” the angel responds. “Begone!”

“I will not leave him without a fight!”

The two spirit beings wrestle dramatically on the forest floor. Finally the angel strikes the demon in the head with her sword. “In the name of Jesus Christ—leave!”

Screaming, the demon begins to retreat.

The sun comes up and the dark figure vanishes. The angel transforms herself into a farm maid and bends over the knight, offering a bowl of milk and bread.

“Awaken, O knight. The day has dawned. Eat this for strength for your journey.”

The knight is startled and reaches for his sword. “Who are you?” he asks.

“I see that you are lost. Your way home is two days’ travel over those mountains to the north.”

“How do you know where my home is?” the knight asks, as he gulps down the milk and bread.

“From the emblem on your shield. I must warn you that many dangers await you on your way. Here. Take this magic key. When you are in trouble, hold up this key. Its power will drive away any force of evil, and attract the forces that can aid you. Remember to never let it leave your side. I must go now.”

“But who are you? ... What?” The knight is confused, though thankful.

The farm maid gets up, and disappears from sight.

Still bewildered, the knight arises and continues on his journey.

The dark figure, who is listening in the shadows, realizes that he must steal the key in order to defeat the knight.

The knight comes to a river, which is too wide and swift for him to cross. Night is fast falling and he hears strange noises. It is the dark figure sneaking up on him.

Use your key, Heinrich urged the actor in his mind.

The knight looks at the key in his hand, and then holds it up. The key starts to glow brightly, and the dark figure quickly retreats into the darkness.

The knight now sees a cloaked figure standing beside a fire on the other side of the river. The figure yells, “Do you want to cross over? Wait there! I’ll help you!” The hooded man steps into the swirling current and crosses over. He motions to the knight. “Climb up on my shoulders.”

Hesitantly, the knight obeys and is carried by the stranger to the other side of the river. After he is put down on the shore, the knight looks around to see where he is. When he turns around, his helper has disappeared.

The knight goes over to the place where he had seen the figure sitting by the fire and finds no trace of the fire.

Heinrich pondered the play’s meaning for him. *Could there be dark forces trying to destroy me? Could there be angels helping me? Is there a magic key that will help me find my way?*

After escaping many more attempts by the dark force to steal the knight’s key and to make him lose his way, the knight finally arrives home to his ladylove.

By the end of the play, Heinrich felt as if he were the knight and there was hope. He knew that he too would find what he was looking for.

The performance over, Heinrich excused himself. Acting on impulse, he climbed the stairs that led backstage. On the table he saw a stagehand's jacket and various other props. No one was in sight.

Then something caught his eye. On the side of one of the boxes was a large printed sign: Schwarzholz Theatre Company, Zurich.

Heinrich's heart skipped a beat. *Just where I would like to go! That's where the swing club is!*

- 3 -

The Swing Club

Acting quickly and furtively, Heinrich put the stagehand's jacket on and started loading up the equipment in one of the buses.

After the work was finished, he boarded the bus and sat down to enjoy the ride. The bus drove out of the castle and towards the main road, which led to Switzerland. About two hours later they arrived, and Heinrich was let off at the city's central square.

After asking a few people for directions, Heinrich found *Zak's Sax*. He entered the plush club. Even though it was close to midnight, the band music was blaring at full volume. It looked like they were going to keep their promise of dancing till dawn.

The drums pounded a steady beat as clarinets blared. The dancers

clapped and shouted words to the rhythm. Heinrich had never seen so much human energy in one place. The young men threw their dance partners high above their heads. The girls soared through the air, then were deftly caught as they came down. The young men tossed their partners boldly between their legs or jumped over them in leapfrog fashion. It was wild and brazenly beautiful choreography, as couples slid all over the polished floor.

Heinrich could not muster up the courage to ask someone to dance, so he was relieved when a black-haired girl with a low-cut dress grabbed him from his seat. She pulled him up and soon they were on the dance floor. He followed her wild gyrations* as best he could.

When the music slowed down, they had a chance to talk—though she carried most of the conversation. Heinrich discovered her name—Astrid Braun. They were both the same age. She lived in Munich, Germany, worked in a hotel named the Müncher Hof, hated politics and having to work for a living, was here to visit her aunt for a few days, loved swing dancing, photography and painting.

An interesting person, Heinrich thought.

The time passed too quickly as they talked and laughed. Heinrich would have to leave soon if he was to catch the last train to the border and then a taxi to the palace. Astrid gave him a token kiss—which left him wanting more—and a phone number, which

**gyrations: movements with a circular motion*

gave him hopes of seeing her again. He wanted the evening to last forever, but it was time to go.

Walking down a deserted cobblestone street that led to the station, he saw four teenagers walking towards him, dressed in brown uniforms and wearing red swastika* armbands. Their military hats made them look fierce, all the more so in this dark, deserted alley. Heinrich tried to step around them, but they blocked his way.

“Hey, *Junge**, nice to meet you,” one of the boys said with a smirk.

Another jeered, “Maybe you should say *Jude**, with that long hair of his.”

“Where are you going?” another one asked.

“I’m just going home,” Heinrich answered, trying to act calm.

“Home? Where might that be—Jerusalem?”

“None of your business. Let me pass.”

“Not until you say ‘*Heil Hitler**’ and give a donation to our Nazi Youth Organization.”

“I didn’t know Switzerland had any Nazi organizations,” Heinrich taunted.

“You’re looking at it, and you have the privilege of being the first donor.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“Because if you don’t, we’ll take your money away from you anyway and you won’t be able to walk for a month.”

“Don’t you realize who I am?”

“Let me guess, ... some Jew musician who just left the swing club.”

“I’m Prince Heinrich Martin, of Thumbringen.”

“Sure you are—and I’m the king of Switzerland.” The boys all burst out in a chorus of laughter.

“Come on, boy. Give us a nice *Hitler Gruf**!”

Heinrich gave no response.

The Nazi youth looked to the other thugs. “Let’s give him a beating and teach him a lesson.” Then he turned to Heinrich and barked, “Don’t you know you should show respect for a superior race?”

Heinrich tried to make a run for it, but they soon grabbed him and overcame him. He remembered the play about the angel who protected the knight traveler from the dark forces. *I could use a key like that now. Dear Lord, please help me!*

One of the thugs took his wallet as the others took their turns punching him. They stripped Heinrich and threw his clothes off the bridge. Then they each grabbed hold of an arm or leg and started to chant in unison as they swung him back and forth. Heinrich seemed destined to join his clothes in the foul black waters of the river, some 20 meters below.

“One ... two...”

**swastika*: the symbol of the Nazi party; a cross with the four ends of its arms bent in a clockwise direction

**Junge*: “young boy”

**Jude*: “Jew”

**Heil Hitler*: a Nazi greeting meaning “Hail Hitler”

**Hitler Gruf*: (pronounced “Hitler Goose”) literally the “Hitler greeting”—the hand salute that accompanied the “Heil Hitler” greeting

Their chanting was abruptly interrupted as the blare of headlights and a honking horn from a black limousine that came towards them skidded to a stop right in front of them.

“Hey, you goons! Let the lad alone!” It was Max, the bodyguard, who stepped out of the car ready for a fight.

“Ein Amerikaner!”*

“Ja, a big one, too! We’d best leave.”

The boys dropped Heinrich roughly on the street and ran quickly off into the night.

Max knelt down and helped Heinrich get up on his feet again.

Bart Davis stepped out of his limo and walked over to Heinrich, holding out his hand. “We’re here to help,” Bart said slowly, hoping the lad would understand.

Heinrich was glad that he’d paid attention during his English lessons.

“Thank you, Mister... ?”

“Ah, you can speak English. Good. That’ll make things easier on all of us. I’m Davis, Bart Davis, and this is my bodyguard.”

“Thank you again. I’m sorry to have caused you trouble.”

“No trouble, kid,” Max replied.

“We can take you to a hospital,” Bart offered. “You have been pretty badly beaten up.”

“I’m all right, I think,” Heinrich said. “Only my clothes were thrown in the river, and are ruined for sure. And of course they took my wallet.”

“At least you’re still alive,” Max commented.

Bart wanted to help somehow.

“Where do you live? Maybe we can bring you home.”

“In Zinstadt, Thumbringen. I live in the palace.”

“You don’t say, the palace, huh?” Bart raised an eyebrow, but decided to keep his doubts to himself. “Well, we’re going to Thumbringen ourselves, and you’re welcome to come along. Hop in the car. Sorry about your clothes. At this late hour, all I can offer you is an extra blanket I have in the back.”

“I appreciate it,” Heinrich said.

Once inside the limo, Max offered him some hot soup he had saved from dinner. “Here, kid, drink some of this.”

Never had hot onion soup tasted so good as it did from that thermos. Heinrich explained to his new acquaintances who he was and what had happened to him as they drove on towards Thumbringen.

The music on the radio was interrupted by a German announcer who read what sounded like an urgent proclamation of some sort.

“What’s the man talking about?” Max asked, seeing the stunned look on Heinrich’s face. “Did you understand what he said?”

“Of course,” Heinrich replied. “The man said that the forces of the Third Reich have begun an invasion of Poland. All units of the Swiss Army have been put on full alert.”

Bart was obviously surprised. “What about all of Chamberlain’s promises of world peace?”

“Peace?” Heinrich asked. “There has been little hope of peace after Hitler forced Czechoslovakia to join

**Ein Amerikaner: “an American”*

his Reich. And now that Poland is falling, who knows what will come next?"

"How does this affect our plans, Mr. Davis?" asked Max.

"Never let it be said that I let a bully push me around," Bart answered defiantly. "Keep driving!"

They arrived at the palace two hours later.

"Well, here is where we let you off. I'm sure they can take care of you from here."

Heinrich got out of the car wrapped only in a blanket and started to approach the palace gates, then turned around. "Thanks for everything."

"Don't mention it," Bart replied with an amused smile. "If you're indeed the prince, perhaps someday *you'll* have to save *my* life!" With that, Bart rolled up his window, and the limo drove off.

Heinrich walked confidently up to the palace guard. "Let me in."

"I'm sorry. It is past visiting hours," the guard said, as he looked at the pitiful figure shivering before him.

"Come on!" Heinrich said. "It's me, Prince Heinrich!"

Taking a closer look, the guard suddenly recognized him.

"Oh, but of course, your highness! Right away. I'm sorry I didn't recognize you, your highness!" the man stammered nervously. In fact, the guards had been told to keep a lookout for Heinrich. Indeed, the whole palace was in an uproar at the disappearance of Prince Martin's son.

Immediately Heinrich was escorted into the palace. Prince Martin was waiting.

"Heinrich? Where have you been?"

Heinrich could not bear to look into his father's eyes.

"What has happened to you? I have been so worried! After the performance I looked everywhere for you. There are guards out looking for you at this moment. I was afraid you were kidnapped. Are you all right?"

"Yes, ... I ... I wanted a little excitement so I went to the swing club in Zurich, but I met some Nazi thugs who beat me up."

"...And could have killed you! Well, excitement is what you wanted, and excitement is what you got. ... You could have asked!"

"I didn't think you would give me permission."

"We could have sent a bodyguard with you," Prince Martin replied quickly.

"I'm sorry, Father." Heinrich glanced up and then looked down again.

"Don't think I don't understand how you feel. I was once young too, you know." Prince Martin laid his hand on his son's shoulder. "But now we must clean you up and get you dressed before you catch your death of cold. We will talk more about this tomorrow.

"I am glad you are safe and home again. Get a good sleep now and then we can concentrate on some urgent matters of state that have come up. Hitler has just invaded Poland, and God knows what kind of consequences that may have for the rest of us."

* * *

The next morning, after Heinrich had explained all that had happened to him, his father told him, "Heinrich, don't you realize that you are the future

of our kingdom? It was very irresponsible for you to run away like that. You endangered not only yourself, but the future and security of our principality.”

Heinrich was silent.

His father continued, “I have enough to worry about without the thought of my son getting himself kidnapped. To help you realize the seriousness of your actions, I will have to give you one week of manual work. You will report to the head steward who will give you your duties.”

“You’re right, Father. It was a foolish thing to do. Please forgive me,” Heinrich said.

“Of course I forgive you. I was once impetuous* like you. But this is how we become wise—by learning from our mistakes,” his father said as he embraced him.

- 4 -

Secret Weapon

A personal secretary entered Hitler’s office and announced, with a suspicious air of familiarity, “Herr* Führer*, the weapon’s team is here with their report. Do you wish to see them now?”

“Yes, I have been expecting them. Just a minute.” The leader was posing for a painting, which pictured him as a modern-day Napoleon set against a background of dark storm clouds. A ray of light shone through to illuminate Hitler’s face.

Hitler nodded to the artist. “You may take a break.”

The artist thanked him and set his brushes down, bowed his head in respect and left.

The three visitors walked into the room with great bravado* and were seated. First was Reichsmarschall* Goring, accompanied by the director of the weapons research project, and lastly the propaganda minister, Herr Goebbels.

“What do you have to show me?” Hitler asked. “What progress have you made?”

“We have achieved a major breakthrough, Mein Führer,” said Goebbels.

“That is good. The German people desire it.”

Goebbels saw his chance to score a few points with Hitler. “We have been circulating rumors that we are developing secret weapons that will bring a speedy victory to this war. We must give them a reason to hope.”

Göring grew a little jealous. “Yes, some of them are quite fantastic,” he remarked sarcastically, “like the aircraft that we are supposed to be developing that can fly so fast that it will have to fire backwards to avoid colliding with its own bullets.”

“Is such an aircraft possible?” Hitler asked.

“Not yet, Mein Führer, but we will work on it if you desire,” the weapon’s scientist noted.

**impetuous*: acting on a sudden impulse

**Herr*: the German form of Mr.

**Führer*: a title by which Hitler was known, meaning “the leader”

**bravado*: a boastful boldness or courage

**Reichsmarschall*: “state marshal”; a high-ranking military officer

Göring continued. “Or my other favorite is the gigantic compressed air pumps capable of scattering entire divisions like chaff on the threshing floor with hurricane-force blasts.”

Everyone was now laughing profusely.

“But you have come to tell me of one that will indeed work, haven’t you?” the Führer asked.

“*Ja, ja*. I think that this one will,” the scientist answered nervously.

Hitler noted uncertainty in his tone of voice. A storm cloud began to gather on his face.

Göring saw it was time to be more positive. “We have been working on the possibility of a totally new kind of weapon. Its power lies in uranium.”

“Uranium? Uranium!” Hitler mulled the word over his tongue like savoring a new wine.

Seeing his interest, the scientist began talking affectionately of his new toy. “Uranium is a dense, hard metallic element that is silvery-white in color. It is ductile*, malleable*, and capable of taking a high polish. In air the metal tarnishes and when finely divided breaks into flames. It is a poor conductor of electricity. Uranium 235, when bombarded by slow neutrons of nuclear fission...”

Goebbels touched his shoulder. “Please, remember that we are not scientists.”

“Yes, I’m sorry. I got carried away.”

“Tell me more about what it can do,” Hitler said with a gleam in his eyes.

“With a kilo or so of uranium 235 we could develop a bomb with the destructive power equivalent to thousands of



**ductile: able to be shaped into different forms*

**malleable: able to bend or transform without breaking*

tons of TNT*,” the scientist said, summarizing the matter all too simply for his own taste.

“Extremely interesting. Tell me more,” Hitler said.

“It is atomic, it is what we call ‘radioactive.’ Allow me to explain.”

The scientist, at Hitler’s cue, pulled out several charts and diagrams that illustrated his carefully prepared presentation. Realizing he was dealing with men of limited scientific understanding, he tried to keep it as simple as possible.

“This atomic bomb is like the size of any normal bomb. We call the amount of uranium needed to produce a sustained nuclear fission as the critical mass. As long as we keep it in quantities smaller than this it is fairly harmless. So what we do is design a way to keep the amounts of uranium separate until we want it to explode. We keep it separate in concentric layers of an orb and on the outside we place a layer of highly explosive material. When we explode this material it forces the separate amounts of uranium together while at the same time compressing it and making it very dense. The neutrons that are always being released by this substance then cannot help but bump into other atoms releasing more neutrons and so on. One little atom being split like this does not release much energy, but millions of them splitting in this chain reaction results in a very big boom.”

“Thus, total annihilation!” Hitler suddenly realized what power he was being shown. “Well whatever it is you

need to build such a bomb, we’ll get it. Where can we get this uranium 235?”

The scientist replied, “It is a very rare element. Uranium is fairly plentiful and there are a number of places in the world where there are quantities to be mined, but less than one percent of it is uranium 235.”

“Where are the closest deposits that can be mined?” demanded Hitler.

“According to our geological surveys, there are sizeable quantities to be mined in a region just outside our own borders, in the principality of Thumbringen.”

“You mean that small place right next door?” Hitler asked.

The men nodded.

“Can they cause us any trouble?” Hitler queried.

“As you know Herr Führer,” Göring answered, “they have no standing army, and they have never been reason for any concern before. But they are of German descent, and deserve their chance to join the Reich, especially now that it seems they could be of great service.”

“Of course,” Hitler added. “So let us embrace them at once.”

Göring continued. “I said they have been no reason for concern. I did not say they were supportive of the Reich. They are a close-knit people, deeply nationalistic, and content under Prince Kurtis Martin. They may not be too enthusiastic about relinquishing their autonomy to become part of our glorious Reich.”

“But they must!” Hitler said, clenching his fists.

**TNT: short for trinitrotoluene, a pale yellow chemical compound used in common explosives*

“In that case, Führer, I shall be most delighted to order in some troops....”

Hitler held up his hand, as a conductor would to instruct his symphony to play softly. “No, that would not be good for our political image. It is no credit for an elephant to squash an ant. And we cannot treat our Aryan* neighbors as we did the Polish. No, we will not march in with our troops. The people must ask for our help, and desire our rule over that of this prince of theirs.”

“With all due respect to the Reichsmarschall, I believe such an

operation might fall more under my area of expertise,” Goebbels interjected.

Hitler nodded, while Göring silently fumed.

“Very well,” Hitler concluded. “I shall leave this matter to you, Goebbels. But I expect results. We shall have this weapon, and we shall have the world under our feet. It is our destiny.”

“Don’t worry, Herr Führer,” Goebbels said contentedly. “Thumbringen will fall into our laps, and you shall have your bomb.”

**Aryan: In Nazi teachings, the pure, superior Germanic race*

To be continued

Hitler and the Third Reich

Born in 1889, Hitler grew up in the city of Linz, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire that was closely allied with Germany. When a Serbian nationalist assassinated the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria on June 28, 1914, a chain of threats, ultimatums, and army movements quickly escalated into World War I, with Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Turkey (the “Central Powers”) fighting against France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and later the United States.

Germany, under Kaiser William II, proved its military strength by quickly occupying large parts of France and Belgium, and by inflicting heavy casualties on the Russian armies. These Russian losses, in turn, helped to spark the Russian Revolution of 1917 that overthrew the Russian monarchy and led Russia to withdraw from the war.

The United States had by this time entered the war, however, and the Central Powers began to suffer more consistent defeats. (Sergeant York became famous during this time.) By October of 1918 most of France and Belgium had been recaptured from the Germans, and shortly thereafter the kaiser abdicated, and Germany was forced to sign an armistice that ended the war.*

Young Hitler had enthusiastically volunteered for military service at the start of the war, but after Germany’s defeat, he determined to enter politics, using the widespread resentment against the terms of the armistice to preach his vision of returning Germany to its former position of power and glory. By 1920, Hitler had become instrumental in building up the National Socialistic (Nazi)

**armistice: a truce in war to discuss terms for peace*

Labor Party, demonstrating his flair for dramatic speeches and his influence over crowds. He soon became president of the party, and by 1930 the Nazi Party was the second largest political party in the country.

In 1933, President Hindenburg of Germany invited Hitler to become chancellor*. One of Hitler's first acts as chancellor was to orchestrate the "Enabling Act" that was passed by the German Reichstag (Parliament). The act "enabled" Hitler's government to issue decrees independently of the Reichstag and the ailing president, effectively giving Hitler full dictatorial powers over the country. When the president died a year later, Hitler assumed the titles of Führer (Leader), Chancellor, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

Between 1934 and 1939, the Nazi Party established full control of all phases of life in Germany, and Hitler and his movement gained the support and even enthusiasm of the majority of the German population, which welcomed the strong, decisive, and effective government provided by the Nazi Party. Unemployment dwindled, and the country became refocused on restoring its pride, dignity, and grandeur. Unfortunately, much of this renewed focus was centered on the Nazi philosophy that the Germanic (Aryan) people were a superior race. Hitler's vision was to unite all people of German descent within their historic homelands, a "Third Reich" (empire) that would be rebuilt on the foundations of the First and Second Reich (the Holy Roman Empire of 800 to 1806 A.D., and the German empire of 1871 to 1918, which collapsed after Germany's defeat in the First World War.) Along with promoting the purity of their own people, the Nazi government also promoted the persecution of "inferior" races, including Jews, Gypsies, and others.

