

ONE

VIENNA, AUSTRIA
10 MARCH 1938

Felix Wolff looked up as the front doorbell announced a visitor. A burly man entered the shop and strode purposefully over to the counter. “I’ll be with you in a second, just need to get this down.” Felix quickly refitted a front tire before gently lowering the old bike back onto the workshop floor. Felix wiped his hands on his apron as he approached the counter, where the man was reaching into a large briefcase. As soon as Felix saw the contents, he frowned. “I know what you’re going to ask, and I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

The man looked up in surprise, holding out a large sheet of paper. “Are you the owner of this establishment?” The tone of his voice betrayed the question was rhetorical, his *Hochdeutsch* accent instantly grating on Felix. “This is a Jewish store, isn’t it?” Felix didn’t extend his arms to take hold of the document, so the man placed it on the counter.

The poster showed a red-and-white Austrian flag, prominently

printed in the middle, surrounded by large typeface prompting readers to vote for independence. *Vote Yes!*

He sighed. “We prefer to keep our political affiliations to ourselves.”

“But surely you don’t disagree?” The man’s eyes focused on the area behind Felix. “Is the proprietor around?”

Felix shook his head and slid the poster back across the counter. “If that’s all, I’d like to get back to work.” He turned and eyed one of the bikes in line for repair.

The man placed his elbows on the counter, studying Felix as he hoisted the bike up on two chains attached to the ceiling. Felix pursed his lips and rummaged busily through his toolbox. *I couldn’t have been any clearer.*

“If we all look away, they’re going to win. We need to stand up for our country. People like you and me.” The man spoke confidently. “Are you from Leopoldstadt? You strike me as someone who’s grown up in the district, in this shop.”

Felix continued working on the bicycle, his back to the man, who kept droning on. After a minute, he closed his eyes in frustration, turned, his voice rising. “Look, I already told you—”

“What’s going on in here?” A baritone voice cut him off as Anton Wolff appeared from the back of the workshop. He gave Felix a barely perceptible look of disapproval as he strode toward the counter, his voice turning businesslike as he addressed the man. “How can I help you?”

The man’s eyes lit up, and he reached for the poster. “I was hoping you would support a free Austria in the upcoming referendum. We need every vote.” His superior air, and his Hochdeutsch accent, had faded as he spoke to Felix’s father. “A man such as yourself surely understands the importance of the voice of the common people in this election.”

Anton picked up the poster, studied it, and turned to his son. “What do you think, Felix? Should we put this up in the shop window?”

Felix shook his head resolutely. “It might bring trouble.”

His father looked thoughtful, stroking his beard.

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“The trouble will be worse if we don’t win the referendum,” the large man on the other side of the counter said, his hand signaling to the street outside. “Most of the other shopkeepers have already put up the poster. They understand the importance of showing a united front.”

Felix bit his lip. Graffiti supporting Austrian independence from Germany had appeared on walls and sidewalks: Their store was positioned in one of the busiest thoroughfares in the district.

“I agree with you.” Anton lifted the gate in the counter, poster in hand. He walked to the door and fitted the poster at eye level. “Can you hand me some tape, Felix?”

“I still think this is a bad idea, Papa.” Felix took a small roll from under the counter and tossed it to his father. “We shouldn’t expose ourselves like this.”

“Nonsense. We can do as we damn well please.” Anton secured the poster, to the delight of the other man. “This is still a free country.”

“And it shall remain that way, as long as people like your father stand up for it,” the man added with a smile. He picked up his briefcase and tipped his hat to Anton. “And now I must take my leave. Thank you for doing the right thing, sir.” He opened the door and stepped out into the Vienna sunshine.

THE DAY PASSED QUICKLY, and Felix was bringing in the bikes lined up in front of the store when he saw five men walking abreast on the sidewalk. They were some twenty meters away, and while Felix pushed one of the bikes inside, he noticed the group bullying anyone unfortunate enough to get in their path.

Just as Felix parked the last bike indoors, the doorbell clanged a little more aggressively than usual. The men piled into the small shop, every single one eyeing the poster with disdain. The tallest moved uncomfortably close to Felix, who was determined to keep his composure.

“This your shop?” The man spoke with a thick Viennese accent,

the words coming out menacingly. He didn't wait for an answer as he swung around toward the front door, pointing. "Noticed the poster on the door. Me and my friends don't like it."

"Be a good little Jew and take it down, eh!" one of them added, much to the amusement of the others, who burst out laughing.

