

# ONE

BYDGOSZCZ (BROMBERG), POLAND

3 SEPTEMBER 1939

**T**he hapless Polish soldiers below had no idea what was coming. Positioned atop the bell tower overlooking the city's main square, Karl Vogt rubbed his clammy hands on his pants. A trooper crouched next to him and Karl gave him a hard stare.

Karl returned his attention to what was happening below. The first soldiers of the retreating Polish army had appeared in the city an hour ago. The overwhelming *Wehrmacht* assault on Poland started two days ago, crushing their defenses with ease. The men below formed the country's rear guard, and Karl estimated they hadn't seen any action yet. Despite their calm exterior, Karl was certain they carried the weight of their comrades' defeat.

"Sir." A hushed voice took Karl from his thoughts. A young messenger knelt next to him, his head low. "The artillery regiment is making its way into the city."

Excitement bubbled in Karl's throat. "When do we expect them to reach the square?"

“Less than half an hour, more likely twenty minutes, sir.”

Karl took in the situation on the square some twenty meters below one last time. The soldiers entered from a wide street on the west, crossed the fifty-meter square, and then split into smaller groups. The lead groups started navigating the maze of narrow streets that led away from the city center. The few mechanized troops escorting them picked the most central route, the only street wide enough to fit the artillery through. Karl turned back to the messenger. “Tell the others the plan is on. Wait for my signal.”

“Sir.” The young man stalked down the chipped stone walkway and disappeared from sight. It took less than a minute for him to reappear on the square, his civilian clothes not drawing a glance from the soldiers. Karl smiled when the messenger disappeared down an alley on the eastern corner of the square. Along with the inconspicuous appearance of the messenger, the open windows of the buildings running along the streets were the only indicators of what was about to happen. The Polish soldiers never thought to look up.

Karl grinned into the calm before the storm. The last seven days had passed in a haze, and he was floating on the cloud that had carried him to the Polish city of Bromberg.

Only a mere four days ago, Karl had led the operation that had justified Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland. Disguised as Polish troops, Karl and his men seized the Gleiwitz radio tower and broadcast a false claim of Polish victory. To enhance the credibility of the mission, Karl’s troops had taken a number of concentration camp prisoners—in Wehrmacht uniforms—from Dachau and left their bullet-riddled corpses outside. Hitler claimed Polish aggression, and the first Luftwaffe bombers were in the air while Karl flew in the other direction for a private audience with the Führer in Berlin. Karl’s skin prickled at the memory of shaking the Führer’s hand, pride swelling in his chest.

Following the meeting with Hitler, things moved quickly and unexpectedly. Karl’s boss, Reinhard Heydrich, had briefed him on his new mission. Unlike with the Gleiwitz mission, Karl wouldn’t be involved in the planning phase: They needed him back in Poland

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the next day. It was how he now found himself looking down from his vantage point in Bromberg, some four hundred kilometers from Berlin.

A glint of light from below brought him back to the present, and he noticed with glee the first pieces of Polish artillery moving onto the square. He was surprised to see the Schneider guns pulled by horses and was unable to suppress a smile. So the rumors were true: The Polish army was powered by literal horses, while thousands of Panzers and trucks powered by mechanical horsepower steamrolled over the border. Emboldened by the sight, he felt his fingers twitch impatiently.

It took less than ten minutes for the last of the horse-drawn artillery to appear on the square. Karl looked to the eastern exit and smiled at the sight of horses being guided down the street. Just as he'd planned. Everything lined up perfectly, and all eyes were now on him. He nodded toward the trooper next to him, who reached for a yellow flag no larger than two sheets of paper, raising it just below the bell tower's parapet. The young man's hands trembled, and he looked at Karl for confirmation one last time. Karl controlled his impatience, and managed a controlled nod. "Raise the flag, soldier."

The man lifted the small piece of fabric high enough to clear the masonry, and only for a few seconds. Anyone passing by and looking up would most likely miss it, but for Karl's men spread around the square, the flag might as well have been a siren.