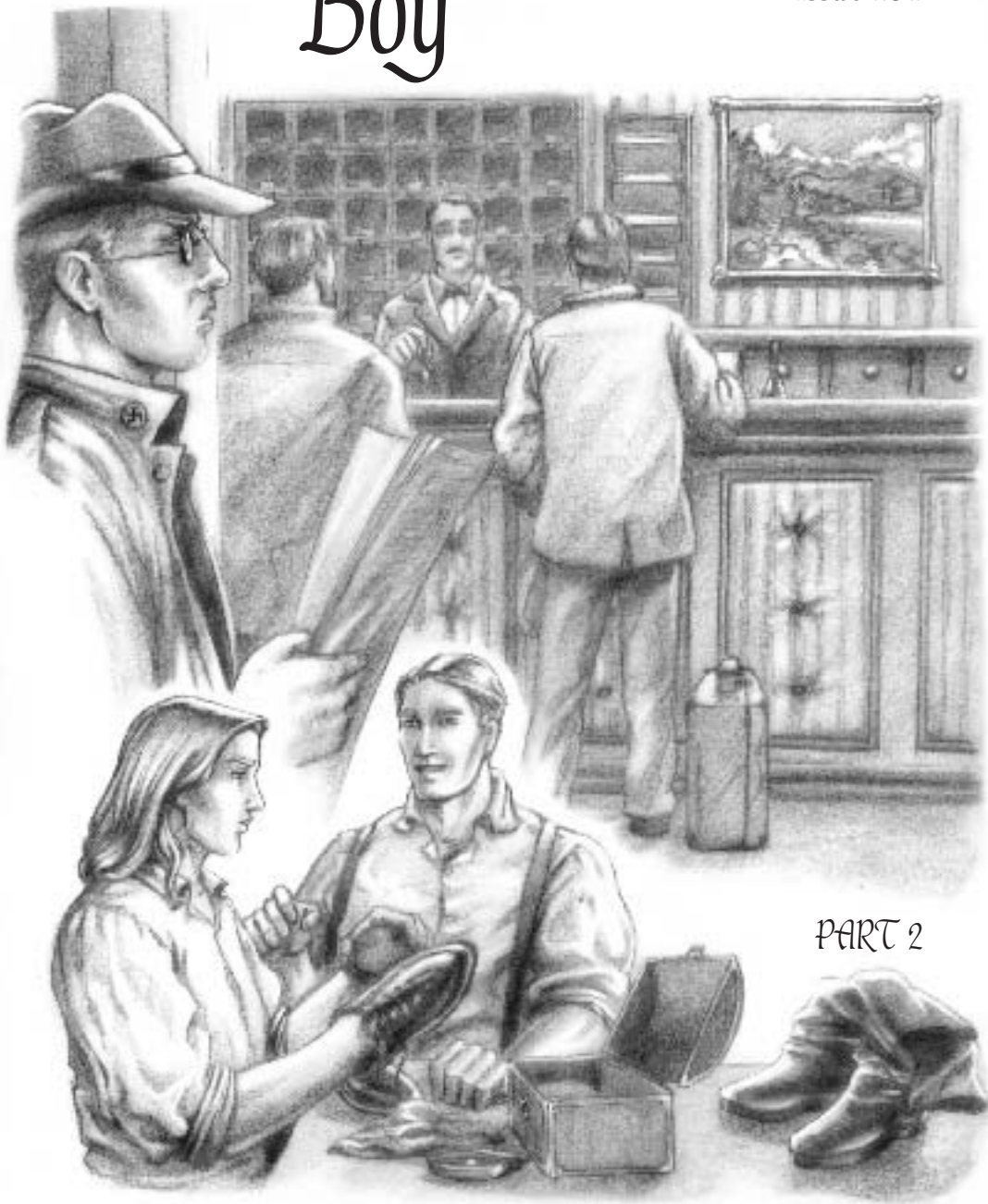
By 1938 the Nazi government and forces had grown strong enough that Hitler was ready to implement the next stage of his plan—the subjugation of non-German people and lands to create more "Lebensraum" (living space) for the Germans, with the Germans as a master race, and all others as subordinates to be organized, exploited, and also protected from the growing threat of Communism. The Munich Pact guaranteed Hitler the return of the Sudetenland, a Germanic region that had been given to Czechoslovakia after World War I. But Hitler did not stop there. He peacefully annexed the rest of Czechoslovakia, and also sent German troops to Austria, which easily agreed to incorporate itself into the Third Reich. Shortly after, having secured a Non-Aggression Pact with Russia, Hitler invaded Poland. Great Britain, however, chose to honor a pact it had with Poland, and, together with France, declared war on Germany, starting the Second World War that would end with the death of Hitler and the collapse of his "Third Reich." (Compiled from Encyclopedia Britannica and various other resources. For more on Hitler and the Second World War, see Childcare Handbook III, pages 199–210.)

***chancellor:** chief government minister, but not commander.

The Shoeshine Boy



Issue 164



PART 2

Note: While this story takes place during the historic era of World War 2, and borrows some of its characters and events, the story itself, along with the principality of Thumbringen and its people, are fictional.

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Assigned to a Mission

The week following his escapade in Zurich, Heinrich had to report for his work assignments every afternoon after his studies. Heinrich found the work a welcome break from the long hours of book study he usually had, though it was humbling to be seen working among the servants.

When the week was over, Prince Martin spoke with his son.

“You have done a good job, Heinrich. The head steward has spoken very highly of your work. Now”—Heinrich’s father looked at his son directly—“it is time for something I have been planning to tell you about for some time.”

Prince Martin placed his hand on the lid of a wooden trunk that was elegantly decorated with gold corners.

“What is it?” Heinrich asked.

“It has to do with a special job I have for you.”

At last, Heinrich thought. He has finally realized my true talents and will now give me a worthy job. Perhaps a job as a... Heinrich spoke, interrupting his own thoughts, “Yes, Father, what is it?”

“I’ll now show you something that has been handed down in our family from generation to generation. Do you see this inscription?”

Prince Martin lovingly fingered the finely carved lettering on the top of the small chest, as he read aloud: “Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation” (*Joel 1:3*).

“What is it?” Heinrich asked.

“What’s in this box has taught the monarchs that have gone before you valuable lessons that are needed to govern well. Now it is your turn.”

What could it be?

“Open it and see.” The prince motioned to his son.

Heinrich opened the trunk as if it were a treasure chest. It smelt strongly of cedar.

“There’s another box inside wrapped in a silk cloth,” Heinrich said.

“Lift it out carefully,” his father instructed.

Opening the lid gently, he looked inside. A bewildered expression came over his face.

“A shoe polishing kit? I ... I ... don’t understand.”

“You are to be a shoeshine boy,” Prince Martin announced proudly.

“What? You must be joking.”

“No, I’m not. What better way for you to learn about the people you will govern than by shining their shoes? Perhaps you know the Bible chapter that speaks of this?”

Illustrations by Sabine

Recommended age: 9 years and up. (May be read by younger children at parents’ discretion.)

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“The Bible is one of my studies, but I don’t...”

“John 13.”

“Sorry, I don’t follow.”

“Read it and you will see what it has to do with shining shoes ... and with being a ruler.”

“Yes, but all this time you have been telling me that my life is in jeopardy if I venture out of the palace—and now you want me to go traipsing all over Thumbringen shining shoes?”

“When we are doing God’s will, we can trust Him for our safety, no matter where we are.”

“And what can I possibly learn by being a shoeshine boy?” Heinrich asked.

“Much, my son. But you must show yourself willing to learn.”

“Why now, Father?”

“You are ready. I’ve seen how your work around the palace has awakened a life and zeal within you that cannot come from studies or books. It’s time for you to experience life. Look at it as an adventure, if you will.”

“Shining shoes is not exactly my idea of adventure.”

“Heinrich, my son, I know this is not what you had hoped for. But a ruler must earn the respect of those he governs. In some African tribes, before a young prince can become a chief, he must first go on a hunt and bring back a lion to prove his bravery to his people. Perhaps this will be your lion hunt.”

“But this is not Africa, Father! Won’t someone recognize me?”

“Who would ever suspect a shoeshine boy of being the heir to the throne?—And not with the disguise that we’ll make out for you.”

Heinrich thought a moment. “But Father, I know nothing about shining shoes. That was never one of my ‘subjects’ in school.”

“True, but I have thought of that too. Meet your new traveling companion.”

A sturdy man of about thirty entered the room, dressed all in leather.

“The stable master?”

“Yes. Klaus here will teach you all you need to know about shining shoes. Isn’t that right, Klaus?”

“If he wants to learn, I can teach him, your highness,” Klaus said.

“Good then.” Prince Martin raised his eyebrows at his son, waiting for a response.

Heinrich sighed. There was no getting out of it. “All right, Father. I’ll do it.”

“That’s my boy. Now don’t look so despondent, Son. You may just have a little fun while you’re at it.” Prince Martin cracked a smile. “You will begin your preparation tomorrow.”

The next day began with Heinrich’s first lesson in the fine art of shoe polishing. Klaus pulled out his shoeshine kit, knelt down, and started to work furiously on Heinrich’s shoes.

“Apply the polish. Take your cloth and work it strongly until the shoes seem like dark mirrors. That is when you know you are done.” He skillfully worked the tools of the trade, talking incessantly. “Many of the famous cafés have their own shoeshine man for their customers, but we will work alone.”

“I really don’t want to do this,” Heinrich complained.

“At least you will get out of your tutor’s lessons. I have heard you complaining about how boring they are.”

“True,” Heinrich said. “All right, then. Now it’s my turn to try.” Heinrich grabbed the can of shoe polish and dark cloth. “I’ll do those black shoes first.”

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Letter from the Third Reich

Two days later, Heinrich was busy buffing a pair of tall boots that he had just polished under Klaus’ watchful eye, when they were interrupted by a knock on the door.

“An important message has arrived by personal courier, your highness,” a messenger announced to Heinrich. “It is of utmost urgency. Prince Martin has requested your presence in the stateroom.”

Heinrich quickly cleaned off his hands and followed the messenger to the stateroom, which was filled with officials seated around a large conference table. The atmosphere was tense.

His father greeted him with a smile. “Heinrich, welcome. I am glad to see you. As you will one day be sitting in my chair, you must learn now how to deal with emergencies. We have just received this message.”

An attendant read:

From the Third Reich to the most excellent Fürst of Thumbringen

It has come to the Fürher’s attention that your nation has become a harbor of dissidents against the Reich, and is being used as a base for their operations against our benevolent nation.

We hereby demand your full cooperation in admitting within your borders inspectors, which we shall send to seek out and destroy the operations of these dissenters. We would ask that you grant them full jurisdiction to carry out their duties unimpeded, and give them unbarred access to any and all locations requested by them.

We expect a positive response from you within one week of the receipt of this letter.

Respectfully,
Heinrich Himmler
—Commander of the Geheime Staats
Polizei*

There was a moment of silence, broken by one advisor, who said, “Every day there are any number of Germans who come into our territory, and we have never stopped them. It seems to me that if they are after dissenters, they could have caught them at their own border.”

“Do you think there are any Nazi dissenters among our people, working against the Reich so close to its borders?” Prince Martin asked.

“We cannot be sure,” another counselor answered. “It would be an effective, though dangerous strategy. There are not many places they could hide, though I believe our people would be kind enough to offer shelter to any that came to their doors—as the Bible teaches us, sometimes angels may appear as strangers in need, and to turn them away would be unthinkable.” (*See Hebrews 13:2.*)

**Geheime Staats Polizei*: “Secret State Police,” often shortened to its nickname taken from the starting letters of each word, the “Gestapo”

“By allowing these Gestapo free rein within our borders, God knows what kind of terror we’d be inviting into our peaceful haven,” Prince Martin said with a weary sigh.

“Yet if we refuse them what they ask for,” the first advisor commented, “God only knows what worse terror we could be unleashing upon our country. One thing is certain—we will not stand a chance against the army of the Third Reich.”

“Let us do what we have traditionally done in times of great decision, since the beginning of the founding of our principality,” the oldest member of the council suggested.

Each person nodded his head in approval.

A large Bible was taken out of a box inlaid with mother of pearl, and placed on the table next to the letter from the Third Reich. The Bible’s cover was ornately embossed* with intricate designs. The council members paused for a moment of silent prayer.

Then Prince Martin raised his hands and prayed. “*Unser Gott im Himmel**, our enemies stand at our gate. You are our only defense. Please lead us in all wisdom. Show us now if we should open our gates to the enemy who seeks an inroad into our borders.”

Prince Martin turned to his son. “Heinrich, would you please open the Bible for us?”

Heinrich approached, opened the Bible, paused a moment, and then read the passage that his eyes fell on.

“Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of

David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates: Thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

“For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation” (*Jeremiah 22:2–5*).

“To ‘deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor’ sounds to me like we should protect whatever defectors from the Reich may have found a refuge among us,” said one of the advisors.

“Which would mean inviting the certain wrath of the Reich upon ourselves,” another advisor added skeptically. “They have by now undoubtedly proven that they get what they want, whether it is given freely, or taken by force.”

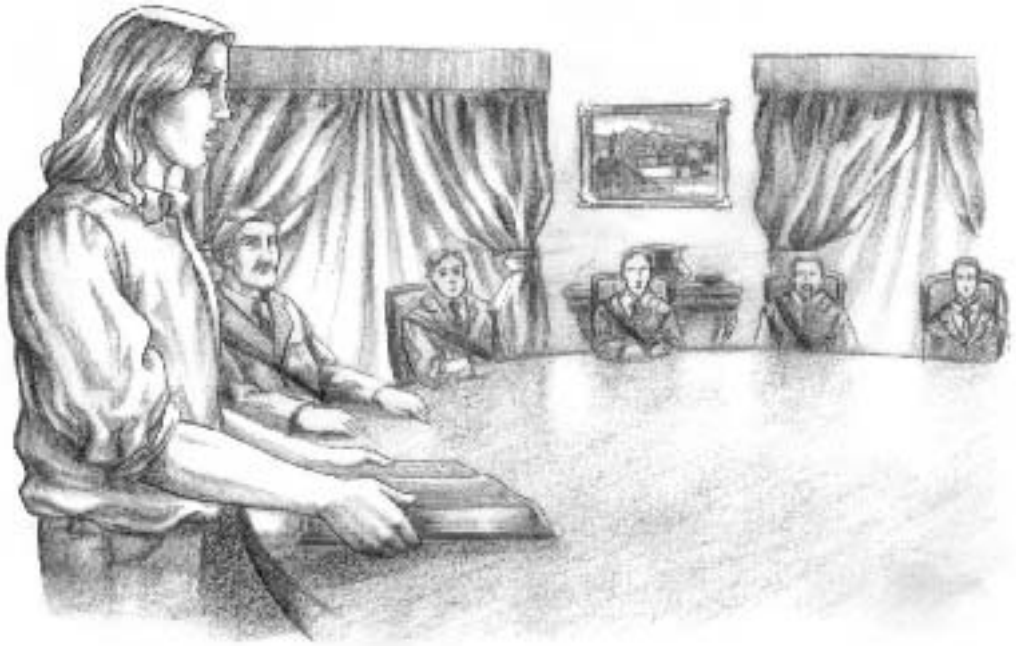
“The passage *was* very clear,” Prince Martin suggested. “But I agree that there is a lot hinging on this decision. I was just reminded of another passage that may shed more light on our situation.”

Prince Martin skipped back some pages. “Ah yes, here it is,” he said, and then read aloud.

“This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:

**embossed*: to cover with raised figures or designs

**Unser Gott im Himmel*: “Our God in Heaven”



There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.”

Everyone in the room looked at each other in amazement at how well the verses fit their situation.

“Now there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. ... Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength; ... Wisdom is better than weapons of war” (*Ecclesiastes 9: 13–18*).

“Our country has always followed the way of peace,” one advisor said, “even when all around us was war. By staying poor and insignificant, we have maintained our freedom. Let us not stray from the path God has put before us, even if it seems a hard one.”

Others offered their counsel and opinions also of what they should do. After everyone had finished talking,

Prince Martin stood up and announced, “We have heard many thoughts on the matter. It is time to make our decision. All those wishing to allow the Gestapo and their ‘inspectors’ onto our lands, raise your hand.”

Not a single hand was raised.

“And so, if it please God, our nation shall remain a haven for those who have sought refuge within it.”

“Regardless of the consequences?” someone asked.

“The consequences are in the hand of God,” Prince Martin said with finality.

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A Spy

After the meeting, Prince Martin asked to speak with Heinrich alone. “My son, I have a very important and grave task for you. Let me explain. In the presence of the counselors, we observed the

tradition of opening the Bible. My advisors believe in God, and respect His Word, but their minds are more on the things of this world—that is what is expected of them. Sometimes I open the pages of God’s book randomly when it is necessary to give a sign to those who require one. But even before the book was opened, God revealed yet another answer to me, and showed me the mind of our enemies.

“There is yet another purpose for them wanting their inspectors within our country. If they wished merely to catch dissenters, I am sure they could find plenty more behind the Swiss borders, or the French, or even within Austria or Liechtenstein. No, they are after something else.

“God spoke to me through yet another verse, which I believe was not meant to be revealed to the advisors, and so He spoke it to me Himself: ‘As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate’” (*Psalms 127:4–5*).

Heinrich looked up questioningly.

“I believe what God was telling me was that I am meant to send *you* out as our official spy, to discover what it is the Germans *really* want from us.”

Heinrich’s eyes grew wide and his face lit up as visions of microdot film*

and fancy gadgetry filled his mind. “Oh, yes, Father, a spy—I’m sure I could do that!” he responded excitedly.

Prince Martin paused, as if he were not sure if he wanted to continue. But then he spoke: “It is a dangerous mission, and if it were not for the specific instructions I have received, I would not send you. I do not want to lose you, my son. Your mother’s passing has been enough for me to bear.” Prince Martin felt the tears well up in his eyes as he thought of his wife, who had died after giving birth to Heinrich. For many years it seemed the light and joy had gone out of his life forever, but over time, Prince Martin had accepted the loss, and let the brokenheartedness he felt draw him closer to God.

Prince Martin continued, looking at his son. “But it is your decision to make.”

At last! A little excitement, Heinrich thought. “Yes, Father. I accept the mission—whatever it entails. Does this mean I get to have special spy training?”

“Believe it or not, your spy training has already begun.”

“What do you mean, Father?”

“God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. You are to go into Germany as a shoeshine boy.”

“A SHOESHINE BOY?!? How can a shoeshine boy ever be a spy?”

**microdot film*: often used in spying operations of the mid-20th century, microdot film was used to capture vital messages as a photographic negative, at the same time shrinking it to miniature sizes, so that the entire message could be disguised as a single black period pasted onto an otherwise ordinary-looking letter, or an unobtrusive freckle on the skin. The message hidden within the near-microscopic dot could then be enlarged to its original size once it reached its destination.

Preparation

“That is something God shall reveal to you when the time is right,” Prince Martin said calmly. “You will go with Klaus, who—though you may not realize it—has often been employed as a secret agent for me, and has been one of my most reliable men. I would not trust you to any other.

“Now that you have learned the art of shining shoes, there is more to be learned to help you on your mission, and not much time. Klaus shall be your tutor in these things, together with Mr. Schelling, my chief of security. Now, do you *still* wish to be a spy, my son?”

Heinrich grew silent, contemplating all that his father had said. “I shall do my best, Father.”

“Good, my son. That is all that we can ask from you.”

Prince Martin reached into his pocket and took out a silk string with a pendant, which he placed in his son’s hand. “I want to give you something to remember us by.”

“A key! Just like the one that was given to the knight in the play we saw.”

“This key is wooden, for a golden one would not suit your role as a shoeshine boy. But when you return, I will replace it with a golden one. Until then, the palace emblem carved on its back will help remind you of your home.”

Heinrich looked closer at the key and asked, “What is this verse inscribed on it?”

“Ask and it shall be given you!”—Matthew 7:7. It is to remind you to ask God for guidance and direction—and your friends for help when you need it.”

“Thank you, Father. I will remember,” Heinrich said, embracing his father.

The following day, Heinrich and Klaus began in earnest to prepare for their mission. No more did Heinrich find his instructions boring, for he knew his life would depend on what he learned. Mr. Schelling, head of internal security for Thumbringen, explained to Klaus and Heinrich the procedures and contingency plans to follow in the event of any emergency.

Mr. Schelling spoke: “You must have a code name to use when you communicate with us—something that only I will know. Let’s see.”

“We will use this to find our code.” Mr. Schelling reached into a pocket of his vest and pulled out a small New Testament with Psalms, and cracked it open to Psalms 21:8. “Perfect,” he said, and read aloud. “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee.”

Mr. Schelling turned to Heinrich. “Your code name will be RIGHT HAND.”

“What about Klaus?” Heinrich asked. “He will need a code name also.”

“He will be LEFT HAND, because you will work together. We will shorten these names to RH and LH.” Mr. Schelling paused a moment before continuing. “Every mission also needs to have a name.”

“Since we are Left and Right Hand, what about Mission Hunting Gloves?” Heinrich suggested.

“*Ja*—gloves protect the hands. We’ll need lots of that!” Klaus added.

“Very well! Hunting Gloves it will be. Now, you should report only when you

have found out important information. There is always the chance that the communication will be intercepted.”

“We should use a code,” Heinrich said.

“*Ja*, you are getting ahead of me. By using a system of letters and numbers we have devised a code using the names of 15 Polish towns that you will have to memorize. You will be able to communicate any word you wish by relaying the relative positions of the letters according to the list of names. Try it.”

“It sounds very complicated to me,” Klaus said.

“It will take some practice for you to learn it, but I am sure you will do just fine. You have already learned Polish geography thoroughly, I believe.”

“That’s for sure,” Heinrich sighed. “I never knew I would be using what I learned like this, though.”

“The letter positions will be relayed to us using this special, high-frequency Morse code receiver/transmitter, or the MCRT.”

With that, Mr. Schelling revealed a device the size of a small suitcase, which opened up to show several buttons and fat wires attached to speaker-like devices.

“First, you ‘write’ out the positions by selecting the appropriate buttons. This creates a punched strip of card, which must then be fed into the transmitter. The speaker you see here can be attached to the mouthpiece of most ordinary telephones. Once you phone our secret number, you can carry on a regular conversation with the woman who answers, who you will pretend is your mother, Johanna, here in Thumbringen. While you are talking, the device will automatically transmit



the Morse code signals recorded on the card to a receiver designed especially to pick up the signals, which are largely inaudible to humans. Always end these secret messages with your code names, RH or LH.

“This other wire is the receiver, which you hook up to the earpiece. It will pick up our signals, and will mark the dashes and dots as they come on this reel of paper, like a stock-ticker machine.

“Most times, you will be sending us information, and your ‘mother’ will acknowledge having received your full message by ending the conversation and signing off with, ‘Auf Wiederhören*.’ If she says goodbye in any other way, you will know that with your next phone-call, which should be made no sooner than an hour later, you are to use the receiver instead of the transmitter. Again, during this procedure, your ‘mother’ will keep a regular conversation going, about the weather, your sick aunt or grandmother, or some other typical piece of local gossip. You can respond however you choose, only make it sound normal.

“What happens if this receiver/transmitter thing breaks?”

“In case the radio stops operating for whatever reason, you can phone the same number, and tell your mother that you got to shine a most expensive pair of shoes. There will not be much that we will be able to do for you in that case, but at least we will know that you are still all right. If there is an emergency, or your

mission has been compromised, phone the number and say that you’re coming home for a visit. Then try to return as quietly and inconspicuously as possible. You should be safe once you reach Switzerland or our borders. Or if your ‘mother’ should plead for you to visit, it means we have called off the mission and want you back as soon as possible. Never, under any circumstances, phone or contact the palace directly.

“You will, of course, also be given a number of false identities and papers, should you need them. From now on you will refer to each other by your aliases*. Heinrich, you will be Günther Reinhart and Klaus, you are Hans Kestner. Günther, you will be from Truppendorf, because there is no time for you to learn a convincingly proper German accent. Hans, you will be from Germany, but came to Thumbringen and befriended Günther in the shoe shining trade here. Now you are both going to Germany to see the glorious Third Reich for yourselves and to look for better opportunities in your business.”

Heinrich turned to Klaus, then chuckled. “Well, ... ‘Hans’ ... this will take some getting used to.”

* * *

After a week of intense preparation and training, Heinrich and Klaus were dropped off in a remote village near the German border. Klaus had let his stubble grow, and with a patched overcoat looked the part of a wandering shoe shiner. Heinrich’s hair had been cut

***Auf Wiederhören:** roughly, “hear you later”—used instead of “Auf Wiedersehen” [roughly, “see you later”] when speaking on the phone

***alias:** a name someone is known by, usually different from their true name

short and was parted perfectly in a very German manner. Along with his thick-rimmed glasses and a similarly tattered coat, no one would have guessed him to be the prince he was.

Klaus and Heinrich each had a small suitcase—one held the Morse code receiver/transmitter hidden under a layer of clothes, and the other held still more clothes, and additional items necessary to change their disguise, should this become necessary. They each also carried a pouch containing some money, their passports, papers proving a pure Germanic ancestry for both of them, and a swastika pin to wear once they were on their way into Germany.

The chauffeur waved, turned around and drove off. Once gone, only a few woodpeckers banging for insects in nearby tall pines broke the eerie silence.

“Well, Günther, how do you feel?” Klaus asked as they looked around.

“I’m apprehensive.”

“How is that?”