Felix felt the blood pounding in his ears, but he calmly clasped his hands together, fingernails digging into his skin. He sized the men up: bulky and each at least a head taller than him. He needed to control himself—if it came to a fight, he wouldn't stand a chance. They fanned out through the store. The tallest stood by one of the bikes, his hands running over the handlebars. Felix took a step forward, then caught movement from the corner of his eye. Anton appeared beside him.

"Is there a problem, gentlemen?"

His father's composure calmed him, and he took a deep breath.

The leader of the group turned his attention to Anton, his beady eyes focusing on him like a bird would its prey. "We was just telling him we don't like that poster on the door. We want it gone."

"Hmm." Anton tilted his head, effortlessly holding the much taller man's gaze. He appeared to be measuring his response, and seemed entirely comfortable with the ensuing silence. Some of the brutes shifted on their feet, unsure how to respond. The leader took a step closer, now almost towering over Anton. Felix purposefully shifted his weight to his toes in an effort to hold his ground.

"I'm afraid I'm unable to comply with your request." When Anton broke the silence his words sucked the air from the room. He straightened his back, his face rising a few centimeters closer to his would-be assailant. Felix suppressed a satisfied grunt.

"Is that so?" Despite the fire increasing in the brute's eyes, there was a slight hesitation in his voice.

"This is my shop, and I can put anything I want in the storefront." Anton's voice only increased in strength. "This is still a free Austria, unlike what you'd like to believe."

The jibe struck home and the brute's face twisted in fury, his hand clenching into a fist. He bent down a little, his nose almost touching Anton's. Felix inched forward, making a fist of his own,

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ready to pounce if the man struck his father. The adrenaline coursing through his veins numbed any fear. If his father was willing to take a stand like this, he would proudly go down with him.

The leader's eyes narrowed. He opened his mouth, then appeared to change his mind. His scowl transformed into an ugly smile before he broke into a high-pitched laugh. His friends joined in, somewhat nervously. The leader took a step back, then jabbed a finger in Anton's face.

"You're a fiery one, old man. I respect that. But you better remember we're not the only ones who feel this way. There are plenty of us, and they might not have the same self-control. Tread carefully." He turned to Felix. "And you. Watch your back."

Felix bit his tongue. His head was pounding, and he tightened his fist. He nodded at the man, then caught his father's look. *Calm down. They're almost gone.*

"Let's get out of here. It's clear these Jews won't listen to reason." The man turned around to his friends, who eagerly shuffled out of the store. "I'm sure we'll find people with reason in Leopoldstadt. People who see sense." He stopped at the door, where he focused on the poster. Felix held his breath. *He's going to rip it off after all.*

Anton moved forward and took the door handle, stepping between the man and the door. Felix found himself moving closer as well. Together, father and son stood.

The brute looked at them for a few seconds, his eyes going between them and the poster, then smirked as he left the store. "That's okay. We'll be back."

Felix stepped outside and watched him join his friends and disappear down the street. The man's last words lingered in his mind. Looking around, there were plenty of people moving about in a seemingly carefree manner. But he knew it was all an act. The Jewish people of Leopoldstadt all harbored the same fear. The upcoming referendum drew closer, and Felix feared there might be more thugs voting in favor of joining Adolf Hitler's regime.

TWO

VIENNA
11 MARCH 1938, MORNING

“**T**here will be no referendum.”

The man at the head of the table announced this with a tone of finality. Karl Vogt beamed as he studied the equally pleased faces sitting around him.

“I spoke to the Führer this morning, and he made it clear Chancellor Schuschnigg’s attempt at undermining the reunification of Austria is wholly unacceptable.” Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the man chairing the meeting and Austria’s current minister of the interior, leaned forward in his chair. “He is furious with the proceedings, and will address his grievances with the chancellor later today.”

“What will his demands be?” Odilo Globočnik, chief of staff of the Nazi Party in Austria, asked.

“An immediate cancellation of the referendum, along with the chancellor’s resignation.” A smile crept onto Seyss-Inquart’s face, and Karl understood even before the next words came from the minister’s mouth. “To be replaced by me.”

Applause filled the room as those present hurried to shake the

future chancellor's hand. Ever since Karl's arrival in Vienna six months ago, Seyss-Inquart had spared no effort in introducing him to Austria's political elite. Karl was by no means a big political player, and Seyss-Inquart wasn't required to invite him to meetings such as today's, but Karl knew the future chancellor valued his input. More so, he suspected he valued his ability to get things done.