Gunfire erupted before the flag was down. Muzzle flashes flared from the once-innocuous windows. Karl pressed his back against the cold stone wall of the bell tower as the rattle of gunfire echoed through the streets below. Screams of surprise on the square quickly turned into wails of despair as the first soldiers were struck by the hail of bullets.

He risked a glance down, peering through a crack in the masonry. Artillery toppled as panicked horses—some bleeding—bolted in every direction. Most of the Polish soldiers abandoned their cargo and ran for cover in the side streets, but a good dozen lay

motionless in the square. Karl hoped a few were still breathing; they would be able to tell their comrades what had happened.

The shooting by the nearby Germans subsided, with only a small number of brave but foolish Polish soldiers firing haphazardly at the windows. Karl enjoyed the macabre spectacle, their chances of striking one of his men practically nonexistent. The gunfire in the adjacent streets continued: Polish soldiers trapped in their narrow confines.

Karl confidently got to his feet and signaled for the half dozen troopers around him to do the same. “Best we make our way out before they realize we’re here.” Adrenaline pumped through his veins as they made their way down the tower. Three troopers, pistols drawn, secured his passage, another three protected his back. When they reached the ground level, one of the men opened a hatch, revealing a narrow tunnel. Two climbed down ahead of Karl, lighting the way. As Karl crawled down the confined passage, the hatch closed behind him, enveloping him in the silence of the moldy tunnel. He allowed himself a victorious grin. Plans had been set in motion.

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A FEW HOURS LATER, Karl sat in a sparsely furnished office. Though the curtains were drawn, afternoon light leaked through, bright enough for him to draft his report. He wouldn’t send these scribbles to Heydrich, of course, but the day’s events had to be captured while they were sharp in his memory. Karl was nearly finished when a firm knock rattled the door.

“Come in.” Annoyance echoed in his voice, and when the young messenger from earlier entered hesitantly, he quickly softened his tone, gesturing for the youth to approach. “Please, have a seat. You bring tidings from the city?”

“Sir.” The man stood before Karl’s desk, but he made no move to sit. “It’s mayhem. The Poles have retaken the square and are going door to door.” He spoke quickly, but Karl was impressed by

the clarity in his voice. He'd make an excellent soldier one day. "They're dragging people into the streets. Our people, sir."

Karl feigned surprise. "As far as I know, most of the soldiers involved in this morning's ambush got out."

"Yes, sir." The messenger opened his mouth, then paused. His eyes darted nervously; in that moment he looked all of his fourteen years. Karl stood, then poured and handed him a glass of water.

"Take your time. Tell me what's going on. Who are they dragging out of the buildings?" Karl had a good idea, but he needed to hear it from the boy who witnessed it firsthand.

"They're taking anyone they suspect was involved in this morning's attack on the square. Most of the men had nothing to do with it, although I did see some of the Polish soldiers come out carrying weapons as proof. The townsfolk have also joined in, sir."

"Who are these people?" Karl pressed, forcing patience into his tone. He needed the boy's uncolored account.

The boy looked up, his eyes showing fear for the first time. "They're Germans, sir. They're people who've lived side by side with the Poles for years, but are now the enemy."

Karl suppressed a grin. It was as he suspected. "What are they doing to these people?"

"Most of them are taken away from the square, but some didn't make it beyond a few steps from their homes." The boy paused, his bottom lip quivering. "Those who had weapons were shot without hesitation. A few managed to run, but they didn't make it far either."

"The soldiers shot them as they ran away? In a crowded square full of onlookers?" Karl raised an eyebrow.

"No, sir." The boy's jaw clenched. "The crowd stopped them. Beat them to death."

Karl turned to the window, hiding a grin at the image forming in his mind. When he faced the boy again, his expression was composed. "What are they doing with the bodies?"

"Sir?"

"The murdered Germans. Are they taking them somewhere?"

“They leave them where they are. Most of the soldiers were moving out of the city as I made for your office, sir.”

