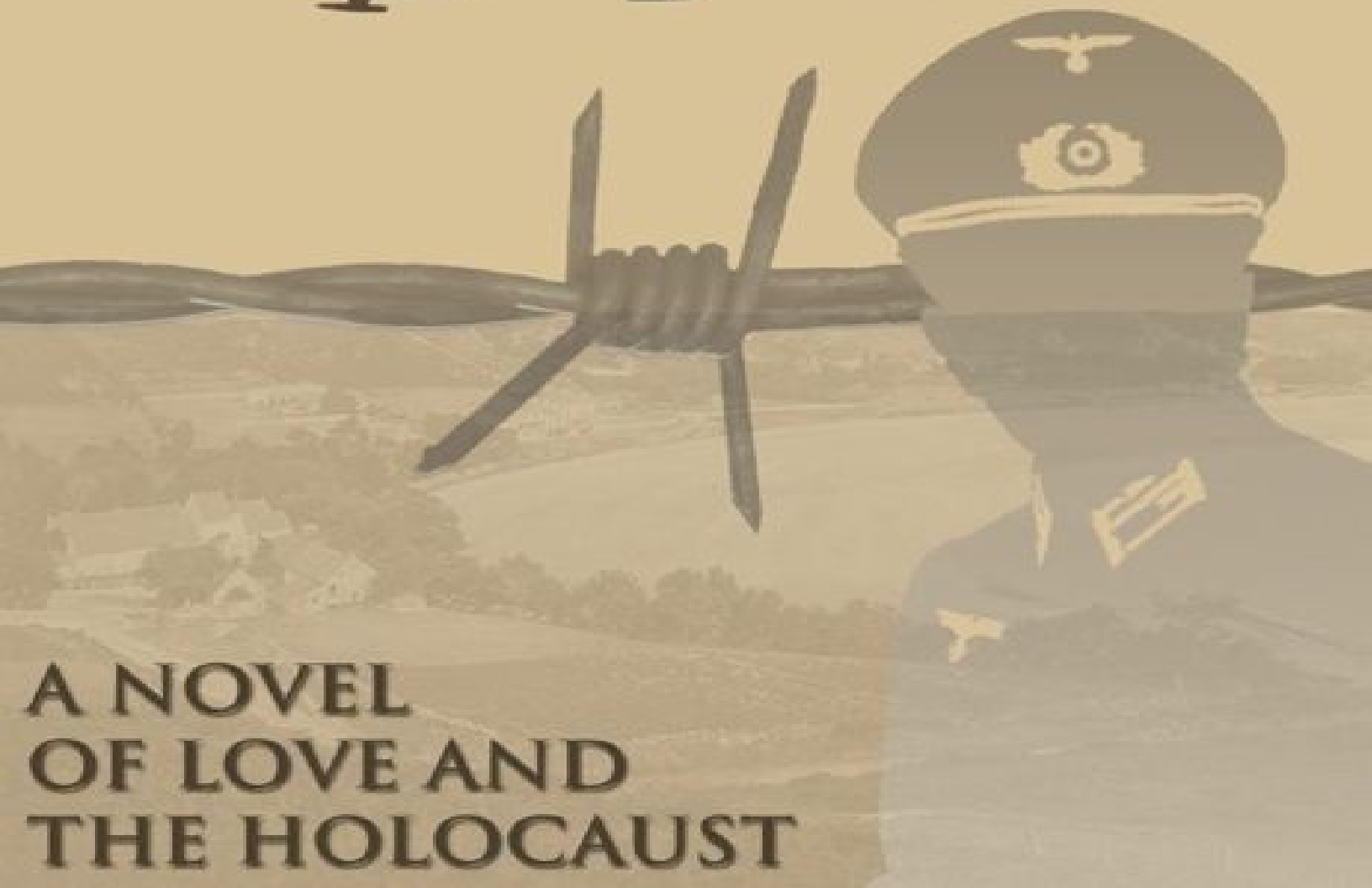


EOIN DEMPSEY
**FINDING
REBECCA**



A NOVEL
OF LOVE AND
THE HOLOCAUST

Finding Rebecca

A Novel

By Eoin Dempsey

German Military Ranks and definitions

Führer: Adolf Hitler, the leader of the German Reich (Empire).

Hauptsturmführer: the SS equivalent of a captain.

Kapo: a privileged prisoner who served as a barracks supervisor or led work details in a Nazi concentration camp.

Lagerführer: SS officer responsible for discipline in the camp.

Lagerkommandant: the head of a particular concentration camp, in Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, (1940-43/44), Arthur Liebehenschel, (1943-1944) and Richard Baer, (1944-1945).

Obersturmführer: the equivalent of a 1st Lieutenant in the US army.

Rapportführer: a mid level officer, specific to the concentration camp system, whose job was to oversee the officers below them who had more direct contact with the prisoners.

Reich: the German Empire, specifically the Third Reich, which existed under the Nazis from 1933-1945.

Reichsführer: Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS and Hitler's second in command.

Sonderkommandos: work units of Nazi concentration camp prisoners, composed almost entirely of Jews, forced under threat of death to aid with the disposal of victims of the gas chambers.

SS: an elite military unit of the Nazi party, which, after being founded as a guard for the Nazi party itself, grew into an army of more than a million highly trained soldiers. The SS were solely responsible for the guarding of the concentration camps.

Standartenführer: the equivalent of a colonel in the US army.

Sturmmann: a storm trooper, the equivalent of a regular enlisted soldier.

Untersturmführer: the equivalent of a 2nd lieutenant in the US army.

Wehrmacht: the regular German armed forces, not involved in the running of the concentration camps.

This book is for my wife, Jill.

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Chapter 1

Auschwitz-Birkenau, September 1943

The car came to a halt and the driver stepped out to open the door for Rapportführer Friedrich. Christopher climbed out of the car after him. “This is where you will be doing the majority of your work.” Friedrich said. The car had pulled up outside a row of about thirty warehouses in three rows, each about forty feet wide and two hundred feet long. Friedrich took the ledger out from under his arm and lifted a piece of paper on top, looking underneath. “I see you’ve been selected for this position as a result of your background in accounting.” Christopher nodded. The barbed wire stood taut at the end of the rows of warehouses and behind. “I’m glad to see we have a professional man here to help out. I was a lawyer back in Frankfurt before the war myself.” Christopher nodded once more, waiting for Friedrich to speak again. “It says here you came from the occupied territories, but you’re a German.”

“Yes, I was living in Jersey before it was liberated by the German forces.”

“A blessed day I’m sure.” Friedrich smiled, dropping the piece of paper back down onto the ledger, which he handed to his driver. “As an SS officer, I’m sure you’re more than aware of the importance of the job we have here.”

“Of course, Herr Rapportführer.”

Friedrich smiled and shook his head. “Such a strange accent.” It was a fine September day and Christopher felt a bead of sweat run down his back. His new uniform was tight around the shoulders and he squirmed to free them from its grip. Somewhere there was a band playing, Christopher could hear the strains of music, faint on the wind. “There are too many tribes in Europe, too many differences, too much potential for conflict and war. You only need look at the history of Europe to see the effect that this has had. Do you study history, Herr Seeler?”

“Yes, Herr Rapportführer.”

“Of course you do. I’m sure that was a large part of the reason you asked

to be stationed here, to be at the nub of history? I feel the same way myself. We have much in common, Herr Seeler.” Christopher remained taciturn and nodded. “Principal among these tribes causing trouble has always been the Jews. They’re responsible for this war. Facilities such as this one are in place to make sure that wars like this one never happen again. You understand that don’t you, Herr Seeler?”

“Yes, Herr Rapportführer, of course.” Christopher looked into Friedrich’s grey eyes and then at a large concrete building four hundred feet away, its massive chimney extending twenty feet into the air spewing out thick black smoke. Christopher brought his eyes back around to Friedrich who was speaking again. Christopher’s face remained stoical and grey, not betraying any emotion.

“The point I’m trying to make is that we must be hard as granite here.” Friedrich was staring at Christopher, as if trying to look through his eyes. “This is something I tell all my new officers. The work we do here is too important to be stained by any form of sympathy or compassion for the prisoners.” He spat. “Any form of weakness, particularly towards the prisoners themselves will not be tolerated. I need only hardened, passionately committed SS men. Do you understand me, Herr Seeler?”

“Of course, Herr Rapportführer, I understand very well.”

“Of course you do. Don’t think I doubt you or your commitment to our cause. This is more of a word of warning against the insidious nature of the Jew and how they prey on the cancer of self-doubt.” Christopher felt his stomach tightening as Friedrich continued. “Like all vermin, the Jew has learned to adapt, and with magnificent success. They know how to read our emotions, to tap into our fears. That is why this is the work that only a strong man could do, a man not susceptible to the vile efforts of the Jew to undermine all that is good in the world. You must know that any order that is given to you is done so with the good of the Reich in mind and thus you must never question any order that you receive. Do you understand all of this, Obersturmführer Seeler?”

“I welcome the task, Herr Rapportführer.”

“Good, good, I thought you’d say that. I have huge confidence in you and yours is a very important task. With the expansion of our activities here we have the need of a dedicated officer in charge of the redistribution of funds back to the Reich, and of course, this is where you come in. You will oversee the

Sonderkommando, the Jewish workforce we have here, in their duties of sorting through the various goods and valuables that we are able to reclaim. You will then sort these valuables and dispatch them back to the Reich. Their safe passage will be your responsibility. I appreciate that it might take a little time to come up with a system, but don't take too long. The needs of the camp are too great to put up with any kind of laziness or inefficiency."

They walked along the line of warehouses. Christopher looked inside an open door. Inside there were perhaps twenty women, sorting through suitcases with chalk markings scrawled on the outside. They did not look up at him as he approached the door. Their eyes remained rigidly on the suitcases in front of them. Every few seconds one of them would step forward to pitch an armful of clothing into a massive pile or to dispatch jewelry onto a long desk overseen by armed SS guards. And there were thirty such warehouses.

Friedrich motioned to him to follow and Christopher stepped out of the building, which he had walked into without even realizing. "You will be in charge of these warehouses." He pointed in the general direction of the warehouses in front of them. "You will also be responsible for the currency that comes out of all of the warehouses. Now, needless to say, any corruption in this, or any other role will not be tolerated by me, or the powers within the camp. The Political Department is always watching. As you know, they have the power to search anyone at any time, and are also constantly on the lookout for any unauthorized contact between the SS themselves and any prisoners. If you are caught stealing, or embezzling, as you accountants like to say, the punishment will be swift and harsh but I'm sure there'll be no need for anything like that."

"Of course not, Herr Rapportführer." Christopher replied.

"Walk with me, Herr Seeler." Friedrich walked between two warehouses. Christopher scuttled to catch up with him. It was strangely quiet outside of the warehouses. Christopher wondered where all of the prisoners were. He had heard that there were thousands of them. "So, had you heard of our facility before you were stationed here?"

"I had. My uncle told me about it. He is an officer in the Wehrmacht, stationed on the Eastern front."

"And how did he hear of the camp?" Friedrich stopped to look at Christopher

“My uncle knew of my desires to serve the Reich and researched where best I might be stationed.”

“Our work here, although of vital importance cannot be spoken of. I have no need to remind you of the oath of loyalty you took.”

“I remind myself of it every day, Herr Rapportführer.”

“Good to hear young Herr Seeler. With men like you here we will make the Führer proud.” They emerged from the third row of warehouses in front of a large brick built building. It looked like a massive farmhouse, stretching several hundred feet in length. “These buildings you see here are new. They were only constructed two months ago, in July. This is where you will be gathering the goods and belongings. This is a good time. We have not received a shipment in a day or so. It’s always better to show new people around when it’s empty. When we get a shipment in things can get a little hectic around here.” Friedrich led Christopher toward the entrance to the building, and past several prisoners. They seemed well fed and looked relatively healthy. Each prisoner was carrying a tool of some sort, or pushing an empty cart. None looked at Christopher as he walked past them. Friedrich led Christopher inside a small anteroom. That room led straight into a large changing room, with benches all along the walls and up the middle, complete with hooks. Each was numbered. It was completely empty, windowless and the air inside was thick. Christopher wanted to leave as soon as he walked in. “You will organize the collection of the clothes and valuables of the undesirables liquidated here.” The word ‘liquidated’ reverberated through Christopher and he thought of Rebecca. Christopher felt his legs shaking beneath him and immediately sat down. “This is no time to be taking a rest Herr Seeler. There is much work to be done.” Christopher felt his legs bound back up and he followed Friedrich back out through the anteroom, past the massive steel door with the peephole and the sign that read; ‘Harmful gas! Entering endangers your life.’

Christopher took the air outside deep into his chest, filling his lungs. Friedrich was already walking ahead. Christopher jogged to catch up with him, trying to slow down his breathing, trying to control his pulse. “I’m sure you can see the nature of our work here and why it is so sensitive.”

Christopher didn’t answer for a few seconds but then caught himself. “Yes, Herr Rapportführer, sensitive and important in equal measure.”

“Yes, that’s it. That is one of the crematoria you will be drawing the repatriated goods from. There are three others, soon there will likely be more. It seems that our work is never done here.” Friedrich led Christopher back towards the car. “Your office is at the end of these rows of warehouses but that also may change over time.” The driver saluted as Friedrich approached and held the door open for the two men. Christopher was shaking so much that he struggled to get into the car and had to force himself to bend over, striking his head on the roof of the car as he got in. Friedrich seemed not to notice. The drive to the end of the row of warehouses took only a few seconds with Friedrich talking all the way, something about responsibilities and honor but Christopher was not listening anymore.

The car pulled up outside the administration building. Christopher thought that it might have been quicker to walk. Friedrich strode ahead of Christopher, still talking as he went, to a wooden door with a large glass window. He stood back as Christopher opened it and then he walked inside. There were three other men in the room, and all looked up as Christopher entered. Friedrich led him through the room to a door to a private office and brought him inside. There was a wooden desk with a large safe behind it. There were bookshelves filled with files and ledgers on the walls and a window. The desk was clean except for a telephone and a stack of papers in the corner. “This will be your office, although I expect you will spend much of your time in the warehouses and crematoria I just showed you.” They walked back out to where the other men were sitting. “Let me introduce you to your support staff.” The other three men stood up. “Firstly this is Karl Flick.” A portly man with glasses stepped forward and shook Christopher’s hand. Flick’s palm was cold and wet and slithered off Christopher’s hand. Wolfgang Breitner stepped forward, a small man with a large nose, who smiled as he greeted Christopher. Last was Toni Muller, a tall, serious looking man.

“Welcome, Herr Obersturmführer, we look forward to working with you.” Muller said. Christopher tried to smile back but he couldn’t. “I’m sure you have many great ideas for the re-organization of the accounting processes here.”

“Yes, I do.” Christopher replied, looking down at his desk. “It seems a quiet day today so we will need to prepare for the next shipment coming in. When is that due, Herr Rapportführer?”

“Tomorrow I believe,” Friedrich said looking at his watch. “I should be

leaving now. The men will show you to your quarters when the workday is over. Welcome to Auschwitz, Herr Seeler.” Friedrich closed the door behind him and Christopher looked over at his new colleagues, his subordinates. Each had sat down at their desks and was poring through papers and ledgers. Christopher asked where the bathroom was and walked out the door and down the hall. Once inside the bathroom he locked himself inside the farthest stall. The burning vomit came quickly, the first time he had vomited in years. Afterwards he sat on the seat of the toilet for as long as he dared, clutching his knees close into his chest.

Christopher returned to his desk and sat down. He looked around the room at the others, who seemed to be working, so he endeavored to do the same. He shuffled the papers in the corner of the desk and laid them out to read. They were accounts of the numbers of people coming through the camp. There were thousands coming in every week but only thirty thousand or so workers were required to work in the local factories. There was no way the huts in the main camp could house any more than a few thousand workers. It didn’t make sense. The numbers didn’t add up. In the desk there were ledgers of the amounts ‘repatriated’ back to the Reich from the prisoners, ledgers of Reich Marks, dollars, pounds, lira, pesetas, francs, Russian rubles and every currency that Christopher had ever heard of. There was a river of money running through the camp, a river whose course he was to control.

Christopher’s colleagues led him down to the mess hall after work. The portions were large, and unlike the SS training camp, the food was actually quite good. Christopher was to share quarters with another young officer from the camp guard itself, Franz Lahm, a young Untersturmführer from Regensburg. Lahm was friendly and wanted to talk but Christopher pretended to be sick and told him that he wanted to get an early night for the arrival of the shipment tomorrow.

“Oh, come on. Come drink with us. If you go to bed early every time there is a new shipment you’ll never stay up with us.”

“You go ahead. It’s just that it’s my first day. I’ll meet everyone tomorrow night, I promise.” Lahm agreed and left Christopher on his own. Christopher was still awake when Lahm came back at around three a.m. Christopher didn’t react as he tripped over the table in the middle of the room. Lahm cursed as he pulled himself up off the floor and hummed a marching tune Christopher recognized as

he climbed into bed. And alone in the dark Christopher wondered how he would find Rebecca in all this mess of chaos and death.

Chapter 2

“Herr Seeler, time to wake up. The shipment is coming in soon. We need to be down at the railway station in half an hour.” Christopher felt his eyes open. It was Flick. Christopher nodded to him and heaved himself out of bed. Lahm was gone. Christopher saw Lahm’s spare uniform hanging on the closet door. There were tiny bloodstains on the cuffs. Christopher got up and changed into his uniform. He looked at himself in the mirror, looked directly into his grey-blue eyes and took a deep breath, watching his chest expand and contract. He fixed his collar and walked out into the hallway. Flick was waiting and nodded to Christopher, leading him into the dull morning sun. Flick handed Christopher a ledger. On the top sheet the numbers for the day were written in black. There was a shipment coming in from Lodz. “Poles,” Flick said. “They should be in pretty good condition. It’s only a short journey.” The number on the ledger said 1200. “Have you been at a selection before?” Flick asked.

“Not as such, no.”

“We just stand at the back and make sure that the luggage is taken care of. The Sonderkommando will be there to do the lifting work. It’s easy.” Flick looked at Christopher through thick glasses. “Don’t worry. They know it’s your first day here. This will be very simple. Our work comes later.”

Christopher nodded back. “Thank you, but I’m sure I’ll be able to handle this.” Christopher held his shaking hands behind his back, after handing the ledger to Flick.

The train station looked like almost any other, with signs and a timetable pinned to the wall above the platform. There was a station house but it was dark inside and the door was locked. Other SS men gathered past the platform, including several in white coats. There were emaciated prisoners, much thinner and sicker looking than the ones Christopher had seen the previous day, running around, pushing ramps and pulling carts into place. Christopher picked out one man, slumped over so much he almost touched the cart with his chest as he pushed it, and watched him as he ran. It seemed impossible that he could move as fast as he did but everywhere the SS men were shouting and the dogs were arriving, straining on the leash, barely held back by the guards. The train arrived.

It moved past the platform. Christopher counted the carriages. The numbers were wrong. There was no way 1200 people could fit into a train that small, built for cattle transport. The train came to a halt and the doors slid back and immediately the shout of the SS men intensified, drowning out all but the sounds of the dogs, snarling and barking. Christopher watched as the Jewish slave he had been watching ran to the open cattle truck and helped the people off the train. They were bewildered, women clutching on to their babies, men climbing out, looking around in the few seconds before they were running to one side or the other. Their faces were lined and thin, their mouths clamped shut. There were children, the elderly and even one old man who had to be carried out. The SS men were on them immediately and as soon as the people clambered off the railroad cars they were being hustled into separate lines, men in one line, women and children in the other.

The cars disgorged their human cargo within a few minutes. Christopher looked at the ground but still he heard the sounds of the women crying as they were wrenched apart from their children mixed with the fearful cacophony of the dogs and the incessant shouting of the SS men in both German and Polish. Christopher took a deep breath and looked down at Flick, who seemed bored. The SS went into the train, guns drawn. Christopher was watching again, unable to ignore the scene in front of him. Christopher's stomach flinched as dead bodies were thrown out of the rail cars. They landed on the ground like loose sacks of sticks, the bones cracking as they fell, the crimson from their wounds draining into the brown dirt on the ground. Another shot rang out and the body of a young girl was thrown out onto the dirt, the blond hair on her head stained by blood. Christopher was cold and a helpless panic ran through him. Outwardly he remained taciturn. The SS guards were screaming at the lines of people. The selection was over. There were two new lines, one of younger, fitter looking people and then the rest, the older people and the children. The line of younger people was maybe one or two hundred at the most and they were marched off, back up towards Auschwitz. The rest of the people huddled together, easily a thousand strong, and the shouting of the SS began to die down.

The trucks arrived and the people climbed in, helped by the same fellow prisoners who had helped them off the rail cars just moments before. Christopher turned to Flick. "How often do transports like this one arrive?"