“We are playing a dangerous game, Hans. The stakes are high. Not only are our own lives in danger, but the future of our country is at stake. Hitler’s war machine could soon start trampling on a whole list of countries. No one would bat an eye if the world woke up tomorrow to hear Thumbringen had been conquered.”

“We’d better decide what to do now,” Klaus said. “Why don’t we try a little opening of the Book? Maybe God will give us some direction.”

They both prayed and Heinrich opened his small pocket Bible to the verse:

Thus saith the Lord God; the gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened. And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate (Ezekiel 46:1–2).

“Looking toward the east? I don’t like the sound of that.”

“Me neither. Bavaria* is due east of us,” Heinrich said.

“Well, if you want to find your enemies’ secrets, what better place to go than where they live?” Klaus stated. “The headquarters for the National Socialist Party is in Munich. Who knows whose shoes we may get to shine there?”

“But the verse also says, ‘the gate will be shut until the Sabbath Day, the new moon,’” Heinrich said, thinking. “Maybe that means that we should pass through the border during the weekend, not on a working day. The security will probably be more relaxed then.”

“But of course!” Klaus exclaimed.

“What?”

“The Oktoberfest!”

“Right!”

“There will probably be a lot of people heading that direction,” Klaus explained. “It will be easier to blend in. The Oktoberfest happens to start Saturday, which is the Sabbath Day. And, by a coincidence, Saturday will be the new moon!”

“How do you know *that*?”

“Ah, there’s more to this simple stable master than meets the eye.”

“Okay, so we wait for the weekend?”

**Bavaria: province in the southeast part of Germany; Munich is its capital*

“Yes,” Klaus said. “I suppose we’d better find somewhere to stay till then.”

Heinrich agreed and they both headed for the village center to find a place for the night.

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Border Crossing

Heinrich and Klaus spent three days in a small inn, waiting for the beginning of the Oktoberfest. During those three days, they talked about their mission and planned their strategy of what they would do and how they would operate together as a team.

Saturday evening, they boarded a bus destined for Munich. The bus was full of passengers going to the Oktoberfest, and they were in good spirits, singing and chatting and swigging schnapps*.

“Whatever you do, don’t act nervous or tense,” Klaus whispered to Heinrich. “They’ll sense it. Loosen up a little.”

Heinrich nodded, and put on a smile. “But what if I say the wrong thing?” he whispered. “I’ll mix up for sure.”

“Don’t think about it,” Klaus replied. “We’ve done our drill work and now it’s time to play the part. Sing a little. It will help you to get your mind off of it.”

Klaus opened his mouth to sing along with the other passengers, and Heinrich soon joined in.

Within minutes, they were at the German border. The bus stopped and two guards boarded the bus.

“Everybody out,” came the order.

The passengers in the bus filed out and stood in line. One by one they

were questioned and had their papers checked, while two soldiers searched the bus.

Klaus was first.

“Can I see your papers, please?” the guard asked.

“Yes, of course.” Klaus handed him his passport. The guard looked at the photograph and then at him. “Visiting for the Oktoberfest?”

“Yes. I was hoping to be able to celebrate it at my cousin’s house. He lives in Munich. I’m taking my friend there to see him. He’s never been to Munich before.”

“I see.” The guard glanced at Heinrich who nodded his head. He motioned for him to hand over his passport. “So you have not been to Munich before?” the guard asked, carefully studying Heinrich’s reaction to his statement.

Heinrich’s heart began to pound. *Calm down. Stay calm*, he kept saying over and over to himself in his mind.

“No. There is a lot of our glorious Third Reich I have yet to see, ... it is growing so quickly.”

The guard only raised his eyebrows, took another quick look at Heinrich’s passport, and then handed it back. “I hear the Oktoberfest may have been cancelled, on account of the war,” the guard said apologetically.

“You must be kidding!” Klaus responded. “How can such a great German tradition be cancelled?”

“I would not be too distressed, friend,” the guard continued. “I am sure that, wherever there is beer, there will be feasting. Have a good time in Munich.”

**schnapps*: German alcoholic drink

Then the guard moved on to the next person.

Heinrich and Klaus returned to their seats, and waited another 15 minutes before all the passengers were back on board. Soon, they were on their way again. Heinrich and Klaus heaved a sigh of relief having made it through the border without incident. They joined in the celebrating that continued unabated on the bus as it wended its way along the roads to the big city.

* * *

Heinrich and Klaus arrived in Munich just after midnight.

“We’ll need to find a place to stay,” Klaus said.

“I have a hotel in mind. It’s called the Müncher Hof.”

“Have you been there before?” asked Klaus.

“No, but I heard about it.”

“From?”

“A friend who works there.”

“You have friends in Munich?” Klaus asked, surprised.

“I ... I met her in Zurich that night.”

“So it’s a she?”

Heinrich looked mildly embarrassed. “Yes.”

“Günther, you wouldn’t have another reason for staying at this hotel, would you?”

“I hear it is a very good hotel.”

“Let me remind you of our mission. Shoeshine boys do not stay at good hotels. In fact, come to think of it, they do not stay in hotels at all. I am sorry, it is out of the question.”

“Excuse me! Let me remind you who is the prince and who is the stable boy.”

Klaus took off his hat and bowed in jest. “So sorry, your excellency, but don’t

be misled by your desires. You could jeopardize our whole mission—and get us both killed.”

“I can handle this. She is very special.”

“She may be special, but she could be special trouble to our mission. War is no time for a romantic fling,” Klaus scolded.

“One of the poets said, ‘Love knows no days nor hours.’ I just have to see her,” Heinrich said dreamily.

“Have to? Look, I’m telling you, this is not good. Not a good idea at all.”

“Listen, in the daytime we can be shoeshine boys, and at night we can do what *we* want.”

“Heinrich, it doesn’t work that way.”

“But I have to go, ... at least for one night!”

“No! Out of the question.” But Klaus could tell that he wasn’t convincing Heinrich.

“Listen, I don’t care what you say,” Heinrich finally insisted as he picked up his bag and started walking. “I’m going to stay at that hotel with or without you.”

Klaus sighed, and then reluctantly followed. He did not want to make a further scene or draw attention to themselves. “All right, then,” he said, catching up with Heinrich. “Have it your way. But just for this one night! And if you don’t see your ‘friend,’ we leave.”

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At the Müncher Hof

Heinrich and Klaus had to push their way through the crowded streets filled with riotous beer-guzzling partygoers keeping alive the spirit of Oktoberfest.

The Müncher Hof was not far from the bus station, so they found it easily.

In the hotel lobby, two undercover Gestapo agents pretended to read newspapers as they scrutinized any guests. These two new peculiar arrivals did not escape their perusal*. They situated themselves close enough to the desk to eavesdrop.

Before Klaus could stop him, Heinrich swaggered up to the desk, trying to appear in control, and placed several large bills in front of the clerk. "I would like to have a room with two single beds. The best room you have."

"That would be our executive suite," the clerk said, looking Heinrich over carefully.

"We'll take it," Heinrich said confidently.

Klaus nudged Heinrich in his side, and between clenched teeth whispered, "We'll take it?? We are *shoeshine* boys, remember?"

"You never let me forget. Let me enjoy life, would you?" Heinrich whispered back.

"Identification please," the hotel clerk said tapping his fingers impatiently on the counter.

"Of course." Heinrich fumbled awkwardly through his belongings.

One of the agents said quietly to the other, "Look, that's strange. They are checking into the best room, yet they are poorly dressed. Not your usual business types at all."

"Yes, most strange," the other answered.

Heinrich fumbled through his pouch until he found his passport, and handed it awkwardly to the desk clerk.

The hotel clerk studied the passport carefully then looked up at his guest. "Herr Reinhart?"

"Uhh ... yes ... Günther Reinhart," Heinrich replied. "And this is my friend, Hans Kestner."

"And how long will you be staying with us?"

"Two or three nights," Heinrich answered. "We are not certain yet."

After the hotel clerk had gone to the other side of the desk to get the ledger, Klaus nudged Heinrich in the side. "I thought it was only one night," Klaus whispered.

"Don't worry," Heinrich replied. "Tomorrow we'll just say some business came up and that we're checking out early."

The clerk returned. "Please sign in the ledger, gentlemen. Our bellboy will see you to your room."

They signed, and then were escorted to their suite on the top floor. As the bellboy put the luggage down, Heinrich tipped him generously.

"By the way, do you know someone working here by the name of Astrid Braun?" Heinrich asked.

"I don't..." The bellboy hesitated.

Heinrich put another bill in his hand, which seemed to improve his memory.

"Oh, yes! Astrid. She works on the first morning shift."

"Thank you."

"Thank you!" the bellboy said on his way out as he waved the large bill in gratitude.

Heinrich started unpacking when Klaus said, "Don't unpack—we might

**perusal*: to examine; scrutinize

have to leave in a hurry. Heinrich, can I ask you why are you doing this?"

"Trust me. Don't worry so much, would you?"

Meanwhile, in the lobby, the Gestapo agents approached the bellboy.

"Did those two men say anything to you?"

"One of the men asked me about one of the chambermaids," replied the bellboy.

"Really? And which chambermaid might that be?"

"Her name is Fraulein Astrid Braun, sir."

"And when does she arrive at work?"

"Her shift begins at six in the morning, sir," the bellboy replied.

The tall agent dismissed the bellboy and then turned to his partner. "Let's pay this woman a visit."

* * *

The two agents quickly found out where Astrid lived and went there promptly, waiting until 5:30 in the morning. The agent in charge knocked on the door to her apartment. He was tall and thin and his large ears protruded ridiculously at a right angle to his long, narrow face. His thick glasses made it almost impossible to see his eyes, as they reflected any light in the room. His short assistant was fat. He used too much cheap hair cream, which gave off an offensive odor. His hair was parted perfectly in the middle.

Astrid was getting ready for work when she heard the knock. She looked through the peephole to see who it was. She reluctantly opened the door when they flashed their badges.

"*Heil Hitler*," they both shouted in unison, as they clicked their heels sharply and raised their right arm so that their palms became visible.

Astrid barely moved her right arm and mumbled something incoherent* in response.

"Fraulein Braun, I see we caught you just in time," the tall agent said, trying to be pleasant.

"Yes, what is it you want?"

"Don't be in a rush, please. We came here to ask your service to help the Reich."

"Excuse me," she said brusquely*. "I'm just a hotel chambermaid—not a member of your army."



**incoherent*: unable to be understood

**brusquely*: rudely

“Don’t be smart with us. Everyone must do their part for our great struggle,” the shorter agent said sharply.

The tall agent put his foot in the door. “Aren’t you going to invite us in?”

“Is that necessary?” Astrid asked. She reluctantly moved out of the way. The two men moved confidently into the entranceway.

“We’ll get right to the point. We want you to find out about some guests that are staying at the hotel.”

“How did you get my address?”

“We have our ways. ... Now”—the tall agent tried to turn on his charm as he moved closer and put his arm around her—“all you have to do is give us the information we need. That’s not too hard, is it?”

Astrid shook his arm off in disgust.

The short agent handed Astrid a piece of paper with a name and room number scrawled on it and said, “We just want you to become ... friends with these two men. Find out why they are here.”

“You sure are nosey, aren’t you?”

“We make it our business to know everything about everyone. Will you help us or not?” the tall agent asked pointedly.

“Why should I?”

“I think it would be in your best interest to help us.”

“And what does that mean?”

“It means, Fraulein, that if you don’t cooperate with us we will have to hold you and your family for questioning until such a time as you are ready to help your country.”

The short agent wanted to make sure that she was intimidated enough, so he added, “And we might publish your unwillingness to cooperate in the *Schwarzes Korps* magazine, too.”

Astrid knew what that meant. She had seen it happen—public humiliation. Harassment from zealous neighbors would soon force her to move. A new apartment would be very difficult to find. They would make sure of that.

Still, something inside her resisted. “Who do you think you are, threatening me?” Astrid said defiantly.

The tall agent began to lose his patience. With a fierce, passionate gleam in his eyes, he shook his clenched fist furiously. “We are agents of the most powerful government on Earth today. Soon, there will be no place for you to hide. We will soon become a worldwide government. Get on board now, or be swept away by the mighty wave that is washing away anything in its path.”

Astrid shrugged her shoulders and said, “I’ll see what I can find out.”

“That is wise.”

“I can’t promise you anything,” she said, glaring.

“There is no halfway with us. You either cooperate with us or you don’t.”

“I said I will find out what I can.”

“We will wait for your results.”

“How do I get in contact with you?”

“We will contact you,” the tall agent replied, as both agents turned and walked out the door.

To be continued

**Schwarzes Korps*: “Black Corps”

The Shoeshine Boy



Issue 166



PART 3

Note: While this story takes place during the historic era of World War 2, and borrows some of its characters and events, the story itself, along with the principality of Thumbringen and its people, are fictional.

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Lunch Hour

Astrid found the room number of her quarry*. She spent an extra long time sweeping and mopping the hallway on that floor, hoping for a chance encounter. It was now 6:30 in the morning.

Heinrich had had a restless night. Dreams, startling and vivid, tore through his fitful sleep.

He was flying high above a river searching for its source. The light reflected off the river in flashes of different colors. At a fork in the river, he began to follow one stream that caught his eye. In the distance he could see a glimmering palace. He suddenly found himself losing altitude, until he landed in the jungle.

It was difficult hacking his way through the vines and smothering vegetation. Deeper and deeper he was led into the jungle as he tried to find the elusive palace, until he became lost. When he sat down for a rest, he heard some rustling in the bush, then a snarl, and then a louder growl. A lion had picked up his scent and was stalking him.

Then began endless running, jumping, stumbling through the jungle, tripping over vines, wading through mud,

trying to escape his predator's hungry jaws. The lion was closing in—ready to pounce on him.

Heinrich awoke scared.

"Hans, I'm going down to the lobby to find something to read."

"I'll go with you."

"No, that's all right. I'll be back soon."

Klaus nodded and closed his eyes for a few more minutes of sleep.

Heinrich had just shut the door, when his eyes met Astrid's. They both reacted awkwardly and startled. "Hi! ... Astrid!"

"Do ... do I know you?"

"Heinrich, remember, from the club in Zurich? I cut my hair, but it's me."

"Heinrich? What are you doing here?"

"You said that you work here, didn't you? I wanted to see you again."

"Really?" Astrid blushed.

"Maybe we can get together sometime," Heinrich said with a sheepish grin.

"How about today, over lunch?"

"Great! Where should I meet you?"

"I know a nice café, *Die Blaue Kuh**. It is in the town center. You can't miss it."

"Lunch then at noon. I'll see you then."

**quarry*: the object of a hunt or pursuit

**Die Blaue Kuh*: "The Blue Cow"

Illustrations by Sabine

Recommended age: 9 years and up. (May be read by younger children at parents' discretion.)

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As she turned the corner, she called out playfully, "Oh, Heinrich, maybe sometime I can give you a dancing lesson."

"You noticed that I couldn't dance at the swing club?"

"Well, you tried very hard."

"Yes, I appreciate that ... the dancing lesson, I mean."

Astrid threw back her head, waved flirtatiously, and laughed as she left.

Heinrich came back in the room and excitedly told Klaus.

"You'll never believe what just happened."

"Try me," Klaus said, yawning and still trying to wake up.

"I was just walking downstairs and I met her."

"Who?"

"Astrid."

"Oh yes, your dream girl."

"I'm going to meet her today for lunch."

Now Klaus was fully awake. "What are you doing? Have you forgotten our mission?"

"Oh, come on, Klaus. How dangerous could a hotel maid be? She is a great dancer. She even offered to give me dancing lessons."

"And what about being shoe shiners during the day?"

"We can do that too. Come on. Let's just have a little fun. I want to make the most of this opportunity before I get cooped up in that palace again."

"Trying to squeeze the most out of this opportunity might leave you bleeding at the bottom of a ditch or rotting in a filthy jail."

"Would you stop being so gloomy?!"

"Somebody has to be the voice of reason on this team," Klaus grumbled, sitting up in bed.

"Don't worry, I can take care of myself."

"You're not listening to me."

"I'm going to do this," Heinrich stated with a note of finality in his voice.

Klaus shook his head. "I still think you're making a mistake, but I won't waste any more time trying to persuade you. We need to scout out the town this morning and see what possibilities there might be to practice our new profession."

"Good," Heinrich agreed. "Let's go."

* * *

After breakfast, Heinrich and Klaus headed out to check out the downtown area.

Heinrich's mind was not fully there as he entertained daydreams of Astrid and their meeting at lunchtime.

At 11:30, Heinrich told Klaus it was time for him to go.

"Do you want me to come with you?"

"I think I'll be okay flying solo on this one."

"I'll be nearby checking on you, in case you need me."

"Thanks!" Heinrich said, as he began walking in the direction of the restaurant. It was about a twenty-minute walk from where they were.

At five to twelve, Heinrich arrived at the *Blaue Kuh* restaurant.

There she is!

Heinrich noticed that she looked a little nervous sitting at the table, playing with the candle wax that had dripped over a wine bottle.

"I see you came early," Heinrich said, greeting her.

Astrid laughed. "You are the best thing happening today. Don't complain about me being early. It's better than coming late, isn't it?"

Heinrich smiled and sat down at the table with her. After a delicious meal and lots of small talk, Astrid put her hand on his.

“Tell me about yourself, Heinrich,” Astrid probed playfully. “What *really* brought you here to Munich?”

“I told you, I just came to see you.”

“You don’t expect me to believe that, do you?”

“Why not?”

“Come now, you must have some other reason.”

“You are the best reason I can think of.”

“So you came all the way from Zurich to Munich just to see *me*? Well, I suppose I should either be flattered or suspicious.”

“Suspicious of what?”

“Of whether you’re telling me the truth or not.”

This is not a good time to satisfy your curiosity, Heinrich thought. *Maybe it was a bad time to do this*. He started feeling hot, and unbuttoned his shirt a little.

Astrid jolted his thoughts. “So are you telling me the truth?”

“Well, if you must know, I was also hoping to open up a business.”

“Business? What kind of business?”

“It’s not much to brag about.”

“You don’t have to be pretentious with me. Remember, I’m just a hotel maid.” Astrid noticed the silk string around his neck.

“What’s that you’re wearing?” she asked.

“Oh, nothing.”

“Come on, let me see!”

Heinrich reluctantly lifted the key from its hiding place, held it briefly in his hands, and then slipped it back under his shirt.

“That’s a very interesting pendant. Where did you get it?”

“My father gave it to me.”

“Who is your father?”

“He is a very important man.”

“Important? What kind of important ... is he a king?”

“You could say that.”

“I see. But why are you starting a business if your father is a king? Wouldn’t that make you a prince?”

Heinrich shrugged his shoulders. “Can we talk about something else?” he finally asked.

“Very well,” Astrid replied. “You’re not really from Zurich, are you? I’ve been to that club before, but that was the first time I ever saw *you* there.”

“No, I’m not,” Heinrich said. “I’m ... from Thumbringen.”

“Well, that explains your accent,” Astrid replied. “I mean, you don’t speak like the Swiss, and you certainly don’t act like one. Not that I mind—in fact, I rather like it. But it has made me curious. You just can never be too careful these days, you know.” She watched his reaction almost as carefully as the border guard had—perhaps even more so, only hidden under her feminine guise.

“Astrid, I’d rather not be talking about myself right now. There really isn’t much more to say.”

“Then what about that dancing lesson I promised you?”

“Sure, if you want to. How about over there?” Heinrich said, pointing to an open place in front of where a band was playing.

“I had something more private in mind. How about your hotel room?”

“Sure.”

It took about a half-hour for the two to walk back to the *Müncher Hof*.

In his room, Astrid was soon busy trying to teach her new pupil the moves of swing dancing, to the accompaniment of a scratchy radio—compliments of the business suite.

“Now don’t be afraid to hold me tight,” she said, guiding his arm around her back.

After some time of fast dancing, Heinrich said, “Could we slow it down? I’m getting out of breath.”

“As you like,” Astrid replied. She tuned the radio to a different station and snuggled closely to Heinrich, as she had done at the club. He was learning fast.

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The Gestapo

When Astrid returned to her apartment shortly after lunch, she saw the two agents sitting in her living room waiting for her.

“So Astrid, what did you find out? Have you done your homework? We have come to grade your papers,” the tall agent said.

“I did what you told me to.”

“And found out who they are?”

“Not exactly. The younger one comes from Thumbringen, His name is Heinrich. The other, I don’t know. Now can you leave me alone?”

“So he is not Günther Reinhart, then?”

“I don’t know,” Astrid answered. “I ... I met him before in Zurich, where he introduced himself as Heinrich. He says he came here to see me.”

“What was he doing in Zurich?” the first agent asked.

“I don’t know.”

“And he comes from Thumbringen, you say?”

“Yes, I’m pretty sure of that,” Astrid answered.

“Why would somebody from Thumbringen be using a false name?” the second agent asked. “Especially if his real name is as common as Heinrich.”

“Maybe because *he* is *not* common!” the first agent said, his eyes narrowing. “I thought there was something familiar about his face.”

“What do you mean?” The second agent asked.

“Isn’t the crown prince of Thumbringen called Heinrich something?”

At this Astrid stepped back. “Who?” she asked.

The other man quickly dialed a number on Astrid’s phone.

“Hello ... yes, Intelligence room, please. Hi. Ronald here. I need a description for Heinrich Martin, the young crown prince of Thumbringen. Yes, that’s right—Thumbringen. And make it quick.”

After a few seconds of tense silence, the agent on the phone rattled off the description to Astrid, writing it down in a notepad at the same time. The other agent watched Astrid’s face carefully.

“One meter 74, dark blonde hair, gray eyes, medium build, 17 years of age, bashful in public, often hesitant in his speech.”

Astrid could only nod each time, not knowing whether to hope they were right, or hope they were wrong. “What would the young prince be doing here?” she managed to ask innocently enough.

“That’s what we were hoping you could help us with,” the first agent answered.

“The only thing I remember him saying was about starting some kind of business.”

“Why would he want to start a business in Germany?” the second agent asked, looking up from his notebook.

“It was just our first meeting. I didn’t want to scare him away. I have an

appointment with him tomorrow for lunch. I can find out more then.”

“Each day we expect some results. You did well for the first time. I hope you will not disappoint us. We will be back tomorrow. You had better have some more information for us then, if you value the safety of your family,” the tall agent said, giving her a final piercing look before stalking out of the room with his co-worker.

Astrid could see where this was leading, and she began to think. *I told them one thing and now they want more. They will not rest until I have destroyed this man—whether he is the prince or not, and then it will be my turn. After they have used me, they will throw me away like an old newspaper. I must find a way out of this. There is only one thing to do, and there is not much time.*

- 13 -
Escape

Astrid ran all the way to the hotel. She knocked on the door of Heinrich’s room, burst in and blurted out, “You should leave here, at once!”

“What are you talking about?” Heinrich asked, startled.

“I’d rather not say. Just ... your life is in danger.” Astrid thought, *This is not going to be easy.*

“Why? We haven’t done anything illegal.”

What will he think of me when he finds out that I have betrayed our friendship? But it’s better to be honest.

“The Gestapo visited me.”

“And ... what did they say?”

“They threatened me that if I don’t do what they want, I will never see my family again. Listen to me, you have to get out of here,” Astrid pleaded desperately as she grabbed his sleeve.