“Very well.” Karl managed to suppress the elation tingling through his body. “You did well. Take some rest, and we’ll call for you when we need more information from the city.” With a wave, he dismissed the boy, who left with haste.

The door clicked shut. Karl exhaled, settling back with a satisfied smile. While it was regrettable to see fellow Germans murdered in the streets, they were part of a greater plan. Collateral damage. He reached for his phone and dialed a number he knew by heart. It took less than three rings before a familiar voice answered.

“Sir. All is progressing as expected.” He paused and listened, smiling at the response, before asking, “When can we expect their arrival?”

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KARL FELT NO compassion for the six men lined up in front of the church. They faced the ring of soldiers with different reactions. Three trembled with fear, barely staying upright. One stared blankly, already gone in mind if not in body. It was the two on the right who drew Karl’s eye: defiant, unflinching. One met his gaze, hatred simmering, before spitting on the ground.

Karl observed the man passively, not gracing him with any response. He turned away and scanned the square behind him. Bodies littered the square, faces mangled beyond recognition. Karl had already tallied them: thirty-five dead, mostly men, one woman. All ethnic Germans, murdered by former neighbors. Karl had already dispatched photographs to Berlin; Goebbels would know what to do with them.

He took his time before turning back to the men in front of the church. At Karl’s side stood a small delegation of Wehrmacht officers—their faces grave.

“At your signal, sir.” *SS-Brigadeführer* Lothar Beutel was nearly fifteen years his senior, but rank and age meant little here. He commanded the *Einsatzgruppe* attached to the German 4th Army. He

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reported directly to the same man Karl did and was here to make sure the Polish massacre of the ethnic Germans received the proper response. Karl was pleased the man was here, and he gave him a curt nod.

“Proceed.”

Karl turned his eyes back to the men lined up in front of the church, his eyes searching for the man on the far right. He was pleased the man locked eyes with him instantly. His defiance wasn't wavering. Yet.

The order to aim rang out. Karl held the man's stare—was that a twitch? The second command followed. Still the man didn't waver. *Tough bastard.*

A deafening volley cracked. Six bodies dropped—but the defiant one still twitched. The squad had botched it.

Beutel called for the men to shoot again, but Karl held up his hand. Surprised, the soldiers lowered their weapons, and Karl covered the short distance to find the man writhing on the ground, blood pouring from his mouth. Any earlier defiance had melted away, his bloodshot eyes lined with fear as his chest heaved, gurgling as his lungs filled with blood.

Karl drew his pistol, and for a moment relief flickered in the dying man's eyes. Gun in hand, Karl simply watched as the light drained from them.

# TWO

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM  
15 SEPTEMBER 1939

**F**elix Wolff closed his toolbox and slid it into a cabinet along the workshop wall. Only one other man remained, tidying his bench—Kenneth Thompson. In his early twenties like Felix, Ken had gone out of his way to welcome Felix since his first day two weeks ago.

“Almost finished, Ken? I suppose we’re closing up.” Felix smiled, leaning on the bench. “Any plans for the weekend?”

Ken shut his toolbox and brushed invisible dust from his spotless bench. “Not really. I’m beat from the week. Just looking to get some rest. Maybe a pint or two down the pub tomorrow.” The large man grinned. “Perhaps you can join and make some new friends.”

“I’d like that.” Felix meant it, but he felt some apprehension, and quickly added, “Let me see if I can make it. Would it be okay if I bring my roommate?”

“Of course. I can introduce you to some of my friends.” Ken opened the door and they stepped out into a narrow alley. Ken locked the door while Felix looked up. It was a rare beautiful

London afternoon. He loved the city's energy but missed the endless blue skies of Vienna.

"How are you getting on in the shop? From what I can tell, you seem to have taken to most of the work like a fish to water?" Ken asked as they ambled down the narrow street, passing warehouses where fellow workers were heading home for the weekend.