"That depends. Sometimes we get several in one week, sometimes, several

in one day. That's when the real work begins. One time...." But Christopher was not listening anymore. It was hard to fix on any one person in the crowd of people waiting to be loaded onto the trucks. Christopher and Flick were standing well back, about a hundred yards away but Christopher walked closer, completely ignoring Flick, completely ignoring everything except the mass of people, packed together, waiting to be taken away. Christopher stared and saw a middle aged woman, with a bright blue headscarf that seemed to have no business in a place like this. She was holding a baby tight to her chest. She was crying but the baby was quiet. Christopher saw Breitner and Muller standing about twenty yards behind them, looking through some of the suitcases left behind as the prisoners loaded them from their carts onto trucks. Christopher looked back at Flick and waved to him, motioning that he was walking towards Muller and Breitner. There was a line of SS men, noticeably calmer than they had been only a few moments earlier, alongside the column of people waiting to be moved along. The terror in the eyes of the people had not changed however, and the dogs still surged forward if any stepped out of line. The column of people began marching up towards Birkenau.

Christopher heard another shot from behind him and swiveled around. There were several SS men poring through the piles of clothing left behind. "Ah, here we are, there's always at least one." He heard one say as he turned a coat over to reveal the shuddering form of a small child. Christopher saw the little boy, no older than four and crying for his mother, from less than ten yards away and went to walk towards him to bring him into the line. The SS man raised his rifle and shot the child in the face. Christopher stood frozen as he watched the SS man shoulder his rifle and drag the boy by the foot, out of the pile of clothes and dump his limp body in front of the railroad cars with the others. Christopher looked around at the other guards, wide eyed, expecting something, but then caught himself, and turned around to walk towards Muller and Breitner. He stood back, about ten feet from them, a safe distance where they couldn't see the look that the feelings coursing through him must have shown in his eyes. They greeted him with a glance as he walked over.

They are expecting an order, he said to himself, so give them one. "I want all these cases loaded away within ten minutes and all of these clothes. Is all this in order?" Christopher inquired. "Will the rest of the prisoners be keeping their belongings with them on their journey to the labor camp?"

Muller looked out of the side of his eyes at Breitner and then back at Christopher. “No, all the suitcases are still here, we will collect the rest of the prisoners’ belongings once they get changed for their disinfection procedures.” Christopher held the gaze of Muller’s brown eyes for a few seconds after he had looked away. The last of the prisoners were leaving. “Herr Obersturmführer, you should probably go up to the changing rooms, they’re in number three, I believe.” Muller said and Christopher came back into the moment.

“Yes, of course. Herr Breitner, come along with me please. I trust I can leave the procurement and cleanup of all that remains here to you, Herr Muller.”

“Yes, Herr Obersturmführer, it will be done within the hour.”

Christopher didn’t answer but walked towards a waiting car that Breitner had motioned towards. He sat in the passenger seat, with Breitner driving. Breitner followed the column of people as they made their way up into the camp at Birkenau. Christopher saw the woman with the blue headscarf again but then she was gone, blended into the crowd once more. Christopher stayed silent for the duration of the short journey. The SS guards were waiting there with the Sonderkommandos, who were all prisoners themselves and were lined up at the side of the yard. They were at the same building that Friedrich had shown him the day before. The SS men all carried truncheons. Behind them, lurking in the background were the officers, including Friedrich. The people arrived onto the hard ground of the yard. They were mostly wearing dark clothes, and all carried the yellow Star of David insignia. Christopher looked up and saw the guards in the towers overlooking the yard training their machine guns on the crowd. Christopher looked around, trying to hide his thoughts.

“Herr Obersturmführer, you should meet the leader of the Sonderkommando. They will be carrying out your orders.” Christopher nodded to Breitner and walked after him across the yard where the crowd of people had gathered in a huge group in the center, speaking Polish and Yiddish. The mood of the people had been lightened considerably by the behavior of the SS men, who had been polite and calm with them as they arrived in the yard, greeting them with smiling faces and even chatting and laughing with some of them. There were directing the people like traffic policemen, evenly across the yard. Christopher saw one SS man pat an elderly man on the back, and help him along. The people murmured amongst themselves and although they had been visibly calmed by the behavior of the SS, they still seemed nervous and

suspicious. Christopher noticed that Friedrich and the other officers had disappeared. Breitner led him over to where the dozen or so Sonderkommandos were lined up. At the head of the line was a tall, handsome man. "This is Jan Shultz, head of the Sonderkommando unit working in the crematoria." Shultz looked down at Christopher, who nodded back, remembering not to proffer a handshake. "These men will go through the belongings the prisoners leave behind before turning them over to us."

"Very good," Christopher said, looking up and down the line of men, all of whom stared straight out in front of themselves. Most had bruising on their faces. "Work hard, men, and you will be rewarded." Christopher added, but none answered back.

Someone had begun to address the crowd behind him and Christopher whirled around. The crowd fell silent. All eyes were on Friedrich who, with the other two officers, was now standing on the back of the flat end of a truck parked outside the long building with the warnings about the gas inside. Friedrich began. "You have come here, to Auschwitz-Birkenau, as a vital cog in the war machinery of the Reich. You have come here to work. Your job is almost as important as those brave soldiers risking their lives every day on the front. All those willing to work will be safe and well fed." Friedrich addressed the crowd in German and, while most seemed to understand, there was a Sonderkommando below who was translating into Polish as he spoke.

The officer on Friedrich's left then took over. "You have arrived here after a somewhat arduous journey. You are valuable to us and the Reich. First and foremost, we want to make sure that you are healthy and willing to work. For this purpose we will require that you shower, and be disinfected. This is very important for the sake of your own ongoing health and wellbeing. We cannot tolerate any infections to spread among our workers." People in the crowd were smiling and hugging their children tighter, moving from foot to foot. Life came back to the people's faces, suspicion being eroded by the light of hope. The officer continued. "Once you have your showers there will be a hot bowl of soup waiting for you." The people were used to killings such as they had seen at the train station. Life in the ghettos had been brutal, but now they were starting to believe that this was their final destination, that this was the work the Reich had in mind for them.

The third officer stepped forward to speak. He pointed down at a man at

the front of the crowd. “You there, yes, you, what is your trade?” Christopher could just about make out the answer. The man was a carpenter. “Oh, very good, we have need for those.” The officer replied. “You will be very useful to the cause. And you, what about you?”

“I am a doctor,” the man replied.

“Excellent, we have urgent need for doctors in our camp hospital here.” He paused to look out over the crowd. “If there are any more doctors or nurses here please make sure to report to me after your shower and I will make sure you are stationed where your skills are most urgently needed. “

Friedrich stepped forward once more. “We have need for doctors, dentists, nurses, mechanics, plumbers, electricians and craftsmen of all kinds. But we will also need unskilled workers as well. All will be given well-paid work here. All are important to the Reich and our fight against the threat of Bolshevism. Now please make your way down to the entrance to the changing room as the guards are directing you. Once inside, make sure to hang your clothes on the clearly numbered hooks and to make sure to remember these numbers for later. We only have one changing facility which must be shared by both sexes, my apologies for this situation which we are in the process of having amended.” The atmosphere among the people had changed entirely. Much of the fear had been lifted and it was with smiling, reassured faces that the people herded through the entrance to the flat roofed building and into the changing room. Christopher saw the woman with the blue headscarf again. Her face was doleful, resigned, different from the others, as if she knew something that they didn’t, that even he didn’t.

Once they were all inside, the Sonderkommandos followed them and Christopher with them. The people were quiet as they changed and folded their clothes into neat piles below their coats, which hung from the numbered hooks. The Sonderkommandos repeated the instructions that the officers had given the crowd from the roof, this time in their native tongue. The people complied without any struggle or argument. Christopher walked along the rows of people changing, their hope was now in his heart and he smiled back at them as they glanced up at him. Christopher left and walked outside, not wanting to add to the prisoners’ embarrassment at changing in front of other people. The relief coursed through his system. The selection had been a nightmare, the murder of the people at the train an indescribable horror, but at least that was over, he thought to himself as he walked out into the now mainly empty yard.

Christopher stood there for a few minutes before he noticed the SS men on the flat roof of the building again. The officers had gone. These men were carrying metal canisters and wearing gas masks, and Christopher's blood froze. He suddenly had the urge to run back inside, to warn the prisoners, but stopped himself for he knew that there was nothing he could do. There was no way to change what was about to happen. Horror overtook Christopher; darkness invaded his sight with unspeakable pain. He looked around the yard to make sure that no one was watching him. The SS soldiers on the roof removed what looked like covers from narrow metallic chimneys on top of the crematorium and poured the contents of the canisters down. Seconds later, the screaming began, pounding through the thick walls of the chamber inside. Trucks backed into the yard and Christopher stood to the side. The trucks started their engines, revving them in an attempt to drown out the horrific cries coming from inside but Christopher could still hear them, and though he wanted to cover his ears to block out the sound, he didn't. An SS man walking past looked at Christopher with a smile and remarked. "The water in those showers must be too hot. The Jews don't like it." He laughed. Christopher tried to smile back with every piece of strength in him, but he couldn't.

The SS man walked on and it was all Christopher could do to remain standing. The effort of not breaking down was causing his entire face to ache. The grey of his uniform filled his eyes as he looked down at his jacket, and ran each open palm along the sleeves. His cap fell off as he bent his head down to his chest. Still the screaming went on, dulling now. He tried to think of Jersey, of Rebecca, of when they'd met, of anything but this. But as the thoughts came he wondered if he were too late, if she had succumbed as these people had this day. If she had died, what was there left for him now, in this place?

Chapter 3

The island of Jersey, June 1924

It might have been the first week or the first day when he met her. Christopher left his father in the house, with Uncle Uli, who had come over with them from Germany to help them move. Alexandra was asleep upstairs as Christopher pushed the front door open and ran down the dirt track, which sprawled five hundred yards down to the beach, the sea and France just across the channel. He picked up a smooth grey stone and hurled it as far as he could out into the blue water, then picked up another and ran down towards the seagulls resting on the shore. He threw the stone out towards them as they took off and watched them soar into the sky. He sat down on the rock where the birds had been, passing pebbles from one hand to another, listening to the clacking sound they made as they clashed with each other. The sun was hot again that day and his green flannel shorts were heavy on his legs. His shoes and socks slipped off easily and he walked out into the thin water a few feet from the shore. His father had forbidden him to go swimming on his own and, even though he could think of nothing more wonderful than to run out into the sea, Christopher obeyed. He watched his toes through the surf and felt the cool water lapping at his ankles. It was a few minutes before he heard her.

He wasn't sure what the noise was at first. It seemed to be coming from a fence, just across the road that ran alongside the beach. Christopher pulled his socks onto his feet, not waiting to dry them, and pushed them into his shoes. He ran across the beach towards the sound of the wailing. As he drew closer he became more convinced that it was a kitten, and wondered if Father would let him keep it. The grey road that stretched along the shore was rough and unkempt, like his father's face when he didn't shave. There was a small hedge running parallel to the road. Christopher looked both ways and made sure there were no cars coming. He waited a few seconds to be sure and then scuttled across, following the wail along the hedgerow. He called out in German and then remembered himself. Father had told him to speak in English, the language of his mother, who had grown up here. The first words came in a whisper that he hardly even heard himself. The wailing stopped. Christopher called out again

and he heard a rustling through the bush, directly in front of him. The bush was just too high to see over and he struggled up and over it and fell through onto the grass below.

It wasn't a kitten. She was crying, her head bobbing up and down between her arms. She raised her eyes to look at him as he stood up. Her blue eyes twinkled through the wet tears as she sat there wrapped up into a shuddering little ball. She had a wide bruise spilling across her cheek. Christopher stood in silence for a few seconds, not confident enough to speak in English, but eventually he began.

“Why are you crying?” She pushed her head back down between her knees. Christopher thought the words through in his head, hearing his mother's voice. “My name is Christopher. I am 6, what age are you?”

“I am 6 too,” came the tiny voice up through the folded arms and the dark blond hair. “My name is Rebecca.” She said as she raised her head up to look at him.

“Why are you down here alone?”

“Will you run away with me?”

“Yes I will.”

Rebecca stood up and took his hand. Christopher noticed that they were in a field, which led up to a small house. She took a few steps back towards the house and stopped.

“Where should we go?” she asked. Christopher tried to think of somewhere, looked back at her looking at him. He didn't know anywhere except his own house and the beach so he led Rebecca through a gap in the hedgerow and across the road, making sure that there was no one around. They ran down towards the sea. She asked where they were going but Christopher didn't answer, he just ran, clutching on to Rebecca's hand as they went. They arrived down at the water's edge and he turned to her.

“What happened to your face?” Christopher asked. She didn't answer, but picked up a stone and hurled it into the sea. He began to look for stones, to skim, just as Uncle Uli had taught him. Christopher picked up a few flat stones, imagining them skipping across the cool surface of the sea as he ran his fingers

over them.

“Have you ever skimmed stones?”

“No. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Here,” he said, placing the stone into her hand, parallel to the water in front of them. “Try to throw it onto the water so it will make them skip along.”

Rebecca smiled and drew her arm back. The stone flew about three feet, barely landing in the white ruffles of surf lapping against the shore in front of them. Christopher placed another flat stone into Rebecca’s palm. She threw it again and the same thing happened again. Unperturbed, he gave her another stone, and then another and then went to look for more until she had thrown about thirty stones into the surf at their feet. She was smiling now. “Isn’t this fun?” she said and Christopher nodded.

They played on the beach for an hour or so before Christopher heard his father. Rebecca turned to him and he told her to hide, that he would come back down for her in a few minutes and she scuttled behind a rock and stayed there. The voice came closer and Christopher saw his father’s silhouette appear across the sky. His father called him for dinner and turned immediately to walk back, where once he might have chased him down the beach and carried him laughing above his head back to the house. Rebecca looked over at Christopher from her hiding place and he smiled at her. He followed behind his father as he walked back up towards the house and, once his father was far enough ahead, doubled back to the beach, back to where Rebecca was hiding.

“Come with me.” Christopher said, extending his hand to her. “Don’t worry, you’ll be safe.”

Dinner was on the table when Christopher arrived at the house. Uncle Uli smiled, picked him up and sat him down at the dinner table in between himself and Alexandra. His father didn’t look at him, just at the plate of food in front of him. They spoke German at dinner, even though Father wanted them to start speaking English all the time.

“So how was your day down at the beach?” Uncle Uli asked. “You were gone for quite a while.”

“It was fine.”

“We had a very productive day painting the house, didn’t we, Stefan?”

“Yes we did,” Christopher’s father answered, briefly flicking his eyes around the table as he spoke. Uncle Uli reached across to Alexandra and gently pinched her cheek, but no one spoke. They ate in silence for a few seconds before the crash came from upstairs.

“What was that?” Stefan said, looking across the table at his brother. Christopher kept his head down. “What was that, Christopher?”

“I don’t know,” he shrugged, still not looking up. Another thump followed by gentle footsteps came through the floorboards above their heads.

“Christopher, have you something to tell us?” Uncle Uli asked. “Did you bring a cat home? Your father made it clear last time you did this.”

“No, no. There’s nothing there. It must have been the wind.”

“We’ll see.” Stefan said, forcing his chair backwards. “Come on. You had better hope it was the wind Christopher, after all the trouble you’ve given me.”

“No Father, no. There’s nothing up there. Can’t we finish dinner?”

Stefan grabbed Christopher by the arm and dragged him off the chair. Uli said something but Stefan ignored him. Alexandra followed as Stefan brought Christopher out of the kitchen and past the bare floors and onto the freshly sanded staircase. Alexandra laughed as they heard another noise from upstairs and Christopher tried to apologize but his father wasn’t listening. Christopher tried to wriggle free but his father’s grip was too tight and he forced him up the stairs. Stefan made straight for the door to Christopher’s room and threw it open with a loud crack.

She was sitting in the middle of the floor, Christopher’s mother’s pearls hanging around her neck and one of her hats almost covering her eyes completely. Christopher grimaced as he saw her. He had told her to stay in the closet until he came back up. But she had come out and knocked over a carafe of water on the bedside table. Christopher heard uncle Uli laughing behind them but his father wasn’t laughing.

“Who is this Christopher?” he said in English.

“It’s my friend, Rebecca.”

“And where does Rebecca live?”

“I don’t know.”

Stefan let go of his son’s arm and bent down to the little girl sitting on the floor in his dead wife’s hat and pearls. “Did you hurt yourself?” he said reaching down towards the puce shaded bruise on the side of her face. She just looked back at him. “Where do you live, Rebecca?” She took the hat off and pointed out towards the window.

Stefan took the hat into his hand and helped Rebecca take the pearls off from around her neck. “You live over there do you? Is it far?” The little girl shook her head slowly and stood up. “Do your parents know you’re here?” Again the girl shook her head. “Well don’t you think they will be worried?”

“No.”

“Of course they will be,” Stefan said, running his hand through his hair, but the girl turned her head away and walked over towards the window. Christopher looked up at his father but the look he got told him he wasn’t getting away with this, no matter how cute the little girl happened to be. “Are you hungry?” he asked after a few seconds. “Would you like some food?” Rebecca nodded. Christopher looked across at her looking back at him, a doleful expression on her face. Why couldn’t she have stayed in the closet like her told her? It was no good being sorry now. So much for her plans to run away from home.

Uncle Uli led Christopher and Alexandra downstairs with Stefan and Rebecca just behind them. Stefan was trying to see where she lived and who was there but she wasn’t talking. He set up a chair for her at the table and they all sat down to dinner again.

Uncle Uli was first to speak. “Christopher,” he was smiling again. “Where did you meet your new friend? What brings her here to visit us?”

Christopher prodded at the potatoes on his plate. How could he tell them that Rebecca had tried to run away, and that he was only trying to help her? He looked across at Uli, and then at his father and Rebecca. “I met her near the beach. She was crying so I thought she needed some help.”

“Bringing her back to the house and sticking her in your wardrobe isn’t

going to help her, Christopher,” Stefan said. Uncle Uli was laughing again. “Uli, please, I’m talking to my son here.” Stefan glared at his younger brother. Uli laughed still but moved his hand up to cover his mouth. Stefan shook his head and moved his attention back to his son, who seemed to be trying to slide underneath the table. “Where does this little girl live? What happened to her face?”

“I don’t know. I heard her crying in a field near the beach. I thought she could stay here for a while.” He hoped that Rebecca didn’t speak German and couldn’t understand.

“Oh did you? You were going to hide her in your room were you? How long were you going to keep her there for?”

Christopher looked at his plate, at eye level now as he had slumped down. “I don’t know, I hadn’t thought about that.”

“There’s a shock,” his father said. “You never think do you?” He looked over at Rebecca, who had stopped eating. It was almost seven o’clock and the sun was still high in the summer sky, but it was time for Alexandra to get to bed. Uli picked her up and brought her over to kiss her father. Stefan ran his hands through the thin blond hair above her ears and kissed her on the cheek. Alexandra waved down towards Rebecca who managed a smile back. Uli took her upstairs, still laughing. Uli was up the stairs before Stefan spoke again. “Rebecca,” he said in a low voice, “you need to tell us where you live. I know that if Christopher or Alexandra were out at this time of the evening, I would be very worried. Now you don’t want anyone to be worried about you, do you?”

Rebecca looked down at the table in front of her and shook her head. Stefan had opened his mouth to speak again when she answered. “I live two houses away. I spilled my tea and mother hit me. She fell down and I ran out.”

Stefan immediately stood up from the table. “I think I need to see your parents now, Rebecca. It’s time to take you home.” Christopher looked across at Rebecca and then up at his father, he tried to speak but didn’t know what to say. Rebecca tried to squirm away from Stefan so he picked her up and carried her out through the front door. He called up to Uli to say that he was taking Rebecca home. Christopher ran out behind his father, pleading with him to come along. “It would be good for you to see Rebecca’s parents, probably half-sick with worry.” Stefan put Rebecca down as they reached the road, making her promise

to be good and to hold onto his hand. “This is some way to meet the neighbors,” Christopher heard his father mutter as he walked along with Rebecca clutching onto his hand, with Christopher lagging a few feet behind them. Christopher saw Rebecca’s face as she turned to him but there was nothing he could do.

They shuffled along the rough-hewn road for a few moments in silence before Rebecca spoke. She pointed to a small house just off the road, unkempt and weather beaten, much like their own before they had arrived and started painting it. Rebecca slowed and Stefan almost had to drag her into the driveway. Christopher caught up to them and ran up to Rebecca, wrapping his fingers up in the palm of her hand. Silent tears dripped down her reddened cheeks. Stefan walked up to the door, peeled and flaking brown flecks of varnish. The window by the door was grey, unwashed and only the layer of spider-webs that ringed it were visible through it. Christopher was frightened and thought of asking his father to go back but he just watched as Stefan rapped on the door. There was no sound from inside, nothing but the sound of the sea sliding onto and stretching back from the shore below them. Stefan looked down at Rebecca as he knocked once more.

“Your parents must be asleep,” he said, more to himself than to Rebecca. “Do you have any brothers or sisters?” He looked down at her.

“Yes, I have a brother, Peter. He is ten.”

Stefan knocked harder this time and the door came ajar with the force of his closed fist. He called out a few times but no answer came and he pushed back the door to walk inside.

The house was musty and old, with a long passed grandeur. They entered into a hallway with the kitchen on their left. The carpet was worn and threadbare and Christopher felt a nail jabbing into the bottom of his shoe, but he didn’t speak. No one did. A shaft of golden light from an open window led them through the end of the hallway and into a living room with paintings of local scenery on the walls. There was a broken bottle on the floor, but there was no one, no sound. Then they heard the voice from behind them, cracked and rough, uneven.