The room settled down as the men returned to their seats, and Seyss-Inquart spoke again. "We don't know how Schuschnigg will respond to these demands, but he has little choice in the matter. The Führer has ordered the *Wehrmacht* to begin staging at the border in case the chancellor fails to comply with our demands." He paused and made eye contact with each of the men at the table. "Now, the reason we're gathered here today is because I want everybody to be aware of what will happen once Schuschnigg resigns. I'd like to go over the status of your individual plans one more time." His eyes fixed on Karl. "Vogt, why don't you start. Are your men in position?"

Karl glanced at Globočnik, who nodded. "Very much so, Herr Minister. As soon as the signal is given, loyal men will spring into action all over the city."

"Including those within the police departments?" Seyss-Inquart's eyes went to the man sitting opposite Karl, Josef Garhofer, criminal investigator within the Vienna police department. Garhofer nodded, and Karl continued.

"We've identified potential troublemakers within the police department, and we'll make sure those are nullified once power is transferred."

"And you're certain those loyal to the Reich will do what's right?" Seyss-Inquart said, raising an eyebrow.

"There is no doubt, Herr Minister." This time Garhofer spoke up. "I vouch for all of these men. They are my colleagues and friends, and every single one of them is eagerly awaiting the *Anschluss*—the reunification."

Karl suppressed a grin. While he had no doubt Garhofer's friends would support the reunification, their motives weren't as pure as Garhofer made them out to be. Most of these men were

stuck on the periphery of the police force. Their involvement in the putsch would see their positions instantly elevated. Nevertheless, they were useful pawns in a greater scheme.

Seyss-Inquart nodded in satisfaction at Karl's and Garhofer's explanations, and he moved on to discuss several political allies. This morning's news didn't come as a surprise; Karl had spoken to his boss in Berlin the day prior, who had indicated big changes in the coming days.

"Right, I think that's all for today, gentlemen." Seyss-Inquart stood, and the rest of them followed, stuffing their papers and files into their briefcases. "Please remain close to your phones, as things can and will change quickly. Thank you for your time." As the room emptied, he signaled for Karl to stay.

"Karl, just between you and me, I want to make sure that whatever you have planned, there is minimal violence and damage to the city. I know you've been preparing with Globočnik, and I feel his men can be, how should I put this delicately, overly enthusiastic at times."

"I understand, Herr Minister, but I assure you we have them under control." Karl spoke with more confidence than he felt. In truth, he shared Seyss-Inquart's concerns about the Brownshirts of the *Sturmabteilung*. "I agree they can be somewhat brutish in their ways, but Odilo and I have made it very clear there is to be no looting or destruction of property."

"Just the semblance of civil disorder is enough, Karl." Seyss-Inquart lowered his voice conspiratorially. "And if there is to be any collateral damage to make it look more authentic, perhaps we can limit it to certain districts in the city."

"Absolutely. I will see to it."

The future chancellor's face relaxed as he let out a long sigh. "Very well. Soon, our hard work of the past months will pay off. I'm sure you have some last preparations to make, so I'll let you get to it. *Heil Hitler!*"

"*Heil Hitler!*" Karl raised his arm in salute, then left the room, his pulse racing with excitement.

KARL STEPPED out onto the cobblestones of Herrengasse and smiled when he spotted Odilo waiting across the street.

“It’s fitting to think we’ll soon occupy all of these former Habsburg palaces,” Karl said, waving a hand at the ornate Palais Modena, where the Ministry of Interior was housed.

Globočnik shrugged in typical Viennese fashion. “I don’t really care where my office is, as long as the Führer appreciates what I’ve been doing these past few years.”

“Come, let’s get something to eat while we wait for things to be set in motion.” Karl slapped his friend on the shoulder. “I’m sure they have a nice spot at parliament lined up for you.”

“You’re sure, or *really* sure?” Globočnik looked at him in anticipation. “Has Heydrich mentioned anything to you?”

Karl shook his head. “Not specifically, but he’s aware of your dedication. He rewards those loyal to the cause. And fewer have been more so than you.” In addition, Karl had made sure to prominently include his friend’s activities in his reports to his boss in Berlin. “Let’s worry about getting us some lunch first. I’m starving.”