“Calm down, and explain yourself.”

Astrid started crying. “I didn’t know what else to do. They wanted me to find out who you were. I told them I met you before, that you had introduced yourself as Heinrich. And now they think you’re the crown prince of Thumbringen. They will come looking for you, and you will for sure be questioned once they catch you. I ... I can’t bear to think what they might do to you, whoever you are.” She was now weeping uncontrollably.

“There, there,” Heinrich said, holding her close and trying to comfort her. “Don’t blame yourself. Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea for me to visit you after all.”

Astrid was desperate to make things right. “Maybe I can help you somehow,” she offered.

Their conversation was interrupted by the click of the door opening. It was Klaus.

“Can I talk to you?” Klaus asked seriously.

Astrid tried to hide her tears. “I guess I’d better be going now.”

“No, please stay,” Heinrich said. “We still need to talk.” He then turned to Klaus. “We have to get out of here.”

“That is what I’ve been trying to tell you all this time. I just noticed we are being watched by some Gestapo agents in the lobby.”

“Astrid just warned me that we are in danger and must leave immediately.”

“Finally that girl has put some sense in to that thick head of yours!”

“But how are you planning on leaving?” Astrid questioned. “They’ll be watching the entrance for sure.”

“There is always the classic escape method of tying sheets together and going out the window,” Heinrich suggested.

Klaus looked nervous. “Not for me—I’m afraid of heights. Besides, we don’t have enough sheets to go down five floors.”

“I’m sorry I got you both into this mess,” Heinrich said. “If I had listened to you, Klaus, we wouldn’t be in this predicament.”

“That’s true, but it doesn’t really matter now,” Klaus replied. “The important thing is that we make the right choice now.”

Heinrich looked down at his wooden key, and was reminded of what his father had told him. “We’ve escaped danger before. God can help us this time again. Let’s take a moment to pray.”

“That’s new for me,” Astrid said, “but I’ll give anything a try that might work.”

They were quiet for a few minutes until Klaus broke the silence. “I was reminded of the story of how the two spies evaded their enemies.”

“I know that story—a woman saved them, a harlot by the name of Rahab,” Heinrich added.

“I’m not that kind of girl! If you expect me to...”

“That’s not what I mean,” Heinrich quickly added. “The woman hid them in stalks of flax.”

“That gives me an idea,” Astrid said excitedly. “I’m working another shift right now, so that the agents wouldn’t suspect anything when I returned to the hotel to warn you. Wait here an hour. It will be dark outside by then. Don’t go anywhere. I’ll do the rounds and return with a full laundry wagon. I believe you could both fit inside, and then I can wheel you out through the service doors without the agents seeing or knowing anything.”

An hour later, true to her word, Astrid arrived at the door pushing a large laundry wagon.

“Keep your head down, and don’t move,” Astrid instructed them as they climbed in, together with a suitcase containing their most essential belongings.

Klaus turned to Heinrich and quipped, “How well do you think you can disguise yourself as dirty laundry?”

“Nothing to it,” Heinrich answered.

“If you don’t be quiet, that’s what you may end up becoming!” Astrid whispered, holding her finger to her lips. “This is no time for joking.”

Astrid collected all the sheets and towels in the room and threw them on top of where Heinrich and Klaus lay crouched in the bottom of the laundry wagon, concealing them as best as she could.

“I’ll bring you down to the service doors. You can exit through the back of the hotel. From there, you’re on your own.”

Trying to act as nonchalant as possible, Astrid wheeled the cart out of the room, down the hall, and into the elevator.

The doors opened again at the basement level.

“You can get out now,” Astrid whispered. The boys climbed out, relieved that things had gone well so far.

Astrid pointed. “The door is that way. Don’t stop till you are far away from here.”

Heinrich put the palm of his hand on Astrid’s cheek affectionately. “Thanks.”

She responded with a smile, then kissed his cheek. “Hurry!” she whispered.

Klaus pulled on Heinrich impatiently to come. The metal door creaked as he opened it. They found themselves on a narrow cobblestone street lined with gaslights, which gave off an eerie glow. They walked quickly, but not too fast lest

they arouse suspicion. They stayed in the shadows as much as they could.

They had no idea where they were going. All they knew was that it was time to pray for another miracle.

- 14 -

Their New "Hotel"

The rain that started as a drizzle intensified until it became a torrent. Heinrich and Klaus had to find shelter quickly, or the radio that they were carrying would be ruined. After dodging large puddles for some time, they found refuge beneath a storefront awning.

"Where are we going?" Heinrich asked desperately.

"Your guess is as good as mine."

Heinrich fingered his key. Given to him by his earthly father, it reminded him to check in with his heavenly Father. It had become like his spiritual telephone. Out of necessity he was learning to use it more. He started talking.

"Dear God, I'm sorry that I got us in this mess. Help us to get out of it somehow. Show us where to go!"

As Heinrich finished his prayer, the rain slowed down considerably.

"We'd better go now before the rain starts again," Klaus suggested. "We can make a dash for the next building at least."

"But where can we go? We need to get a roof over our heads soon before we die of pneumonia."

Just then, a light bulb turned on in the window of a building down the street, attracting their attention.

"That's funny," Heinrich said.

"What's that?"

"I just heard someone say something."

"I didn't say anything."

"Not you. I heard a sentence—clearly."

"What did it say?" Klaus asked.

"It said, 'Follow that light.' I think it referred to that light that just turned on. I remember a verse. 'O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me'" (*Psalm 43:3*).

"I get it—like a direction sign. Remember that time Jesus' disciples were looking for a place to stay, and they followed the man with a water pitcher?" (*Luke 22:10*).

They hurried to the building where the light was shining. On the street level there was a clothing shop. The stern-looking mannequins in the window stared back at them. Above the store were apartments, where all was quiet.

"Well, here we are. Now what?" Heinrich asked.

"Let's look around the back. Maybe we'll find something."

Behind the building they discovered an abandoned shop. It was one of the condemned buildings in the block that was to be demolished. The graffiti painted on the wall told them that the former occupants had been Jews, who like many others, had been forced out of their homes and shops and shipped to concentration camps.

Klaus carefully removed some planks and forced open a window. They could tell from the cobwebs covering everything that it had not been used for a long time.

"How do we know no one will come here?" Heinrich asked.

"We don't, but take a look around. The cobwebs speak for themselves."

They turned some crates over to create a makeshift table. Trying hard to get warm by jumping up and down and rubbing their limbs vigorously didn't help

much. They wrung the excess rainwater out of their clothes and hung them up on an improvised clothesline, and then changed into the spare clothes they had brought. There was a fireplace, but starting a fire could attract unwanted attention.

Somehow Klaus and Heinrich managed to get through the night lying on some lumps of rags that they found.

* * *

The reality of their situation hit Heinrich the next morning. "We're trapped here," Heinrich moaned. "The Gestapo will be looking for us. It is only a matter of time before we will be discovered. The police make house checks regularly and the SS* patrol all night, every night, with searchlights and dogs."

Klaus sighed. "We have to finish this mission before we are caught."

"But how?" Heinrich asked.

"I don't know. But whatever we do, it will be harder to do on an empty stomach. I'll go out and get something at the bakery I saw around the corner," Klaus said.

"Be careful."

* * *

Klaus soon came back with an assortment of German bread rolls. Having not eaten dinner the night before, this simple fare was a feast for them.

"Well Hans, here we are in our new hotel! What do we do now?"

"Perhaps we should check the radio to see if it's still working."

"Good idea."

Klaus and Heinrich spent many hours trying to get the radio to operate.

"I've tried everything I could think of to get this radio operating," Klaus finally

said. "Some rain must have seeped in and ruined it."

"Isn't there anything we can do to fix it?"

"We could if we had the parts," Klaus answered, "but they're not the kind of parts we could just buy without bringing suspicion on ourselves."

"So all it's good for now is to be used as a stool," Heinrich moaned.

"We can't even use it for that," Klaus explained. "We'll have to get rid of it. It will be a dead giveaway to our mission if we're discovered with it."

"Then how are we going to relay information back to the palace when we do find out what's going on?"

"I don't know," Klaus said calmly. "You'll have to phone tomorrow and let them know the radio is out of commission. But we're certainly not ready to head home yet."

A siren wailed as a police car drove down the street. *They're coming for us!* Heinrich thought in a panic.

To their relief, the car passed. The sound faded into the distance.

Radio propaganda speeches blared from the rooms above, and a couple started arguing. The broadcast ended with instructions followed by warnings. Heinrich and Klaus could make out the voice of the Nazi leader himself. He began his speech quietly.

"Never will I abandon those of our people who are today at the mercy of autocratic* rule." Hitler paused briefly, then continued. "Ten million Germans living outside our borders belong with all Germans, not victimized by foreign rulers. We are one people. We will not

*SS: Short for "Schutzstaffel" or "Defense Protective Unit" that consisted of uniformed guards

*autocratic: led by a supreme ruler

be separated. We must not be separated. Here and now I pledge to those Germans: I have not forsaken you. We who share a common heritage belong together. We have been patient. No one can accuse Germany of not being patient. We have waited for a thaw in the icy climate which separates our sister nations who share a common heritage.”

“I have a feeling he’s including Thumbringen in his plans,” Heinrich said.

“That’s what we’re here to find out about,” Klaus answered.

By now Der Führer had worked himself into a fury, and was shouting like a madman. “We share a common history. We share a common language. We are parts of a whole! We must come together! We must unite!”

Heinrich commented, “Won’t he ever stop his ranting?”

“I don’t think so—not unless someone shuts him up.”

After hiding the broken radio under some loose floorboards, Heinrich and Klaus sat down to discuss their situation. The noise upstairs had mercifully quieted. “We’d better get a plan quick, or we’re finished,” Klaus said, shaking his head.

“It’s going to be a miracle if we discover *anything* now before they discover us,” Heinrich said. “I am so sorry I followed my feelings instead of listening to you.”

“It’s never too late to do the right thing.”

“Let’s pray,” they both said in unison, which brought them to laughing in spite of the predicament that they found themselves in.

Klaus prayed, and after a few minutes of silence, Heinrich said, “I see five letters shining like a bright signpost in the dark-

ness. Every time I close my eyes I see the same word.”

“What is it?”

“DAVID.”

“Maybe if we read in the Bible about King David, we’ll find a situation similar to ours,” Klaus said excitedly. “Remember, he was the smallest of Jesse’s sons, but he toppled the giant Goliath with only one stone!”

“Just like our country is about the smallest in the world. We sure are up against a giant now,” Heinrich said.

“Wasn’t King David chased by Saul? Let’s see now, where could that be?”

Heinrich thought for a moment, then started thumbing through his Bible. “As I remember, the story of David is in First and Second Samuel.”

Heinrich leafed through the worn pages until he found something that caught his interest and read: “And he asked, ‘Will Saul come down, as thy servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech Thee, tell thy servant.’”

“And the Lord said, ‘He will come down’” (*1 Samuel 23:11*).

“That certainly fits our situation,” Klaus said.

“Yes,” Heinrich agreed. “David knew the moves of Saul through hearing about it in prayer. He wanted to know if he should stay or flee, and if the people he was staying with would continue to help him or not, so he asked God.”

Heinrich kept reading. “‘Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?’”

“And the Lord said, ‘They will deliver thee up’” (*1 Samuel 23:12*).

“So they left. Knowing what his enemies were up to saved them that time. Saul must have thought that David had a spy because he always knew his every move ahead of time, but it was just God showing him.”

“We could use a little of that kind of information ourselves right now,” Klaus said, laughing. Then he yawned, and settled down on his rough bed. “I’m sorry, I didn’t sleep very well last night. Why don’t you just read it yourself, then tell me what it says?”

“Sure.” Heinrich was like a schoolboy having just discovered the most interesting book. It had his complete and full attention.

* * *

A few hours later, Klaus woke up.

“Did you have a good sleep?” Heinrich asked.

“Yes, thanks. If you get tired enough, you can sleep anywhere. What did you find out?”

“Some amazing things. David’s story fits ours so well.”

“How is that?”

“Well, there was the time that David was asking the Lord if he should go up and attack his enemies, and the Lord told him, ‘Don’t go straight up and fight them, but circle around behind and wait there. When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the trees, that is my signal for you to attack. Move quickly then, for that will mean that I have gone out ahead of you to smite the Philistines.’” (*See II Samuel 5:23,24*)

“I see—waiting for a sign. Maybe that’s what we need to do,” Klaus said.

Heinrich continued, “God was very specific about how, where, and also when to attack. David’s men didn’t move until God gave the signal.”

“So timing was important. Seems like David had a habit of getting things from God instead of just trying to fight a war on his own.”

“Here is another part that is interesting,” Heinrich said, as he flipped open to Second Samuel chapter 10. “David’s

general and his brother promised to help each other. ‘Joab said, ... Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth Him good.’”

“Good advice. We’re doing this for our country, and the Lord will have to take care of us.”

“Sometimes we must first act brave, and then we really do become brave,” Heinrich said with a smile.

Heinrich then flipped through the pages looking for a particular story he had read earlier.

“This is what I was looking for—the story of Absalom,” Heinrich said, pointing to the 15th chapter of Second Samuel.

“Isn’t that when David’s son tried to overthrow the kingdom?” Klaus asked.

“Right. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? There may be elements that would like to do the same with our principality.” Glancing back to his Bible, Heinrich continued, “It was a tough situation for David. His own son was in rebellion against him. He prayed that God would turn the counsel of those who had betrayed him into foolishness. When David was camping in the wilderness with some 600 of his mighty men, one of his loyal followers, Hushai, offered his help. David told him to go and pretend to be a friend in Absalom’s court to get information.”

“I wonder, ... how does that apply to us?” Klaus asked.

“Well, it is a big jump from something that happened 3,000 years ago to the 20th century,” Heinrich replied. “But then again, some things never change. Every generation has had its Absalom, and now we have our Hitler. Here Hushai was sent into enemy territory to act as a spy—just like we are!”

“Are you getting the same idea I am?”

“I have a feeling I might be. Hushai pretended to be a follower of Absalom and gave him the wrong advice so he could be defeated. He got close to Absalom, which gave him a chance to find out what Absalom’s plans would be, and to warn David so he could escape danger. Absalom was deciding when to attack David. Hushai advised him to wait. He gave him lots of good reasons for waiting. He told him that David was such a great warrior that he would need many men to defeat him.”

“I see—stalling tactics. Good idea. Did Absalom fall for it?”

“Yes! By a miracle, Absalom accepted his advice, and unknowingly followed the counsel of a spy!”

“How did he communicate with David?” Klaus asked with obvious interest as he thought about their defunct radio.

“Hushai delivered the news to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests. Then they communicated with Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the priests’ young sons, who were hiding not far from the Tabernacle. Then the priests’ sons would carry the news to David.”

“Sounds a bit complicated.”

“No one would suspect young boys of spying,” Heinrich said. “Hushai told the priests what was happening, and they told Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the two boys. But they were discovered by another boy, who reported them to Absalom. Right away Absalom’s soldiers started looking for these two spies! The boys only escaped arrest by hiding themselves in a well.

“The young messengers then arrived early in the morning at David’s camp tell-

ing the news to David, which gave him time to escape, gather his followers and organize a new army. God was definitely with Hushai—and David!—That’s why they won!”

“I can see that there is a lot in those Scriptures we could work with,” Klaus said. “Let’s pray and ask God to give us wisdom and show us how He means for us to put these plans and our mission into action.

Heinrich led out in prayer, asking God to show them a plan of what they should do next.

After being quiet for a moment, Klaus said, “Our original instructions were to be shoeshine boys. I have a feeling that as we obey what He told us to do already, we’ll find out what to do next.”

Heinrich agreed. In order to keep from being recognized, they decided to further change their appearance. They both dyed their hair blonde by rubbing in some peroxide that they had brought with them in the suitcase. Next, Heinrich added an artificial mustache and Klaus a small beard. These would suffice until their facial hair had grown in. Heinrich pulled out a different pair of battered wire rim glasses from the bottom of the suitcase. Klaus also mashed their old papers into a pulp, and created new papers and identities for both of them. Heinrich would be Gerhard Schwarz, and Klaus was now Leo Hartmann. Klaus then went out and bought some secondhand clothes, a hat for each of them, and two worn leather jackets. They filled their pouches with shoe cream and buffing cloths, pinned on their swastika pins, and then looked at each other approvingly. The transformation was complete.

To be continued

The Shoeshine Boy



Issue 168



PART 4

Note: While this story takes place during the historic era of World War 2, and borrows some of its characters and events, the story itself, along with the principality of Thumbringen and its people, are fictional.

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A Friend's Loyalty

The day after Heinrich and Klaus' escape, the two Gestapo agents stormed into the hotel and angrily approached Astrid. "You let them slip through our fingers!" the tall agent screamed.

"I don't know what happened," Astrid said, trying to hide her inner quivering.

"Why don't you try the truth? You helped them escape, didn't you?"

"I just cleaned their room and brought their dirty laundry to the cleaners."

"Do you expect us to believe that? Do you think we are stupid? Just when we are about to close in on them, they disappear. Can you explain that?"

"Maybe they checked out."

"Fraulein Astrid, you have more guts than brains. You are truly misguided to not join us in our efforts to make a new world."

"So now, anyone who does not fall down and worship your *Übermensch** is considered misguided?"

"I can see that you will need stronger persuasion. We will see what we can do

to convert you. We are going to have to take you to headquarters. You can have a family reunion. Your parents are there already waiting for you."

"I tell you, I don't know where those two men went."

"We will find out. I suggest you make it easier for yourself by cooperating with us. You could be of great help to us."

"I think I'd rather die first."

With one of them holding each arm, Astrid was forcibly escorted out of the hotel. The visitors and staff looked the other way, trying to avoid getting involved. This was not the first time they had seen such a scene. It was generally considered safer to look the other way.

Whatever happens to me, it was worth it, Astrid thought. I would do it again for him.

* * *

Heinrich and Klaus worked at their shoe-shining business for a week without any noticeable results towards their quest. During their break one morning, Heinrich said to Klaus, "Why are we doing this? Maybe we should skip this part and just rush into the headquarters and look for what we want."

**Übermensch*: "superior being"; a term used to describe a man who is considered superior to all humans

Illustrations by Sabine

Recommended age: 9 years and up. (May be read by younger children at parents' discretion.)

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“Remember what happened the last time we didn’t follow God’s plan?” Klaus reminded Heinrich. “We almost got caught. If our friend hadn’t helped us, there’s no telling what would have happened.”

“You’re right,” Heinrich agreed. “I guess we’ll just have to wait for an opening, instead of trying to force things.”

“That takes patience, Gerhard,” Klaus said. “Saul should have waited for the prophet before making his sacrifice. The early Christians had to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit before they were given power to do their job...”

Heinrich fingered the wooden key he was still wearing under his disguise, and prayed. “Dear God, help us to get the information we need and quickly—before it’s too late.”

That afternoon, they tried to put their hearts into their work. They would

strike up conversations with their customers as they had before, but didn’t ask too many questions that could appear suspicious. Besides learning the fine art of shoe shining, they also learned how to converse and make friends with their customers. They tried to find out any information that could be useful to them, all the while keeping their eyes focused on their work. Business, however, was very slow.

“Maybe we need to move our location to be in the right place at the right time,” Heinrich said.

“That’s funny,” Klaus said. “Just before you said that, I was reminded of the story of Elijah.”

“Elijah?” Heinrich said. “What does he have to do with anything?”

“Remember when he was hiding by the brook of Cherith? God made sure Elijah had food and water the whole time he was in hiding. But then the



brook dried up, and that was God's signal that He wanted Elijah to move somewhere else." (See *1 Kings 17:1-9*.)

"I get it," Heinrich said. "Maybe the fact that business is so slow today means that it's God's time for us to move on."

"Yes," Klaus answered. "Let's pray and see if God has a clue for us. Maybe there's a Zarephath here He wants us to go to."

Klaus prayed, and then Heinrich pulled out his Bible and cracked it open to a verse. "And Ittai answered the king, and said, 'As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.'" (*2 Samuel 15:21*)

Heinrich looked up at Klaus. "Maybe I should look for another one. I don't see what it could mean."

"No, wait," Klaus said. "It's very specific. After all, we are servants, and we need to be in a certain place. We just need to figure out *what* place."

"The place of my lord the king," Heinrich repeated from the verse. "A palace building, maybe?"

"Of course!" Klaus said. "It's so simple. The Kings Place ... Königsplatz ... where the Nazi headquarters are!"

* * *

Arriving at the large square, Klaus and Heinrich spent a few moments politely admiring the two Temples of Honor at its end, prominently placed between the two main buildings of the Nazi government, and honoring the 16 revolutionaries who had died during one of Hitler's early attempts to take over the government by force.

But they soon had enough of this sightseeing, and so found a spot and

began calling out to people passing by. "Need a shine? Best shine in Munich—right here!"

One of the shoeshine boys who worked in that area approached them. He had long brown hair and was surprisingly well groomed for a shoeshine boy. But the polish smudges ingrained in his hands, so deep that no soap could remove them, gave his profession away.

"Do you have a license?" he asked them, somewhat gruffly.

"What? Who are you?" Heinrich asked.

"I'm Hans Sigwald, head of the shoe shiners in this part of town. All the boys here pay me tribute to keep them informed of the latest and to keep them out of trouble with the police. It costs money to get protection here. And you owe me a mark each—hand it over."

They reluctantly gave him the money he asked for.

"Tell us more about this license," Heinrich said.

"It's a new law the Worker's Party is putting into effect beginning next month. Nowadays you even have to be pure Aryan to be a shoeshine boy. Pretty soon you will have to have a license for everything—garbage collector, delivery boy—whatever."

"Can you tell us how to get a license?"

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't," he said with a jeer. "But today I'm not in the mood. Matter of fact, I could use less competition. You'd better find a way to get one soon or I'll be the first to report you!" And with that, Hans swaggered off.

Although a bit shaken, Heinrich and Klaus tried to ignore his threats. The Lord had led them here, and He would have to provide the license in His way and in His time. They went back to their shoe shining.

A tall, skeletal man in his 70s with protruding cheekbones was working near them. He looked up from his polishing to say, “Don’t worry about him. He’s just a lot of hot air. As long as he gets paid he’ll leave you alone.”

“Thanks,” Heinrich answered. “Who are you?”

“The name is Reinhart.”

After exchanging small talk, the sparkling-eyed septuagenarian* went on to talk about his life. “I came to Munich after my parents’ business went broke,” he said with a distant look in his eyes. “I tried to support my whole family, but they are all gone now. I have no family or friends left—just my customers.” He was silent for a moment, but his mood picked up when he talked again of his shoeshine business.

“My customers are my friends now,” he said, smiling warmly. “I really have nothing to complain about. With hard work, I’ve been able to make it all right. God has smiled on me and helped me to get through the tough times. Compared to many, I am richly blessed. But you look like you could use some advice. I notice you have very few customers. You must be amateurs at this profession.”

“What makes you think that?” Klaus asked.

Reinhart puffed out his chest, like a professor delivering a lecture. “I’ve seen

you working,” he said, with a grin, then leaned in closer. “Let me give you a tip. Don’t buff the shoes with your rag as if you were drying your back with a towel after a shower.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Heinrich asked.