“Where the hell have you been?” They all turned around and Rebecca hid behind Stefan’s leg. The man, seemingly Rebecca’s father, was standing in the doorway. He was older than Christopher’s father but it was impossible to tell by

how much. His brown hair suggested a much younger man than the lines on his face. His brown eyes darted down towards Rebecca and then back up at Stefan, but the anger did not fade. “Who are you? What are you doing in my house? Why is my daughter with you?”

Christopher’s father stepped forward and proffered his hand. The man shook it, saying nothing. Stefan cocked his head and then straightened it before speaking. His words were slow, deliberate. “My name is Stefan Seeler.” The man’s face changed as he heard Christopher’s father’s heavy German accent. His eyes bulged. “My son found Rebecca on the beach earlier today. It seems she was in some distress.”

“You are German.” The man’s accent was French. Stefan nodded. The man continued. “She’s always getting into some kind of trouble, clumsy.... You know children these days.” The man rocked backwards slightly as he spoke. Christopher watched his father as he listened, saw his jaw tighten.

“Christopher, could you take Rebecca outside for a moment please?”

“That won’t be necessary. Thank you for bringing back my daughter, but now you must leave, before my wife comes home.”

Stefan looked down at the little girl, clinging tight to his trouser leg, and then down at his own son. “Come on, Christopher, let’s go.” He bent down to Rebecca. “We have to leave now, but you know you can always...”

“Goodbye, Mr. Seeler.” Rebecca’s father walked over, grabbing Rebecca by the arm. He walked her into a back room and Christopher and his father were alone.

Chapter 4

It was the next day, after he had woken up and eaten breakfast, when Christopher saw her again. She was sitting in the tree house that Uncle Uli had made for Christopher and Alexandra, her head down and facing out towards the sea. She looked up and smiled, walking over to the open hole where the window should have been to wave as he ran down towards her. Alexandra came out of the house and ran down too but she made far too much noise and Christopher's father knew that there was something going on. Christopher turned around and saw his father coming out of the house just as he reached the tree house at the bottom of the garden and climbed up inside.

"Rebecca. You came back." She only nodded. She had brought an old doll with her and although it had an eye missing and was scratched and worn, its hair was perfectly combed into smooth golden streaks. She held the doll close to her chest and then looked at Christopher.

"This is Susan."

"Alexandra has dolls too, don't you Alexandra?" he asked his sister as she arrived at the tree house beside them and Stefan was there too.

"Children, I'd like to speak to Rebecca for a moment. Hello, Rebecca."

"Hello, Mr. Seeler."

Christopher saw his father smile and then stiffen once more. "Rebecca, did you ask your parents if you could come over here and play?"

Her eyes seemed to melt and she looked down and to the side, not into his face as she had before. Christopher wanted to say something, wanted to be the person to ask her and the person that she could look to, but she didn't look at him either. His father asked the question again, in the same smooth tone as before and she shook her head. He looked up and away from her and blew a breath out.

"Do they even know where you are?"

“They were still in bed.”

“They were still in bed when you left this morning? Don’t you think you should have told them where you were going?”

“I don’t know. They were up very late last night. I could hear them talking.”

“Where is Peter, your brother?”

“He went out riding his bike. He made me breakfast.”

“That was nice of him. He is a very good brother.” Rebecca nodded. “Do you miss him when he’s not around?” She nodded again. “What about your parents. Do you miss them?” She looked up at him and gently shrugged her shoulders.

“I like it here.”

“Can Rebecca stay here with us Father?” Christopher asked but the look his father gave him silenced him immediately. Christopher reached over and took Rebecca’s hand and felt her fingers clasp around his.

“All right, you can stay here for a few hours, Rebecca. Uncle Uli is going to look after you. I will be back soon and we’ll see about you coming over to play.” All three children smiled, thinking that those few hours would stretch into forever.

They played in the tree house for a while and then Uli took them down to the rock pools and they waded through the cool water with their shoes and socks in their hands and the sun gentle on their faces. They wanted to go swimming but had forgotten their swim suits so they stayed at the rock pools and threw stones instead. Uli taught them how to throw them so that they flew faster and they watched the ripples in the water as the stones plinked in. They stayed down there all morning and Uli brought them back up to the house where Stefan was waiting for them. He did not smile as they walked in and Christopher immediately sensed that they were in trouble. But they weren’t. This was different.

“Hello children, did you have a nice time down at the beach with Uncle Uli?” They all nodded in almost perfect unison. “Uli, can you take Alexandra

down to the tree house for a moment?” Uli picked up the little girl he called ‘Sonnenschein’ and carried her out into the garden. Stefan asked the children to sit down at the table and Rebecca folded her little arms as she sat down. “Rebecca, you like coming here don’t you?”

She looked across at Christopher and then back at Stefan and Christopher felt his heart jump as she answered. “Yes, I wish I could stay here all the time.”

Stefan smiled as the little girl looked up at him and looked at his son and his pleading eyes. “I spoke to your parents, both your parents.” Rebecca’s face froze. “After I saw your parents I went down to the police station and I spoke to that nice policeman, Sergeant Higgins. I must tell you Rebecca that your father does not want you to come here and play. He doesn’t want you to play in the tree house or with Christopher and Alexandra at all.”

“But Father...”

“Be quiet, Christopher. Let me finish.” He ran his hands through his thin brown hair and then back down to the table. Christopher had never seen him quite like this before. “But I spoke to your mother and also with Sergeant Higgins and I’ve decided to let you play here.” Christopher gasped and Rebecca smiled and Stefan even tried to smile too. “I thought long and hard about it and I really did not want to go against your father’s wishes, but I think that it is for the best.”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Seeler.”

“But if you get into any trouble, I will go straight down to your mother and tell her and you’ll never be able to come up to this house again. Do you understand?”

“Oh yes, of course. I will be really good.” She beamed and looked over at Christopher who was as happy as he could ever imagine being. Rebecca stayed that afternoon and also for dinner and went home afterwards and came again the next day and every day for the rest of that summer. They decorated the tree house with pictures they drew and laid out a tablecloth on the shelf and they all cried when Uncle Uli went back to Germany.

It barely mattered that they were in different schools because still Rebecca came. They still played together almost every day even if they never saw one another in the morning. Rebecca usually asked to stay for dinner as her mother

rarely cooked and when she did Rebecca said she could hardly touch it, so Christopher's father sometimes let her stay. She would also ask if she could stay the night but Christopher's father would never allow that, so Christopher would walk her down the road until the bush bent around and Rebecca's house came into view and run back home looking over his shoulder to see if her father might have seen him on the road.

Chapter 5

The letters became their way of seeing one another, a way that her father would never understand because the language was their own. They were surrounded by language. By the time Christopher was 12, he was fluent in German and English and could understand whole conversations in French and even Jèrriais. What Rebecca lacked in German she made up for in French but their language was different from any of them. *Gunde de viznay bin lion's mane reiv*, would mean that they would meet at the Lion's Mane at 4, the number on the end being the German but backwards. It was a language only they knew and, apart from them, only Alexandra knew existed. By the time they were twelve they had named all the crags and headlands beaten by the waves in winter and split by the summer sun. They would arrange to meet there, by the Lion's Mane, the Butterfly's Table or the Angry Horse. When they met they would speak in gibberish, as if their language was entire, and burst out laughing at the ridiculous sounds spilling out of each other's mouths and the puzzled looks of whomever happened to be there with them, whether that was Alexandra, or Percy Howard or his brother Tom, or one of the other children that lived nearby.

Christopher was fifteen when he arrived home from school with Alexandra and she was there, her head down on the table, her light brown hair covering her face entirely. Rebecca looked up at him, her blue eyes twinkling with tears. She had a large bruise staining her left cheek. Christopher saw his father sitting beside her at the kitchen table, his face taut from the same dismal anger that overtook Christopher whenever Rebecca's father beat her. She looked up at Christopher and then down at the table again. Christopher sat down beside her at the table because he wanted to be the one to comfort her and he felt it inside, the pang of jealousy that it had been his father she had come to and not him, but he dismissed it immediately, embarrassed in front of himself.

"Rebecca's been here for about half an hour," Stefan whispered in English. "We got her cleaned up but she's still very upset. She hasn't said much."

Christopher glanced up at his father and then at Rebecca. Alexandra had come around and was hugging her from behind. Stefan placed his hand on the spill of hair on top of her head and kept it there and Christopher took her hand.

They stayed like that for a few seconds before Christopher spoke.

“What did he do this time, Rebecca?”

She lifted her head off her arms, her eyes reddened and bulging wide. She brushed the hair away from her face and sat up in the chair. “Can I have a glass of water?”

“Of course, get her a glass of water, Alexandra, please.”

“Yes Father,” Alexandra answered. Rebecca waited until Alexandra had returned and she had the water in her hand to start talking.

“It all started last week when my father said that since I was fifteen now and that it was time that I left school to get a job. I told him that I wanted to stay in school, at least for another year or two. But he got angry and hit me. Peter tried to stop him, but he hit Peter too.”

“What did your mother say?” Christopher asked.

“Oh, she said that she left school when she was fifteen and that if I wanted to stay then I should be allowed, but then we haven’t much money and my father’s paintings haven’t sold these last few years. She also said something about the textile factory. She still talks about that place even though she lost her job there two years ago.” Each word collided with the last in the rush of the effort to get them out.

“Did she try to stop your father when he hit you?” Christopher asked.

“Yes, at first. But he tells her that it’s the best thing for me. She said that my father loves us very much and that everything he does is for us. We were in the kitchen and she sat me down and did my hair, although she didn’t do a good job at all and I had to do it myself afterwards. She was slurring her words and she started crying. I heard her go into the bathroom and then a crash.”

“What happened then?” Stefan asked, his eyes closed and the words spoken through clenched teeth.

“I tried to get in. I wanted to help her. I could hear her groaning on the floor and then the sound of glass cracking or breaking. She screamed something at me but I could hardly make out what she said. I was so scared, I just wanted to run out of the house and come up here or anywhere but I had to help her. She’s

my mother.”

“Of course,” Stefan said.

Christopher looked into Rebecca’s face, amazed that she wasn’t crying. He tried to imagine his own mother, what he remembered of her, being stuck behind a door and he unable to reach her. He looked at his father and then at Alexandra and took Rebecca’s hand once more. “What happened then?” he asked.

“I got the door open and I saw her lying on the floor with an empty bottle and with sick on the ground. She was crying but I picked her up and cleaned her up and put her to bed. I told Peter about it later on that night when he got home from work and he got angry and started shouting at her. Then my father arrived home and they were all screaming at each other. Peter said that he was never going to let my father hit him again.” She paused, the silence in the room descending on each one of them, almost crushing them, until she began again. “I never saw my father so angry and he picked up a poker from the fireplace and ran at Peter.” She looked at Christopher and then at Stefan and Alexandra. “He hit out at Peter, striking him in the arm and Peter went down. He was standing over him about to hit Peter with the poker so I picked up a piece of coal and threw it at his head.”

Christopher squeezed her hand, the tears welling in his eyes.

Rebecca seemed to ignore Christopher and he felt the sting as she drew her hand away and stared out in front of her as she spoke. “The coal hit him on the side of the head and he swung at me instead. I saw Peter get up and run out of the room. And I saw my father come around.” The tears were coming now, distorting her voice into a whisper. “He drew up the poker and said he was going to teach me a lesson I’d always remember and then I heard Peter behind him, holding my father’s shotgun. He said that if he touched me that it would be the last thing he would ever do. My father said that he was sorry and told Peter to calm down.”

Stefan let out a deep breath and stood up. Rebecca stopped and looked at him as he took a glass from the cupboard and set it down. Alexandra walked over to him and embraced him, pushing her head onto his shoulder as he held her.

“It’s all right Father,” she said. “We’ll look after her.” His mouth moved,

as if he wanted to say something in reply but no words came and he set her back down and filled the glass with water and returned to the chair.

“I’m sorry, Rebecca, please continue,” Stefan said.

“I stood behind Peter as my father explained that he was sorry and that he was just trying to defend my mother. Peter didn’t believe him and told him that nothing he said could change the fact that he was leaving and that he was taking me with him.”

Christopher’s heart froze in his chest. “What?” he said but Rebecca ignored him, still staring out into space.

“My father apologized for hitting him and told him to put down the gun. Eventually he did but Peter went straight to his room and wouldn’t talk to my father. My mother put me to bed. She hugged me and asked me to forgive my father and that he only wanted the best for us.”

“He’s got a funny way of showing it.” Christopher said.

Rebecca glanced at Christopher and then away. “Then, last night Peter told me to pack my things and that we were leaving. We never even said goodbye.” Christopher couldn’t understand why she was crying now, why this would upset her.

“Where did you stay last night?” Alexandra asked.

“We’re staying with his friend Ronald Smart, just down the road.”

“I know the Smart family, they’re good people,” Stefan nodded.

“I went back to see my parents this morning, but my father got angry and said that it was my fault that Peter left and that I had destroyed our family.”

Christopher felt his fists tense, but he knew not to say anything.

They sat there for a while. Christopher looked to his father, but even he didn’t seem to know what to say. It was a few minutes before he spoke. “I’m proud of you Rebecca,” he said and got up to walk away towards the counter top where the raw materials for that night’s dinner were laying untouched. He picked up the knife and pressed it down on top of the carrots, the blade impacting with the wooden cutting board with a loud clack.

“Can I stay for dinner, Mr. Seeler?”

“Of course you can, Rebecca, of course you can.” He tried to smile but his swollen red eyes betrayed him and he turned his head to stare out into the greying dusk outside. “Christopher, why don’t you take Rebecca and Alexandra down for a walk on the beach before dinner?”

They left him there, the cracking of the knife on the board ringing in their ears as they pushed open the front door and even as they stepped out into the front yard. Rebecca stopped talking as they left the house and the conversation slowed and then stopped as the three children made their way past Rebecca’s house on their way down to the beach. Christopher knew he shouldn’t be walking past the front of their house with Rebecca, but somehow it didn’t seem to matter anymore and none of them even commented that they were breaking their own cardinal rule as they shuffled past. They continued down towards the seafront, past the beach and along the coast, where they sat in a row, with Rebecca in the middle, overlooking the grey waves crashing against the rocks below.

Christopher thought of what Peter had said about taking Rebecca away, but never mentioned it out loud. No one spoke, and instead they just watched the waves roll back and forth, covering the rocks like a white tablecloth spreading out and then being drawn back again. They sat there for twenty minutes or maybe more, until the night air drew in and forced them back up to the house, where dinner was on the table as they walked in. Rebecca took her usual place and they sat there eating, mainly in silence. Christopher’s father let Rebecca stay much later than usual, well past ten o’clock, and hugged her as she left.

“Christopher will walk you home,” he said. “Take good care of her, Christopher.” Christopher nodded and they walked out into the night. It was March and the chill in the air bit at Christopher’s neck and he flicked up the collar on his coat. He looked at Rebecca and she at him and they set off into the darkness. The light had faded and all they could see was the outline of the house behind them and the moon illuminating the sea beyond and a million shining stars above their heads. The light shone grey-white on Rebecca’s skin and sent shadows cascading from her cheek bones and down along the bruise on her face. Her brown hair moved gently with the wind and her blue eyes were dark. “I don’t ever want to go back there Christopher,” she said but still she walked on.

“I know Rebecca. I...I wish there was something I could do. I wish I could get a job and take you away from here...and...”

“You’ve already done so much, Christopher.”

“Do you really think that Peter will leave home for good?”

“Yes, I think so. He’s been talking about leaving for months now. He has a friend in Portsmouth who said he could get him a job working on the docks there.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“There are some things I can’t tell anyone Christopher, even you.”

Christopher looked over at her, his heart beating so hard that he could almost feel it coming out through the skin on his chest but she looked straight ahead. He felt a tear in his eye, but fought it back before he began again. It took every piece of his courage to ask her, “so do you think Peter will take you with him to Portsmouth?”

“Peter looks after me.”

“I look after you, and so does my father. And my sister looks after you. We all do.”

“I know you do. I know you do Christopher but you can’t always be there. Peter was there with me all the times when you couldn’t be.” Rebecca reached over and took Christopher’s hand. He felt her fingers clasp around his.

“I don’t know what I would do without you, Rebecca. I just don’t know what I would do if you left. I want to be there for you whenever you need me. ”

“You could come with me.”

“My father would never allow that.” Christopher replied without thinking.

“Maybe when you’re older then.”

The words swirled around within him and he thought of leaving with her but those thoughts dissipated as soon as they came. “I don’t want you to leave,” he said, as the lights of her house came into view.

She turned to him and took his other hand to face him and his heart

quicken even more. Christopher's eyes were used to the dark now and he could make out each curve and angle of her face and the outline of her long hair falling down over her shoulders. "Christopher, I want to tell you..." she paused and looked at the ground and he thought his heart would drop out. "I just want to thank you. You're my favorite boy, the best I could ever..." And he reached forward to her and felt his lips against her and he felt the feather touch against his and it was awkward and perfect and he reached his hand up and put it behind her neck and gently held her head. Rebecca drew her head back with a smile and his body was electrified, his heart on fire. Christopher had no idea what to say. She shifted her feet and let go of his hands.

"I'd better get going inside."

"Okay."

"I'll talk to you in a few days. I need to wait until things settle down here."

"You can leave a note for me under the rock on the beach."

"Ok. Good night, Christopher." She leaned forward to peck him on the lips again and was gone.

Five days later she was gone. Christopher left her a note and when she didn't turn up he knew that Peter had kept his promise.

Chapter 6

It was 1937 when Uli came back, just in time for Christopher's 19th birthday. He still looked almost the same with just a few more grey hairs than he had in the summer of 1924. They sat out in the back garden in deck chairs, drinking cold beers as Alexandra prepared the dinner.

"It's been a while since you spoke German this much I'd say?" Uli asked.

"Not really. We try to speak it a little around the house. Father doesn't want us to forget where we're from."

"And nor should he."

"I can't believe it's been four years." Stefan said. "Times were so hard after mother's funeral. I meant to come back to Germany, but who had the money then?"

"I understand, Stefan. Times were hard everywhere. Germany was worse than most." There was a lull in the conversation for a few seconds before Uli began again. "And how about you, Christopher, how are you enjoying working for the old man? You like being an accountant? I hope he's not working you too hard, although I'm sure that he is," Uli laughed.

"I do enjoy it. We spend a lot of our time in town in the back rooms of businesses doing their books. We get to meet a lot of people. I never knew my father was so popular." Christopher smiled. "I thought it would be easy working for my father. I thought he'd let me go early every day and give me more money and time off than I'd know what to do with."

"I do give you time off. It's called the weekend." Stefan laughed along with his brother.

"No, it's been great working for him. I'm learning a lot and one day I'll open my own practice."

"You should come back to Germany, Christopher. There are plenty of opportunities there now."

“Christopher is doing fine in Jersey.” Stefan said.

“All I’m saying is that there are a lot of exciting opportunities for a young man like Christopher in Germany right now....”

“Maybe we can talk about this another time, Uli,” Stefan said

Uli was laughing as he started speaking again. “I see the old tree house is still there. Do you still want to live in it Christopher?”

“No, I think this house has a little more room.”

“Whatever happened to that sweet little girl? Rebecca? I know that she was in England for a while. What happened to her? Did she ever come back?”

Christopher opened his mouth to answer, but his father was already talking. “No, she never came back. She went to Portsmouth with her brother and as far as we know they still live there. She and Christopher were very close at the time. It took him quite a while to get over it when she left.”

“And she never wrote? If you two were so close why wouldn’t she write?”

“She sent a couple of letters but then they stopped. She never gave us her address.”

“I’m sorry Christopher. That must have been hard to lose your friend like that.” Uli said. Christopher looked up from his beer bottle and nodded.

“Yes it was a difficult time for Christopher but we got through it. He even has a new girlfriend now don’t you Christopher?”

“No I don’t,” he said. “Every time I mention a girl my father thinks she’s my girlfriend.”

“Don’t worry about it Christopher, he still does the same thing with me and I’m 36 years of age.”

“Which reminds me, when are you getting married Uli? What happened with that girl Angela?”

“She asked too many questions. Listen Stefan, I’ll get married when you get married, okay?”

“I was married.”

“Yes but you’ve been a single man for a long time now, almost 13 years. What’s your father’s love life like Christopher? Ever find any strange women at breakfast?”

Christopher looked at his father with a smile on his face and his father smiled too. “No, no strange women at breakfast. He must sneak them out before Alexandra and I get out of bed.” They all laughed again. Alexandra came out and sat down with them.

“Sunshine, you’re getting too big to sit on my lap now.” Uli smiled.

“I can still try.” She said and sat back on Uli’s lap. Uli grunted and snorted, pretending that she was crushing him, but Alexandra just laughed.

“All right, Alexandra, that’s enough,” her father said. “Sit down there, please.” He pointed to the extra chair.

“We were just talking about your father’s love life, or lack thereof. So what about you Alexandra, surely a beautiful young girl like you has hundreds of boys chasing after her?”

Christopher and his father both sat forward and Alexandra smiled. “There’s too many to choose from Uli, I just can’t make up my mind.”