They navigated the narrow alleys of the city center to reach Franziskanerplatz. The unassuming square was home to Globočnik’s favorite restaurant. A queue had formed at the entrance, which they ignored as Globočnik opened the door. The air was heavy with the smell of frying oil, the warmth enveloping Karl like a welcome blanket, his mouth watering as he realized he’d skipped breakfast that morning. All seats were occupied, but for a small table in the back.

“Ah, Herr Globočnik, how lovely to see you!” The immaculately dressed owner appeared out of nowhere and motioned to the vacant table. “We’ve kept your table free. I had a feeling you might come in today.” Karl knew Odilo’s table was always free.

“*Danke*, Herr Mayrhofer.” Globočnik was curt as he took his seat, declining the menu offered by their host. “I’ll have the usual.” He turned to Karl. “You’ll have the *Schweinebraten* as well, right?”

Karl nodded, eager to get their order in. “And a *Krügel*, *bitte*.”

“For me as well,” Globočnik said, and as the owner disappeared, he leaned forward on the table. “What did you think of the meeting? You already knew, didn’t you?”

“I knew something was going on.” Karl leaned back in his chair, inspecting the diners around them, avoiding Globočnik’s piercing, eager gaze. “I spoke to Berlin this morning, and they said we’d have to deal with the referendum, and quickly.”

“Did you speak with Heydrich?” Globočnik’s eyes sparkled.

Karl shook his head. “He was meeting with the other big chiefs.” He paused as a waiter placed two half liters of beer in front of them. “I don’t speak to him nearly as much as you think, Odilo.” He allowed himself a smile and picked up his mug, holding it out to his friend. They clinked glasses and both took a large sip. Karl relished the slightly biting sensation, as the cold liquid made its way down his throat. He took another sip before setting the mug back on the table. “When it happens, we need to assume control of the city quickly.”

“Of course.” His friend nodded from across the table. “Our men are in place. They know what to do.”

“I know. But one thing is very important.” Karl took a small sip and lifted his index finger. “No looting or destruction of Austrian property.”

A twisted smile appeared on Globočnik’s face. “Oh, don’t worry. Most of them are unthinking ruffians, but their leaders have them under control. Most importantly, they know the enemy. Like us, they have been waiting for the right moment to strike. They’re not going to bother any good, upstanding Austrian citizens.”

Their food arrived, and Karl studied his friend. Odilo Globočnik was ruthless, and he surrounded himself with capable people. Managing an army of eager Brownshirts lurking in the shadows was what he did best. Karl picked up his knife and fork and cut into his honey-roasted pork. He brought a piece to his mouth, then paused. “If any of your men want to have some fun, send them across the canal.”

Globočnik took a bite, smiled and nodded. “Don’t worry. We’ll take care of those *Juden* in Leopoldstadt.”

THREE

VIENNA

11 MARCH 1938, EVENING

The cold evening air rushed at Felix as he pedaled his bike a little faster along Vienna's Ringstraße. The heavy traffic moved as it always did on the broad boulevard encircling the inner city, but the air felt different.

Football training had been suspended as soon as Schuschnigg's voice interrupted the regular broadcast, and the boys were called inside the clubhouse. There, they huddled around the single radio set and listened in shock. The chancellor had canceled the referendum, and stepped down from his position. Worse, he accepted that the Nazi factions within the government would take over. The chancellor signed off, and the national anthem of Austria came through the speakers. The boys stared at the radio in disbelief, but there was no time to linger. Training was canceled, and they were urged to go home as quickly as possible.

When Felix passed the university on Schottentor, he saw a group of students had gathered on the steps to the main entrance. A crowd of Brownshirts carrying homemade wooden weapons approached

from the main street. Felix kept his head low, careful to avoid eye contact. They did nothing to hide their disdain for the students.

“Leeches!”

“No-good, left-wing Bolsheviks!”

“Jew-lovers!”

The last of the Nazis had passed Felix when a chant grew from the front. “Heil Hitler! Down with the Bolsheviks! Death to the Jews! This is our time!” It quickly picked up, and the sight and sound of some fifty armed men wearing the uniform of the Sturmabteilung feverishly moving toward the unarmed students sent a shudder down Felix’s spine. Without another thought, he pedaled his bike along the Ring. Despite the increasing distance between him and the Brownshirts, their chant only appeared to grow louder. He clenched his jaw and focused solely on the street ahead.