“Well, the shoe will be shined, but that sheen will soon grow dull. Shoes are like a woman’s face. First you need to remove the old polish and grime from the leather.”

“Like a woman removing her makeup,” Heinrich added.

“Exactly!” Reinhart continued. “Then you prepare the surface of the leather with coarse polish to remove the roughness. To get longer-lasting results, you must caress the shoes gently. Let the cream do the work by applying it in a circular motion with a soft cloth, gently massaging it into the fine leather. For the final coat, I use a smooth Meltonian shoe cream—the best polish in the world. Each shine takes 40 minutes. You can’t rush an artist.”

“So that is how you get your shoes to glow so radiantly,” Heinrich commented.

A customer came by to pick up his shoes that were ready and overheard the last part of their conversation. “*Ja*, Herr Reinhart is the best! I bought these shoes 10 years ago and they still look new. I’ve tried others around here, but he’s as good as his price.”

“Thank you! You are kind.” Reinhart inclined his head humbly.

But the customer was not done praising him. “My wife is always surprised by my shoes. I’m going to Zurich

**septuagenarian*: somebody between 70 and 79 years old

tomorrow for an important business meeting, so I came by for a shine.”

“Farewell! Have a safe trip and good luck in business,” Reinhart said as the customer strode off with a smile, and an extra spring in his step, carrying his dazzling shoes.

Just then Heinrich spotted a government car pulling up in front of the Nazi headquarters’ building, and two soldiers roughly escorting a woman into the car.



His heart nearly stopped for a moment. *Could it be...? That almost looks like Astrid!* The form of the woman was clearly visible, but her dark head was slumped down and he could not see her face.

He was still trying to catch a glimpse of the face when the car drove off, and he was interrupted by a shout. “Hey, shoeshine boy! Give me a shine!”

Heinrich was snapped back to reality. He picked up his box and walked towards the man who had called him, a tall man in a black leather coat.

“How much?” the man asked brusquely.

“I give very good shines ... for only one mark.”

“Your price is good. Let’s see if your job is worth a mark.”

“I will do my best.”

The man leaned against a wall and placed his boot on top of the box. Heinrich dipped into the black polish with his special glove. Then he began to work his magic, putting his all into his work. It took a lot of effort not to think of the car that he had just seen pulling away from Nazi headquarters. Had it been Astrid? He could not be sure. *But after I am done with this customer, I will find out!* he vowed.

He tried to converse while he pampered the shoes with a wide assortment of cleaning agents, softeners, conditioners, polish, and finally waterproofing cream. He continued to work although his heart was heavy. Even if it was Astrid in the car, what could he do to rescue her?

With his finishing glove, Heinrich buffed his customer’s shoe to a high shine until ... *Yes, I can see myself!* It

was a good job, but the man was busy reading a newspaper, and merely grunted.

Heinrich commented on the headlines that he read. “I see we’ve won another victory for the Third Reich. Our glorious army will soon take over the world.”

The man put down his newspaper suddenly and responded, “You sound very patriotic for a shoeshine boy.”

Heinrich suddenly recognized the man and realized who he was talking to.

“You’re Herr Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda!” Heinrich exclaimed, at the same moment recovering from his shock. “I ... I am honored, sir!”

“You look like you should be in the Army of the Third Reich,” Herr Goebbels said.

“I wish that I could be,” Heinrich answered. “Unfortunately, I am not from Germany.”

“Yes, I noticed from your accent that you must be from somewhere else.”

“I am from Thumbringen.”

“And what brings you to Germany?” Herr Goebbels asked.

Heinrich heard the Lord’s voice speaking to him. *This is your chance! I set this up. Use it.*

Heinrich seized the moment and said with confidence, “Doesn’t a child want to be close to his mother? I’ve heard of the Führer’s accomplishments, and I wanted to see for myself. Perhaps I could teach my own countrymen some of what I’ve learned.”

“And why are you shining shoes?”

“It is a stress-free life. I’m happy enough bumping along, making a little money, while serving the common people. But I don’t plan on doing this forever. I hope to save enough money to one day enter a school. I’ll study political science. I hope to take some of the greatness I have witnessed here to share with my countrymen.”

What a perfect opportunity, Goebbels thought. A foreigner, a poor student working his way to get to college to study, so he can take back what he’s learned to spread the message of our superior way of life. Yes, show other countries embracing the Nazi way ... this could be a great propaganda opportunity! But let’s take this slowly. It is wise to be cautious. His loyalty must be tested first.

“I see you are a very industrious young man,” Herr Goebbels said. “I admire that. Hard work and determination will help you realize your dreams. Perhaps I could help you in some small way. What is your name, lad?”

“Gerhard Schwarz, sir,” Heinrich answered.

“Well, Gerhard, why don’t you come to the book burning this Friday at the Odeonplatz. I have some friends—some of your countrymen that I would like you to meet.”

“What is a book burning?” asked Heinrich as he began to coax the brilliant sheen out of the other shoe.

“We’ve collected insidious* works from communists, Jews, and dissidents—we plan to keep them warm with their burning pages. There will be speeches, rousing music—perhaps you

**insidious*: slowly or subtly harmful or destructive

can make some friends there that might help you.”

“I would like that.”

“Seven ’o clock then, Friday. I hope you will be there.”

“Can I bring a friend?”

“Who is that?”

Heinrich pointed in the direction of Klaus. “Leo Hartman. He is working over there. We are partners together.”

“Is he also from Thumbringen?”

“No, he is German, but we have been working together in Thumbringen for a few years. He is the one who insisted on showing me the birthplace of our Third Reich.”

“Yes, bring him too, of course.”

The job was finished in the customary manner. Like a magician waving his wand, Heinrich twirled the clean polish cloth over the second shoe and said, “*Vielen dank**!”

With a nod, Goebbels tossed him the customary coin and then swaggered off.

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Heartbreak

An hour had passed since Heinrich had seen the car pull away from headquarters. Heinrich walked over to Klaus, who was massaging some life into a pair of tired Testonis*.

He called him aside and whispered, “I think Astrid is in trouble. I’m going to call her apartment.”

“Don’t forget to disguise your voice,” Klaus said, and then went back to his shoe shining.

In the nearest coffeehouse, Heinrich dropped two coins into a pay telephone to call Astrid’s apartment.

“Answer!” he muttered to himself impatiently, after waiting several minutes for someone to pick up the phone.

Finally he heard a woman’s voice answer roughly, “Ja?”

“Hello. I would like to speak with Astrid, please.”

“She is ... out.”

“Where is she? When will she come back?”

“Do not call again. She will not come back.”

“What happened?”

“I am not allowed to give that information. Who is calling?”

Heinrich smashed down the phone on the hook in anger. *All because she helped us escape! If only I ... maybe I’m not too late. But I have to find out for sure.*

When he called the hotel, his worst fears were confirmed. From the front desk clerk he learned that Astrid had died earlier that afternoon.

Heinrich crumpled in a heap, and the tears fell. “Oh God!” he cried out.

He thought of running, of giving up his mission. *What am I doing here anyway? The whole plan is crazy.* His mind began to race uncontrollably, fueled by his grief. *I could slip back over the border the way I came. I could cross the mountains to home, away from this madness. I want to be rid of this whole scheme—rid of the Nazi nightmare. I could reach the safety of the palace*

**vielen dank*: “many thanks”

**Testonis*: an expensive shoe brand

before dawn, safety forever. I could just tell my father and Herr Schelling that I didn't find out what they needed. I could tell them it was just too hard.

Klaus could tell from a distance what must have happened. He came over and patted his friend's shoulder trying to comfort him in some way. "Bad news?" he asked.

"They ... they ... murdered her."

Klaus dropped down beside him, and placed his arm across Heinrich's shoulders. Heinrich tried to rub his eyes to stop crying, but it was like trying to stop the tide.

"I'm sorry," Klaus said softly.

* * *

Astrid, like so many other innocents of that time, faded from this life only to be reborn in another. What her executioners did not realize was that her death was a part of God's plan. Heinrich was in need of someone to plead his case in the heavenly courts—someone who understood him and his mission.

Astrid was chosen to be that link between Heaven's resources and Heinrich's needs. She was to be close by his side at all times. Without her supernatural help, Heinrich's mission to save his country would have surely failed, as had so many others who sought to stand up against the might of the Third Reich. As one of God's children, death had no sting for her. She was transported through the portals of time to eternity—to the palace that had been prepared for her. There she did have a family reunion as she was promised, though it was not as she had expected. It was far greater!

In the middle of their family's festivity, the Lord Himself entered the room.

He walked over to Astrid, looked her in the eye and led her by the hand. "Come," He said. "It's time. Let Me show you your mission. You need to go to him. Now is his greatest need."

Through a window in the spirit world, Astrid could see Heinrich, crumpled in a corner of the miserable hole where he and Klaus still lived. She could feel his anguish.

Heinrich was crying out, "Jesus, I loved her so much and now she is gone. Why couldn't You save her? It's all my fault—my fault for going to see her in the first place. I love her and need her now more than ever—and she is not here."

Astrid was notably moved, and wanted to reach out to his world and comfort him, to let him know she was all right. Jesus explained, "He is deeply discouraged by your death. You must comfort him and show him My love."

"How can that be possible? We are in different dimensions!"

"With faith and love, all things are possible. When deep sleep falls on men, I am able to show them things through the thoughts and visions that I give them." (See Job 4:12-13.)

The Lord then spoke to Heinrich directly and told him, "It is enough sorrow for one day. Sleep now. Tonight something wonderful will happen."

Heinrich became weary and succumbed to sleep, collapsing onto his pitiful bed.

Astrid's coming was like the lightning flash without the thunder. When the light dimmed, to his amazement, Heinrich was able to make out Astrid's figure. Astrid found herself next to his mattress.



“Astrid, is that you?”

“Shhhh!” She pressed her fingers on his lips.

“Is this a dream, or is it really happening?”

“What do you think?”

“You seem so real.”

“Touch me, and find out.”

He clasped her hand, and her touch was like fire that enveloped him in her warmth.

“I’m afraid that I will wake up and you will be gone,” Heinrich said. “That I will find that this was only all a ... dream.”

The Lord gave Astrid the words to say to him. She listened and repeated what she heard. “The spiritual world is more real than the one we can see with our eyes. For the flesh passes away, but he that does the will of God lives forever. Our lives are like a shadow that falls on the lawn, and then is gone. Like a moment at sunset that is only captured in the mind but is remembered

for eternity. Let this experience change your life forever.”

As they lay next to each other, Heinrich raised himself on his elbow to look at Astrid. He saw her eyes sparkle, and kissed her. He felt the Lord’s voice speaking to him directly.

I took her to Me for this time, but she will be with you, helping you, along with Me. Take heart, and know that whatever the outcome of your mission, whatever the circumstances you find yourself in, My special love for you will never die. Astrid is a special token of My love for you, and she lives on. Though you are apart from her, fear not. This special love will grow and thrive, and one day you will see her, and you will reap such love, such joy that your world knows not of. You will know that your trials have been worth it all.

As a man that rejoices because he has purchased a precious pearl of great price, so will you value even more the joy that I have laid up for you—much

more so than if I would have just given it to you without any tests at all. I will bestow upon you delight, and greater treasures of the heart! Therefore, have great courage and fulfill the mission I have for you, and all these joys will be added unto you.

Heinrich smiled and said slowly to Astrid, “The spirit world has suddenly become so real to me! I can’t doubt what I have seen. For me to doubt what my senses have experienced would be to deny my own existence.”

Astrid looked into his eyes and said, “That’s the way it should be. Never doubt the Lord’s love—or mine either. Remember, I did not die in vain.”

“Why did you have to die?”

“To help you accomplish your mission.”

“I think it’s just too hard for me. Maybe someone else could do the job better.”

“You are the one the Lord has chosen—you and Klaus. Your mission is not in vain. You must not abandon it. You are about to discover the information you need, if you don’t give up. It will begin at the book burning. I will help you to meet the people you need. Be like Hushai with Absalom. Be like Hushai, like Hushai. ...” Her voice faded as she disappeared like smoke—a vapor of incense and flowers entwining upwards.

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A Turn of Events

“Get up,” Klaus shouted as he shook Heinrich awake. “I hear marching and loudspeakers blaring. They are conducting a house-to-house search for

someone. Maybe they’ve discovered our hiding place.”

Heinrich rubbed his eyes wearily, then sat up with a start.

The two looked desperately around the room for a place to hide.

“Where can we go?” Heinrich asked.

“I found a stairway—it leads to a basement. It is not very large—just enough room for you and me and our suitcase to cram inside. Come, I’ll show you, but we have to move quickly!”

Heinrich looked surprised. “I didn’t know this dump had a basement.”

“Neither did I, until ... I heard something from under there,” Klaus said pointing to the spot.

“You what?”

“It’s the strangest thing! I’ll tell you about it later. Hurry up, they’ll be here any minute.”

Klaus moved a grimy rug that covered the entrance to the side. The opening to the basement had been made to fit so tightly that it was almost impossible to see the cracks when it was shut, unless you looked very carefully.

It was a squeeze to get their suitcase through the small portal, but they finally managed. They could hear the soldiers searching the building next door. As soon as they had gotten below, they heard the sound of wood splintering. Two SS troopers were furiously smashing the flimsy door with their rifle butts, trying to force an opening. The two soldiers burst into the room pointing their guns at every corner. They stalked carefully through the building, ready to fire quickly on any surprises they might meet. Their trained eyes darted everywhere to find

a clue that might betray anyone who was hiding from them.

The lieutenant said, "That's strange! There are cobwebs all around, but there were none near the door when we entered it."

"Maybe someone has been using this place?" suggested the other soldier.

"That's possible. Inspect the building thoroughly."

"Yes sir!" the soldier said, as he began searching the building like a hunter stalking a deer. He listened for the slightest sound of life. He paused directly above the basement door—unaware of its existence—with his head tilted upwards and nostrils flaring as though trying to catch the scent of his prey.

A whistle and a shouted order from his commanding officer from the next house distracted him. "We have found someone! We need help, come quickly!"

Deep down in the basement, Heinrich sighed with relief. "That was a close one! ... So, can you tell me now?"

"Tell you what?"

"What did you hear under the floor?"

"I don't know if I should tell you this or not."

"Tell me, it's important. What did you hear?"

"The voice just said, 'Here.'"

"Here?"

"That's what made me look at the floor more carefully, and helped me to find the basement."

"Was it a woman's voice?"

"Yes."

"Astrid?"

Klaus raised his eyebrows. "It sounded like her. Why did you think it was her?"

"She came to me also—last night. She told me ... not to worry, that she would help us."

Klaus nodded his head. "Then so she has."

Heinrich kissed into the air and said, "Thank you for coming through for us."

Klaus gently put his hand on Heinrich's shoulder. "Back to the problem at hand. We aren't out of danger yet. Either we move and find a new place, or we brave it out here. Which will it be?"

"It seems we should go—but then again, maybe we shouldn't," Heinrich answered. "The safest place to be in a forest fire is where it has already burned. Moving might expose us to new dangers. Let's make sure that we are moving when it is best and not jumping from the skillet into the fire."

After praying, they both agreed that they should stay in the same area for their shoe-shining business, but that they should not come back to the apartment.

"We'll sleep on the street if we need to," Heinrich said.

Klaus grabbed the suitcase and Heinrich their shoe-shining kits, and together they snuck out the back entrance.

Following the Lord's guidance to leave proved correct for—unbeknownst to them—the next day, the same soldier came back to examine the room more carefully.

All of a sudden, a rotten board crumbled under his step. Beneath the planks he could barely make out a shiny metal object. When he removed the ter-

mite-eaten boards, he discovered the broken radio that Klaus and Heinrich had hidden.

The soldier blew his whistle and called to his fellow soldiers, "Come quickly, I have found something."

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Captured

After surveying possible investment opportunities in Thumbringen, Bart and Max had returned to their limousine and were making their slow way back through winding roads towards the airport in Bern, Switzerland. It was now near midnight. As they turned sharply on a high mountain pass they came to a detour sign. Some construction workers directed them to a side road marked with red flags and flashlights.

Their car bumped down a road full of potholes.

Bart looked out of the window. "Strange! This road hasn't been used for a long time. They should be repairing *this* road instead of that one."

"Something strange is going on here," Max affirmed.

When they rounded the next hill, they discovered why the road had been blocked.

"It's a trap!" Max yelled. "Get down, boss! They might start shooting!"

The limo was quickly surrounded by a dozen storm troopers sporting bright red swastika armbands. They pointed their weapons menacingly at Bart and Max. Behind them was a convoy of staff cars, trucks and motorcycles.

Max reached for his pistol, ready for a fight, but Bart shoved it back into his pocket.



“Put that thing away before you get us killed! It’s no use—there’s too many of them. Let’s surrender and see if we can’t talk our way out of this.”

“I’d rather fight my way out if I could,” Max fumed arrogantly.

“Remember, Max, discretion is the better part of valor. I know I’m paying you to be my bodyguard, but let’s try to use our heads.”

“Get out of your car with your hands in the air!” the officer barked.

Max and Bart reluctantly obeyed.

“Hey! You’re speakin’ American,” Max remarked.

“Obviously,” the officer returned curtly. “I studied at one of your universities before the war. Now show me your papers, Yankees!”

“Hey! Who are you calling a Yankee? I’m an American citizen!” Bart yelled.

“I am Commander Otto Wolfstein and, yes, we know that you are American citizens.”

Bart retorted, “But you have no right to stop us. Switzerland is a neutral country.”

“Yes, but we are not neutral and neither is America, as it pretends to be. Anyway, Switzerland will soon be ours, so these borders mean nothing to us.”

“I demand to see a lawyer,” Bart insisted. “This is going to cause an international incident—you’re going to be sorry you did this,” Bart insisted.

“Demand? I hardly think you are in a position to demand. Besides, you may be spies, in which case you have no rights at all.”

“We are just doing business here, nothing else. Why don’t you call the Ford factory in Cologne that you Nazis took over? The Danish manager there

will vouch for me. We have done business for many years.”

“You must admit that it is strange for an American to be doing business when all Europe is at war,” said Commander Wolfstein.

“We didn’t know that Europe would be at war when we came here.”

“You can explain all of that later in Germany.”

“We are not going to Germany. We have a plane to catch.”

“I’m afraid you won’t be able to make your flight. You have another appointment at headquarters for questioning.”

Bart looked him straight in the eye. “Come on, tell us, what are you doing this for?”

“You have some information we want,” the commander replied, “and we always get what we want.”

“Well, you’re not gonna get it from us, you Nazi monkeys!” Max bellowed.

The commander whacked Max across the mouth with his pistol butt. “Your chauffeur would be wise to keep his mouth shut.” He returned his pistol to its holster.

A soldier opened the back door and motioned with his pistol. “Get in!”

“You won’t get away with this!” Max yelled.

The soldiers roughly began forcing them in.

“Where are you taking us?” Bart yelled.

“Be quiet! We are the ones who will ask the questions!”

The two were thrown into the back seat of one of the Nazi’s cars, and the door was slammed shut.

Will we ever make it out of this place alive? Bart thought.

The convoy quickly drove out. The driver in the first car nodded to the construction workers, which sent them scurrying off into the forest. After crossing the border without further incident, they traveled for several hours through mountain passes.

At last they arrived at Nazi headquarters in Munich, where the car that held Bart and Max drove into a rear entrance. After getting out of the car, Bart and Max were unceremoniously pushed into a room illuminated by a single light bulb, and told to wait there.

In the next room, Commander Wolfstein met the officer who would do the questioning. They saluted each other with the customary salute.

“We have brought the prisoners as ordered,” Commander Wolfstein began. “But why all this trouble for these Americans? Why not just shoot them, like we do everyone else?”

“That would be like killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.”

“Excuse me?”

“A fairy tale.”

“I had no parents to read me fairy tales.”

“They can help us find the prince of Thumbringen who has escaped our capture.”

“Thumbringen? What could that little country have that would interest the Third Reich?”

“It is a top secret. I would soon be on the Russian front or six feet under if I told you that.”

“I see.” They saluted once more and parted, the commander going back to his car and the other to the room to begin the questioning.

The tall Gestapo officer walked in and stood with his hands on his hips looking like a stern schoolmaster getting ready to discipline his ill-behaved children. Another soldier came in and sat at a small desk in the corner, ready to scribble into his notebook anything of value that was said.

The officer nodded his head and spoke in English with a thick accent. “Welcome.”

“Let us out of here!” Max yelled.

“You would do well to cooperate with us, unless you want this to become your worst nightmare.”

Bart protested. “But I am a businessman, I’m not a—”

“Nonsense! You are a spy—admit it! You came to Europe for espionage purposes.”

“I’m just a businessman! I came here looking for business opportunities, I tell you!”

“In case you didn’t know, there’s a war going on. It’s not a time to be doing business.”

“Well, some of my associates don’t think so. They are still cooperating with you and operating several factories in Germany.”

“Yes, those are very wise businessmen, and you’d be wise to cooperate with us in like manner. Just answer the questions. Why were you traveling to Thumbringen?”

Max butted in. “Could we get something to eat and drink? I’m starvin’ after being in that cramped back seat for hours.”

Bart tried to explain, “You see, we are used to a little more comfort and better treatment.”

“That is most unfortunate, but we had to move quickly. Switzerland is not

yet our domain. But let us complete our questioning before we go to dinner. It's been reported that you interfered with some Nazi youths who were questioning a man by a bridge."

"That wasn't questioning, we stopped them from murdering him!" Max blurted out. "And if they hadn't run away we would've had a good fight, too."

"What is your relationship with that person? Why did you stop and rescue him?"

"Look," Bart pleaded. "I don't know why you're asking me all these things. We just saw someone in need and we helped him out. Any decent person would do the same."

"Yeah, we don't like to see little guys being picked on," quipped Max.

"What did you do with him after you rescued him?"

"We took him back home."

"Where was that?"

"He said he was the prince of Thumbringen, so we dropped him off at the palace like he asked us to."

"The prince?"

"Yes, of Thumbringen. But he could have been making that up. He didn't look like a prince."

"Would you be able to recognize him if you saw him again?"

"I guess so. But why would I want to do that?"

"Because if you don't, you're going to spend a very long time in a dark prison."

"I see. Well, I can't promise you anything, but I'll see what I can do."

"That is wise, for both of you."

"Well, I'm a good businessman—I

know when to cash in my poker chips and cut my losses. Where do you want us to begin?"

"We have reason to believe that he's in Munich, though he may be disguised. We found a radio that he could have been using. We are watching the building in case he returns. But if that turns out to be a false lead, we have you as our alternate plan. You will be our bait to catch our prince. We'll have you wait at the major cafés."

"How will I find him?"

"When he sees you he will try to make contact with you, I'm sure."

"I'll see what I can do."

"Good," the officer said. "You will need your car." The officer handed the keys to Bart. "But don't try to escape. You will be under 24-hour surveillance."

"Now, why would we want to butt out of this party early?" Max added with a sneer.

* * *

Bart and Max knew that the apartment that been provided for them was probably bugged, and so carried on what they hoped was a fairly normal conversation. But during a short break, when Bart retired to a couch for a quick nap, Max came over with a drink. He bent low beside Bart and, in an almost inaudible whisper, asked, "What are you doing? Why are you helping them?"