"It's not so different from my father's bike shop back home. Then I fixed bicycles, now I make new things." The words stung. Some days, Felix could no longer even picture his father's face. The thought of his father's ashes scattered among thousands in Dachau kept him awake at night. At least he could cling onto hope that his mother was alive in Vienna.

"Are you all right, mate?" Ken looked at him with concern.

Felix shook his head, forcing a smile. "I'm fine. Just haven't spoken of my family's shop in a long time."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up painful memories. I'm sure you've had your fair share of troubles before you made it here."

Ken walked on, and Felix was glad he didn't press the issue. In truth, Felix avoided speaking of life after Hitler annexed Austria a year and a half ago. Ken was right about one thing: Felix's journey to England had been fraught with danger. He owed his life to luck, and to the brave souls who smuggled him past the Nazis. Adela most of all.

They reached the end of the street, and Ken made to turn left. "If you decide you're up for a pint tomorrow, we'll be at the Victoria in Islington." He took a step toward Felix and patted his shoulder. "I hope you can make it. It'll be good to make some new friends." With that, the tall Londoner merged into the busy foot traffic. Felix lingered a moment, watching Ken vanish around the corner. Right then he decided: Tomorrow the pub. It was time to start rebuilding his life in London.

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FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, Felix froze outside his boardinghouse. Two uniformed officers stood chatting casually, unconcerned. Even from

fifty meters away, the sight made sweat appear on his brow. Memories of the Gestapo raiding his home—dragging his father away, threatening to take him too—rushed back. He hadn't seen his father since.

He took a deep breath and considered his options. *Run?* Everything he owned was in the boardinghouse—a few meager belongings and his new passport. Felix didn't have a choice, and he forced himself to take measured steps toward the place he called home. Whatever the policemen were there for, it wouldn't come close to his Gestapo experiences in Vienna.

It took less than thirty seconds to reach the police officers. They abruptly stopped their conversation, and the look in their eyes instantly made Felix regret his decision. *I should've walked away.*

"Do you live in this building?" the eldest of the two asked. He spoke with the authority of someone who'd spent his entire life in law enforcement. Felix estimated him to be at least in his early fifties.

"I do, sir." Felix cursed his slightly higher-pitched voice, betraying his anxiety. Steadying his nerves, he managed to add in a more composed tone, "Is there a problem? Has something happened?"

The man raised an eyebrow. "That's quite an accent. You German?" He stepped closer.

"I'm Austrian, sir. I'm a registered refugee, and I have the paperwork to prove it." Felix reached for his pocket, but the police officer held up his hand and shook his head.

"No need. I believe you. Just a standard inspection of tenants." The words were too smooth, as if rehearsed. "We're going to need you to step inside and report to our colleagues in the common area. Can you do that for me?" The man took another step closer as his colleague positioned himself on the other side of Felix. This purposefully guided Felix into the boardinghouse while cutting off any escape path.

Not that Felix intended to run: Where would he go? There was no safer place than his new London home.

"Of course."

Felix stepped inside, and the house that had quickly become his

home now felt violated. Walking through the narrow hallway, he stepped aside to make room for a stern-looking man who hardly slowed down as he made his way toward the front door. He reached the common room to find Mattias, his best friend and roommate, sitting in the corner. Felix was shocked by his friend's appearance. The confident, easy-going man he knew so well was reduced to a pale, shaky version of himself. He was staring at the floor, his left leg jiggling nervously.

"Matti." Felix spoke softly as he approached his friend, keeping half an eye on the uniformed police officers farther down the room. "What's going on?"

Mattias looked up, a spark of relief in his eyes. "I'm so glad to see you. They arrived about an hour ago demanding to see my documents." Mattias' words came at Felix quickly, in their native German. "Just do as they ask, and you should be okay. You don't want them taking you away—"

"Okay, that's enough." One of the police officers cut Mattias off, turning his attention to Felix. "I assume you also speak English."