“I’ll bet. You look just like your mother. She was just like you, those blond curls and those pale blue eyes. Just don’t end up with the kind of man that she did.” Uli roared laughing. Stefan pursed his lips slightly and scratched the back of his head, but still smiled.

“Is dinner ready yet?” Stefan asked.

It was and they went inside where the table was laid out and Alexandra brought the roast beef and potatoes and laid them out on the table. Christopher helped her bring over the vegetables and they sat down to eat. It had been some time since he had thought about her, but the mention of Rebecca’s name quieted Christopher and he remained silent through the dinner, watching the others speak. Uli was talking to Alexandra about her plans to go to university when Christopher noticed his father looking at him.

“Christopher, could you clear the table please?” Stefan asked. Christopher nodded and took the plates, making sure not to waste any food before scraping

them off. He stepped out into the garden and reached into his pocket for a packet of cigarettes and drew one out. "Are you smoking out there?" his father asked.

"Yes." Christopher said. He raised up his eyes whilst facing the other direction.

"Well if you insist on indulging in that filthy habit please go down to the end of the garden, at least that way we won't have to smell it."

Christopher trudged onto the grass without answering. The night was drawing in and the greying light was gritty and solid, as if he could reach out and feel it between his fingers. He lit the cigarette with a match which glowed bright orange gold and then died as he drew the smoke into his lungs. Christopher continued walking on down towards the old tree house and the sea beyond. He stopped at the tree house and reached up to touch it, to run his hand along the wooden surface. He was six feet tall now, tall enough to see up and into it and the simple shelf that hung below the gap in the boards that served as a window. The paint he and Rebecca had applied to the inside of the tree house was flaking and cracked but still showed the garish red color she had insisted upon, and Christopher smiled. He drew on the cigarette and watched the grey smoke billow up and merge into and become the night air. He thought about Rebecca and wondered where she was now and why he had never gone to Portsmouth to look for her. He wondered what she looked like now. He thought about their kiss, but then dismissed it. They were kids at the time. He wasn't a kid anymore.

"You know the government in Germany has proven the link between smoking and cancer? Herr Hitler himself has spoken out against the evils of smoking," Uli said from behind him.

"Is that right?" Christopher answered.

"Yes, the government has initiated a nationwide campaign to stop people from smoking. They say it causes heart disease and that it can stop women from becoming pregnant."

"Well, when I start trying to get pregnant, I'll quit."

Uli smiled and looked down at his feet before bringing his eyes back to the tree house. "This thing wasn't easy to build."

"I can remember seeing it for the first time. I think it might have been the

greatest thrill I've ever had, even to this day."

"I'm glad to hear that, but maybe you should get out a little more and not work so hard eh?" They both laughed and Christopher threw down the cigarette and followed his uncle back up to the house, where Stefan and Alexandra were waiting at the kitchen table.

The bottles of beer piled up on the kitchen table and Christopher's father opened the bottle of brandy he had been saving. It was the first time Christopher had ever seen Alexandra drink more than a couple of glasses, and the white wine Stefan gave her had its inevitable effect on her. When she started asking her father when he was going to get married again and imploring him to get out there and meet someone, Stefan stepped in.

"I appreciate your concern, Alexandra, but I think it's time you got off to bed now."

"Ok." She nodded and stood up. "Daddy, will you carry me, like you used to when I was a little girl?" she said with her arms outstretched. Christopher watched his father and started laughing.

"I think you're getting a little too big for that, and I'm a little old." Stefan scratched his head. "I think that the wine I let you have has gone to your head."

"Oh, come on Dad, you can still do it. I know you can."

"You heard the girl, Stefan, carry her up the stairs," Uli said.

Stefan smiled and shook his head. "Ok then, come on." He took her in his arms. Alexandra waved goodnight to Christopher and Uli, then disappeared out through the door and up the stairs in her father's arms.

Five minutes later, Stefan arrived back into the kitchen, wiping a bead of imaginary sweat from his brow. "She asked me to read her a story after I put her to bed, but I had to draw the line somewhere." The three men laughed as they had all night.

"So tell me about your work Christopher?" Uli asked.

"I enjoy it. I am good at it too, I think."

"He is good at it. I'm very proud of him," Stefan added.

Christopher looked across the table at his father, his eyes lingering for an extra second before he turned back towards his uncle.

“Yes, this is a very beautiful island, a very beautiful place. But you’re always going to be the outsiders here, aren’t you? You’re always going to be the German family living on the English island.”

“This island is not a part of England,” Stefan replied.

“Come on, Stefan, you know what I mean.”

“There were problems, especially when we first arrived, but they’re few and far between now,” Christopher’s father said, looking out into the black of the night outside. “It took me a while to persuade certain people that the war was over.”

“I remember,” Uli said, and picked up the glass of brandy. He swirled the brown liquid around in the glass for a few seconds before taking a sip. “Do you ever regret coming here?”

“No, not with what was going on in Germany when we came over here, and particularly with what has happened since,” Stefan replied.

“But Germany has changed now. It’s a different place than it was when you left.”

Christopher shifted in his seat as Uli spoke and threw his eyes onto his father’s face. Stefan looked back at his brother and picked up the glass in front of him. Christopher wondered if he should speak, but his father eventually spoke. “Different how? Better or worse?”

“Oh it’s far, far better Stefan,” Uli said, shaking his head as he spoke. “Don’t you read the newspapers?”

“Yes I do little brother. I read them every day.”

“Then you must see what’s happening in our country. These last few years since Hitler came to power have been the best for a long time.”

“I see that Herr Hitler has banned all other political parties apart from his own Nazi party.”

“Yes, but what good did this democracy do us Stefan? The years before

Herr Hitler and the National Socialists came to power were the worst Germany has ever known. Utter chaos. You got out in time, Stefan, but we weren't all so lucky. I am glad that you weren't there, my brother. I am glad that the children weren't there then but it could be a wonderful place for them to grow up now."

"Jersey is a wonderful place for them to grow up."

"Yes, it was wonderful when they were children, but look at your son Stefan; he's not a boy anymore. This is an island, a tiny island. It can't possibly offer them the kind of opportunity that Germany could."

"I would never stand in the way of what my children wanted to do. It would be their decision, not mine."

"All right then," Uli said, turning towards Christopher. "What would you think of the idea of coming to Germany?"

Christopher smiled and looked at his father, but his father's eyes were stone. "It's your life Christopher," Stefan said. "I can't tell you what to do. You're a man now."

Christopher could feel his eyes flitting around in his head like tadpoles in a glass. Both men were looking at him. "I would certainly think that it would be a great experience. I mean, I love Jersey, but to live in Munich or Berlin? That would be incredible. But where would I work?"

"I'm sure I could get you a job in the bank, I've been there almost seven years myself," Uli said.

Christopher coughed slightly, holding his hand up in front of his face for longer than was necessary. "That would be an amazing experience." He looked at his father again.

"Yes, unfortunately, you would have to forget your friendship with Rebecca Cassin if you went there." Christopher's father said.

"What? What are you talking about?" Christopher said looking at Uli who slugged back a massive gulp of beer whilst still looking bemused.

"Think about it, Christopher, Rebecca is a Jew."

"I never knew," Uli said. "What difference would that make anyway?"

Christopher hasn't seen or heard from her in years."

Stefan leaned forward towards his brother. "I do read the papers Uli, I read them every day and I know that Jews are being completely disenfranchised, completely removed from society." Christopher turned to look at Uli, but Uli's eyes were low. "So that's the new Germany Christopher, a land of opportunity for most." He turned to look at his son. "There is a new set of laws making it illegal for Jews to be German citizens or to marry non-Jews, or to own businesses or property. So make your choice Christopher, but make it wisely."

Christopher looked at Uli. "I never knew Rebecca was Jewish. Not that it matters to *me*." Uli said.

"But in Germany it would matter to her, and it would to you too, Christopher."

"Maybe you should go to Germany. It's the only way you'll ever get Rebecca off your mind." Uli laughed and a flame of embarrassment crept over Christopher. He wanted to argue that he was over Rebecca, and that it was three years since she'd left, but he could see now that they could see through him. The beer had dulled Christopher and his mind lolled back and forth, unable to fend off the images of Rebecca that swept through him upon the mention of her name.

"I haven't seen Rebecca for a long time," was the best Christopher could muster in reply, but neither man looked at him as he said it. The laughter was over and they were staring at each other.

"But if you did want to be with her you never could be, not in Germany anyway. Here in Jersey, we may not have all the opportunity of Germany but we have some things."

"I don't agree with the Nazi policies about the Jews either," Uli said. "But what can I do? The government says that it was their fault that we lost the war, that they are enemies of Germany and are in league with the Bolsheviks."

"And what do you believe, Uli?"

"I believe that I remember Mrs. Rosenbaum who lived down the street from us and how she would smile at us and give us candy when we were young. There is so much talk of the Jews these days. I had never really considered them before. I never knew it mattered to single them out."

Stefan stood up from his seat and walked over to the counter and poured himself another glass of beer before sitting back down. "I read what Hitler says about the Great War. The talk of these *November Criminals* and the Zionist conspiracy, it makes me laugh, Uli, really it does. We stabbed ourselves in the back. There was no Jewish conspiracy. Some of the best men I fought with in that godforsaken mess were Jews, good Germans. Ernest Heppner, Hans Buchsbaum, Franz Bachner. They were all Jews, and friends of mine, all dead."

"The Nazis are not perfect Stefan, far from it, but things are so much better in Germany now. It's easy for you to sit here in Jersey and judge us in Germany. You weren't there when things went bad. You left." Christopher could hear the bitterness creeping into his uncle's voice, something he had never heard before.

"Yes Uli, it is easy to be here, to sit in judgment of Germany and the Nazis, and that's why I won't go back and why I won't encourage Christopher or Alexandra to go back there, even if it is the country of their birth."

A silence settled across the room. Christopher wanted to say something to get the conversation moving but couldn't think. He lifted the glass to his mouth and took another mouthful of beer. His father looked at him and breathed out heavily. Christopher saw him try to smile but his face was too tight and the curvature of his lips made him look like he was in pain. Stefan looked at his watch. "I think it's time you went to bed Christopher," he said. Christopher looked at his father and then at Uli. He smiled, expecting some reprieve, but found none. It had been several years since he had been sent to bed, but as he looked at his father again he understood, and got up from the table. Uli stood up and hugged Christopher as if he was trying to smother him to death and smiled at him as he drew away.

"Good night, you two," Christopher said as he walked out. "Try not to kill each other." Both men smiled. Christopher raised his eyebrows and looked back at them, saying nothing. He turned and tramped into the hall and up the stairs, each step a minor triumph. His head felt like a thin raft, afloat on a boiling sea and the top of the stairs brought a nausea that he had barely felt before. Christopher fought past the bathroom door and sat down on the toilet seat, his trousers still up, his head in his hands. His eyes heavied and his vision thickened into black and sleep overcame him. He jerked his head up and felt different. He looked at his watch. More than two hours had passed, and his legs were numb from sitting on the toilet. He dragged himself to the mirror, more in control than

he had been earlier and, looked at himself. His eyes were bulging wide and only white and blue, not bright red as he had expected. The image of Rebecca wandered somewhere into his vision. He wondered why he couldn't forget her. He turned the cold-water faucet and splashed some water up onto his face. The voices were still there, still downstairs in the kitchen and he wanted to go back down. The towel was hard and cold and he used it quickly, finishing drying his hands in his armpits as he approached the door. He listened to the house, as he always did at this time of night. There was nothing other than the gentle flow of the wind outside and the muffled patter of voices through the floorboards. He would go down, if only to say goodnight, even though he had already done so.

There was light coming from downstairs cast up the stairs and he followed it down, taking each step slowly. He heard Uli speak and then his father and he sat down on the last step, not wanting to interrupt. He listened. The conversation had turned and meandered between their own mother, who had died 6 years before, their own father, who had died before Christopher was born, and Christopher's mother.

"All dead," Uli asserted. Christopher moved his head around the banister at the end of the stairwell. The door was open enough that he could see Uli sitting back on his chair facing Stefan, out of Christopher's view behind the wall. "I can't quite remember meeting Hannah for the first time, I was so young." Christopher's heart burned at the mention of his mother's name. He watched Uli stare across the table, waiting for an answer that didn't come. "She was always so good to me, and even Father liked her, even Father." Uli's voice trailed off and he picked up the glass in front of him and took a gulp of the mahogany brown liquid.

"She was the only thing I never had any doubt over. People say that I should move on. You tell me that all the time, but how can I? I can't. I don't feel that she ever truly left me. I feel like she's still here, with me."

Christopher stared down into the dark of the corner, his entire body rigid. The fire within him had gone out and he felt absolutely cold.

"Perhaps it's time to let her go. It's been thirteen years now, brother. You're not old. You've still got a life to live."

"Maybe, but maybe I just don't want to live it without her." And then nothing, for thirty seconds or more until Stefan started again. "Anyway I've

never met anyone who matched up to her. And bringing a woman back home to the children.... they're not children anymore, I suppose, but I just couldn't do it. You know I met Hannah when I wasn't too much older than Christopher was when we moved here. Her grandfather was German. You knew that already though."

Christopher saw Uli smiling as he nodded his head.

"You know I don't remember the first time I met her either. It was like she was always there, always with me, from even before I was born." Stefan said.

"I never had anyone like that. I never had what you had."

"You still can. It's all there for you."

"It's still there for you, too."

"Christopher and Alexandra are more than enough for me. Christopher is..." and Christopher jerked his head around the end of the stairwell, just far enough that he thought Uli wouldn't see him but his movements were clumsy and slow and he smacked his cheek against the banister. The stairs shook slightly and Christopher was sure he would be caught but they didn't notice, and kept on talking. "We're so alike," his father continued, "too much so sometimes. That's why I took the decision about Rebecca, when she left I mean." Christopher froze.

"With the letters she sent?"

Christopher felt his eyes almost bulging out of their sockets and the nausea came again.

"Yes. I knew that his feelings for her were blinding him. Sometimes I feel bad, for her as much as my own son. She still doesn't know that he never saw all those letters she wrote him. I glanced through a few of them myself and I knew I had done the right thing. The things she said.... they would have distracted him too much. He can be such a hotheaded boy, led by his emotions. Who knows what he might have done? Gone over to her I expect, and where would this family be then?"

"I'm sure you did the right thing Stefan. I know it wasn't easy."

"I never meant to hurt him. I kept every letter she sent with the intention to

show them to him one day, when he's ready. I loved her as a daughter myself, there's nothing I want more than to see her back here one day, and if she was ready, with Christopher, sure."

"What if our father had done that to you? Barred you from seeing Hannah?"

"He never had reason to."

"What if he had?"

"I don't know Uli, I really don't know. I think I would have found a way. I think..."

"And you say that you and Christopher are the same?"

"Yes."

"Do you still send her money?"

"Yes, when she needs it. She understands that she can't see Christopher now, that she would be too much of a distraction to him. Usually she sends the money back, usually, not always. She used to threaten to come back, to tell him the truth, but I knew she couldn't. If she could come back I wouldn't need to keep her letters from him."

Christopher wrung his hands together and pushed them hard into his face. They were still talking in the kitchen, but he couldn't hear them anymore just the rushing of his own blood and the quickening pulse racing electric through his veins and he got up, stumbling up the stairs and found his way to the top and into the bathroom and stared into his own eyes again. He crouched down into a ball, his arms wrapped around himself. He thought about Rebecca and the times when she needed him and he wasn't there. The times when she had reached out to him and he had not answered and the hatred for his father surged through his veins. Christopher heard a knocking on the door.

"Christopher, are you in there?"

He waited for a few seconds, not knowing what to say but then the surge came again. "Get away from me. Just leave me alone." He threw his head back down into his hands, his chin tight into his chest and waited for an answer that took thirty incredibly long seconds to come.

“Christopher,” his father said, his voice more faint and distant than before. “Christopher, are you all right in there?”

Christopher leapt to his feet and yanked the door open. His father was standing there at the door. He looked sick. “Where are the letters?” Christopher shouted, trying not to slur his words. His father jerked his head backwards as Christopher thrust a finger in his face. “Where are Rebecca’s letters?”

Stefan drew a breath and moved his lips but never made a sound.

“Where are the letters?” Christopher was square against his father now. He was taller than his father, not by much, but enough that he was looking down on him. The sound of thundering footsteps up the stairs brought Uli to them. “I asked you a question. Where are they? They’re mine...” Christopher reached forward to grab his father by the lapels.

“Don’t you touch me,” Stefan spat through gritted teeth and Christopher drew his hands away. The door opened and Alexandra was there, her eyes thin slits and her hair a mess.

“What’s going on?” she asked but nobody looked towards her.

“How could you do that?” Christopher roared but the words caught in his throat as the tears came. “How could you do that to me? How could you keep Rebecca’s letters from me? She needed me, and I wasn’t there for her. I said that I’d always be there for her....”

“It wasn’t an easy... I’m sorry Christopher. I thought you’d get over her in time and we could move on with our lives. I was going to give them to you when....”

“Where are the letters, Father? Where are my letters?” Christopher said through angry, hot, deep breaths.

“Christopher, just give me a chance to explain first. I had to try to do the best thing for both of you. You know I think of her as my own.”

“Where are the letters?”

“Christopher, we’ve all had a bit too much to drink and I think that it would be best if....”

“If you kept his letters, give them to him, Father.” Alexandra said.

“Stefan, give him the letters.” Uli said.

Christopher stood, staring at his father, his face a few inches from his. He had never stood this close to him before and had never seen that flash in his eyes.

“Come with me.” Stefan said and pushed past Uli on the stairs and down into his study. Christopher walked behind him, his eyes fixed on his back as if trying to pierce a hole in it. Stefan walked into the study. He stopped in front of the bookshelves above his desk and reached up behind the picture of Christopher’s mother for a leather bound box. He opened a drawer and took out a key and opened it. Christopher saw the letters on top “I had to open the letters to see if she was all right, and to get an address, I had to see...”

“Give me my letters, Father.” Christopher said, his voice almost calm now. The impulsive anger had given way to something far worse. He held out his hand and Stefan placed the pile, about five letters, into his hand.

“Go to bed, Christopher, it’s time you...”

“No Father, no. You don’t get to tell me what to do anymore.” Christopher left him there alone in the study. He walked past Uli, still standing at the top of the stairs, but Christopher didn’t look at him and walked onwards to his bedroom. He turned the light on and sat down on the bed, spreading the letters out on the quilt. He heard a knock on the door.

“Are you all right in there?” Alexandra said.

“Yes, I’m fine. I can’t talk to you now, Alex, I’ll speak to you tomorrow.” He heard her mutter a faint good night and then she was gone. He picked up the first letter. It was almost three years since Rebecca had written it, since she had touched it. He pulled out the piece of paper from the envelope and read the first few words, skimming through the lines, looking for anything important, almost too eager to finish and move onto the next to read the letter itself. Sentences stood out. She had gotten a job, collecting glasses in a bar that a friend of Peter’s worked in. She was thinking of her parents more, but had not contacted them. Peter was happy and said he would never return to Jersey again, although she hoped she would. No address.

Christopher placed the letter down on the bed and opened the next one, written to arrive in time for Christmas 1934. He scanned through it and came to the address in the middle. They had found somewhere more permanent to live, in a place called North End. She finished the letter by asking about Alexandra and his father. She said she missed them both, but especially him. Christopher gritted his teeth crumpling the delicate letter in his fist, crumpling the words that she had written to him. He took another look at the address, before moving onto the next letter, dated February of 1935. Her first words were to ask why he had never written to her. She supposed that he was very busy, or that the letter might have been lost in the post. She wrote her address again in large letters decorated with colored pencils and lined with tiny blue flowers. She was doing well and back in a local school during the day, working in the bar at night. The letter was short. She asked that he write back again at the end and that he might even come to see her that summer when school stopped.

Christopher lay back on the bed, staring up at the ceiling and thinking of her as she wrote the letter. He had told her he would always be there for her, no matter what. And now his father had made him a liar. He ripped open the next envelope. This letter was only a few words.

May 12th 1935

Dear Christopher,

Please reply to this. I am worried, I can't come back to see you but wish that I could. Your father told me that you are trying to move on but please just let me know that you are all right, that you don't hate me.

Love

Rebecca

Christopher came to the last letter. The dread inside him was building, as if he knew what it said. He gasped as he saw the date, a full year and a half since the previous letter. He tried to remember where he was on that day when she wrote it, but he couldn't, and read on.

November 13th 1936

Dear Christopher,

This is not a letter I ever thought I would write, because before this I could never imagine my life without you. You have always been there whenever I needed you. I suppose I was naïve to think that you'd always be there for me, even when I left Jersey and even as I sit here, alone in this room in Portsmouth. I knew that you would be angry that I left without saying goodbye and that it took me so long to write to you but I never thought that you would be so angry that you would not reply to me, or never want to see me again. But I understand, your father has explained everything to me. I know that I haven't been the easiest person to be around. I still remember that first day we met, when you found me crying in the bushes and I think that if you looked for me today you would find me the same way, just in a different place. But I will be all right. You know me, I'm a survivor, and I am where I need to be at this time in my life. One day I will come back to Jersey and we will see each other again.