"I'm afraid it looks like the only way to get out of this mess," Bart whispered back. "But don't worry. Something will work out. I have a feeling that this is going to backfire on them."

"Okay, boss ... if you know what you are doing."

To be continued

The Shoeshine Boy



Issue 170



PART 5

Note: While this story takes place during the historic era of World War 2, and borrows some of its characters and events, the story itself, along with the principality of Thumbringen and its people, are fictional.

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The Tip-Off

Although they had looked, Heinrich and Klaus had not yet found another place to stay. They had slept on nearby park benches for two nights, and were tired and achy. During the day they continued their shoe shining business.

Bart had set himself up at the main café in the area, in accordance with the instructions he had been given. The trap was set. Now all that was needed was for the prey to walk into it.

Bart was sipping his coffee and watching the street while Max was engrossed in reading the newspaper.

Everything in the café became quiet when someone turned on a radio for one of Hitler's speeches. Waiters stopped serving, and diners felt embarrassed to continue chewing their food in this reverential* atmosphere. The kitchen staff was told to not mar the occasion with the clatter of cutlery and plates.

"Another one of those boring speeches." Bart groaned.

Bart looked down at his shoes that were uncharacteristically scuffed and dirty. "I really need to get a shine, Max."

Max looked up from his paper and pointed across the street. "There are

some shoe shiners right over there. Why don't you go get it done?"

"Good idea. I don't think our Nazi goons will mind me getting a little shine, will they?" Bart said as he looked over at the dozen plainclothes agents who were watching his every move, while trying to be inconspicuous. "They probably know how many times I've blinked my eyes since I have been sitting here."

Max added, "Yeah! Every time I go to the toilet, they follow me to make sure I won't escape."

"Okay, I'm going. What about you? You want a shine?"

"No, you go ahead. I want to finish the comics."

Bart looked at the comic strips that Max was engrossed in reading. "But Max, they're in German!"

"Yeah, I know that. I just like lookin' at the pictures."

"Suit yourself," Bart said as he got up and walked over to a line of shoe shiners who were set up across the street.

Heinrich was busy finishing a shine of a customer's shoes. When he turned around and recognized Bart, his initial reaction was to run over to him and reveal his identity, but Astrid was whispering to his heart to wait. She spoke this verse to his heart: *A prudent man*

**reverential: worthy of awe or deep respect*

Illustrations by Sabine

Recommended age: 9 years and up. (May be read by younger children at parents' discretion.)

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foreseeth the evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and are punished (Proverbs 22:3).

Heinrich was finished with his customer, and then turned to Bart who stood waiting. “Need a shine?”

“Sure.” Bart put his shoe on the metal horn. “You speak English. How did you know I spoke English?”

“Just a guess,” Heinrich said. “But that book you have under your arm, *Learning German*, helped.” Heinrich began to apply the polish.

“I thought it would be helpful for business if I knew some basic German phrases,” Bart said as he looked curiously down at Heinrich, who was now furiously buffing his shoes.

Heinrich was waiting on the Lord for the best time to reveal his identity. He deliberately tried to avoid looking into Bart’s eyes for fear that he would be recognized too soon.

“I have something to tell you, but you can’t look surprised,” Heinrich said. “Just keep reading your book.”

“What is it?”

“I’m the kid you rescued on the bridge in Zurich. You know, the ‘palace brat.’”

“Don’t say?” Bart replied in a whisper. “Whatever you do, don’t show that you know me. There are at least a dozen pair of eyes on us right now watching my every move.”

“Right,” agreed Heinrich.

Bart continued. “I have some information that might help you. Whatever you do, do not go back to the place where you were staying. They are onto you. They are waiting for you. They found some kind of radio.”

“I understand. Thanks.” Heinrich paused for a moment. “That’s about as

good as I can get these shoes. That will be one mark, sir.”

“Here you go,” Bart said as he flipped two coins into the air, and Heinrich artfully snatched both of them before they hit the pavement.

“Thanks for the tip, mister”—and then in a quieter voice that only Bart could hear—“and the tip.”

Bart walked back over to the table where Max was chuckling to himself over the comics.

One of the men who was watching them came up to the table. “Who were you talking to?”

“Just getting my shoes shined. I can’t go around looking like a tramp now, can I?”

“Have you spotted the boy yet?”

“Not yet, but as soon as I do I’ll let you know.”

“I have just received new instructions. You will now need to find the boy in two days.”

“Or?” Bart asked suspiciously.

“Or you will no longer be useful to us.”

“That doesn’t sound good,” Max said mockingly.

“To put it more bluntly—if you don’t find him, you’d better start writing your will.”

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A Way Out

Bart and Max were returned to their small apartment that evening after they ate dinner in the café where they had been sitting all day, except for a few strolls up and down the streets close to Königsplatz.

“What a boring day,” Max said as he plunked himself down on the edge of

his bed. “I don’t know how they think we’re going to find the guy like this ... and as if it’s *our* fault if we don’t find him in two days! It’s crazy!”

Knowing the room was bugged, Max made as many sneering comments as he could, especially with “them” in mind. Bart remained silent for the most part.

If they needed to talk about something they didn’t want their eavesdroppers to hear, they chose the pen and paper method. Max had found an old notebook in one of the drawers, and half a pencil stub between some pillows in the couch. This had now become their primary means of communication.

“So what are we going to do, boss?” Max scribbled on the notepad. “They follow us everywhere we go.”

Bart scribbled his message underneath. “I don’t know, but I’ll think of something tomorrow.”

That night, Bart turned to the Lord in his desperation—something he hadn’t done in a long time. “Dear God, please don’t let us die here.”

The next morning, Bart woke up to an unusual dripping noise. Water was dripping from the ceiling, and there was a large puddle on the floor next to Max’s bed.

Bart heard a vehicle pull up outside the apartment building, and he jumped out of bed to look out the window.

“Max! Time to wake up,” Bart said as he watched two workmen step out of a motorcycle with a sidecar.

Still half asleep, Max sat up and swung his feet around—only to be jolted rudely awake when his feet landed right in a large puddle. Max looked up at the ceiling in surprise and saw the leak. “Hey! What’s this?”

“Must be from the next floor. There are two plumbers coming to fix it.” Bart motioned out the window.

Bart got an idea. He pulled out his notepad and wrote: “This is our chance.”

Bart grabbed his German phrase book and began copying down words that would fit the meaning that he wanted to convey to the plumbers, while Max stood out in the hallway to spot them when they came down. Bart also deliberately made a sink pipe loose, which began leaking water on to the floor.

“Hey, boss,” Max whispered through the doorway as he saw the two plumbers come out of the apartment upstairs.

Bart came out and closed the door to their room behind them. “I’ll take it from here.”

Bart approached the men as they came down the stairs. He spoke haltingly, doing his best to pronounce the German words correctly. “Excuse me. I have a plumbing problem. Can you help me?”

“Yes,” one of the men replied.

“You speak English?” Bart asked.

“A little,” the tall, dark-haired plumber said.

“That’s good, because I don’t speak much German,” Bart replied. “There’s a loose pipe in the bathroom which has caused quite a mess.” He showed them inside their apartment, and they fixed it easily.

“*Vielen dank!*” Bart said as he paid them more than the price asked.

Bart followed them into the hallway, chitchatting a little, then said, “By the way, I noticed from my window that you have an antique motorcycle. I’m a col-

lector and want to buy it. How much do you want for it?"

The man looked straight into Bart's eyes for a moment. Bart could tell that he didn't believe his story. The plumber then whispered a few words in German to his partner who nodded. Taking Bart aside, he whispered, "We noticed you're being watched by the Gestapo."

Bart was surprised at this sudden direct comment, and wasn't sure what to say. But there wasn't time to be cautious. What other chance did he and Max have? They were as good as dead anyway. He decided to tell the truth.

"More than just being watched," he whispered back. "We're their prisoners, and if we don't find some way to escape soon, we're history."

"We can help you. My name is Johann. This is my friend, Leopold," the plumber said, motioning to his partner. "We work for the resistance."

Bart was never more relieved to hear those words. "Thank God," he sighed.

"You should wear our uniforms and take our tools also, then we'll go out the back entrance. We know how to evade them. Here are the keys."

Bart handed Johann a good sum of money. "Thank you. Take this. Use it to help your work."

Johann quickly stuffed the money in a chest pouch he had around his neck and then pointed to Bart's apartment. "We shouldn't take much time."

The four went in to the room and switched clothes quickly, and without a word. Max barely fit into the other plumber's uniform, busting the seam

of the shirt, but there wasn't time to worry about that.

The plumbers headed out the back way. Johann turned and indicated with his hand as a farewell before disappearing out of sight.

"Boss, what about our suitcases and limousine?" Max asked.

"Forget them. What good are they to us if we're dead?"

They made their way down to the motorcycle, put their helmets on, and pulled their goggles over their eyes so that their watchdogs wouldn't recognize them. It took a few tries to get the motorcycle engine started, but once it got going, Max pressed on the gas pedal and they raced off right past their guards. Bart hunkered down in the sidecar and held on as best he could. A few times the sidecar almost tipped over as Max took the turns too fast and sharply.

"Slow down! You're going to kill us before the Nazis get a chance to!" Bart yelled.

"Sorry, boss."

Bart found a map in the sidecar and found their position. He charted out the fastest route to the Swiss border that avoided any main roads, and gave Max directions.

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The Book Burning

Heinrich and Klaus went to the book burning as invited. Ten-foot tall Nazi banners lined the road. The induction* of new recruits into the SS troops had begun.

**induction*: formal entrance

Mass choruses, pylons* reminiscent* of Rome, flaring torches, fanfares*, and the sternly classical backdrop of the Party's administrative building gave a spectacular theatrical effect.

A motorized procession passed beneath triumphal arches adorned with the Party symbol of sovereignty, the stylized eagle clutching a wreathed swastika. The fronts of houses were drenched in a sea of red bunting* dotted with white circles offsetting black swastikas.

The limousine halted in front of the podium, and the Führer got out and mounted the steps that led to the speaker's platform.

The masses turned to face the podium where the author of this madness stood with his arms outstretched in salute. The whole crowd roared and raved in a delirium* of self-intoxication.

A parade of the Nazi elite filed past Hitler bearing banners and flags. The whole of this vast spectacle was enacted under a light dome of vertical searchlight beams stabbing into the night sky.

Hitler was the object of hysterical adulation among many Germans. Below the reviewing stand, girls in national costume pushed each other for the privilege of coming face to face with the Führer. "I must look in his eyes!" one shouted.

Hitler gave a stirring speech. "As evolution teaches us, the whole of nature is a continuous struggle between strength

and weakness, an eternal victory of the strong over the weak. We must eliminate the weak in favor of the strong! We must win back our rightful past glory. We will rebuild Germany into a mighty empire that will last a thousand years."

Hitler's fiery words and brilliant blue eyes seemed to hypnotize his enthralled listeners. The enraptured crowd believed that their protector, savior, and friend had come to rescue them from the horrors of the Depression and the economic vicissitudes* which they were suffering. His emotional speech ended, and the mighty wave of cheers from the crowds echoed and reechoed, "Heil Hitler!" over and over again for nearly an hour.

Heinrich made his way to the side of the podium, introduced himself to one of Goebbels' men and explained his purpose. This man then went over to Goebbels and whispered something in his ear. Goebbels approached Heinrich wreathed in smiles.

"Ah, Gerhard, I'm glad to see you decided to come. If you don't mind, we're going to take a movie film of you to show at the theaters during the newsreels as an example of a foreigner actively involved in our cause."

"Well, I don't know if I can..."

"Just be enthusiastic. You will receive great satisfaction knowing that you are contributing to the glorious cause of the Third Reich."

**pylon*: gateway

**reminiscent*: to remind of

**fanfare*: a short, lively passage of trumpets

**bunting*: flags or banners

**delirium*: great emotional excitement

**self-intoxication*: being intoxicated (as in drunkenly happy) about yourself

**vicissitudes*: shifting changes

One of his assistants came up to Goebbels. "It is time."

Goebbels nodded his head and turned to Heinrich.

"We will speak more later. Duty calls, I must deliver my speech." As Goebbels approached the podium, his expression turned to rage.

"Our cities have been infected by rats. The rats must be kept in the sewers. Just like you would burn weeds to keep them from spreading, so we will burn these poisonous works of so-called intellectual literature, and purge our land from this vermin, these poisonous communist ideas. Gather with me now and throw these works into the fire with me."

He picked up a book and threw it into the fire. Shouts of "Heil Hitler" echoed through the crowd, and soon everyone took up the chant until the whole square was resonating with shouting voices as the flames leapt higher. Heinrich did his best to join in, picking up various books that were strewn on the floor around him and throwing them into the flames. When he noticed the cameras moving in closer to him, he tried to look especially enthusiastic. Afterward, there was an interview.

"You know, you did very well today," the director of the newsreel said.

Goebbels' assistant came to Heinrich and shook his hand vigorously. "You did just fine. In fact, I think that it's time you realized your full potential. The Third Reich has great things for you in the world order that we're establishing."

"Yes, we are all brothers," Heinrich said.

"But not all have had your privilege. You have escaped mediocrity*, and come to the true knowledge of who you are."

Goebbels walked up and slapped his hand on Heinrich's shoulder. "There is someone here I want you to meet. He is also from Thumbringen."

"Oh, really?" Heinrich was caught by surprise. "Uh ... that would be great." He was soon standing in front of a tall man dressed in black wearing a leather jacket. With him was one of the youths who had almost thrown him over the bridge in Bern. At first Heinrich did not recognize him, for the color of his uniform had changed from brown to black.

"This is the man I was talking about," Goebbels said, pointing to the younger one. "Emil Grass."

Emil eyed Heinrich suspiciously as they made the customary introductions. Goebbels moved on to another group of people, leaving Heinrich alone with the two men.

"You look somehow familiar," Emil said. "Thumbringen is a small place. Which part are you from?"

"I'm from Truppendorf," Heinrich answered, sticking with that part of his story.

"Oh, really? I have a brother who lives there. He is here tonight. I'll go find him."

Oh Lord, Heinrich prayed, Help me not to be discovered. Help us to discover their plans without them discovering ours.

Emil returned after looking for his brother. "I can't find him right now, but why don't you come to a meeting tomorrow. We are planning some great things for Thumbringen. Perhaps you would like to join us."

**mediocrity: being mediocre, or not good for much*

"Where is this meeting?"

"At the Kellerplatz. Do you know where that is?"

"I have seen it."

"Meet us there at noon tomorrow. Go to the basement door and knock three times, wait and say my name. There will be someone waiting for you there to open the door."

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Plans of the Enemy

Heinrich and Klaus had prayed, and both had felt strongly that, for some reason, it would be better for Klaus to stay back and Heinrich to go alone. They didn't know what this meeting would bring, but whatever would come from this, it was sure to be decisive. Everything that they had been through had been leading up to this moment.

At the time appointed, Heinrich descended a flight of stairs that led to the basement of the Kellerplatz. He came to a bolted metal door. At the entrance a bare light bulb glared. Heinrich knocked, waited a moment, then called out in a loud voice, "Emil Grass?"

After a moment of silence, a small hole opened and an eye peeked out. The door was unbolted and a burly-looking guard led Heinrich into a well-lit, busy office. Swastika banners, a large well-marked map of Thumbringen, and large propaganda posters hung on the wall. The clang of typewriter bells and general confusion was enough to give Heinrich a headache.

A man bent over a cluttered desk got up and approached Heinrich when he saw him enter the room. They both

greeted each other by raising their arms in the traditional Hitler salute. "Ah, Herr Schwarz. I heard that you have come to help us with our cause, *ausgezeichnet*! The major will see you now."

The man ushered Heinrich into a private office. Behind a large oak desk sat the head of security, his gray hair and carefully trimmed mustache reinforcing his image of authority. He sported a pair of round spectacles that sat on the bottom of his nose. He slouched low in the plush leather chair, trying hard to look informal. "Sit down," he said pointing to an uncomfortable wooden chair. "So you are the shoeshine boy turned newsreel star?"

"You could say that," Heinrich said as he nervously shifted in his chair and sat quietly listening to the officer's gold pen scrape across the paper. Heinrich turned slightly to make the swastika pin that he was wearing more visible.

The major noted down all the usual details of name and date of birth.

"So, you want to work with us, Herr Schwarz?" he asked.

"Yes ... uh, I need the job," Heinrich said.

"What languages do you speak?"

"My English is acceptable, some Spanish, and a sprinkling of French."

"Languages aren't enough," said the officer.

"I want to make my own contribution." Heinrich realized he would have to convince him. "I want a position where I can be of use. I wish to bring Thumbringen into the Nazi fold, into the new society of the new age. I believe in your philosophy, sir."

**ausgezeichnet*: "excellent"

The major seemed slightly interested, but he maintained an aloof disposition. "There seems to be no record of your birth, Herr Schwarz," he said suspiciously.

"That is because I was abandoned, you see."

"I'm sorry."

"We cannot choose our background, sir."

The officer nodded his head in agreement.

Heinrich continued as he had rehearsed many times. "I was raised by a kind woman who adopted me, but life has not been easy for either of us, or many others I know. I've seen too many injustices. The society is rotten but it will soon crumble, and then you'll be hailed as the saviors of the repressed. On that day, I want to be on the right side."

The major leaned back in the chair, toying with his pen, but writing nothing. He stared at Heinrich, who continued to complain of the inadequacies of living under a monarchy.

The major nodded in agreement, convinced by the sincerity and conviction Heinrich portrayed.

Heinrich continued. "I left Thumbringen when the war broke out, I asked myself 'Whose side should I take?' There was no question. The Third Reich represents Europe's future justice." He was glad that he had learned some of the propaganda slogans by heart.

The major nodded. This was no propaganda to him. This was the truth. In his mind, here was a Thumbringer who had perceived his truths and held to them.

"And if I can play even a small part in bringing that justice to my country-

men," Heinrich continued, "to be part of the mighty wave that will wash over the world, I would count it a personal honor, sir."

The major grunted, gave a nod, then stood up and came around to Heinrich's side of the table and shook his hand. It was a symbolic gesture. Heinrich knew he was in.

"Welcome, then, to our struggle to make a better world."

"Thank you, sir."

"By the way, where are you staying?"

"To be honest, I was going to look for a new place tomorrow."

"There is no need for that," the major said as he handed him a piece of paper. "The Third Reich has supplied modest accommodations. Here is your new address. And I'll see to it that we get you the proper membership papers for the Nazi Party."

"Thank you, sir. Could my friend become a member too?"

"Who is this friend?"

"Leo Hartman. He shines shoes with me. He is German, but has been with me in Thumbringen for a few years now. He is the one who insisted I come visit this glorious country."

"He will have to be interviewed as well, of course," the major answered, "and if he meets our qualifications, I see no reason that he could not join the Party, and our cause."

"I appreciate that."

The major collected his papers and walked towards the door. "Please, wait here. We will discuss your case, and see if we can find some suitable position and task for you." Then the major left the room and closed the door behind him, leaving Heinrich alone in the silence.

Outside the office, different officers, the major, and Emil Grass discussed Heinrich's situation.

"So you're sure?" the major asked Emil.

"Positive, sir," Emil replied. "He has cut his hair and is wearing glasses, but it's the same kid we caught in Zurich that night, who I later found out *was* the real prince after all."

"So what is he doing here?" the major asked.

"That," answered Dietrich, the officer who had shown Heinrich into the major's office, "is what those other two agents never found out."

"Right," the major added. "Those incompetent fools scared him away before they could learn anything. And now they are emptying trash cans in the prison complex."

"So what are we going to do with him, sir?" another officer asked.

"Keep him busy," the major answered. "He must not know that we suspect anything of his true identity. We must find out what he's doing here."

"He's a spy!" Emil hissed through his teeth.

"You forget that he came to us of his own accord," the major answered. "If he is a spy, he is either very brave or very stupid. I believe there is an equally great chance that he truly desires to bring his antiquated* country and government into the Third Reich. He appeared very sincere."

"But what about the false names, the forged papers, and the radio?" Emil persisted.

"They also prove nothing," the major answered. "Whether a spy or defector, he

would still have to be careful about any communications into Thumbringen. The only thing we will do for now is keep a close eye on him. His actions will soon reveal his true intentions, especially if he has no reason to suspect that we are watching him—so let's not give him one!" The major looked sternly around the room, and all the officers nodded.

"If he is indeed the prince," the major continued, "then we have one of the greatest bargaining chips in our hands that we could hope for, which is why we must handle this situation very delicately. Herr Goebbels will be pleased."

"Of course," Emil added matter-of-factly, "we will have to eliminate him after we have taken over the country."

"Of course," the major answered. "Still it is a shame. He could be such a loyal German, with the proper teaching. But no matter how German he is, the Third Reich has no place for an heir to a throne. He would only be trouble waiting to happen."

"So what are we going to keep him busy with?" Emil asked.

The major was silent for a minute. "I have an idea."

Heinrich was kept waiting a long time. He began to worry that perhaps he had been discovered. *What have I gotten myself into?* he thought. *Should I make a run for it now before it's too late?* He pulled out his Bible, opened it cautiously, and read.

My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense. I shall not be moved (Psalm 62:5–6).

**antiquated*: ancient or old fashioned

Astrid spoke to his heart. *Yes, you should stay here. Wait only upon God. Don't worry. He will take care of you.*

Heinrich heard the door opening, and barely had time to put away his Bible before the major walked in, followed closely by Dietrich.

Without offering any explanation for the long wait, the major said forcefully, "The time has come to put our plans into action, to right the wrongs, to put things right. We will stage a civil uprising in Thumbringen, and we would like you to help."

"If you don't mind me asking, why don't you just march into Thumbringen as you have other countries?"

"Herr Goebbels was very insistent that this be a propaganda victory and not a military one. Besides, there is a long-standing pact with Switzerland to come to Thumbringen's defense in case they are attacked. So you see, invading Thumbringen is like invading Switzerland, which we will do in our good time. But right now we are occupied with Britain and France, who must be subdued first. Like a chicken yard, you gather the stubborn stray ones first and then catch the easy ones last."

"The plan consists of three stages," Dietrich added. "First, we must work clandestinely* among the people, using any local contacts and newspapers that we can find to begin highlighting the failures and shortcomings of the monarchy, and expressing opinions about the benefits of the Third Reich and the efficiency of the Nazi government.

"Next, when those opinions have been widely disseminated, we will

orchestrate the creation of a National Socialist Party within Thumbringen, consisting of our most loyal supporters, and force the monarchy to recognize the party as a part of its government. The third and final stage is that the party will gain more popularity, power, and votes, and so be able to force out the monarchy by the will of the people, and become part of our fold."

"What if the Party does not become popular?" Heinrich probed.

"Don't worry, it will. The people ... yes, the people, as always, or at least the majority that matters, will follow like dumb sheep."

"So what is my part in all this?"

"My young associate, Emil Grass, will give you more information of what is expected of you."

Emil entered and stared for a few minutes at Heinrich, who finally broke the uncomfortable silence. "What exactly do you want me to do?"

Emil came over and inspected Heinrich more closely with eyes that seemed to penetrate his soul. "We have noted that you bear a remarkable resemblance to the prince—a remarkable resemblance."

Heinrich paused for a moment, and then said, "I don't think I have ever met him."