His legs ached, but he hardly noticed. Schuschnigg’s words reverberated in his mind. *For the good of Austria. To avoid the spilling of blood between German brothers.* His head was spinning, and he almost missed the crowd blocking the road. He squeezed the handles of his brakes, his bike coming to an abrupt standstill. Felix returned to the present as dozens of voices speaking at the same time came at him. People moved about and between the cars blocking the road. Police cars were parked haphazardly along the sidewalk and the street; he was standing in front of the Vienna police headquarters.

The crowd swelled, and as Felix looked for a path through, Brownshirt uniforms encircled, along with even more people in regular clothes. Despite their more casual exterior, they wore the same satisfied, menacing scowls as the members of the Sturmabteilung. The air was thick with anticipation, and even though Felix knew he should move on, he found himself fixed in place.

The doors to the police station opened with a crash, and two Brownshirts escorted a uniformed police officer between them. A cheer erupted from those gathered outside. The Brownshirts paused atop the steps for drama, then stepped down and bundled the man into a waiting car. It slowly moved through the crowd, with plenty of onlookers banging the hood and roof.

THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

“Out with the old!”

“Traitor!”

“This is our time!”

“Heil Hitler!”

The frenzy made Felix's skin crawl. A terrible thought struck: The people hurling abuse at the police weren't just Brownshirts. They were regular people, like him. The chants at the university echoed in his mind. *Jew-lovers*. His blood turned cold, and he looked at the faces around him—his fellow Viennese no longer hid their true, pent-up feelings. They were looking for someone to unleash their fury on. A little farther down the Ring, across the Danube Channel, was his home, Leopoldstadt. *Papa. Mama.*

Felix began pushing his way through the crowd, no longer caring who was in his way. *I need to get home.* A large man wearing a gray overcoat stood in his way, and Felix hesitated before pushing his bike on. The man turned to him, a scowl on his face.

“*Bist Du deppert?* You can't push your bike through here, you idiot.” The man kicked the front wheel of Felix's bike, turning the handlebars sideways. Felix only just managed to keep his balance as the bike swerved and fell onto the ground. The man glowered at him. “You touch me one more time, and you'll end up over there with your bike. You got that, boy?”

Anger rose inside Felix as he turned away and picked up his bike. He balled his hands into fists. As he turned around, ready to pounce, he was surprised and slightly disappointed to see him gone. He scanned the faces around him, but the man had melted into the crowd.

The sound of screeching brakes followed by a revving engine drew everyone's attention. A large truck turned the corner from Wipplingerstraße, honking its horn as the people on the street in front of the police station parted to make way. The crowd moved forward as one when the driver got out and opened the rear doors. The disappointment was palpable when the truck turned out to be empty.

However, the mob didn't have to wait long. The double doors of the police station swung open once more. More Brownshirts poured

out, this time accompanied by armed police officers. The officers walked with their heads held high and formed a corridor leading down the stairs toward the truck. Felix watched the spectacle in horror, certain this is what the crowd had come to see.

Uniformed, senior police officers in various states were dragged down the stairs. Their uniforms were torn, their insignias and badges ripped off. Some sported bloodied but defiant faces, others trod past the jeering onlookers with their heads bowed, their gazes fixed on the street a few steps before their feet. As they climbed on board the truck, finding a spot on the hard wooden benches on either side, the crowd spilled forward, closing any potential escape route. People spat at the policemen, or failing that, on the side of the truck. The Brownshirts and policemen in charge allowed the violent spectacle to proceed for a few minutes before gently dispersing their brethren. The truck doors were then closed with pompous ceremony.

Felix stared at the grotesque scene from a distance. When the crowd moved forward, he stood where he was, holding his bike. The truck slowly started moving, the driver giving the angry mob ample time to release its fury on the toppled men of power inside. Felix felt sick, but he knew he needed to leave before the situation escalated further. He looked around, searching for more sensible minds to intervene and end this madness. Then he realized those very people were in the back of the truck. Sadness overwhelmed him as he cast his eyes on the police headquarters once more. Bright lights shone from every window, but all he saw was a veil of darkness taking over. A window on the top floor opened, and two men appeared. A large roll of red fabric was attached to the building, secured by the men with nails. The crowd below went silent. The men tugged at the fabric and slowly unfurled the roll. Felix's stomach roiled, and he turned away. The crowd had thinned after the police chiefs were escorted off, and there was now enough space on the opposite side of the street for him to fit through. Felix stepped onto his bike and pushed his pedals down with as much force as he could muster. He didn't look back when the loudest cheer of the night erupted behind him. It was the end of Vienna as he knew it.