"I do." Felix couldn't help but look to Mattias, whose eyes seemed to plead with him. *Be calm, tell them the truth. I have nothing to hide: I've done no wrong.*

"You also live here?" The officer spoke quickly, and with a thick accent, and Felix struggled to understand the next words. "When did you arrive in Britain? Did you arrive alone?" He must've noticed the shock on Felix's face, for he stopped and pointed in the direction of the hallway. Speaking much slower, and articulating more clearly, he said, "Follow me to a more quiet place to talk."

Felix nodded, and he soon found himself in one of the boardinghouse's vacant rooms. A small table with two chairs had been set up in the middle, and a small window provided some daylight. The officer sat down and gestured for Felix to sit down as well. The door to the hallway was still open, but before Felix could say anything, another man stepped in, closing the door behind him.

"I'm sure you understand the situation we're in is quite challenging," the man who'd just entered started without preamble. Felix turned to him and took in his lack of uniform. Felix shuddered, his

mind casting back to Gestapo interrogations in Austria and Czechoslovakia. Those men also wore plain clothes. “With your countrymen invading Poland, we had no choice but to declare war on them.” The man sounded resentful, almost as if blaming Felix for Hitler’s warmongering. It stirred Felix into action.

“My country has been invaded. I’m a registered Jewish refugee on the run from those very people that have invaded Poland.”

The man in plain clothes continued as if Felix hadn’t spoken. “From now on, we’ll be watching you closely. Unless you convince me otherwise, you’ll end up in the back of a police van—a German spy.” He took out a pen, wielding it almost like a weapon.

Felix almost laughed at the absurdity, but desperation kept him still. Instead, he laid down his refugee papers with as much conviction as he could muster. “I’m sure these documents will prove I’m no spy. I was almost killed by the Nazis in Dachau.” *Would that mean anything to this man?* Felix fixed his gaze on the men opposite him as they both ruffled through his papers. After a terse few minutes, they placed the papers on the table, just out of Felix’s reach. It wasn’t clear if he was allowed to take them, so he left them.

“Do you have any connections left in Austria? Family, friends, or other acquaintances?” The man stressed the last word, almost spitting it out, his lips curled in semidistaste. Felix wasn’t sure if the man’s behavior was an act, or if he genuinely believed Felix to be a threat. He assumed the latter.

“Just my mother.”

“What about your father?”

“Murdered in Dachau.”

The man put his pen down, then looked up at Felix with a frown. “Who can confirm this?”

The words felt like a punch to the gut, and Felix could barely control his anger. He clenched his hands into fists—the gesture not missed by both men—but he gritted his teeth and forced himself to answer, “My mother shared the news with me in one of her letters. I could get it for you.”

“That won’t be necessary. We’ve seen the letters.” Felix was

dumbstruck, but he was given no time to respond. “Is it true that you were interned in Buchenwald yourself?”

“Yes.”

“And you were let go after a few months?” The man raised an eyebrow. Felix could almost smell his stale breath. “Doesn’t happen too often, that, does it?”

Felix was as surprised as anyone when he was offered a way out of Buchenwald. “You could say I was lucky. My freedom was on the condition I leave the Reich within a month. That’s where my journey to Britain started.” He recounted his stay in Prague, until Czechoslovakia was also invaded by the German army. Felix left out his internment when he was caught trying to flee Czechoslovakia but detailed his route through Poland, eventually making it to the harbor of Gdynia to board a ferry to England.

Both men were silent. Then the uniformed police officer nodded slowly. “You’ve suffered quite some hardships. We’ll verify your story, and if everything turns out to be true, you’ll most likely be classified a Category C refugee.”

Felix had no idea if that was good or bad. “Will that allow me to remain in England? And continue working?”

They nodded, with the plainclothes man responding. “But keep in mind: If there’s any indication you’re not being honest with us, or if we feel you’re a threat to His Majesty’s government, we’ll revoke our decision, Mr. Wolff.” The man stood up and pointed a finger at Felix. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Crystal clear, sir.” A shudder ran down Felix’s spine. *Stay calm, you’re almost there.*

Silence hung in the air while the men observed each other. After a minute, almost as if on cue, the men got up and one opened the door.