"Nor have I," Emil said. "But we have pictures of him, and are confident that, with a little makeup and a wig, we can turn you into a convincing double for him."

"For what?" Heinrich asked.

"You did so well on your last newsreel," the major added, "that we want to make a film of you, posing as the prince, speaking for the Third Reich. We will

**clandestinely*: secretly

broadcast this film through all available channels, and have our agents organize viewings in Thumbringen, and so undermine the authority of its monarchy.”

Heinrich tried hard to hide his shock. “Um ... well, that’s an interesting idea, but won’t the people know the difference?”

“Not until it is too late.”

“What if the real prince makes an appearance?” Heinrich asked.

“Simple,” Emil answered, carefully watching Heinrich’s reaction. “We will counter his appearance with yours, and say that the true prince—you—is on our side, and that the other is the imposter. As Hitler so wisely has said, if you make the lie big enough, people won’t even consider that it might not be true.”

Heinrich was stunned at the ludicrousness* of what was unfolding before him. Here he was, the real prince, being given the job of impersonating himself. *O, Lord, he prayed silently, confound my enemies. And help me to get word of all this to the palace somehow!*

Heinrich did his best to hide his nervousness behind a mask of uncertainty. “But won’t the people recognize the real prince when they see him?” he questioned again.

“The prince has often been in seclusion,” the major reassured Heinrich, “so his appearance is not very widely known. There have been a few times at official functions when he appeared. But all that most people have seen of him in the last few years is this one official palace photo. Here, look. Do you see the similarity?”

Heinrich looked at the photograph and tried one last attempt to get out of this predicament. “But ... if he has a

different voice it will be unconvincing.”

“Voices can be learned,” the major said. “And you already have the advantage of speaking the Thumbringen accent. We just need to teach you some high-class words, refine your pronunciation a bit, and you’ll be all set.”

Heinrich hesitated. “I don’t know if I can do that, sir. We have no idea what his true voice sounds like.”

“Ah, but we do,” the major answered with a satisfied grin, motioning towards Dietrich. “Our agent was able to get a recording of his voice on tape. Listen.”

Dietrich pushed a button on a large reel recorder in the corner of the room. Amid noises of a restaurant in the background, the following conversation was heard very clearly.

“Who is your father?”

“He is a very important man.”

“Important? What kind of important ... is he a king?”

“You could say that.”

“I see. But why are you starting a business if your father is a king? Wouldn’t that make you a prince?”

It was hard for Heinrich to hold back his tears as he remembered the moment with Astrid so clearly. He knew that he would have to control his emotions or all would be lost.

“Do you think that you can sound like that?” the major asked.

Heinrich cleared his throat. “He is a very important man.” Heinrich tried to sound like his voice sounded on the tape.

“Almost perfect,” Dietrich said, grinning. “Keep working on it and you will sound just like the prince.”

“I’ll do my best.”

To be continued

**ludicrousness*: something absurd and ridiculous

The Shoeshine Boy



Issue 172



PART 6

Note: While this story takes place during the historic era of World War 2, and borrows some of its characters and events, the story itself, along with the principality of Thumbringen and its people, are fictional.

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Operation Hushai

"I can't do this!" Heinrich whispered when he was with Klaus in their new apartment. The radio was playing loudly in the background just in case there were any hidden microphones in the apartment. "This is crazy! How can I imitate myself?"

"Easy, just act natural," Klaus whispered back.

"Seriously, what if they find out I am who I am pretending to be? That could put us both in danger!"

"I guess it's time for us to trust the Lord again."

"Jawoll*, Herr Commandant," Heinrich joked, saluting Klaus in jest. "Forgive me for doubting."

"What are friends for but to put your doubts to rest? Remember the verse we got about playing the man? Now you're doing that—literally. You're playing yourself."

"How absurd!"

"God often works through absurdities," Klaus answered. "We just need to play along, and find out where He is going with all this."

* * *

Heinrich was given a week to practice impersonating the prince. He purposely

stumbled as much as he could, to give them as little reason as possible to suspect that he was the real prince. By the start of the next week, Heinrich, Klaus, and the other operatives were summoned for a presentation of the plan. Heinrich and Klaus sat in the back of the room as the major addressed the Nazi operatives chosen for the mission to infiltrate Thumbringen.

"You operatives will leave for Ravensburg tonight," Dietrich explained. "From there, you will make your way into Thumbringen to start phase one of the plan. You will have one week to complete your mission of indoctrination. During that week, Gerhard Schwarz will remain here to help us make a series of newsreels, acting as Prince Heinrich of Thumbringen, speaking against the palace and about the benefits and glories of the Third Reich.

"After that week of indoctrination, you will announce the creation of the National Socialist Party of Thumbringen, and demand recognition from Prince Martin and the palace government. Once the party has been created, you will have one more week to gather further votes and popularity for the party. The newsreels should do most of this work for you, but you will have to seek out the key local

**Jawoll*: "Yes"

Illustrations by Sabine

Recommended age: 9 years and up. (May be read by younger children at parents' discretion.)

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figures with the strength and influence to make this revolution a reality. Then, on the 23rd of October, you will gather the party and the citizens of Thumbringen together, march on the palace, and demand the abdication of Prince Martin. We will have troops standing by to officially welcome Thumbringen into the Third Reich, and to protect its people from any armed retaliation the palace might initiate against them for their democratic actions.”

Astrid reminded Heinrich of Hushai. The palace would need time to prepare their plans and defenses.

“Excuse me, major, but can I make a suggestion?” Heinrich asked.

The major nodded.

“I do not think that gives our operatives enough time,” Heinrich continued.

“Why is that?” the major asked skeptically. “Our operatives are very efficient in what they are trained to do.”

“I am sure that is true,” Heinrich agreed. “But I know the people of Thumbringen. Though they are Germans, they are very slow to embrace any kind of change. We must make sure that we have enough time to convince the people of the righteousness of the cause, and I don’t think two weeks is going to be sufficient.”

“I disagree,” Emil countered. “I say we move sooner, take the people by surprise, show them the efficiency of our system, that we will not let ourselves be slowed down by bureaucracy. We need to show ourselves able to bring change quickly! And the sooner we act, the sooner our troops can move in to deal with whatever pockets of resistance might remain!”

“But the idea,” Heinrich persisted, “is that the party becomes popular and powerful, and in order for that to happen, we are going to need more time to convince

as many as possible, not as few as possible. I think it is better to be cautious. We must be sure of victory before we march on the palace. Remember, although Thumbringen is tiny, it has powerful allies. If we fail, the world will laugh at us. We must have time to make our victory secure. After all, none of us would want to disappoint the Führer.”

“We will consider both of your arguments,” the major finally said, “and decide which is the best course of action. In any case, you operatives will be on that train tonight. This plan must be put into action as quickly as possible. Already Goebbels is growing impatient.”

“If I may ask,” Klaus ventured, “what is Goebbels’ interest in this tiny country? I mean, I can understand a few dedicated individuals wanting their country to join the cause of the Third Reich”—Klaus paused and looked at Heinrich and Emil—“but why is Goebbels himself so interested in this operation?”

“Not just Goebbels,” the major answered, “but the Führer himself. I have met with him personally on the matter. He cares greatly for all his Aryan children, and does not want to neglect the opportunities for any to join the Reich. But he does not want to risk ridicule by simply sending in a military occupation force, as we have successfully done on other occasions. He did not want to look like an elephant squashing an ant, were his exact words. So he has made Goebbels responsible for this operation, and is adamant that it be a propaganda victory. I need not remind any of you what is at stake if you fail.”

* * *

“So the young prince has advised us to move more slowly?” Goebbels asked when the major had finished his report.

“Yes sir.”

“And what do you make of him?” Goebbels asked. “Is he a spy, or a friend?”

“I believe he could be sincere,” the major answered. “Additional intelligence has revealed that Heinrich was apparently not very satisfied with palace life. He could very well be seeking a better way of life for himself and his people. In either case, the prince’s counsel seems more logical than that of Emil. That boy is a hothead who is going to get himself killed without our help, as he almost did, if you recall, trying to start that Nazi youth organization in Switzerland, of all places.”

“And what about this friend of the prince, what’s his name?”

“Leo Hartman.”

“Yes, him.”

“He is evidently with the prince as a protector, but our intelligence has been unable to identify him or come up with any additional information about him.”

“Make sure you keep an eye on them both, but don’t let them catch on that they are being watched, or that we suspect anything. I am still curious about exactly what they plan to accomplish here.”

“And what about the plan?” the major asked.

Goebbels paused for several moments, then slowly began. “Inform our operatives to form the party as planned, and then to continue their work of indoctrinating the people about the benefits of joining the Third Reich, but to postpone the march on the palace until we give the signal. We may be able to use the prince to lead the procession to the palace. But first we must be sure of his loyalty, and of our party’s popularity.”

The major clicked his heels, raised his arm in salute, and left the room.

After being informed of Herr Goebbels’s decision to postpone the march against the palace, Heinrich knew that the Lord and His helpers had engineered the delay in order to give him time to pass the information on to the palace. Now they just had to find a way to get a message through without the radio.

“We’ll need to pray about what to do next,” Heinrich said.

“Yes. Why don’t we take a little walk? Hopefully nobody will be following us close enough to hear our conversation, especially if we keep it low. We can pray as we go.”

They prayed and then remained silent for a few minutes, which was enough time for Astrid to get her message across to Heinrich.

“Just write down the message and then I’ll show you how to deliver it.”

“What did you say?” Klaus asked.

“Did I say something?” Heinrich answered.

“Yes! You said ‘just write down the message and I’ll show you how to deliver it.’”

“I did?” Heinrich asked. “I ... I don’t remember anything.” He paused and looked down. “I ... was thinking of Astrid.”

“Well, then I think she just gave us a message,” Klaus said. “We need to write everything down, and then she’ll show us a way to send it.”

“But what are we going to write? We can’t just say, ‘They’re planning to overthrow the palace.’ What if somebody happens to open the letter?”

“We’ll have to write it in code. We can use the same code we memorized,

with the names of the Polish cities, but hide the letters in a normal letter as the first letter of each word. I'll need your help. We'll need to make the letter sound normal while still getting all the letters in the right place."

"Look, there's a café," Heinrich pointed out. "Let's have some lunch and work on it there."

The secret message was soon composed, and then they worked on making the fake letter sound as real and normal as possible, at the same time pretending to be working on a crossword puzzle in a newspaper they had found on their table. By the time they had finished their simple lunch, the letter was finished. They both looked at it with approval, and double-checked the hidden message within the letters:

Eagle plans peaceful takeover. Sends agents to sway people. RH film appearance no concern. Identity still safe. Agents form party on second October Monday, demand recognition. March on palace to demand royal abdication delayed. Will try to delay further. RHLH

"Do you think they'll understand it?" Heinrich asked.

"Herr Schelling will. Now we just need to find a way to get it to the palace. I would say we could mail it, except that I'm pretty sure they would open anything we send, and even as innocent as this letter looks, it probably wouldn't get to its destination."

"So we need to find somebody else to mail it for us," Heinrich said. "Somebody that we could give it to without anybody else noticing."

"That will be a challenge. And who do we send it to? We can't send it to the palace. That would be too obvious."

"Oh, Jesus, please show us what to do next," Heinrich prayed.

They were both silent for a few minutes, when Klaus spoke up.

"I saw a picture of a postcard ... and it was addressed to your mother."

"My mother?" Heinrich answered. "But she's dead. And this letter won't fit on a postcard."

"Yes, I know. But still, the picture was very clear. There must be some meaning to it."

"What about my *other* mother, our palace contact?"

There was a short pause before Klaus exclaimed, "Oh, but of course! That makes perfect sense. You phone the contact, let your 'mother' know you're sending her a postcard of Munich, and that way Herr Schelling will know to instruct the postmaster to watch for any mail coming in from Munich. We'll mail this letter in an envelope with your mother's *real* name, and just make up an address. Hopefully the postmaster will catch it and get it to the palace as quickly as possible."

"That could work," Heinrich agreed.

"Now we just need to figure out how we can send it."

"Didn't Astrid say that she'd show us a way to send it?"

"Yes, you're right," Klaus answered. "I imagine we'll just have to wait for her to do that, or wait for a sign of some sort. And speaking of waiting, I think we've been sitting here too long already. Let's get back to the apartment."

Klaus had just finished putting the letter in an envelope and writing an address on it when there was a knock at the door of the apartment. Heinrich went to answer.

A boy of around 17 years of age stood in the doorway dressed in a messenger's uniform with an embroidered swastika band around his arm. His hair was slicked back in the traditional manner of the youth at the time. He wore khaki knee pants and long socks. A thick brown leather strap ran diagonally across his chest. A medal for punctual service could be clearly seen on his shirt.

"Telegraph for Gerhard Schwarz," he said curtly as he handed the envelope to Heinrich.

At the same moment, Astrid spoke to Heinrich's heart. *This is the one.*

"Thank you," Heinrich said taking the telegram and looking straight into the boy's eyes, trying to detect any glimmer of light that would convince him that he could entrust their secret letter to him.

Heinrich doubted if he could rely on this boy. From outward appearance, he seemed to be a faithful Nazi. But he heard the words repeated again: *This is the one.*

Listening to these leadings had never proven wrong. Heinrich decided to test the waters. He stepped into the hallway and closed the apartment door behind him.

"Are you able to deliver messages also?" Heinrich asked the boy, keeping his voice low.

"Yes, sir, if it is authorized. That is one of my duties."

"And if it is not authorized?"

"Why would I want to do that?" the boy asked cautiously.

"If it would help others to be free from tyranny."

"I don't understand."

"I think you do." Heinrich spoke the words as Astrid gave them to him. "You doubt the Nazi way of oppression, even

though you are forced to be a part of it. Is this not true?"

"And if it is?" the boy asked cautiously.

"Then this is a chance for you to right the wrongs that you have seen." Heinrich could tell that he was getting through.

"It will be risky," the boy said nervously.

"Some risks are worth taking," Heinrich reassured him. "Wait here. I'll be right back."

Heinrich returned to the apartment and to Klaus.

"Klaus, I've found somebody to mail our letter."

"Who?" Klaus asked.

"A delivery boy, he just brought me a telegram. I could feel Astrid giving me all these questions to ask him, things to say to him. He'll help us. I know he will. Astrid told me."

"Are you sure?" Klaus asked.

"Yes!"

"Very well, then," Klaus answered, handing Heinrich the sealed envelope. "May God's hands go with it."

Heinrich went back into the hallway, where the messenger still stood waiting.

"Here it is," Heinrich said, handing the envelope to the messenger. "Now, it is absolutely important that nobody sees you leaving the building with this letter. Mail it from the post office tonight, after you are off duty. Nobody can suspect that this letter came from this apartment. Do you understand?"

The messenger nodded.

"Good, because my life and the lives of many others may be dependent on it," Heinrich added.

"I will do my best," the messenger said. "You have my word." Then he took the letter and slid it into an inner pocket of his jacket.



“Here,” Heinrich said, slipping a few coins into the messenger’s pocket. “For your trouble.”

“Thank you, sir,” the messenger said, and with a curt bow and a stiff salute, he turned and left.

“Do you really think that we can trust him?” Klaus asked after the boy had left.

“All I know is that Astrid said that he is the one. I’m sure he’ll do just what he said, his best. That’s all we can hope for.”

Heinrich opened the telegram that had been delivered to him and read:

FILMING TO BEGIN WEDNESDAY MORNING, 9:15 AM, KELLERPLATZ HALL. BE THERE. - DIETRICH

“That’s tomorrow!” Klaus exclaimed to Heinrich.

“Yes, it is,” Heinrich said. “Guess it’s almost time to play the man.”

“Just don’t play him *too* good,” Klaus cautioned. “If that letter doesn’t reach the palace, we don’t want to give them any reasons to suspect us yet.”

“I won’t,” Heinrich answered. “And speaking of worrying, maybe now is a good time to give my mother a call.”

“Good idea,” Klaus said. “There’s a phone down at the entrance. Just be sure to keep your conversation as innocent as possible.”

A few minutes later Heinrich was at the phone, waiting for the contact to pick up at the other end.

“Ja, hallo?*” a woman’s voice answered. “Wer ist da?*

“Hello, Mother,” Heinrich answered.

“Ah, Gerhard!” the woman answered cheerily. “It’s good to hear from you again. How is everything going?”

“Everything is going well. Leo and I have just been made members of the Nazi Party here in Munich. Things have been moving fast for us.”

**Ja, hallo:* Yes, hello.

**Wer ist da?:* Who is there?

“Oh, that is wonderful,” the woman answered, and then asked, “Are you going to be visiting me soon?”

“We’re saving up for the trip back,” Heinrich answered, “but we still have some shining to do before we have enough. I’ll call you again when we know more. Keep us in your prayers.”

“I will do that. And are you taking care of yourself? Do you have everything you need, enough clothes?”

“Yes, I’m fine, Mother. I’m glad I still have my gloves. The weather is starting to get cold. But we have a warm place to stay for the moment, courtesy of the Party.”

“Excellent. Well, Gerhard, I am looking forward to seeing you again, and am glad you’re having such a wonderful time. Stay in touch.”

“I will, Mother. Oh, and I’m sending you a postcard of Munich. This is just such an incredible city, with so much to see. So watch your mail.”

“I will, Gerhard. Take care. Auf Wiederhören.”

“Auf Wiederhören,” Heinrich answered, and hung up the phone.

I hope they get it, Heinrich thought as he walked back up to his apartment. *At least they should know we’re safe for the moment.*

They will, Astrid answered.

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The Storm Breaks

“We’ve got the letter!” Herr Schelling said excitedly, waving it in his hands. “And it doesn’t look like it’s been opened or tampered with.”

“That’s a good sign,” Prince Martin said. “What does it say?”

“The letter itself is a casual one, but we discovered a message hidden within

the letters, written in the mission code, with Klaus and Heinrich’s signatures. They’re telling us that Hitler is planning a peaceful takeover of our country. They are going to attempt to form a Nazi Party here in Thumbringen, apparently on the second Monday of this month, the 16th.

“The next stage of the takeover, apparently, is for the Party to grow strong and popular enough that they will march on the palace and demand your abdication. From the sounds of it, Heinrich and Klaus have managed to persuade the Nazis to postpone this part of the plan, and they will try to postpone it for as long as possible. That should give us time to find out who the Nazi agents among our people are, and what to do about them.”

“Was there anything else?” Prince Martin asked.

“Yes. It confirmed what we already suspected from the phone call, that their identities have not yet been compromised. There was one odd line, however, that we don’t really understand. It talked about Heinrich making a film appearance, but that there is no concern.”

“So there are Nazi infiltrators among our people,” the prince muttered.

“It would appear so,” Herr Schelling answered. “But now that we are aware of them, and their intended activities, any such activists will be easier to track down, and even eliminate when they become a more significant threat.”

“Perhaps,” Prince Martin answered, sounding weary. “Excuse me, Herr Schelling. I’m going to need some time to think about all this.”

“Of course, your highness,” Herr Schelling said, and left the room.

That night Prince Martin had a dream. The windows of his palace were open.

Outside, a ferocious wind was blowing. As long as the windows were open, the palace was safe and the wind blew harmlessly through, causing no damage*. When he awoke, he knew what it meant. They were not to try to stop these men. That could only bring greater danger to the palace, and to Heinrich and Klaus. They would let these men do as they pleased, form their party, speak in the streets, and the palace would even officially recognize the party without any resistance. After that, all they could do was trust that the storm would blow over.

And so the storm came to Thumbringen. The activists, confident in their abilities and the powers that were behind them, did little to keep themselves hidden. They spoke openly among the people, started their own newspaper to print their own articles, and showed newsreels of the glories and exploits of the Third Reich in public squares.

The palace, meanwhile, did nothing—even when the activists pulled out their secret weapon newsreels of the prince of Thumbringen himself telling the people to follow the actions of Austria and Czechoslovakia, who now had peace and security with the Third Reich, and to not make the same mistake Poland had made, and risk war with Hitler.

While the palace was initially alarmed at the news of the films, they quickly remembered the coded message, and so again did nothing to speak against these public showings or to deny that the prince was behind them.

The people of Thumbringen, meanwhile, watched these events with a quiet interest. Few bothered to commit to action of any sort, whether for the

*See ML #367 on page 404 of Junior Daily Bread 2.



palace or against it. As long as the activists were only talking, and the palace did not seem to be concerned, there was no reason for them to be concerned either.

The palace was not surprised when, on Monday morning, October 16th, it was announced over the local radio that a new political party calling itself the *Thumbringer Deutsches Volk**, or TDV for short, was asking voters for their support and signatures so that the organization would be officially recognized by the palace.

Prince Martin was ready, and moments later the radio station received a phone call from the palace.

“People of Thumbringen,” the newsman read, “we have just received a statement from the palace that we would like to read to you.

“From his royal excellency, Prince Kurtis Martin, to the citizens of Thumbringen, and the ministers of the TDV party. We commend the TDV for its initiatives and efforts to make Thumbringen a better place, and to represent the interests of our good citizens. In acknowledgement of its efforts, the palace recognizes any current and future elected ministers of the TDV as valued members of our government, and invites them to participate as advisors and ministers in any matters of state that pertain to our citizens.

“The palace welcomes the organized and professional approach to serving our citizens offered by the TDV, and will extend what help and resources are requested for the accomplishment of its goals. His excellency also hopes our citizens will contribute to the success of

the TDV by participating in its programs, supporting its efforts, and letting its ministers and advocates know what manner of programs and initiatives would most adequately serve and benefit you, the citizens of our nation.

“That,” the announcer said after a short pause, “is the statement from the palace and his excellency, Prince Kurtis Martin. We have also been informed that a formal invitation has already been extended to the founders of the Thumbringer Deutsche Volk, and that they will be meeting with palace officials in the next few days to discuss the details regarding their official integration with the palace government.”

“Let’s hope that does the trick,” Prince Martin said with a sigh when Herr Schelling turned off the radio.

“It will certainly make it difficult for them to rally the people against us,” Herr Schelling commented. Herr Schelling had begun to see the wisdom in Prince Martin’s decision to accept the presence of this party and the Nazis behind it rather than fight it. “From the looks of it, not many people have joined the cause, and I think even the activists have been surprised at the lack of resistance to their presence. It will now be even *more* difficult for them to draw a ‘for us or against us’ line that would force the people to have to take a stand.”

“Yes,” Prince Martin said. “We will have to see how long it lasts. Doubtless they will continue trying to engineer situations or make demands to try to force us into taking a stance against them. We are going to have to weather this storm one gust at a time.”

**Thumbringer Deutsches Volk*: “Thumbringer German People”

The Last Briefing

“We are stepping up our timetable,” Goebbels announced to Heinrich and Klaus, and several other people who were also in the room for an emergency briefing. “Our operatives have met with some surprises, and the party has been unable to force the palace into an adversarial* position after the party was officially accepted, and have not been able to gather the necessary votes or power to march against the palace. So we are going to march on the palace anyway, and you, Gerhard, will lead the procession—disguised, of course, as Prince Heinrich!

“You will all depart this evening. Our operatives are preparing for your arrival, and have guaranteed us an attendance of 100 people to start the march two days from now, on October 30. With you, Gerhard, at the head of the procession, that number should quickly grow, and the palace will be forced to either capitulate* or to take action against us. In either case, we win.”