I miss you. I always will.

Love

Rebecca

Christopher felt the wet on his face and the heat of the pain inside overtook him and he lurched forward, the letter falling out of his hand and onto the floor. He sat there for a few minutes before he finally got up, to walk to the window and stare out into the black nothingness of the night.

Uli left two days later. "Go back to Berlin and find yourself a wife, Uli," Christopher laughed as they hugged.

"No way Christopher, you know me-I'll never buy into that old con." Christopher laughed again as Alexandra hit him in the chest and Stefan glared at him. Christopher was still not talking to his father, but his anger had faded over time. Stefan assured him that Rebecca was safe. He knew little more than that. She was gone and it was time to get on with his own life, at least until she came back, and if she didn't, at least he would know that her parents would never hurt her anymore. Christopher thought over the words and actions of his father and

much as they hurt him, he accepted the situation as it was. Rebecca was gone.

Chapter 7

It was only six months later that Christopher received the letter from Uli, just before Christmas in 1937. He had met a 24 year old teacher, Karolina, and they were to be married in the spring. They had only known each other a few weeks. Everyone was shocked except Stefan, who said that nothing his brother could do would surprise him anymore.

They arrived at Lehrter Stadtbahnhof, the main train station in Berlin on a fine morning in April 1938, three days before the wedding that Christopher had thought he would never see. It had been seven years since they had been in Germany, for their grandmother's funeral. Christopher watched his father as the train pulled in, his face hardly betraying any emotion at the return to the city of his birth. Alexandra smiled as they stepped out onto the platform. "It feels like we're coming home, truly it does," she said turning to Stefan.

"I love Berlin," Stefan answered with a tiny sigh. "But this isn't the Berlin that I knew," he said as a horde of school children shifted past them across the platform, dressed in the light brown uniforms of the Hitler Youth. They stood and watched the children pass and Stefan looked down at Alexandra again.

She shrugged her shoulders. "It's no different than the scouts." But Stefan didn't answer and picked up the bags. They followed beside him as he walked out to a tram, which arrived in a matter of seconds, and they pushed aboard to make for their hotel. The flags were the first things Christopher saw. The black swastika, in the white circle on the red background, lined up to obediently flicker in the wind outside the station in great 30-foot swathes.

The tram was packed and they stood with their bags at their feet, holding onto the straps draped down over the pole above. Alexandra was still smiling. She hadn't stopped smiling since they'd arrived. Everything was fascinating and Christopher looked at the people around them on the tram, studying the expressionless faces of the commuters. There was a young man, a little older than he, standing about three feet from him, leaning casually against the window, reading a newspaper. Christopher saw the drawing on the front and looked up at his father in disgust. Stefan stared back at him and then at the

picture of the overdrawn, plainly Jewish man, murdering a screaming child, and at the bottom of the page ran the headline, *The Jews are Our Misfortune*. Christopher stood in front of his sister, between her and the newspaper as the tram continued.

Uli and Karolina were waiting in the lobby of the hotel as they arrived. The soon to be married couple stood up to greet them and Karolina hugged Christopher first. They had never met before. Christopher had only seen her in faded black and white photographs, and always with Uli, she and Uli in a restaurant smiling and holding their glasses of beer and her and Uli on the beach at Wannsee. She was a small woman, with long blond hair and bright blue eyes. She was pretty. She was young, only five years older than Christopher himself. Stefan looked like he could have been her father. Christopher hugged Uli, roughly bashing his shoulder with an open palm until his uncle let him go and stood back as Uli grasped Alexandra, lifting her into the air. They all stood back, facing one another. Karolina was first to speak.

“It’s wonderful to meet you all at last,” she said, her eyes darting from one person to the next. “I’m sure you’re tired from your journey, but the bad news is that we have a packed afternoon of sightseeing ahead of us. No time to be tired, I’m afraid. So drop off your bags upstairs and get back down here. Is that all right, Stefan?”

“Of course it is, Karolina. We are all so eager to get to know you that we don’t want to wait another minute.”

Christopher heard Karolina’s laugh as they walked back down the stairs to the lobby and she greeted them again, as if she hadn’t seen them in a lot longer than the five minutes they had been gone. Stefan looked at Christopher and laughed as they walked out onto the street to where Uli was parked. Stefan sat up front with Uli.

“I’ve never been to Jersey, I would love to, it sounds wonderful, but this must all be quite different,” Karolina said as the car started.

“Very different,” Christopher answered.

“It’s absolutely wonderful here,” Alexandra answered. “I never thought there would be anywhere like London, but this is even more fabulous.”

Christopher knew that the others were talking as the car moved but none of

their words registered with him. He could only stare out the window at the marvelous city where he might have grown up, the enormous avenues buzzing with cars and ladies in hats and trams and trains that he might have known so well, instead of pondering them in amazement as a tourist. They parked the car and walked to the Stadtschloss, the royal palace.

“I’d say this compares pretty well with your Buckingham Palace.” Uli joked as they beheld it. Christopher looked back at Alexandra who was standing, arms linked with Karolina. He smiled at them again and then at his father.

They made their way to Unter den Linden and the Brandenburg Gate, where Uli took his turn as tour guide. They looked up at the huge structure and the chariot led by four horses atop of it.

“This is it, look up at the column of victory. This is the center of the Reich, the center of the new Germany.” He took Karolina close to him. “This is the symbol of the new start for all of us,” he looked down at Karolina, who smiled back at him. “Look back down Unter den Linden, it stretches for as far as the eye can see.”

Christopher looked down the wide avenue, the green trees interspersed by the flags of the party, stretching for miles.

“And look,” Karolina said. “The changing of the guards, we’re in luck.” Christopher looked over at the grey uniformed soldiers, stepping in perfect time, their long rifles on their shoulders.

“I don’t think I really want to see this,” Stefan said.

Uli looked back at him. “Okay, Brother, it’s getting towards dinner time anyway. We have somewhere special to take you.”

It was a fine evening, warm and clear, and they went to dinner in a café outdoors. There was dancing on the patio and the music from the live band floated around them as they ate. Christopher was thinking about Rebecca, and how they could never be together in this strange and wonderful place, warm and friendly yet intensely hostile all at the same time. He didn’t know how to feel.

After dinner, Uli asked Alexandra to dance with him and although she refused he, dragged her up with him. Karolina turned to Christopher and asked if he wouldn’t mind if she danced with his father. Christopher shook his head and

smiled as Stefan took her hand and led her out onto the patio. Christopher watched them dancing as the evening faded into night.

Uli's wedding was on a beautiful Saturday but of course, he had insisted on having his bachelor party the night before. Alexandra stayed with Karolina's family as Stefan and Christopher accompanied Uli and a horde of his friends out into the Berlin night, for "one last night of debauchery", as Uli himself put it. As 37 year old men, Uli's friends seemed to have more interest in talking about their children, or the wedding the next day, than the debauchery that he had in mind, at least at first. Christopher found himself sitting at dinner between his father, who seemed genuinely determined to have a good time, and Uli's friend Werner, proudly displaying his swastika badge to signify his membership of the Party. He was a lawyer, originally from Dresden, and Christopher found himself speaking to him for the entire dinner.

"So what do you think of Berlin? It's quite a city isn't it?"

"It's incredible," Christopher said, looking first at the Nazi insignia and then into Werner's brown eyes. "I never seen anywhere quite like it."

"It was so different, just a few short years ago. Before the National Socialists came to power, and while the Bolshevik threat was still lurking, that was a terrifying time. I'm glad you weren't here to see that. I can see why your father wanted you away from here during that time."

"We've had a wonderful life in Jersey."

"I spoke to your father earlier, it does sound like the most beautiful place, but do you not find yourself intoxicated by the sheer surge of life in this city?"

"I'm feeling intoxicated by something," Christopher replied, and they both laughed.

"This is the most incredible time to be German. You should come back here and be a part of this revolution. The Party, we're trying to change the world, to work for a better future." His eyes were on fire, the half smile on his face growing beneath his thick moustache. "I mean, you don't have to join the Party. Your uncle says he never will, but he's as proud a German as you'll ever meet."

"I know."

But Werner hardly seemed to hear him. “It’s a revolution all right, a wonderful, bloodless revolution. Look at this city, everything’s in order again, everything’s clean and the people are back at work. Finally it’s okay to be proud to be German once more.” Werner looked at Christopher, most likely for a cue to continue, but Christopher didn’t feel like giving it to him. He wanted to ask him about Rebecca, and why she could never be a part of this wonderful society but he didn’t, and instead looked over at Uli, who was roaring laughing.

“Why do you think he did it? What is so special about Karolina?” Christopher asked Werner.

Werner smiled and lifted the glass of beer to his lips. “I think time catches up on all of us sooner or later, Christopher. You’re young now, but you’ll understand one day. We all marry for different reasons, some for love, some for money or power, and some, so they won’t be forgotten or left behind.” He looked at Christopher and then around the table. “But I’ve met Karolina, several times now. She is a wonderful woman, and she’ll make Uli very happy.” They looked across at Uli, downing the third of three straight shots of vodka and laughed.

“Why did you get married Werner?”

“I think a little of each reason, my friend, a little of each.”

Christopher was sick before his uncle’s wedding, and had to run out of the church during the ceremony itself, not an easy task considering he was sitting in the front row. But the day was a huge success and Uli smiled almost the whole day and Karolina seemed very happy too. She looked beautiful and Christopher’s father seemed happier than he’d ever been.

Chapter 8

Christopher awoke from a dreamless, dead sleep and immediately felt her beside him. It was the morning after his 20th birthday. He was on his back, she on her side facing away. He lifted up the sheet and saw the gentle curve of her back as she lay, her legs tucked up so far as to be almost touching the elbows she held clenched together in front of her. Her gentle hair was carelessly split over her shoulders, gold against the light brown of her skin. He had never realized quite how small she was, just how fragile. He went to reach his hand over to touch her hair but stopped himself. He drew his hand back and let it fall uselessly onto his belly. She kicked her legs slightly as she breathed out hard, almost as a snort, and then drew them back in. Christopher was frozen, unable to leave as they were in his room in the apartment he shared with his friend Tom. He sat up in the bed, more as a reflex against the pain than anything else and Sandrine stirred beside him. She turned over to face him and opened her eyes with a gentle grace he had never quite seen before.

“Good morning,” she said.

“Good morning,” he replied and it took everything within him to stop himself finishing the sentence with, *I think you should leave*. He looked down at her as she smiled up at him but then saw her smile fade. He wanted to be there with her, wanted to smile back, to feel what she seemed to feel, but he couldn't. Christopher came back into the moment and was still looking at Sandrine. How this beautiful, fun, kind girl filled him with dread was hard to explain. The letter he had received from Rebecca was on the dresser opposite them. He wished he could say something, or that she would. The silence in the air was almost unbearable. She propped her head up on her elbow to face him and all he could do was get out of the bed. He was naked, standing in front of her, and pulled a towel over himself.

“How are you feeling today?” he managed.

“I feel fine, how are you?” she said. Her voice was flat, almost emotionless.

Christopher looked back at her, wishing she'd say something more but she just looked back at him and then out the window. It was a grey day and steady drizzle was licking the windows, covering them in a thin coat distorting the view outside. "Yeah, I feel fine." Christopher opened his mouth and sat back down on the bed without saying anything. She was looking towards the window, but not through it, seemingly anything to avoid his eyes. "Listen, Sandrine, I'm still in shock after hearing some bad news yesterday, you understand, don't you?" She pursed her lips and looked at him, still not talking. He raised his hands to his head again. There was a knock on the door. Christopher spun his head around. "Yes?" he said.

"You have a visitor." It was Tom. "Your sister's here to see you."

Christopher looked back down at the bed, at Sandrine. "My sister Alexandra is here to..."

"I heard." Sandrine said. "I will leave if you just give me a moment to change."

"Let me go out and talk to her. I'll be back. I'm really sorry about this." She drew her knees up to her chest, the blanket up to her collarbone and draped down over her sides. She looked up at him and then away. He pulled on his trousers and sat back down. It took all his strength to reach out to her, to put his hand on her face but it felt good. Her skin was warm, smooth and she leaned into his palm. "Sandrine, I'm sorry, perhaps last night was a mistake, I just don't know right now."

The knock on the door came again, louder this time. "She says it's important."

He drew his hand away from her face and pointed towards the door. "Just let me see what this is about. I'll be back." Christopher buttoned up his shirt and opened the door, just wide enough for him to slip through before closing it behind himself. Alexandra was sitting at the kitchen table with Tom. Christopher smiled at her but she didn't smile back, instead throwing leaden grey eyes up at him and then back at Tom who was seated opposite her. Tom looked nervous, and immediately excused himself to his room as Christopher sat down.

"What is it?" Christopher asked. "Is everything all right? You seem..."

“I need you to come with me right now.” Alexandra replied. “Are you ready? I drove down to get you....”

“What’s wrong? Is it Father?”

“He’s fine. It’s something else. I can’t tell you now. I have to show you. Please, just get ready and come with me.” She stared at him for a few seconds after she spoke. Eventually he nodded and went back to the room. Sandrine was fully dressed and sitting on the bed.

“I have to go,” Christopher explained. “I think there’s something wrong, Alexandra’s here.”

“What is it?” Sandrine seemed genuinely concerned.

“I don’t know. She wouldn’t tell me but I have to go right now.” Christopher was putting on the same socks he had worn the night before and sat down to put on his shoes. “I’m sorry, but you’ll have to see yourself out.”

“I’m ready to leave. I’ll walk out with you.” Sandrine said and stood up.

Christopher raised his head, and let his laces fall untied. “No, really my sister is out there. There’s something wrong. I don’t want to upset her.”

“Upset her? What are you talking about? Are you ashamed of me?”

Christopher walked around the bed to where she was standing and took hold of each of her elbows. He went to talk and then stopped, the breath hurting his chest as it came. “No, of course not, it’s just that I don’t want to upset her. If there’s something seriously wrong...” He took his hands off her. “Please, just let yourself out after we leave?”

“Maybe I should just climb out the window, shin down the drainpipe?”

“I don’t have time for this.” Christopher said. Sandrine sat back down on the bed facing away and out towards the window. Christopher put one hand on the doorknob and turned around. “I’m sorry Sandrine, I have to go now. Can we talk later?”

“Of course. You go. I hope everything is okay,” she said still facing away from him. Her voice was soft, distant, as if she were in the next room, talking through the wall. Christopher tilted his head to say something, but no words

came and he left her there, alone on his bed.

Alexandra was standing up as Christopher strode up to the table and he led her out the door and down the stairs to the street. She put her little umbrella up for the walk to the car, fifty yards away across the street.

“What is it, Alex? What’s going on?” Christopher asked as his sister went to start the car.

“I don’t know myself. Father told me to get you, that he had to tell us both together, and that it was very important. That’s all I know, I swear.” She pushed the keys into the ignition and the car rumbled to a start. “Christopher, who were you talking to in your room? Was there someone in your room with you?”

“No, of course not. Come on, let’s get home.”

They didn’t speak for the duration of the ride to the house. Christopher thought about Sandrine, alone in his room, and closing the door behind her as she let herself out to walk back home and he felt ashamed of himself.

The rain was stopping as Alexandra pulled in and Christopher closed the car door behind him. Christopher waited for his sister before pushing the front door open and stepping into the silence of the house. Christopher stopped and looked at his sister but she motioned for him to keep going towards the closed door to the kitchen, at the end of the hall. Christopher pushed open the door. Rebecca was sitting at the table. Her full lips curled into a massive smile and as she started to laugh her light brown hair fell down across her forehead, momentarily covering her blue eyes before she pushed it behind her ear. She was taller now, maybe about five foot seven and up to Christopher’s shoulders. The picture of her he had harbored in his mind was nowhere near as beautiful as she actually was. She was a woman now.

“Surprise,” she whispered and Christopher’s father yelled and Alexandra hugged him and started laughing. Christopher felt his mouth open and closed it as Rebecca stood up. She kissed him on the cheek and threw her arms over his shoulders and around his neck. His heart was beating so hard that he thought it was going to burst through his chest and onto the floor. Christopher looked at his father, who was absolutely beaming. Christopher brought his hands from his sides onto the middle of Rebecca’s back. He stood back and looked at her and realized he hadn’t spoken yet. There was a young man with her. It wasn’t Peter.

He was blond, with a tanned face that looked somehow older than Christopher guessed he was. The young man was watching Rebecca as she pulled away from Christopher. It was the man she had mentioned in her last letter. It was Jonathan Durrell. "Christopher, this is Jonathan, Jonathan, this is my oldest and dearest friend, Christopher Seeler."

Jonathan stood up and seemed to try to smile but it came as more of an expression of pain. The handshake he proffered was firm and he looked into Christopher's eyes before he let go and sat back down without saying a word.

"So?" Stefan said. "What do you think of your surprise?"

"It's amazing." The smile on Christopher's face was beginning to hurt. "What are you doing here?"

"We got off the ferry last night."

"It's such a pleasure to see you and to meet you too, Jonathan," Christopher said and stood back from her. He saw the awkward look on his father's face.

"Come on Alex, let's leave these three to talk for a while."

"Well, I was hoping we could go for a walk." Rebecca said, staring at Christopher who looked back at her and then away at Stefan and Alexandra. "Down to the beach, the Lion's Mane or the Angry Horse?" She smiled at him and his heart was aflame.

Jonathan was sitting down, staring out the back window. "I've not spent too much time in this part of the island before," he offered.

"You're from St. Brelade?" Christopher asked, although he knew perfectly well where Jonathan Durrell, son of the former Bailiff of the island of Jersey. Everyone knew the Durrell's mansion.

"Yes, quite." Jonathan replied. "It was strange to have to go all the way to England to meet a girl from home, but Rebecca captivated me from the first moment we met."

"Yes, it's not raining too badly. We're going to go out for a walk now." Christopher said. His father nodded his head and looked down at Alexandra, whose smile had melted.

Christopher led Rebecca out of the house and into the grey morning. She looked more beautiful than ever but he was having difficulty looking at her. They turned on the road down towards the sea, the road that led past her parents' house. Rebecca was walking with Jonathan on her right, Christopher on her left. Christopher had thought this would have been easier.

“So what are you doing here? I knew you were coming back, but I didn't expect to see you so soon.”

“I've missed you so much all these years I've been away,” Rebecca smiled.

Christopher kept his mouth shut, breathing in and out through his nose as they walked. He could feel Sandrine against him and see Jonathan Durrell down on bended knee. When was he going to say it? “So I heard the good news. I hear congratulations are in order.” Christopher finally said. His eyes dropped down to the muddy gravel below their feet.

“Yes, we've come back to get married. We'll live in the house to start, until my practice picks up and then we'll find accommodation of our own,” Jonathan answered.

“Congratulations,” Christopher managed. “I'm delighted for you both.”

The silence was broken by the sight of Rebecca's parents' house. The front door had been freshly painted. Jonathan turned to Christopher. “I'll leave you two to talk. I'm going to call back into the house.” Jonathan shook Christopher's hand again and walked down the driveway to the house Christopher had not been inside for more than ten years.

“He knows your parents?”

“They were over to visit twice in the last year.” Rebecca looked away from him as she spoke. Her voice was not celebrating the new relationship she had forged with her parents. It was as if she were embarrassed more than anything.

“Things have changed. That's a good thing. How are you getting on with them? How is Peter getting on with them?”

“I'm getting on better with them. It was easier not living there, not being privy to...” she took a breath to continue. “I'm glad I went to live with Peter in

England. I had to do it. Peter wouldn't see them when they came. He said that they were only interested in us because I had Jonathan as a suitor, and they were only there to see what they could gather up for themselves."

Christopher didn't answer, just looked back at her. The wind was picking up and sweeping in across the channel. It was a smell as familiar as any he knew. They were on the beach now, the wet sand hard beneath their feet. "I missed you so much when you left, and when I found out that my father had kept your letters from me I felt that I'd let you down, that I'd said I'd always be there for you no matter what."

"You were fifteen years old, you did so much. I never would have made it through without you." She took his hand and the guilt of the pleasure he felt at the touch of her spread through him. Sandrine came to him and the rational part of him tried to focus on her, not Rebecca, but Christopher dismissed those thoughts as quickly as they had come. He watched her mouth as she spoke again. "I thought about you so much back then. I never forgot you. Jonathan had a lot to live up to." She almost laughed. "I never thought it would come to this, you and I here, back on this beach, and me living back with my parents."

"And you getting married to the son of the richest man on the island?"

"Yes. It seems like a dream sometimes. I feel like I'll wake up and we'll be back in the tree house with Alexandra."

"It's still there. It's still hanging on for dear life. Uli did a good job. You know he's married now?" They spoke about Uli and his wedding for a few minutes. Her reaction to the news was similar to his, as he still couldn't believe Uli was married. They talked about when they were children. Christopher did not ask about the wedding, about what kind of a man her husband would be or even how they met. The truth of it was that he didn't want to know and he had only found that out himself earlier that day. Each minute with her was a pathway to discovering emotions that he had tried to drown within him, but which had somehow learned to swim. He longed for her to reach across to him, to take his face between her hands and kiss him but she didn't and instead they just talked for another ten minutes or so until Jonathan came to get her for their lunch engagement.