“You’re free to go, Mr. Wolff. We’ll check your story, and if we need anything, we’ll come and find you.”

Felix stepped out of the room and walked toward the stairs at the end of the narrow hallway. He inhaled deeply, stepped one foot in front of another as he calmly climbed up. It wasn’t until his hand

turned the dorm room doorknob that he dared to let out a deep sigh.

Over by the small writing desk near the window lay his mother's letters, the only tie to his old life. Beside them, a familiar envelope: the most recent one from Vienna, sent a week ago. It had been opened, resealed, and returned.

"They were going through your letters when I entered our room." The familiar voice from nowhere was Mattias'. "Not the police, but the ones in plain clothes. When I caught them, they appeared unconcerned."

"I'm not surprised." Felix held the returned letter in his hand, the envelope feeling much heavier than it was. "Mail's not going through anymore, Matti."

Mattias sat down on his bed and stared at the carpeted floor. "I know. But from everything you've told me about your mother, she'll find a way to survive."

Felix nodded. He heard his friend speak, but the words didn't register. The final connection to home was severed. Worse, the country where he hoped to build a new life was turning hostile, too. It all felt too familiar. As he clutched his mother's letters, dread wrapped itself tight around him.

# THREE

PILSEN, PROTECTORATE OF BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA  
20 SEPTEMBER 1939

**A**dela Beran rapped on the open door. The man at the desk looked up, recognized her, and waved her in. “Miss Beran, please enter. I just need to sign these documents, and I’ll be right with you.” He returned his attention to the sheets of paper in front of him, his forehead creased in concentration.

Adela sat opposite her boss, watching Albert Göring’s eyes dart across the pages. In the short time she’d been working for him—he’d arrived at the Škoda Works about a month ago—she’d become used to his somewhat chaotic way of working. Never once was he prepared; there was always something to finish first. Adela moved her eyes to the file in her hands and took out a thick sheet: Göring’s travel schedule for the next two months. *This is as good a time as any to check for errors.*

When assigned as Albert Göring’s assistant a month ago, Adela had been apprehensive. She was now a single handshake away from

one of the Reich's most powerful men, reporting to *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring's brother every morning.

"Okay, that's that." Albert Göring pushed the papers across the desk. "Can you make sure those are posted today?"

"Of course, Herr Göring." Adela handed him the schedule with a nervous smile. "You have a busy stretch ahead, sir. Are you comfortable with all these trips?"

Göring studied the agenda, hummed a little, then nodded and looked up. "This is perfectly manageable." He pointed at a date near the bottom of the sheet. "I see Bucharest is penciled in for early November. But only two days? Can you extend that to five days?"

Adela frowned, then caught herself. "Of course, I'll change the travel arrangements." Silently, she wondered why Göring wanted to be in the Romanian capital for so long. There were only two clients there, and he could easily manage both in two days. *It's not my place to question.* "Are you happy with the rest of the schedule?"

"Ja." He placed the sheet of paper on his desk, then leaned back in his chair. "Have you been to Bucharest, miss Beran?"

"Sir? Bucharest? No." Adela had never been out of the country, and she fidgeted in her seat.

"Why don't you accompany me? It'll give you a chance to see how we conduct business." His smile was disarming as he sat back in his chair, his eyes sparkling. "You know, in these times, some might consider it dangerous to say no to a Göring."

"I mean, it sounds nice." Adela felt her spine tingle, unsure what to make of the invitation. "Wouldn't my time be better spent at the factory, handling orders and preparing paperwork while you meet the customers?" The Škoda Works was running at full capacity, and while the majority of the production capacity was reserved to produce weapons for the German army, Albert was responsible for the small portion of civilian industrial goods produced. Adela had been surprised and a little wary when he was appointed. To her, he was part of the recent German invasion of management taking over Pilsen's largest factory.