Heinrich hesitated. “But ... Herr Goebbels,” he began, “it is one thing to pretend to be the prince on a newsreel. The people will know I am not the prince.”

“Nonsense,” Goebbels answered. “They have seen you in the newsreels. The real prince must be cowering somewhere, because he has not made any appearance. The people will be ready to accept you as the true prince, and to listen to whatever you say. Don’t worry. I will be with you from the moment we drive into Thumbringen, and will be briefing

you personally on exactly how you will act and what you will say. Nobody will be able to get close enough to you to realize that you are not who they think you are.

“Now,” Goebbels finished, addressing the rest of the room, “I suggest you all go pack. We have a train to catch.”

* * *

At the station they met the major who was there to see them off. He shook Heinrich’s hand for what seemed longer than normal. His smile revealed a row of gold fillings. *This is the last time I’ll ever see your gold teeth*, Heinrich thought. The major was also thinking that this would be the last time that he would see the prince and his companion. The plan was that the prince and his friend would be “assassinated” during the march, and then it would be proclaimed that the assassin was an agent of the palace who killed the prince for turning against the government. This would then hopefully make even more people angry enough to march against Prince Martin. It was also a convenient way to get Prince Heinrich out of the way.

“Good luck, *Junge*,” the major said. “You’ve been good students. Make sure your training is of some use to us.”

“We’ll do what we can,” Klaus said. Heinrich and Klaus did not have anything against the major. He was a fairly kind man. They had spent many pleasant hours in his company. *Maybe he will miss us*, Heinrich thought. *Lord, please work in his life and change his heart.*

They parted, as it was time to board the train.

Slowly, the iron horse began to pick up steam as it chugged and puffed and lurched forward. As it gained momentum, the steam

**adversarial*: to be in conflict with

**capitulate*: to yield or surrender

billowed out thicker clouds than before. It barreled through a tunnel, screeching like a dog when its tail is pulled.

Half an hour after pulling out of the Munich station, Herr Goebbels excused himself from the cabin he shared with Heinrich and Klaus to go out and smoke a cigarette in the narrow hallway.

Heinrich turned to Klaus. "We have to get out of here," he whispered. "Once we get off this train, we are going to be surrounded by Nazis. And something tells me that we should *not* be in that march."

"I was thinking the same thing," Klaus answered. "That leaves us no other choice but ... escape!"

"So ... how are we going to do that?"

"Our route takes us into Austria. The train will make a few stops before our final destination. But the stations are all going to be heavily patrolled. Even if we do manage to get off the train, we wouldn't get far. I'm afraid we don't really have much of a choice but to jump."

"Jump?" Heinrich asked.

"Yes," Klaus answered. "As in, get in position between cars, wait till the train slows down for a turn or something, and then jump!"

"But Goebbels is watching us all the time, and there are two guards outside this door. What are we going to do?"

"We're just going to have to wait for an opening," Klaus answered, "and be ready for it when it comes!"

Heinrich nodded, and turned his attention back to the growing gloom outside, and the passing lights of distant farms and small houses. Before long, he was asleep.

* * *

Heinrich suddenly woke up and looked around. Goebbels was fast asleep.

He could see the shadows of the two guards still standing outside the cabin. He looked over at Klaus, who was still awake, looking intently out the window.

"It's time," Klaus whispered. "Go outside and tell the guards you're going to the bathroom. I'll meet you out there."

Heinrich nodded and left. A few minutes later Klaus grabbed a cigarette from the package that was on the seat next to Goebbels, and stepped outside.

"You have a light?" he asked one of the guards, who obligingly offered Klaus a packet of matches for his cigarette. "Danke schön*," Klaus said. He stood there a few moments longer, smoking, and then turned to the guards again. "I'm just going to stretch my legs for a few minutes."

The main guard nodded, and Klaus walked in the same direction as he had noticed Heinrich go. The two of them met up between cars.

"We're going to have to do this quick," Klaus said, shouting over the rushing noise of the train. "Jump, and let yourself roll when you hit the ground!"

"It's still going too fast," Heinrich shouted back. But just then the train began to slow down.

"Now!" Klaus shouted. They both jumped into the darkness, hitting the ground hard and rolling they knew not where. Heinrich landed softly on a patch of grass, though he could not stop from getting a mouthful of dirt before he stopped rolling. Klaus, however, landed on a rock, and screamed with pain when he stopped rolling.

Heinrich picked himself up, and when his head finally stopped spinning and his eyes had adjusted to the darkness, he ran to Klaus.

**danke schön*: "thank you"

“What is it?” he asked.

“I ... I think I’ve broken my leg,” Klaus said. Heinrich noticed that Klaus was lying half on the tracks going the opposite direction.

“We’ve got to get you out of here,” Heinrich said, grabbing Klaus under his arms and starting to drag him. But Klaus let out another shout of pain.

“No, don’t move me!” he shouted.

Heinrich looked up to see another train coming from ahead of them.

“I’ve got to move you!” Heinrich shouted.

“Roll me into the middle of the tracks!” Klaus shouted back.

“What?”

“Quick! There’s no time!”

Heinrich obeyed, and rolled Klaus into the gap between the rails. Klaus let out another loud scream of pain. “Move!” he shouted to Heinrich.

Heinrich jumped back, just in time for the train to rush by in the darkness, passing safely over Klaus with a great clatter, and leaving them in perfect silence only moments later. Klaus, however, was shaking from his close brush with death.

Heinrich finally managed to drag Klaus off the tracks, and to find some branches that he used to make a splint for Klaus’ leg.

“Where are we?” Heinrich wondered after they had been sitting in silence for some time.

Klaus had regained some of his composure, and his leg had grown numb, so that he no longer felt the pain.

“In Austria,” Klaus said haltingly, “and according to my calculations about thirty kilometers east of Thumbringen. You ... you are going to have to head back alone. At least one of us can make it. I’ll just ... lie down here.”

“I’m sorry, that’s not the way we work, remember?” Heinrich said. “I have to try to save you or I could never live with my conscience.”

“Now don’t go sentimental on me,” Klaus joked. “But ... thanks.”

Heinrich looked around, and suddenly remembered his key. He frantically felt around his neck, fearing he may have lost it in the jump, but then felt it under his clothes. He closed his eyes and prayed. “Dear God, please help us. We need You to be our magical key right now, to keep away any forces of evil that might seek to harm us, and to send us someone who can help get us out of here. Amen.”

Just then, Heinrich heard something. “A car!” he said. “There must be a road nearby. Wait here! I’m going to see if I can get help!”

Heinrich ran in the direction of the sound, and broke through a small, forested area to see two headlights approaching. He stepped into the road, and the driver stopped. The vehicle turned out to be a farmer’s truck with a large flatbed covered by a thin layer of hay.

“Please help me,” Heinrich pleaded. “I have a friend who’s hurt!”

“Where is he?”

“On the other side of these woods. I couldn’t move him. I think his leg is broken. Can you help me take him somewhere?”

“Of course,” the man answered. He stepped out and followed Heinrich to the spot. Using a blanket from his truck and some large sticks, they formed a stretcher and carried Klaus to the truck, where they scooped together some hay on the flatbed and lay Klaus on top of it.

“From the looks of you,” the man said, eyeing Heinrich and Klaus carefully, “I don’t imagine you’ll want me to take you to a hospital.”

Heinrich looked worried for a moment, but Astrid spoke to his heart. *He will help you*, she assured him. Heinrich looked at the man and nodded.

“Very well. I’ll take you to my house. My wife can take care of your friend.”

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Returned

At his cottage, the farmer and his wife took care of Heinrich and Klaus, feeding them some hot broth and potatoes. That night a thickly bearded visitor came. He called himself Petrus, although everyone knew that was not his real name. He said that he was from the resistance movement.

“Can you get us to Thumbringen?” Heinrich asked after telling of their escape from the train. “We have to get out of here. Our companions have probably realized that we have escaped. Before long this area is going to be swarming with patrols looking for us, and they will probably shoot us on sight if they find us.”

“Thumbringen, you say?” Petrus remarked. “It’s not that far away. But if the SS are as desperate to catch you as you say they are, driving there is not an option, even at this hour of the night.”

“Isn’t there something you can do? Some way to smuggle us into Thumbringen? It’s urgent!”

Petrus thought for a while before he answered.

“We have a small plane. It would still be risky, but faster and safer than any other option right now.”

“An airplane? But where would you land?” Heinrich asked.

“We wouldn’t. You would have to jump out and parachute down.”

“But what about my friend? He is in no condition to jump.”

“I can make arrangements for him to get out another way, but not that soon.”

“What way would that be, may I ask?” Heinrich questioned.

“No, you may not. Believe me, the less you know, the better it is for all of us. Trust me.”

“I guess I’ll have to,” Heinrich conceded. “But ... I’ve never jumped before!”

“That’s okay. You just fall into it. Just make sure that you roll when you land to absorb the shock. It won’t be any worse than your jump from that train.”

Heinrich and Klaus embraced each other and committed each other’s care to the Lord. Petrus led Heinrich to a cow pasture and uncovered an old biplane that had been camouflaged with branches. After Heinrich had strapped on his parachute and was seated in the plane, Petrus walked to the front and pulled down the propeller. “Open the gas when it sparks!” he yelled to Heinrich. After a few attempts the engine kicked in, and moments later they were airborne.

Heinrich could see the dawn starting to break low on the horizon, and could make out soft clouds drifting along lazily in the darkness a short distance beneath them.

Even though they were running without any lights, they soon heard the unmistakable sound of a German Messerschmitt plane coming closer.

“I think we’ve been spotted!” Heinrich yelled.

“Yes! He’s coming up on our tail! Hold on!” Petrus grabbed the throttle and took the plane through sharp dives and turns trying to lose the attacker, but their pursuer could not be shaken off. Soon the Messerschmitt was peppering the sky with blasts from his machine gun. Sparks from the tracer bullets lit up the sky around them. A few bullets hit the biplane’s fuselage.

Fuel started to leak, followed by a plume of smoke streaming from the engine.

“Get ready!” Petrus yelled. “You’ll have to jump exactly when I tell you, or you’ll miss Thumbringen completely!”

Heinrich climbed out of the cockpit, gripping the plane’s struts in fear.

“Now! Jump!” Petrus commanded.

Heinrich jumped and pulled his cord. A few seconds later he saw the biplane start to plummet downwards in a spiral. Another chute opened and slowly fell to the ground. The German plane came back a few times to fire at the parachutes, but the clouds closer to the ground obscured his view. As Heinrich fell he saw Astrid with her arms wide open, as if she was forming a protective wall between the jumpers and the German warplane. It was only for a few seconds, but it encouraged him greatly.

Thank You, Lord, for sending Astrid and the thick clouds to save my life! Moments later he saw a fiery trail through the clouds, followed by an explosion as the biplane hit the ground and burst into flames.

Once Heinrich had landed and was back on his feet, he looked around. There was no sign of Petrus or his parachute, and no indication where he might have landed. But the familiar mountains of his home made Heinrich feel like a runner in sight of the finish line. *I’ve got to get to the palace right away!*

He made his way to the nearest farmhouse, and as he drew closer the door opened and an elderly man with a large handlebar mustache emerged. “And who might you be?” he asked.

“Hello, I’m Prince Heinrich.”

“How could you be? The prince is in Munich, working with the Nazis. I’ve heard it on the radio, and even seen newsreels of him in town!”

“Don’t believe everything you see on those Nazi newsreels,” Heinrich said. “I can prove to you that I am the prince. See this key? It has the palace emblem carved on it.”

“It’s wooden.”

“I’m on my way to redeem it for a golden one that my father promised to me. Call the palace now and see for yourself.”

“I’ll do that.”

The man returned after a few minutes with an embarrassed grin and said, “I’m so sorry, your excellency. We would like the privilege of bringing you to the palace ourselves. I’m afraid that we don’t have any cars, but it would be an honor if you would ride in my tractor. The palace is sending a car to meet us on the way.”

“Thank you, kind sir. A tractor would do fine if it gets me to my destination faster than walking.”

Heinrich clambered on board the tractor and the powerful diesel engine revved up, leaving a smoky trail in its wake. News spread quickly, and soon the small road was lined with cheering villagers. Heinrich smiled to himself as he thought about the time that Jesus rode before the crowds on a donkey.

Twenty minutes later they were met by a small motorcade from the palace. Both vehicles stopped. Prince Martin got out of his car, Heinrich got down off the tractor, and they ran to meet each other and embraced.

“Thank God you’re safe!” Prince Martin said.

“Yes, it is a miracle indeed.”

Prince Martin looked behind Heinrich. “Where’s Klaus?” he asked.

“It’s a long story, but he’s safe, and should be returning in the next few days, if all goes well.”

“Then we shall pray that it does,” Prince Martin answered. “Come. You can tell me all about everything on the way back to the palace.”

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The March

By the time Prince Martin and Heinrich's motorcade arrived at the palace, they received word that the march was now under way. Of the 100 participants that had been promised by the German operatives, fewer than 70 showed up, and almost a third of them left when they heard that Prince Heinrich would not be leading the procession after all.

Those who remained, however, proceeded as planned, marching towards the palace chanting “Einheit mit Deutschland*! Einheit mit Deutschland!”

One man from inside his house yelled, “GobacktoGermany!” as he threw a bucket of foul water from his window on some of the marchers. The demonstrators shook their fists and yelled back some obscenities*, but continued marching on. They lit torches on swastika stands along the way to the palace, but when they weren't looking, people in the neighborhood came out from their houses to extinguish the flames and knock down the swastikas.

When a young priest heard of the march, he brought out the two-meter high Madonna statue from the church wearing the *schutzmante*!. In times of trouble it had always been the custom to use the statue as a focal point for prayers

of refuge and deliverance from evil or danger. They all knew that the statue itself was not magical, but it helped them to focus their prayers. Many more people gathered around the statue than had joined the marchers, and the priest soon ushered them into the church that stood on the opposite side of the palace square. There they prayed for God's blessing and protection on their prince and country.

By the time the demonstrators had reached the palace square, their band had grown to a little over 80 men. But even as the leader of the procession began to shout his angry words against the palace through a megaphone, many of the demonstrators became disillusioned by their small numbers, and one by one began to disperse, setting down their banners, and returning to their houses.

* * *

Later that evening Hitler was advised about the failed attempt.

“So, will you invade Thumbringen now?” a military advisor asked.

“My plans have been delayed, but I will not be denied. Right now we have more pressing business. I believe that if we conquer the West first, the East will fall soon after. No one can stand against the ocean. Perhaps it is only low tide for the Third Reich in Thumbringen now, but we are ready to sweep across Europe, and the world!”

“But why not just sweep into Thumbringen at the same time?” the advisor asked.

“I do not want to be known as the first man in history to annex Thumbringen.

**Einheit mit Deutschland*: “Unity with Germany”

**obscenities*: indecent and insulting remarks

**schutzmantel*: (literally “protective cloak”) in the Catholic tradition, a cloak that Mary wears which symbolizes divine protection

I would look ridiculous to the world. People would laugh.”

“But what of our plans to make a super bomb? Wasn’t Thumbringen vital to these plans, and this war?”

“I have my scientists working on something a little less dramatic, but hopefully a lot easier to perfect—rocket propelled bombs that will fly themselves to their targets so that our pilots don’t have to. And when the time is right, and we have our super bomb, we’ll already have the rocket power to deliver it whenever and wherever we want! The world *will* bow before us. It may just take a little longer.”

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A Key for a Prince

Between the leftover blankets of night, the eye of morning was piercing through, announcing the coming of the day.

It was November 1, and the thin blanket of snow that covered the city gave it a fresh and renewed look, as if all the turmoil and confusion of the past few weeks had been washed away.

The first light saw the morning paper being delivered to the waiting newsstands. Some people were already lining up to get the latest news about the German infiltrators, and the march that threatened their liberty, but had come to nothing. In large bold print the headlines read:

Thumbringen Stands!

The palace had issued a declaration that any citizens of Thumbringen who wished to join the Third Reich or the Nazi Party were free to do so, but would have to renounce their Thumbringer citizenship and seek better fortunes in Germany. For

those who remained, Prince Martin proclaimed November 1st a day of thanksgiving, and invited everyone to the palace square for a jubilee celebration.

By noon, most of the country had gathered together. The few remaining swastika banners were burned, and replaced with new banners painted in bright colors, which had messages like, “In Liberty We Stand!” and “We Stand Together!”

The church’s bells were ringing, and from a small raised podium in front of the church, the royal family greeted the happy crowd. Heinrich was there, and behind him stood Klaus, who was on crutches. He had made it safely back, smuggled into Thumbringen in a secret compartment of a truck.

A multitude of heavenly helpers and angels also surrounded the square, including Heinrich’s mother and Astrid standing arm in arm. They likewise joined in the rejoicing and praised God for the victory.

From the spirit world, Astrid stroked Heinrich’s hair. She looked forward to the time when they would be together again. As if to punctuate the scene, soft fluffy clouds appeared on the horizon, with the sun shining from behind to create a silver lining.

Heinrich and his father joined hands and raised them in a sign of victory. After the cheering died down, Prince Martin came closer to the microphone and spoke. “God has delivered us from our enemies.” The cheering started again. Prince Martin had to wait for a minute before he could be heard. “God has lifted us above those who sought to rise up against us. He has delivered us from the violent man—not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit. He has taken the foolish and the weak things of this

world to confound the mighty, and He has brought to nothing the wisdom of the wise. Thumbringen may be one of the smallest of nations, but we are beloved in God's sight, and if He is for us, no man or country or empire can stand against us!"

The people cheered and clapped again, and Prince Martin embraced his son, who stood tall and strong next to him. Prince Martin lifted his hands to quiet the people again. The strain of the last few months showed on his face. He looked weak and pale.

He continued. "Be exalted, Lord, in Your own strength: so will we sing and praise Your power. Let us dance and sing our praises."

The streets were soon alive with singing, dancing, eating, and feasting until the sun went down.

But not all were happy at the victory celebration. During the revelries, two dignified-looking gentlemen in Nazi uniforms approached the royal podium. Prince Martin motioned for the guards to let them through.

"If you publicize what happened here," one of the men began, "if you flaunt your victory, it will act severely against your country's interests."

"It sounds like you are threatening me," Prince Martin said.

"Unlike the false story that was printed in your papers," the other German officer answered, "the German government had nothing to do with this demonstration. It was a local initiative started by foolhardy people who knew nothing of what they were doing. Germany has no reason to be bothered with a principality as insignificant as this one."

"You mean you don't want people to think you were unable to take over this tiny principality."

"Call it what you like," the second man said. "Is our meaning understood?"

Prince Martin decided it would be better to agree with his adversaries while they were showing themselves willing to be agreeable. (*See Matthew 5:25.*)

"Perfectly," he said.

The men then turned and left without the usual diplomatic courtesies.

Then Prince Martin turned to Heinrich. "And now, my son, I must give you special recognition for the part that you played, and played very well."

"Not that well," Heinrich said, lowering his eyes. "I'm afraid any good that came from all this happened in spite of me, not because of me. My mistakes even caused the loss of one I loved very much."

"So it is in life," his father said, "but as God has promised, He will give joy for mourning, beauty for ashes, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. That you might be a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified. (*See Isaiah 61:3.*)"

"Though your experience may feel like a defeat, Heinrich, God has used it to win a great victory, and not just against Hitler. For now you will be an even more careful and prayerful servant of His. Here, I have something to give you."

With that, Prince Martin pulled a small and ornately decorated box from a pocket in his vest, and handed it to Heinrich.

Heinrich took the box and opened it to see a pure golden key, woven in delicate patterns, with a rim of precious stones painting a diamond halo around a black onyx stone in which the palace emblem was intricately etched in gold. It hung on a long chain of alternating gold and silver links.

Prince Martin smiled, lifted the key from the box, and placed the necklace around his son's neck.



“When you wear this key, remember that it is only a symbol of the glory and power that is God’s. We are but little pictures of this power, but still we must play the part that God has given us to play as prince and ruler over this small nation. And we play it best when we follow the sample of our King and Ruler and heavenly Father.

“When you have a son, please give him this key. Give him God’s Word as I have done with you, that he may grow in spirit and in faith as well as in mind. Because just like the mind must be educated to know and understand its place in the world, so must the spirit grow in faith and be educated in spiritual matters to understand its place before God.”

Epilogue

And so Thumbringen was spared from the fate of war and oppression that

befell many other nations in that time, and even became a refuge for some fleeing the persecution and horrors of that great World War.

There were some who left to Germany to join the Nazi cause, but after the end of the war and Hitler’s defeat, they returned to Thumbringen, and were welcomed back with open arms, like the prodigal son, to start their lives again.

Emil Grass, after the attempted takeover had failed, returned to Germany and joined the German army. He was later killed in action trying to defend Berlin from the Russians.

Klaus soon recovered from his broken leg, and Heinrich discovered a new friend at the hospital from his visits there—a nurse named Lauralei, who he later married. Together they had a daughter, who they named Astrid.

After parachuting from the burning airplane, Petrus found his way back into

Austria, where he continued helping others in need as best he could.

Bart and Max returned to visit Thumbringen after the war, and bought a house there, where Bart often came for vacations, spending time with Heinrich and learning about the Bible and God's love for man. As Bart grew in faith he became a philanthropist*. When asked why he gave so much money away, he replied, "God has given me so many blessings, that I have to keep giving to make room for what He gives me in return. ... I also love to see the joy in the faces of those who receive it."

So that the people of Thumbringen would never forget, a display was set up in the local museum which contained the threatening letter from Nazi Germany, the shoe shine kits that Heinrich and Klaus had used, their code book, the letter with the secret message, a bit of wreckage from the plane that had returned Heinrich to the country, and most treasured of all, the wooden key that Heinrich had worn through it all. These became like the crown jewels of Thumbringen, for they helped the nation to remember how their country was delivered from the hand of their enemy through simple things, even foolish things, by the power of God.

The story of Heinrich's adventures as a shoeshine boy became a legend as famous in Thumbringen as the story of the Pied Piper was in Hamelin. And once a year, on the nation's jubilee celebration day, Prince Heinrich would sit beside the royal table and give free shoe shines to all who wanted one.

Not long after all these things, Prince Martin died, having lived a full life of

service to his people, and of faithfulness to God. A message that he had written in preparation for this event was read to the nation at his funeral by Heinrich.

I have closed the door, locked it, and thrown away the key, never to return. I am moving to a new palace that the Lord has built for me. Do not grieve for me, but rejoice in knowing that we will meet again in a better place.

Please love my son as you have loved me. I trust you will honor and respect him as you have honored and respected me, and as he honors and respects our God, our country, and the heritage of freedom that God has given us.

And so it was Heinrich's turn to take up his father's crown, and to carry on the traditions of love and righteousness that had made this small country a great one in the eyes of God.

Heinrich was thankful for all that he had experienced. He knew it had all been for a purpose, to help prepare him for the challenges and responsibilities he would continue to face in the days to come. Yet he knew there was also much that he still needed to learn.

He would have to protect his country from new dangers that would arise. Perhaps there would be other Hitlers. Perhaps he would see the rise of a world power or dark empire even more terrible. But he knew that God would, as always, keep and protect him and his nation through the darkest night.

THE END

**philanthropist: a person who willingly gives something, often money, for the benefit of others*