Christopher shook both their hands and they left him standing alone on the beach. As they walked away Rebecca turned and smiled at him. Christopher

stood there alone, watching them leave until they disappeared into the house and a squall blew in off the sea and the rain set in again.

Chapter 9

It was two days later when Christopher found the letter pushed under his door. Tom was bending to pick it up when Christopher stopped him. It was a single piece of paper folded. There was only one sentence written.

Gunde de viznay bin lion's mane xes

It wasn't signed. It didn't need to be. Christopher held the letter tight and stared out into space. He smiled as he thought of her and the unreasonable thoughts of romance that were ghosting through his mind. In less than five seconds, he had already broken up the wedding and run away with Rebecca, not before smiting her father once and for all. Sandrine crept into his mind. It had been he who had pursued her, but that had seemed like a long time ago, before Rebecca had come back. Tom asked who the letter was from, and cocked his head to the side, rubbing nonexistent facial hair between three fingers with a smile on his face when Christopher answered.

"Be careful, Christopher," he advised, his smile melting away. "She's engaged, and not just to anyone, to Jonathan Durrell."

"I know what I'm doing," Christopher replied, trying to convince himself more than anything else by saying the words out loud. There was no denying that his mind, his world, had been tinged a different color now. Christopher didn't speak of the note that morning in work with his father, though he would have liked to. It would have been good to speak to someone who knew her like he did, but he knew what his father would say, and he knew his father would be right. So he didn't mention it.

Christopher arrived ten minutes early and she was already waiting for him. She beamed, dressed in a new blue dress. Christopher raised his hands to his tie, pushing it upwards as he smiled back at her. Her face was so wonderful he almost burst out laughing as he walked to her. Rebecca was sitting on a rock overlooking the Lion's Mane, a rocky outcrop, about half a mile down the coast from Rebecca's parents' house. Rebecca stood up as Christopher walked to her. He was still moving forward and he held up his arms but stopped short, as she

did. Christopher brought his arms back down and offered a handshake, which she took in both hands.

“Christopher, you look wonderful. I can’t tell you how splendid it is to be back here, with you.”

Christopher’s smile widened so far he thought it was going to tear his face apart. “Why did we call this place the Lion’s Mane anyway? It looks more like a bunch of black carrots cutting into the sea to me.”

“I suppose the Lion’s Mane was a better name. It does sound better than the Bunch of Black Carrots doesn’t it? It flows off the tongue rather better.”

Christopher laughed and then caught himself staring. He tore his eyes away and threw them out towards the endless fascination of the sea. It was hard to know what to say next. There was so much. “Tell me about your time in England, where were you?”

“In Portsmouth mainly. We moved around a little towards the end. Peter is in Southampton now, working on the docks. He likes it there. I don’t think he’ll ever come back.”

“What was it like when you left? The last I saw of you was as a fifteen year old. You must have been terrified.”

“I was, at first, but I think I could get used to about anything now. Peter had set up somewhere for us to live and a job for himself when I arrived so that was a comfort. I had Peter to look after me. He was more of a parent to me than my mother and father ever were. I owe him so much.”

“But you’re back living with your parents now.”

“Only until the wedding,” she answered, looking directly at Christopher as she spoke. The word *wedding* cut into Christopher like a razor blade and he felt himself tighten inside. Rebecca seemed not to notice or ignored him if she did, and continued talking. “They’re better now, most of the time anyway. My father dare not lay a hand on me now, as he knows how it would look in front of the Durrells, his new darlings. It sickens me how much my mother and father fawn to them, but they’re my parents, I can’t give up on them.” She took her eyes off Christopher and gazed out at the water extending out in front of them. The early June sun shone off the tops of the waves as they crested out in front of them like

golden icing on some giant cake. Christopher didn't speak, just waited for Rebecca to continue. "Their drinking is better now, although it seems hard to imagine it could've gotten any worse. I've really noticed the effect it's had on them. They look more like they should be my grandparents. They were so handsome once, at least from the old photographs I've seen."

"They were a comely couple." The next words strained in his throat. Christopher wanted to tell her how much he missed her, how much she still meant to him, how beautiful she was, but he kept it inside. The feelings he had for her felt rough and jagged, as if they were tearing at his insides like swallowed glass. He knew he should get up and leave, that it was the only truly sensible thing to do, but it was the one thing in this situation that he knew he would never happen. He was sitting beside her on the rock, his hand only inches from hers. It would have been so easy to touch her. Instead he reached up for a phantom itch on his neck. "It was such a shock when you left. I remember thinking that life just couldn't go on." He feigned laughing. "It seems so ridiculous now, the things that children think?" He turned to her with a smile on his face, the smile he thought she would want to see.

"No, of course not." She started and reached across to take his hand but didn't, instead patting him on the knuckles, before withdrawing in one clumsy movement. Christopher felt the tension between them, felt it crawling up his spine into his jaw, which he stretched out before looking back at her. She was staring out to sea again. "No, Christopher, we were the center of each other's world. It's sweet when you think about it."

"But we were young then."

"Yes, of course," Rebecca answered, pushing out a breath. "Nothing ever stays the same."

"That's funny, I thought nothing ever changed. It doesn't seem like anything ever changes on this island."

"I came back, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did, and engaged to be married. Perhaps you are right after all." It felt good to reiterate that she was engaged. It was a boundary for them both to be wary of, for them both to obey. "So how did you two meet? Where were you?"

Rebecca's eyes flitted over to his and then away as she began to speak. "I was working as a waitress in the yacht club in Southampton. A friend introduced him to me when she heard he was from Jersey also. I can't say that I thought much of him at first." She smiled to herself, as if for her own benefit, as if she were repeating a story she practiced many times, and was now reciting to him. "But he wore me down, like every man does, I suppose. He found out where I lived and sent me flowers, and even befriended Peter to get to know me better."

"What's he like? I hear his parents are very well thought of around the island. I've never met them myself, but my father has."

"He's not as outgoing as they are. He's shy, and can be rather serious, I suppose, but he was so good to us in England when we really needed him. I'm sure he'll make a wonderful husband."

Christopher resisted temptation to say anything other than, "Congratulations."

"Thank you. What about you? You must have every single girl on the island chasing after you. You've grown up so handsome," she said. Christopher felt the touch of her hand on his shoulder and just as quickly it was gone. Her face reddened a little and she coughed.

"Oh yes, every girl on the island. It's tough you know, trying to keep them from waking my family at night. There's so many of them camped outside my house. They even have their own little town amongst the tents, Christopherville, I believe they call it."

Rebecca laughed, and the tension eased, at least for a few seconds. "No, seriously, I heard you were seeing that girl from the Red Lion, Sandrine? I've not met her, but I hear she's very pretty."

"Seeing is a strong word."

"You sound like Uli now." Rebecca laughed again. "Is that what you're going to be, the eternal bachelor?"

"You do know he's married now, don't you? I told you that in my letter, didn't I?"

"You did, but you know what I mean, don't dodge the question, Master

Seeler.”

“I feel like I’m being questioned by the police.” Christopher laughed. “Let’s just say I’m still waiting for the right girl to come along. Sandrine is lovely, a really nice person but....” He stopped himself. “I don’t think that she’s the right one for me, not now anyway.” The sun had disappeared by this time and leaden clouds were extending over the land from the sea. Christopher looked across at Rebecca again, tried to catch her eye but couldn’t. He took a deep breath and thought of what he really had to lose. “I suppose I thought you were the person... I know it sounds silly now that you’ve found the one that you truly want to be with.”

“Oh Christopher, you’re so sweet. Any girl would be so lucky to have you, truly they would. Perhaps things might have been different...”

“Perhaps I should leave.” Christopher said as he went to get up, hoping she would stop him. She did, grasping his wrist with a strong grip. She didn’t say anything, just shook her head and he sat back down. “So when is the big day?”

“There’s no date set yet.” Her voice came as a whisper this time, almost lost on the strengthening wind. “I’m not feeling sorry for you, Christopher, there’s no need for that. I loved you for so long, but I never thought I’d come back here. I had to let go. You father told me that you were getting on with your life in his letters. He never told me to forget about you, but I thought it best, especially for you. You didn’t need me holding you back. Your father was right in what he did.”

“You never held me back.”

“I left, Christopher. I didn’t want you to uproot yourself from your home and your family, for me. I wasn’t ready for that. It was just a bad time. ”

Christopher wanted to tell her that there was no better reason to leave Jersey and that it had taken him a long time to forgive his father for protecting him but the rain began, first as a spattering that drove them to their feet, then as a deluge which soaked them through. Their clothes were stuck to them as they started back towards the houses. Rebecca was barefoot, as she always was, and she streaked ahead of him. She stopped outside her parents’ house to wait for him. The rain was still pouring down, and Rebecca’s hair was clamped tight to her scalp as she spoke, rivulets of water running down the smooth skin of her

face. "Come on inside, my parents are not here." Christopher looked back at her. "Trust me, they're out." She scampered down the driveway. Christopher stood still and watched her push the front door open before running over and inside.

She was standing there laughing as he came inside. The lamp was on, casting a sparse light against the greying evening outside. Her blue eyes were staring directly into his and he had never seen anything quite so beautiful as she was. Without thinking, he reached forward to her and put his arms around her, hugging her tight to him. He felt her arms wrap around him. His hands were on the center of her back and he could feel the wet ruffles of her dress between his fingers. The rain was beating down outside but they were safe inside her parents' house. *Of all places to be safe inside*, he thought to himself. It was thirty seconds before she drew her head back and they released their grip on one another. When they did, things had changed between them. Somehow it felt that everything had been leading to this. She looked into his eyes, as she did before, and mumbled the words. "We should get you dried off."

Rebecca led him through the hallway, seemingly freshly wallpapered, to the newly carpeted stairs. He was at the foot of the stairs, watching her ascend in front of him when she stopped and waved a hand for him to follow. There was little light on the stairwell, only that of the dull hall lamp behind them. Rebecca was at the doorway to her room, her hand on the knob. Christopher had never been in her bedroom before. She pushed open the door and Christopher saw the iron bed, still unmade from the night before below the window and the old dresser with the mirror above it. They still hadn't spoken. She reached out to him, taking his hands in hers, holding them up so each could see them in front of their faces. Christopher felt his breath quicken, could hear hers do the same, and watched as she held her arms in the air. "Can you help me?" she whispered and he leant back to undo the hooks on the back of her dress, unclasping each one in turn. She stood there wordlessly as he worked on the hooks and then the belt. Christopher tried to pull the dress down but she redirected him with a gentle, "not that way," and he pulled it up over her head. He pulled the slip up over her head the same way and Rebecca lowered her arms and reached out to him, dressed now only in brassiere and underwear. She took his tie and smiled as she roughly tore it off, and began to work on the buttons of his shirt. Meticulously, she worked through each button on the shirt and once it was open pulled it off him to reveal his bare chest. She took a towel from the chair behind her and rubbed his torso and arms, moving up to his hair. She was inches from him and

handed the towel to him. He dried each arm first, before moving on to her hair and finally her breasts and flat belly.

Christopher handed the towel back to her with a smile and Rebecca placed it over the chair behind her once more. She wasn't smiling. They stood there for a few seconds. Christopher wondering what to do next but Rebecca answered for him. She reached forward to him and undid the belt around his waist, letting it fall to the floor with a clack. She helped him with his trousers and they were at his ankles. Christopher lifted each foot in turn and she picked the trousers up to throw them across the room. She moved to his undershorts and he was fully naked now. She reached around her own back and undid the hooks on her brassiere. Christopher watched as she pulled down her underwear and she was naked in front of him, her knees touching as she crossed her legs ever so slightly. Christopher reached towards her, putting a hand on her shoulder, feeling her warmth. She reached up and put her hand on his and he took a step into her and put his other hand around the skin of her waist. She was four or five inches smaller than he and she looked up at him to smile. Then their lips were touching and he felt her tongue slipping into his mouth. Seconds slid into minutes, the only sound that of the rain outside and the sea below. They were still standing there by the bed when the sound of a car pulling into the driveway filled the air. Christopher pulled away. "I thought you said they weren't coming back."

"I didn't think they were. You really need to leave." She was already pulling her underwear back on.

The noise was at the door now, and it opened. Two or more people walked though. "How am I going to get out?" Christopher had his trousers on now.

"Eh," Rebecca was looking around the room, and Christopher saw her glancing under the bed. "The window, you can shin down the drainpipe. It's not too far anyway." Christopher walked to the window and looked out. It was less than twenty feet. There were voices downstairs now, both Rebecca's parents and Jonathan. Christopher was fully dressed within seconds and Rebecca was at the door, shouting that she would be down in a minute. Christopher opened the window and looked at Rebecca again. He stuck one leg out and then drew it back inside. He looked at her and smiled.

"What are you doing? You need to leave, please."

He strode across the room and took her in his arms to kiss her again.

He opened the window and let himself flop down into the sloshy wetness of the still unkempt back garden and looked back up at the window at her one last time and saw her smiling at him through the driving rain.

Chapter 10

Christopher went through the motions of changing for bed and even climbed under the covers and put out the lamp but his mind was already made up. He needed to see her. He threw back the covers and reached down for his clothes, folded neatly on the chair beside his bed. He was dressed and ready to go within thirty seconds. The light of the moon covered the apartment in a thin film of luminescent grey, just enough for him to find his way out and he was gone.

It was a few minutes before he had cycled past the lights of the town. The lamp on his bike cast out a tunnel of white in front of him, illuminating the narrow road and the bushes closing in around him. The warmth of the summer night lay thick in the air and Christopher could feel the sweat beading on his forehead.

It had been six days since he had fled from her bedroom, and he had been seeing Rebecca as much as he could but something had changed. He understood the pressure she was under, but surely the best thing was to finally reject Jonathan Durrell and his proposal. It all seemed so simple, yet Christopher felt something had changed. Christopher arrived at his father's house and climbed off the bicycle. The sweat had transferred to his palms now, the handlebars moist and clammy from where he had touched them. He rested the bike against a bush and began walking down towards Rebecca's parents' house. There was no light other than that of the moon and stars but his eyes soon adjusted whereby he could make out almost everything around him. In truth, he needed little light, as he could have done this with his eyes closed. He knew the road down to Rebecca's house better than almost anything else. Christopher stopped walking and turned around to face down towards the sea. Thoughts of her with Jonathan Durrell flooded his mind, seeping into every corner. And the picture of Sandrine, sitting on his bed facing out towards the rain was there, as if to torture him further. He was running out of excuses not to go into the pub where she worked. His friends all knew what had happened. He reached around the back of his neck and took a piece of hair between his fingers and pulled. The pain jerked him back into the moment, standing there on that dark road. He walked on and the

house came into view over the black green bushes that fenced the perimeter.

Christopher ducked in through the hole in the hedge at the back of the house, ignoring the pricking of the twigs jutting out of the bush as they grazed his ears and the side of his neck. He crouched down in the overgrown grass at the back of the garden surveying the scene, as he always did before he looked for suitable stones to throw up at Rebecca's window. There was a dull light on downstairs, as there always was but that didn't mean anyone was awake. It was after midnight. She wasn't expecting him tonight so he would need to find something big enough to wake her up, but only her, not her parents. He moved forward, feeling through the patches of grass and rough soil for stones. It took him a few seconds to find two or three good ones and he threw the first up at Rebecca's window in its solitary position on the second floor. His first throw was a good one and he crouched down again, waiting for Rebecca to appear. Thirty seconds passed. Usually she woke up with the first stone. He threw another, this time missing the window altogether. He cursed gently under his breath, berating himself for his bad throw, before throwing the third. This one hit with a loud clack and Christopher bent down again, hoping that he hadn't cracked the glass. He waited for Rebecca, expecting an angry face to greet his sheepish grin. But his smile faded as no answer came.

Christopher dug his hands into the loose soil of the untidy garden as he thought of Rebecca with Jonathan, somewhere with Jonathan Durrell. He got up to retreat through the bush and back to his father's house. Christopher heard the back door opening, fifteen feet away, and threw his head back to see. The twin barrels of a shotgun jutted out of the door, coming through as if in slow motion. He got up to run towards the bush. The sound of the shotgun being fired exploded in his ears and Christopher stopped running, half expecting to feel the slicing heat of shot fragments in his back.

"You there, stop now," Pierre Cassin said. "Turn around. That was a warning shot. The next one will be right at your head."

Christopher immediately had the thought to keep running, to leap over the bush and keep running all the way home. Cassin was drunk, that much was clear from the slurred words that fell out of his mouth and he only had one shot left. There must have been a good chance that he was too full of whisky to shoot straight but Christopher thought better of it. He turned around slowly and with his hands raised above his head. The light flooding out of the open door behind

Pierre Cassin illuminated his face just enough that Christopher was able to see his lips curling up as he recognized him. The wind gusted up to carry the whisper as Cassin's eyes lit up. "*L'Allemand.*"

Christopher stood there for a few seconds waiting for Cassin to speak but he only smiled. "I'm sorry that I was sneaking around in your back garden, Monsieur Cassin. I was only here to see Rebecca."

"Oh, I understand that," Cassin laughed. "It's heartening to know that love is still alive in the world, and creeping around my back garden of all places." He threw his head back to laugh. Christopher didn't flinch, he hadn't moved, his hands still raised above his head, the wind licking at the top of his neck. "I suppose you're wondering what I'm going to do with you now? I should have you arrested for this."

"I'm so sorry Monsieur Cassin. I won't do this again."

"You won't come to see my daughter again, just because I came out here and pointed a shotgun at you? You disappoint me, young man. I thought you felt more for her than that."

Christopher looked back at Cassin. His face was a dark hole illuminated only by the light curving around the sides. His eyes were black fires, his hands uncertain as they pointed the shotgun directly at Christopher's chest.

"Where is Rebecca? Is she here?" The wind blew hard against the house almost pushing Christopher forward off his feet.

"No, she's not here. Come inside and I'll tell you where she is," he said and gestured at Christopher with the point of the shotgun to walk towards him. Christopher looked at him again, hoping for some kind of a reprieve, some word from Cassin that he could go home now, that this game was over. But the word didn't come. Cassin gestured at him again and this time he wasn't smiling. Christopher tried to move his feet but he couldn't. He brought his hands down to rub his face. He raised his hands again and shifted his feet, one in front of the other, walking towards Rebecca's father. Cassin stood aside as Christopher approached him and gestured with the shotgun for him to go inside. Christopher had the thought to wrestle the gun away from Cassin, to fight his way out of this, but every muscle in his body was seized with fear so that it was almost too much of an effort just to walk inside the house. Christopher heard the crack of the door

closing behind him. Cassin told him to keep walking, into the sitting room.

“I haven’t seen you in this house for many years but I’m sure you know it almost as well as I do,” he said. Christopher wanted to say something back, but the words wouldn’t come. He moved through into the sitting room, lit by a dim lamp in each corner. The room was covered in a flickering golden half-light, the corners dark. The once grand furniture seemed faded and worn, the walls covered in Cassin’s paintings of summer days and leaves blowing in the breeze. Christopher could make out only the dark shapes in the murky light. Cassin directed him to sit down on a chair by the fireplace. Cassin sat down opposite him in a large armchair and picked up the whisky glass. His face was weathered and old, his crooked nose extending out into a point above his long brown moustache. His large shoulders slumped down as he sat, his tattered dressing gown draped across his shoulders like rags on a rotting scarecrow. His still chestnut brown hair was receding slightly and greased back across his scalp. Rebecca often spoke of how handsome her father had been as a young man and how her mother fell in love with him the first moment they met. That was hard to believe now. He was staring at Christopher across the firelight, the shotgun resting beside the chair within easy reach.

“Do you want a drink?” he said holding up his glass.

“No, no thank you.”

“Oh, now, you don’t say no when a man offers you a drink in his own house. Now do you want a drink, young man?”

Christopher looked back across at him for a few seconds. “Yes, please.”

“Good. I do so hate to drink alone.” His French accent was still strong. He spoke as if he was just about to clear his throat, but never did. He reached over to the cabinet beside him and took out a whisky glass, filled it to the brim and held it out. Christopher pitched onto one foot and leaned forward to take it.

“Thank you, Monsieur Cassin,” Christopher said, the brown liquid spilling over the edges. Cassin motioned for him to drink it and Christopher held it to his lips, taking a sip.

“Is that the best you can do? Drink that back.”

Christopher looked across at Cassin at then the tumbler of whisky in his

hand. "Monsieur Cassin, this is a lot of..."

"I said drink it!" Cassin hissed. Christopher looked across at him and the shotgun, cradled in his lap. He raised the glass to his lips and took the largest gulp he could manage, letting the whisky slide down his throat. It was vile, like drinking flaming gravel, but he didn't flinch.

"So let's talk about why you are here, despite the fact that you are not, well, how can I put this, you are not welcome?"

"I'm sorry, Monsieur Cassi..."

"You've said that boy!" Cassin shouted. "Don't you say that again! You're not sorry, no, you're not sorry. If it had been Rebecca who came out into the garden and not me, would you be sorry?"

"No."

"Well, then, don't give me that *sorry* line anymore. It's tiring. It demeans us both."