Göring held up his hands. "Nonsense! It's important for you to

make a connection with our clientele as well. Join me. It will be a good way for us to get to know each other a little better as well.”

He'd been professional so far, but this shattered their working relationship.

“Can I check my schedule and get back to you about it tomorrow?” Adela was annoyed to feel her cheeks flush somewhat.

Göring's smile edged toward triumph as he inclined his head. “Certainly. But I hope you'll decide to join me. There are things in Bucharest that might interest you, Miss Beran—things not on any official schedule.”

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“YOU SHOULD DEFINITELY GO.” Václav's voice was firm, his eyes urging her on. “This could be an incredibly valuable connection to the very top of the Nazi Party, Adela.”

“I know. But it feels too good to be true. Too convenient.” Adela clasped her hands together on the table. “But isn't it odd that Göring is so interested in me joining him?”

“Is there any reason to suspect he knows about your role in our organization?”

Adela shook her head resolutely. “I've been careful. You're the only contact I've met: That should tell you everything.”

Václav didn't immediately respond, and Adela picked up her glass of beer. She cursed her trembling hands and took a too-large sip of the local brew. Václav chose the bar as one of their primary meeting spots. It was inconspicuous, far from the city center and filled with factory workers who kept to themselves. The bartender knew everyone—any stranger would stand out.

“Very well. Then we must assume he has different motivations to ask you to come along.” Václav stroked his chin, his mouth turning into a half smile. “Do you think he might genuinely like you?”

Adela shifted in her seat and cradled her glass. “I've considered it.”

“Then you should absolutely explore this avenue and travel to Bucharest with him. The closer you can get to him, the better.”

Adela nodded slowly. As one of the leaders of *Obrana Národa*, the country’s largest resistance network, Václav had placed Adela at the Škoda Works for this very purpose. She’d been collecting information on weapons production and shipments the past six months. To be appointed Göring’s assistant had been an unexpected surprise, but his invitation to Bucharest provided an even bigger opportunity to infiltrate the Nazi leadership.

“From what I’ve seen, he goes out of his way to appear opposed to the Nazis.”

“Yes, you’ve mentioned this before.” Václav drummed his fingers on the table. “You know how I feel about this. It’s hard to believe Hermann Göring’s younger brother rebelling against the very man who placed him in this position.”

“I know. And it’s also exactly what you’d expect someone who infiltrated the country’s largest armament factory to search for traitors or saboteurs would do.” Adela bit her lip. “But still, he comes across so genuine. I overheard him speaking on the phone with his brother the other day, and he was lecturing him on some new policy the Nazis are implementing. He sounded furious.”

“It could all be part of the act, Adela.” Václav shrugged, took a sip of his beer, then shook his head. “Or you could be right. He could be one of the few good Germans. The best way to find out would be to—”

“Join him on the trip. Yes, yes, I’m aware,” Adela interrupted.

“Sorry.” He gave her a sheepish grin. “This is just such an exciting opportunity. I realize you’re taking all the risks by joining him. It’s your call, Adela.”

“No need to apologize.” They were quiet for a moment, and the talk of possible new risks moved Adela’s thoughts to another part of their partnership. “Have you heard from Dieter recently?”

Václav shook his head. “No one’s spoken to him since he shared the German intentions to invade Poland with you in June.”

“Not even Moravec?” Adela was only mildly surprised when Václav repeated his shake of the head. Her *Abwehr* double agent had

made it clear in their last meeting that he preferred to communicate with her alone. Her post at the Škoda Works made it harder for Dieter to reach her, but she'd expected he'd at least send word to František Moravec, the head of Czech military intelligence in London, and the man who had recruited him.

"We have to consider the possibility he's dead." Václav's words were chilling, but not unreasonable. Before Adela could respond, he continued. "There's one more thing you need to know before you make your decision."

Adela looked up and was surprised at the pained expression of Václav's face.

"The Gestapo's infiltration is improving. Two nights ago they raided four homes without warning, taking entire families. The children had nothing to do with it, and I suspect the wives didn't know of their husbands' involvement with us either."

"I'm sorry." It was unusual to lose people, but she couldn't recall such a large number picked up in a single go. "Did you know any of them well?"

"No, they were fairly new recruits. I'd only met one of them, briefly. From what I heard, they were a little too loose-lipped about their membership."

"Loose lips kill," Adela muttered. "Foolish pride."

"Indeed." Václav's face hardened. "But Adela, people talking aside, we could really use an inside track into the Gestapo's activities. I know you and Moravec discussed much higher level plans with Dieter, but he also managed to throw us some scraps about the Gestapo's progress every once in a while." His mouth twitched. "With Dieter out of the picture, we need a new contact."

"I know." Adela drained her beer, setting the glass down harder than she meant. "I'll do it. I'll go to Bucharest."

Václav inclined his head ever so slightly. "Thank you." He got up, leaving a half-full glass of beer on the table. He put on his coat. "You know, Adela. When Moravec told me to get you out of Prague, and to recruit you, I wasn't sure if you were going to be worth the hassle."

Adela pretended to be offended, but she couldn't suppress a grin. "Hassle?"

"I can't think of anyone else I'd rather have in your position now. Let's make sure you're properly prepared before your trip. I'll be in touch." He turned and, after making a quick stop at the bar to pay, stepped into the dark street outside.

Adela sat for a bit longer, as was their protocol. They should never be seen leaving their meetings together. She considered what they'd talked about. Even though she hadn't given Václav any indication, she had decided before the meeting that she would accompany Göring to Bucharest. The resistance leader's enthusiasm had only confirmed it was the right decision. The news about the Gestapo raid had clinched her decision. She thought about the horrors those families would be subjected to. Their lives had been turned upside down, just like that.

It brought her mind to the man she'd grown close to in Prague: Felix. He was still on her mind every day. Václav had recruited her on the day she put Felix on a train to Ostrava, a mining city on the border with Poland. There, Felix was to make contact with a local resistance cell to be smuggled across the border. Adela hadn't heard from him since: Both their lives had changed dramatically that day. Adela had been sent to Pilsen to begin a new life. Felix knew nothing—his only chance of reaching her was by writing to her old Prague address. Moravec and Václav had been very clear: Under no circumstances was she allowed back anywhere near her old home.

Adela wanted to believe Felix had made it to freedom, but the talk about Dieter's potential fate had her mind conjuring up all sorts of scenarios. If the Abwehr turncoat hadn't made it, what chance did Felix have? Her heart felt heavy, but she steeled herself. Worrying and assuming the worst wouldn't do her any good. *Felix is alive.*

It had been ten minutes since Václav left, and she decided she could head home as well. Nodding at the bartender as she passed him, she opened the door, the cool air hitting her face. Outside, she took a deep breath. Pilsen was much smaller than Prague, but she liked the friendlier people.

## PHOENIX RISING

She turned onto the sidewalk and started to make her way home. As she did, she sensed a shadowy figure to her right. In the corner of her eye, she spotted a figure on the opposite side of the street. He hadn't been there when she exited, or had he? She forced herself to stay calm, watching the reflections in shop windows, certain the figure across the street was following her. Cold terror gripped her heart, and she turned into the first side street, upping her pace as she was momentarily out of her stalker's sight. She glanced over her shoulder just before she made another turn, and she was encouraged to see no one following her. Almost running, she made it to the end of the street and stepped back onto a busier thoroughfare. Adela had never been so relieved to be in a crowd. She wanted to run across the square, but she forced herself to keep a normal pace. When she was about halfway across the square, she chanced a glance over her shoulder. No one was following her: The figure had disappeared. Had she imagined it? No, she decided, someone had definitely been waiting for her outside the bar. Suddenly, joining Göring in Bucharest no longer felt like a choice. She needed every scrap of information. Not just for the resistance, but for her own survival.