"I don't know what you want me to say." Christopher replied. He held the glass up to his face and then brought it back down. Cassin ruffled his eyes into tiny slits and gestured for him to drink. Christopher held the glass to his lips and sipped "Okay, you're right. I'm not sorry."

"Now that's the answer a man would give," Cassin smiled but his face was stiff, unyielding, and his eyes dead. He finished his glass before pouring himself another. "You like my daughter then?" Christopher didn't reply. "Oh you love my daughter then?" Cassin said and started laughing so hard that Christopher thought he was going to have a seizure. He was still smiling as he lit a cigarette. The smoke hung thick and heavy in the air as Cassin leaned forward to speak again. "So, what do you know about love boy? Tell me about love."

Christopher didn't answer, instead taking another sip of the foul liquid swirling around in the glass. "I don't pretend to be an expert," he said through his grimace.

"Let me tell you a little something about this love you speak of." Cassin spat. "It's pure lies, perpetrated by women to control the men of this world. I can see what you think you know and it makes me laugh, boy. You think you know

everything now don't you?" Christopher felt a chill along his back and shook in his seat. "You love Rebecca and she loves you? You know where she is tonight? You know where?" Christopher shook his head. "She's at a reception in Lord Durrell's house. As you know the young master Durrell has taken quite a liking to Rebecca." Christopher's heart dropped like a stone. "Now, what was that you were saying before boy?"

Christopher stared down into the grey black filth of the fireplace.

"She doesn't want you. You won't need to come creeping around my back garden anymore. Soon she'll be married into the richest family on the island." Cassin smiled.

"She doesn't love him. How can she?"

"There you go talking about that crap again. There's no love boy, there's no love. There's only this," he said pounding his chest. "And this," he held his glass aloft and took another sip. "There's no better reason to marry than money, no better reason, to look after your family, in their old age." His voice trailed off and he took a deep swig at the whisky in his glass, exhaling deeply as it went down.

"Are you going to let me go?"

"I haven't decided yet. That's up to you. That depends on you." He picked up the shotgun, cradled it across his lap. "Now, tell me, why do you think I don't let you see my daughter?"

"I don't know."

"Oh come on now, are you going to make me ask every question twice? Are you man enough to answer a few questions or not? Now why do you think I don't let you see my daughter?"

"Because of my father, because you hate Germans."

"Good, good. That's a good start. There's also the fact that you're a filthy wretch scrounging around in my back garden like a little Nazi rat. Why would I let someone like you see my daughter? Why would I give her to you?"

"She's not yours to give."

Cassin laughed and drew on his cigarette. "What age are you, 20? You are a naïve fool aren't you? This love you speak of, I suppose Rebecca tells you that she loves you, that she wants only you?" The smile spread across his face once more. Christopher was about to speak but Cassin began again. "Only today she was talking with her mother about how much she was looking forward to the wedding, and how much she wanted to take Jonathan Durrell as her husband."

The words hit Christopher like bullets but he remained taciturn. Cassin was lying. He had to be. Rising to the bait would only be letting him win. Yet the words lingered in the back of Christopher's mind like scum floating on a pond, choking the life out of it. Christopher looked down at his shoes, caked in dirt from the back garden and then up at Cassin again. "What about you, Monsieur Cassin? You have it all worked out then, do you?"

"I know what exists and what doesn't" He drew on his cigarette again and leaned forward. "I left home when I was about your age to go to Paris to pursue my art. I met Monsieur Monet and Monsieur Renoir, worked with them both. It was a wonderful time. A time.... of discovery," he held up his glass, staring into it as he spoke. "During which I discovered that I was never going to be good enough to be one of them. I had my talents though. And my talent, boy? Women were my talent. Women were easy to me and I soon realized that with my talents it wouldn't matter that I wasn't good enough to be rich myself. There were so many ladies in Paris looking for a young artist to fulfill themselves with, and I gave them what they wanted. In return they gave me the freedom to pursue my art. I travelled all over Europe, from Paris to Rome to Vienna and Berlin. And there were always women, rich women."

Christopher looked up and around the room and wondered where all the money had gone. The lamp in the corner flickered, throwing shadows around Cassin's face. Christopher looked at the shotgun and then at Cassin. Cassin was enjoying this. Christopher took another sip of foulness from the glass and stared back across at him.

"I was living with a woman in Paris, long before you were born, before the war. She was a wonderful woman-rich. My wife Marjorie, Rebecca's mother, was her niece." Cassin sneered. "She was beautiful back then, but there was more than just that. I saw my opportunity when I realized that Marjorie was in line to inherit the family fortune. I began to see Marjorie. Her aunt never knew, of course." Cassin took another sip and looked down at the floor between them.

“That was a golden age, perhaps the best time of my life. But Marjorie moved back here-to Jersey, to her family home.”

A morbid fascination was creeping across Christopher. It was hard to believe that this man was Rebecca’s father. Christopher sat in silence.

Cassin paused, pursed his lips and blinked heavily before continuing. “She... she was gone and I was left in Paris with her Aunt. But then the war began and I did my duty, served with honor in Flanders until I caught a bullet in the leg and went home. Let me tell you, many of my friends were not so lucky, your father and his friends took care of a great.... took care of many of them.” Christopher stared back, unblinking. “And now that madman Hitler.... determined to destroy everything he touches. Is there no end with you people?” He almost spat the words out as they came.

“I don’t concern myself with politics, Monsieur Cassin.”

“You think by living here you can change what you are? You are one of them. You really think I would give my daughter to you? A filthy Boche?”

“I was born German, but I live here. My mother was from Jersey. I have been living here since I was six years old,” Christopher said trying to hide the fear that was still almost paralyzing him.

“Oh, what difference does that make? You will always be one of them, you will never fit in here and you know that.” Cassin settled back in his chair, laid down his glass and leveled the shotgun at Christopher. Christopher squirmed backwards in his seat. “You know I could shoot you now, don’t you, boy? I could shoot you and say that I caught you breaking into my house. No one would ever know.”

“Please, Monsieur Cassin, I’m sorry...”

“I told you not to say that to me again!” Cassin roared. “I told you that already. Now are you sorry?”

“What?”

“Are you sorry, you Nazi rat?”

“No, no, I’m not sorry,” Christopher said, holding up his hands in front of him.

“Okay, at least you admit that much. At least we’re being honest with each other. Now get yourself together. See that piece of paper behind you on the dresser.” Christopher turned his head. “Yes, see there boy. Pick it up and the pen too, we’re going to write a letter to Rebecca, telling her how you really feel. I think she deserves to know. Don’t you?”

Christopher reached back and took the pen and paper in his hand. The shotgun was still pointed directly at him. “Monsieur Cassin...”

“Shut up. I’ll do the talking from here. You write. You do know how to write don’t you? Yes, lean on that book. We don’t want this to look.... rushed.” Cassin laid the shotgun back across his lap and picked up the whisky glass and began to dictate. “Dear Rebecca. Write it boy, write!”

“Okay, okay I’m writing it,” Christopher said as he pushed the nib against the paper. The words appeared.

“Dear Rebecca, I could not see you to tell you this face to face as I find myself overcome with guilt.” Christopher looked up at Cassin. His face was stern, unforgiving. “I have spent a lot of time of late contemplating our courtship. I am sorry to tell you that I can’t see you anymore. I have found myself wracked with guilt since sleeping with Sandrine Malard, the barmaid in The Red Lion in St Helier.” Christopher looked up at Cassin, his mouth wide open. He stood up, forgetting where he was. Cassin smiled and gestured with the shotgun for him to sit down and Christopher let himself drop back down into the chair “I take full responsibility for my actions and cannot blame them on my growing dependence on alcohol. I want you to be happy and now realize that I am not good enough a man to be with you, particularly bearing in mind the infection I have contracted since this occurrence.” Christopher let the pen drop, but Cassin raised the shotgun again. “You write the letter or I call down to the police to tell them that I have just shot an intruder in my house. You choose, boy!” Christopher’s muscles seized and his heart was dead in his chest but he brought the pen back down to the paper. Cassin began again. “I know that you have been contemplating the offer of marriage from Jonathan Durrell. This is some comfort to me that you have found a suitor who is worthy of you. I wish you all the best in your future with him. Yours, etcetera, etcetera. Don’t try anything funny, boy. Sign it and if I see anything strange about the letter, any kind of code...”

“There’s no code, see for yourself, you twisted old bastard!” Christopher snarled through the tears, holding up the letter.

“Pass it here.” Cassin scanned through it. “Good, very good. This is going to be an unfortunate shock for Rebecca, but at least Jonathan will be there to comfort her, along with her family, of course.”

Christopher sat back, throwing his head against the back of the chair. The effort of holding back the tears was overwhelming him now. He stood up. “I’m leaving now.”

“Yes, get out,” Cassin said. Christopher fumbled through the shadows and towards the front door, Cassin’s words echoing and then fading as he walked out. “Stay away from my daughter. If I see you around her again, I’ll kill you, you hear me, you hear me, boy?” Christopher closed the front door behind him and ran out of the garden and bent over as the tears came.

Chapter 11

Christopher stumbled back up the road, back towards the house, the wind churning around him and the sound of the waves crashing onto the beach ringing in his ears. His vision was dimming and the taste of whisky swirled around, mixing with the bile in the back of his throat and he cried out. There was no light now, nothing, not even the moon and the stars so he led himself by memory up the road towards his father's house. He kicked something hard and crumpled onto the road. He pushed himself up and immediately felt the dull pain in his knee and the limp as he tried to walk. The pain in his left leg intensified as he tried to stand on it and he hauled himself forward on his right, dragging the other leg behind him as he went. There was no stopping now. The house was ahead. He couldn't see it, but he knew it was there. The sound of the sea receded as he went, replaced by the sound of his own breathing and the blood rushing electric through his veins. "I have to get to her," he said, perhaps out loud, perhaps in his head. The road leaned to the left and he followed it around, his eyes now adjusted to the black. The house was there. No lights on. He saw his bike, still resting against the bush where he had left it. It was no use to him now.

Christopher took a deep breath, and reached up to his forehead, dripping with hot, salty sweat. The pain in his leg ran up through his entire torso, but he ignored it, or tried to ignore it, and dragged himself towards the front door of the house. The door opened and he took another breath before limping inside. The house was completely quiet except for the breath thundering through his lungs. Christopher put both hands on the wall and edged along towards the kitchen. He was able to move more easily with the solid structure as support and was sure he wasn't making any noise as he moved. He sat down at the kitchen table, his breath finally slowing, but the thoughts in his head only quickening. He had to get to her, to explain this. If her father got to her first...he might never see her again, or worse, see her rolling past in the Durrells' huge car.

The adrenaline had almost gone and he realized how drunk he was. But there was no time for that and he looked down at his left trouser leg, ripped and with dark bloodstains spreading out across the knee. He took a tablecloth, hanging over the back of his chair, and dabbed the cut through the tear in his

trousers. His knee was stinging, but it didn't seem to be broken. It was hard to tell, drunk and in the dark. There was no sound from upstairs and he continued along the wall and into the study. The car keys were, as they always were, in a cup on the desk, and Christopher reached in to fish them out. He pulled out the key to his father's car, looked at it for a few seconds and then up at the staircase. The house was absolutely still and Christopher struggled out the front door.

It was 45 minutes to the Durrells' house in St. Brelade. Christopher squinted at his watch. It was hard to tell in the darkness, but it seemed to be around 1 am, or maybe later. Rebecca and her mother were out very late and the thought of waiting for them came to him, but where would he wait? He certainly wasn't going anywhere near that house again. The best thing was to drive down there. There must have been a party at the house. They would have made excuses for Cassin himself as he was liable to ruin an occasion like that. He turned the key in the ignition, the car coughing and spluttering to a start and he looked up at the light going on in his father's room. The bedroom window opened and Christopher stuck his head out.

"I have to borrow the car, Father. It's an emergency!" he shouted and accelerated out of the driveway, not waiting for word of a reply. The certainty of what he had done was with him as he drove away from the house but so was the certainty that what he was doing was the right thing and forgiveness from his father or whatever else would have to wait.

The lights on the car cast out thirty or maybe forty feet in front of him, but as he looked in the rearview mirror there was nothing but blackness extending behind. He thought about Cassin and the shotgun and the whisky. It seemed almost impossible that Rebecca was his daughter...and he saw the cow on the road but he was going too fast and swerved off into the dark by the side of the road. The steering wheel collided with his chest and he was upside down and then on his side. The car creaked, and he felt the stabbing agony in his chest and up through his left arm. His head came to rest on the earth and his legs fell down. He heard a whooshing sound in his ears. The pain was so bad that he could almost see it, pulsing through the air, and he saw his family and Rebecca and then nothing.

Alexandra was there with his father. She was crying. Stefan wasn't angry. He bent over further, now coming into Christopher's view. Christopher could feel his left eye closed. He couldn't open it, and then the pain came, trickling up

his spine at first and then in great waves and he arched his back and saw the white sheet lift and fall with his chest. He tried to reach up with his right arm to where Alexandra was standing, but couldn't move it and felt his father take his other hand, felt the warmth of his fingers wrapped around his. There was a window behind where they were standing and white sunlight was streaming through. He wanted to tell someone to draw the curtains, that it was too bright but the words came out as a splutter that rocked his head back and forth. His father pursed his lips, shushing him, and put his hand on his forehead. Christopher tried to sit up but fell back. His vision cleared as the pain increased and he raised his fingers to feel his swollen eye.

"I'm sorry about the car, Father."

Stefan shook his head. "No, no, I don't care about that. Don't worry about that."

"I had to do it... I had to stop her." His vision dimmed once more and the light was magnified, blurring everything and everyone in the room. "It was her father, it was Monsieur Cassin, I had to..." And the darkness descended upon him again.

It was night when he woke up again and as he looked around the room, he saw his father and sister, both asleep in chairs on opposite sides of the room. His vision had cleared and the pain was more regular now, more of a surging current as opposed to the waves he had felt before. He watched them sleeping for a while until he closed his eyes again.

Alexandra was there, looking at him, as he woke up and he moved his eyes around the room, searching for his father. "Where is Father?" Christopher said. A smile spread across his sister's face as she touched her hand to his forehead.

"He had to leave, he'll be back soon. He was here with me all night. How are you feeling now?"

"I feel fine," he lied, looking down at his body as it lay motionless in the bed in front of him. His left arm and left leg were both in thick white casts and his head ached like nothing he'd ever felt.

"How did Father react to my borrowing the car?"

"Not well, as you can imagine, but he only mentioned it a couple of times.

We were just so worried. Why did you do it Christopher? We have that clothes that they found you in. They stink of whisky.”

“Who found me?” Christopher said, embarrassed in front of his sister.

“Mr. Baines, you almost ran over one of his cows.”

Christopher was about to tell Alexandra to express to Mr. Baines how sorry he was when Rebecca walked in. She was alone, holding a bunch of flowers. Alex smiled as she saw her and took the flowers. “I suppose I should leave you two to talk,” she said and left.

Rebecca tilted her head to one side. There were tears in her eyes as she sat down next to the bed. Christopher tried to sit up but couldn’t. He tried to read what she was going to say by the look on her face. It was impossible to tell whether she was upset at the letter or the accident or both. He waited for her to begin speaking.

“How are you feeling? I was so upset when I heard about what had happened.”

“I’m doing fine, just a little sore.”

“I got the letter that you wrote. My father gave it to me.” The evening sun was golden through the window and the room was full of ethereal light, each speck of dust now a precious ingot. She was more beautiful than he could have imagined possible.

Christopher tried to sit up again, but felt a sharp dart of pain up his side and he slid back down. “I didn’t mean what I wrote in the letter...I...” She took his hand where it lay on the bed.

“Stop, Christopher,” she whispered. “I know.” She was smiling now. “I know who you are.” She took his hand to her mouth, kissed it and held it to her cheek. “Oh Christopher, how could you imagine that I ever would believe that?” Christopher’s heart soared within his chest and all the pain was gone now. “How could I believe what my father said? You’ve always been the best thing in my life. I always knew that, I just forgot for a while. You were always in my heart, from the first moment we ever met. I have loved you all my life.” Her tears had gone. “I was out that night at Jonathan’s house telling him that the engagement had to end, that I didn’t love him and that I was going to be with you.” Rebecca

leaned up and kissed him. It hurt. Christopher didn't care. "It's always been you, Christopher. It always will be you."

Chapter 12

With nowhere else to go, or nowhere else she wanted to be, Rebecca moved into Christopher's apartment and was waiting for him when he'd recovered enough to join her there. The official story was that Christopher still lived with his father. He had his mail delivered there and was seen in the house enough to make it somewhat convincing. There was no way they could openly live together, unmarried, and although everyone knew, no one mentioned it, at least not to their faces. Living together was easy, at least for that first year. It seemed like the lives that they had always wanted were laid out in front of them and that the golden sunsets of those summer days would last for the rest of their lives. But the mood both on the island and beyond was beginning to change.

By the summer of 1939 there was fear everywhere and from that fear Christopher could feel the resentment building. This was his home too. This was his island as much as it was theirs. Christopher, along with everyone else, was becoming more obsessed with the politics of the country of his birth. There was no escaping it. Even Uli admitted that the country might be headed towards war after the rest of Czechoslovakia fell in March. It was difficult to empathize with his uncle's excitement at reclaiming Germany's place among the nations of the world and making up for the crimes perpetrated against her at the end of the Great War. Christopher could not be like him, could not share in the patriotic pride swelling in Germany at the rallies where Herr Hitler held the gigantic crowds in thrall and entranced them with his words. The Seelers were finding it harder to be German, to associate themselves with the book-burning hordes but they weren't from Jersey either, there was no mistaking that. Conversations about politics hushed when he approached as if his friends were unsure of his allegiances, even though they had known him all his life.

Uli knew what side he was on, even if Christopher didn't. Uli had rarely mentioned any measure of politics in his letters in the past but as the year had worn on, it was a subject that was becoming more and more difficult to avoid. Uli truly seemed to believe that Hitler didn't want war and that he and his Nazis would stop once Germany had retaken the lands stolen from her after the Great War. Uli mentioned these truths as he saw them in passing, preferring to

comment on the Christopher's life and to recount stories of the domestic bliss that he and Karolina had launched themselves into. But Stefan saw things differently, and was becoming visibly upset by the situation in Germany. Christopher could feel the disapproving glances and hear the insidious whispers in the darkness of the movie theatre as the encirclement and public humiliation of the western powers by the Nazis played on the screen in front of them in the newsreels.

Only Tom, his old friend who had moved out when Rebecca had moved into the apartment with him, would speak to him frankly, even joking about divided loyalties should he and Alexandra end up married. Tom looked at Christopher as he made the joke, as if trying to gauge his reaction to the issue of marriage. Christopher smiled back at him, putting his arm on his shoulder. No further words were exchanged on the topic. Two weeks later Tom proposed to Alexandra. They walked into the house on a Sunday evening in May with wonderful smiles on their faces to announce the news. Tom hugged Stefan, Christopher and Rebecca in turn. They sat down to have drinks together and laughed. It was perfect, perfect in every way.

War was declared on a Sunday, as Christopher sat in the pub with Rebecca, Alexandra and Tom, who were with them talking about their wedding the previous week. The inevitable question of when Christopher and Rebecca were to be married was broached just as the bar owner announced it and a hush came over the crowd for a few seconds. A few people cheered and shouted *God save the King* and *God save poor Poland*, but Christopher could only think of Uli in Berlin, and Karolina, pregnant with their first child. Tom tried to make a joke about divided loyalties, but Christopher barely heard him, and if Alexandra did, she didn't react. Rebecca slid her hand across his and assured them that this would all end soon, probably by Christmas. Christopher drank the rest of his beer and stared across at Rebecca. He looked around the pub. The other patrons, most of whom he knew, at least in passing, clinked their glasses together, toasting the King and wishing death to the Germans. There was loud cheering and then someone started singing *God Save the King*. Tom took Alexandra by the hand and stood up.

“Perhaps we should be leaving, Christopher,” Rebecca said.

Christopher looked at her and around the pub again. “No, I think I'll stay if that's all right.” Tom nodded and Christopher walked to the bar alone, to order a

beer. Christopher was standing beside Jacques La Marque and Sidney Morris, both men in their fifties, fishermen on the island. They greeted him with a nod as he sat down and stared forwards. They didn't look him in the eye, although he sat between them, and Sandrine pushed the beer towards him with a sympathetic smile. It was on the house, she said, and Christopher thanked her. In the background, the sounds of *God Save the King* swelled and filled the room until all were singing it except him. He raised the glass to his lips and let the beer run down his throat and then looked at the ground. The song ended and the conversation ignited all around him. Christopher thought of Uli in Berlin. Was he sitting there tight-lipped as he was, as the crowd rejoiced and sang the national anthem? Christopher doubted it somehow.

Jacques leaned forward, looking past Christopher to Sidney. Both men had served in the Great War, and now too old for this one, reflected upon the times and what would become of the island. It would be over quickly, Sidney said. Hitler would take Poland and then be done with it. Britain and France were too strong, and the Nazis would be beaten back. Sidney took a long pull on his cigarette, looking first at Jacques, then at Christopher before answering. He shook his head and laughed, saying that he admired Jacques's sense of optimism, and then sang along with the rest as they began to sing again. Christopher lit a cigarette, staying silent though he knew the words to the song. The words swirled around the room mixing with the smoke in the air. Christopher and Rebecca stayed there for another hour before he went home to tell his father that they were at war with the country of their birth.

The letter came six weeks later.

October 12nd 1939

Stefan, Christopher and Alexandra,

First of all congratulations to Alexandra on getting married! It seems like all the best people are getting married these days. What about you Christopher? Isn't it time that you gave up your freedom forever and subjugated yourself to a woman? No but seriously.... Alex and Tom, we were so sorry that we weren't

able to travel to Jersey for the wedding. It seems like these politicians seem to have other things on their minds than my travelling for your wedding. Thank you for the nice letter you sent me, Alexandra, and the photographs enclosed. It's amazing how your father could have produced a daughter quite so beautiful. Questions could be asked, but I don't suppose now is the time. I look forward to meeting Tom again as your husband as opposed to Christopher's friend, who used to scuttle around the house in those ill fitting shorts that left little to the imagination. At least we know that your children will have fine legs when they do come.

On the subject of children Karolina is doing very well, pregnancy seems to suit her. If it's a boy we are playing with idea of naming him Stefan, after Stefan Zweig of course, our favorite novelist. Karolina seems to want to come up with names for a girl, but really what's the point when I know I'm going to have a son? The question of what kind of a world my little son or daughter is to grow up in is an entirely different one however. And this brings me on to the serious part of this letter. With all that's going on in the world at the moment one has to decide what is worth fighting for, what is worth sacrificing for. I have been considering joining the army for some time now, just as you did, Stefan when last our country called, back in 1914. I was too young then, but now I feel it's my turn. Once Germany has reclaimed the lands stolen from her after the last war the German people will once more be safe from the threats of Bolshevism and be able to take her place among the great nations of the world. The fact that conscription has been introduced for all able-bodied men up to the age of 41 reinforced my decision. There is no escape from this. I am joining the Wehrmacht, and by the time you receive this letter the process will be under way.

Try not to worry. I am sure this war will be over soon enough and we will all be together again, in a better world for our children to grow up in.

Uli

Christopher looked at his father after reading it, as if somehow he might have the answer to all this. But there was none. Alexandra began to cry. Stefan looked stunned, absolutely helpless, and he waivered slightly as he stood up. He moved the letter from one hand to the other until Alexandra asked him for it. Christopher moved towards him, put his arm around his shoulder and his father looked at him and then down at the ground.

“What do we do now, Father?” Alexandra sobbed.

“We do nothing, we stay here. We’ve nowhere to go, no place to be but here.” He placed his hand on her head. “We haven’t changed, Uli hasn’t changed either.” He looked across at his son. “Christopher, you have Rebecca to think of now. The risk of the Nazis arriving here is too great. You need to leave.” Christopher didn’t reply, just stared down at his fingers and listened to the sound as he tapped them on the wooden table.

The line at the ticket booth for the ferry was out the door as Christopher arrived with Rebecca. Christopher couldn’t stand the thought of leaving this place, this in between place that was so perfect for him and his family, who were neither German nor English, neither one side nor the other in this new war. But Rebecca’s touch as she held his hand reassured him that this was the right thing to do. Staying here would be too dangerous. It was okay if it was for her. She herself didn’t want to leave either but said she would do whatever it took to be with him and that had been the right answer in his mind. They had been standing in line for about ten minutes, deflecting questions from Mrs. Mesrine about their living arrangements when Arthur Cooper, the ticket seller got out of his booth. He walked down the line to them and motioned Christopher to come to him. Christopher knew him from the pub, but Arthur was a bad drinker, and Christopher had learned to avoid him. Christopher felt the shock of nerves inside him as Arthur took him aside, away from anywhere their conversation might have been heard. Arthur grimaced as he began to speak and then stopped to rub his hand through thinning hair.

“I presume you’re here to get off the island, to England?”

“Yes, of course,” Christopher replied, trying to figure out what he was about to say from the pained look in his eyes. “Is there something the matter?” Christopher asked as Arthur hesitated.

“Well, yes, there is. I’m sorry to tell you that since the war was declared, His Majesty’s government has barred all German citizens from either entering or leaving the country or its protectorates.” His moustache twitched above his mouth and Christopher felt his heart drop, though he didn’t show it. “So I’m afraid I can’t let you leave. Even if I did, they’d never let you into the country.”

Christopher looked at him for a few seconds, running through what he could say or do, but there was nothing. “You’re sure about this?”

“I’ve been dreading the day you or your family came in here. There’s no one else this applies to on the whole island.” He looked genuinely sorry and Christopher reached to shake his hand. “I’m sorry.” Arthur said.

“It’s not your fault, there’s really nothing to be done.” Christopher looked at him, and then his eyes slid away, back towards Rebecca, still waiting in line. She smiled at him. “We’d best be going then. Thanks for taking me aside like this.” They left. They were trapped. There was nowhere for them to go, nowhere for Christopher and his family to be except this in between place. The war had seen to that, and, for the first time since he and Rebecca had come together, Christopher felt as though he was losing control.

There was talk of war everywhere, and all over the island young men upped and left for the mainland to join up for their chance to have at the Hun. Tommy Smith went, and Patrick St John, Michael and George Shockley. The newspapers spoke of the *phony war* as if eager to pit each nation against one another like children in the schoolyard. The war seemed far away, like a storm out at sea that the fishermen would talk about while the sun still shone down on land.

Peter Cassin’s ship was sunk off the Norwegian coast in April 1940 and the war was real. The knock came at six o’clock on a Monday. Christopher answered the door to Rebecca’s mother.

“Hello, Mrs Cassin.”

“Hello Christopher, how are you?” Her smile was watery, fake. She was wearing a black suit, perfectly pressed and seemed sober.

“I expect you want to see Rebecca?”

“Is she here?” As Rebecca appeared around the door, a burst of joy seemed to come across Mrs. Cassin, and then she began to cry. She threw her arms around Rebecca, who hugged her but still cast a suspicious eye towards Christopher over her mother’s shoulder. “Oh, my darling, you look so beautiful.”

“Thank you Mother, how are you? Is Father treating you well?”

“It’s Peter, oh my son! My son!” She was wailing now and raised a handkerchief to her eyes. Christopher moved to ask her in, but Rebecca jumped in.

“What is it, Mother? Is Peter all right? Has something happened?”

“The boat was sunk, Peter drowned. It was sunk, torpedoed by the Germans. He’s gone.” The tears were drenching her cheeks now and Rebecca broke down immediately. “Oh my darling you’re all I have left.” Rebecca stood still, hugging her mother, convulsions of grief jerking her body every few seconds, before she finally drew away.

Christopher stood breathless, waiting to hear what Rebecca would say to the woman who had enabled her own son to be driven away and now professed to be heartbroken over his death. Christopher had his arms around Rebecca as she spoke. “Oh, Mother, I know you loved him too. I know you did.” Her tears still flowed and distorted her voice, but the power behind it was not diminished. “I need you to leave now, however. I would like to be alone with Christopher.”

As he held Rebecca in his arms Christopher thought of Peter, how he had never found any real happiness. He was dead and his funeral was to be three days after, an empty box to be buried as his body was lost in the depths of the cold Norwegian Sea.

The funeral was on a sunny Tuesday morning at the end of April 1940. The Cassins were there, suitably dressed in black to mourn the death of a son who hated them. Christopher stood with Rebecca beside him, Stefan, Tom and Alexandra just behind. They ignored the glares from the other side. Christopher listened to the ceremony and thought of Uli, who was now a Captain in the 3rd Panzer Division, and wondered if his funeral would be next. Rebecca cried for the entire funeral, the only person who cried at all.

Christopher brushed past Pierre Cassin after the burial, not returning his looks. Christopher’s father wanted to leave. So they trudged back to the car along the rough rubble path of the graveyard, only stopping to look at Christopher and Alexandra’s mother’s grave quickly before they left. Christopher noticed the fresh flowers, perhaps two or three days old.

Two weeks later the German forces began their advance into Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, which soon all capitulated, and the British Army was pushed back towards Dunkirk. The atmosphere on the island changed as rumor began to spread that the British forces stationed on Jersey were to be withdrawn. Christopher’s father, who had been hoarding canned

foods for several months, began to buy as much petrol as he could carry but most people on the island had the same idea and it became harder to come by as the days went on. The local fishermen helped out with the massive evacuation of British troops to England from the beaches at Dunkirk. Tom began to talk about joining the army himself. His twin brother Percy had left several weeks before, along with Harry Locke, to enlist with thousands of others. The only thing that held him back was his wife and the thought of her not being able to flee to England like so many were now planning to do. Christopher waited, read and re-read the last letter from Uli, looked at the picture of his newborn son, Stefan. Uli was in the advance, which seemed just days away from defeating France and perhaps pushing onwards towards the Channel Islands and England itself. There was fear everywhere. Everyone was scared, some hid it, but there was no getting past it.

Christopher worried about Rebecca more than himself. He knew that the Germans wouldn't be too harsh on him, but the reports filtering across from Europe about the Nazi's treatment of the Jews were too frightening even to imagine. There was talk of Jews being uprooted from their homes and being stripped of all their possessions, and even of their citizenship. He remembered the headlines in the newspapers he had seen in Berlin in 1938. They were coming.

June came and Paris fell. Two weeks later, Winston Churchill, the new Prime Minister, announced that the Channel Islands were of no strategic importance and that the garrison stationed there was to be withdrawn to the mainland. The Channel Islands were to be declared an open town, and to be left for the Germans. But on the newsreel that night there were no reports of such an occurrence. Christopher was driving home when he saw the green uniforms of the troops. They were being loaded into trucks. Christopher asked the policeman directing traffic and was told that they were pulling out. There was no official announcement. The news was out. The roads were packed and it took him more than an hour to make the ten minute drive. There was panic everywhere. People were scuttling around like ants, carrying their possessions to God knows where. The stores were full of people and soon the shelves were empty. Christopher went to Rebecca. Since the time they had tried to leave they had skirted around the conversation of what would happen if the Nazi's were to invade Jersey, but she in particular had become very good at avoiding the topic. Besides, they had never truly believed that it could happen, not until now.

“The troops are leaving.”

“I heard,” she replied. “We’ve been left to rot, to fend for ourselves.”

“You’ve got to leave. You can’t let the Nazis get you. I’ve heard of what they’re doing to Jews. I can’t let that happen to you.”

“I know,” she said, and in the dim light it was hard to tell but her eyes seemed to glaze over. “Mr. Gold, who owns the photo shop in town, called over earlier to tell me the news. He is leaving. All of the Jews are. My mother is leaving, although my father is being stubborn about it as always.”

Christopher couldn’t possibly have cared less about Rebecca’s father, but he didn’t show it, and he showed the same concern for him to Rebecca.

“What about you?” Rebecca said. “I can’t leave you.”

“What do you mean? I’ll be fine. I’m sure the fact that we’re German will mean we’re treated better. Don’t worry about us.”

“No. I won’t leave you. What have I got to go to in England?” The look on her face was almost angry at his suggestion that she should leave him. Christopher felt a jab of anger through him as she spoke.

“No, it’s too dangerous. You can’t do that. I won’t let you stay.”

“You can’t tell me what to do. I’m not going anywhere without you.” Her voice was strong, unwavering.

“You know I can’t leave.”

“Of course I do. Anyway, what makes England so safe? Who’s to say that Germany won’t be invading England next month or next week? Where do I flee to then? “This is my home. Why should I leave?”

“You left before.” Christopher waved his hands in the air as he spoke. Was he shouting now? It was hard to tell. He walked to the window in their apartment. There were people rushing back and forth on the streets below. There had never been anything like this before.

“I was a child then. I’m telling you, Christopher, I’m not leaving. We’re going to be together, nothing can change that.” Christopher stopped, and drank in the words. He felt his lip quiver and the urge to lunge forward and scoop her

into his arms was strong. He looked around and into her eyes, which were pleading for him to agree.

“No, no way. I want to be with you but not at that price, not at the price of your safety, your life.” He took his arms away from her hips. “You’re going to England and that’s it. You’re leaving before they arrive.”

He slammed the door behind him and heard her words as she shouted after him. “You can’t tell me what to do!”

Chapter 13

There were rumors everywhere, that the British forces were coming back, that the Germans were to bypass Jersey, or that they were to invade and deport all the inhabitants to camps on the mainland and use the islands as a springboard to invade the south coast of England. People spoke of leaving but few actually did. It was June 27th and Rebecca was still refusing to discuss the possibility of her leaving. Christopher had been sleeping on the couch and then had moved back to his father's house, and he was there, with his father, listening to the radio, when Rebecca came in. Christopher cursed under his breath as he saw her, but she put her arms out, telling them both to sit back down.

"Rebecca, what are you doing here?" Christopher stood up, despite her protestations.

"Oh, so you're talking to me now?" Rebecca countered. She half smiled but she realized the anger any flippancy on her part would bring out in him and the smile quickly died. "Christopher, you know I don't take orders from you or anyone else." Christopher looked over at his father, wary of the argument that was seemingly about to occur. "I know you want the best for me, but who's to know what will happen? At least if I stay here I'll be with you." Stefan got up to leave. "Please, Mr. Seeler, I'd really rather you stayed for this." Stefan looked across at his son, his lips tight. He pressed his tongue against his upper lip and then sat back in the chair.

"Rebecca, you're so pigheaded. You've got to realize the danger staying here puts you in." Christopher looked across at his father.

"I have to agree, Rebecca. Staying here is insane. I know you want to be with Christopher, but there will be a time for that, after the war is over."

"When the British win?" Rebecca looked exasperated. "How are they going to do that? They were routed at Dunkirk. The French were beaten in weeks." She sat down beside them at the kitchen table. "They will probably be in England in a month. If Christopher could come with me I would go, of course I would try, but without him what's the point of a few more weeks of freedom?"

Christopher put his head in his hands. “Don’t you see you have to try?” he said, his words muffled by his palms, but the others understood him and he brought his head up again. “Who knows what they’ll do if you stay here? We’ve been through this before!” Christopher shouted the last few words and they seemed to resonate through the room, bouncing around even after the sound had faded.

Stefan looked at his son, and then at Rebecca. “Rebecca, we can’t force you to do anything.” His voice was level and sober. “But if you do stay, you will be putting yourself in an unreasonable amount of danger. We will do our best to protect you, but the Nazis hatred of the Jews is like nothing I’ve ever known. They blame the Jews for everything. We may not be able to protect you from them.”

“Rebecca, you get on that boat, and you leave this island. I told you what those newspapers I saw in Germany said.” Christopher raised his hands to his head again and puffed out a deep breath. He kept his eyes closed as he continued. “Rebecca, if you stay here, you’re on your own. Don’t come to me. I won’t be here for you.”

“I don’t believe you,” she said and left.

The German bombers came on Friday afternoon, the 28th of June 1940. They came to St Helier and also to St Peter Port in Guernsey and dozens of people, mainly waiting on the harbor to be evacuated to the relative safety of England, were killed. Christopher knew some of them, Mrs. Shearer and her son Norman, just 15 years old, John Barrow, who had served in the Great War, and old Tom Frost, from St Savior. The next day, the main British fleet arrived to take away the remaining evacuees.

Christopher had barely seen Rebecca since they’d fought in his father’s house. The morning of the evacuation he had been to the apartment, anticipating another fight but had not found her, just seen the two suitcases packed with her clothes. The feeling of hollow satisfaction he felt at seeing those suitcases was unlike anything he’d felt before and the bitter relief that swept through him as he left almost choked him. Christopher went down to the harbor to see Rebecca off, to make sure she left, to say goodbye. The ships were waiting in and outside the harbor, strewn across the water like leaves on a pond, waiting for the swelling crowds on shore. There were thousands of people, whole families lined up along

the stone jetties, waiting for their turn to squeeze onto the tiny row boats that would take them out to the larger ships moored further out. But some people weren't leaving. The atmosphere of defiance spread through the crowd, and children who were forcibly pushed onto the boats were jumping back into the water, swimming back to their parents, who chided them with smiling faces, holding them tightly, wrapped in towels in the summer sun.

But the Jews were leaving. Christopher's father embraced his friend, Albert Gold, as he left with his family. They all left, the Fogels, the Levis, the Kleins and then Christopher saw Mrs. Cassin, alone and struggling with her suitcase as she made her way to join the line of people waiting for the boats. A young man in front of her immediately went to her and helped her along and Christopher watched her as she got into the boat and sat down without saying a word to anyone around her.

Christopher waited there for several hours. Thousands had left the island, but many thousands more had decided to stay. Still there was no sign of Rebecca. There were a few others there like him and his father, just there to say goodbye. Most were too wary of the German bombers coming back to risk seeing their neighbors evacuated to the mainland. Tom's family arrived, his parents and little sisters. Christopher and his father said their goodbyes, not lingering too long as Alexandra and Tom were there. Tom stood stoically by holding his mother's hand as she cried. He took her in his arms and then each of his sisters. Tom's father shook his hand and they left. Tom was alone, his entire family gone. Alexandra was all he had left.

Rebecca never came. She was there at the apartment after the final ships had left. He pushed open the door and she was sitting on the couch, pretending to read. Her suitcases were still on the rug in front of her, untouched from when Christopher had seen them that morning. Christopher didn't speak, just shut the door behind him. The couch creaked as he sat down next to her and he put his arms around her, bringing her head close into his chest. "You really are quite mad," he whispered.

"I love you," she replied in a whisper, and they sat there for several minutes not talking.

The next day, the Germans came, with two divisions of men, and the five-year occupation of Jersey began.

Chapter 14

Rebecca clutched Christopher's hand as they stood watching the columns of troops march past. There was no sound from the crowds on either side of the street. The swell of people, three deep on both sides, were in shock. The only noise was that of the marching songs. Rebecca turned to Christopher to ask what the words were.

"They're singing, '*On, On to Battle*,'" he answered. People in the crowd stared at them, but Rebecca just clenched ever tighter onto Christopher's hand, and, though she pretended to ignore them, Christopher saw her jaw tightening and felt her nails digging into his flesh. Christopher extracted his hand from her grip and suggested they leave, but she refused.

"Surely these people have more to worry about than the fact that you happen to be German," she said, so they stayed another five minutes until, their curiosity quenched, they left. They had seen their conquerors first hand.

Two weeks later a car pulled up outside the house in St Martin. Christopher and Rebecca were there, visiting his father. Stefan turned to Rebecca, sitting a few feet away and told her to go upstairs and to close the bedroom door behind her. Christopher watched through the windows by the front door as the German soldier held the door of the car for the officer, who looked up and down the road before making his way towards the house. He knocked on the door and stood back. Christopher stood up, but Stefan put his hand on his shoulder and walked towards the front door. Christopher could hear the conversation-in German. The officer asked if he could come in and Stefan agreed. Stefan led the officer into the kitchen and asked him to sit down at the table. When Christopher came, in the officer was sitting upright in the chair, hat on the table in front of him.

"Christopher, this is Captain Voss, he asked to see both of us," Stefan said with no emotion.

Captain Voss stood up and smiled. "So good to meet you," Voss said, proffering his hand. Christopher shook it, his eyes drawn to the iron cross on the grey uniform.

“So, Captain Voss, to what do we owe this pleasure?” Stefan said, crossing his arms and leaning back against the kitchen cabinet.

“Straight to the point, eh?” Voss laughed. “Well, as you know, we intend the occupation of Jersey to be an example for all the rest of the countries now under the control of the Reich.” Voss looked at both men, but neither reacted and he looked slightly disappointed as he continued. “We wish to have a good working relationship with the people of Jersey, and hence have left your local government, or the States, as you call them, in place. My Commandant, Dr. Von Stein, has asked for the co-operation of the people of Jersey and we expect this co-operation to be forthcoming. We know that life will be different under the guardianship of the Führer, and that war always brings hard times.”

“That’s all very well, Captain Voss, but what does this have to do with us?” Stefan shrugged.

Christopher was thinking about Uli, how he had sat in that same seat so many times and how now he was wearing that same uniform. Two weeks ago the Seelers were the only Germans on the island but now there were thousands, almost one for every three islanders. This was the first time Christopher had spoken to one of them.

“We were looking through records of the people on the island and were very pleased to see that there was at least one German family living here.” He grinned once more. Stefan looked at him and then out window. Voss continued, “Dr. Von Stein sees this as way of introducing ourselves to the local people.”

“What would we be required to do?” Stefan said after pushing out a deep breath.

“Nothing more than to act as a go-between and to facilitate the smooth running of everyone’s affairs on the island.” Voss said.

“Captain Voss, I’m sure that you’ll understand that we’ve been living here for many years now. We’ve integrated with our neighbors and made many friends,” Stefan answered.

“What are you getting at here?” Voss asked.

“We may need to refuse this duty.”

“Why on earth would you refuse such a duty?” Voss looked genuinely hurt at the thought. His eyes widened in amazement. “This is an opportunity to help out your neighbors as well as the Fatherland. This is a unique chance. And, of course, helping Dr. Von Stein in his duties will bring certain rewards.”

“Do we have a choice?” Christopher asked. Both men whirled around to him, his father shaking his head.

Voss coughed and pressed his hands together. “I understand you’ve been here most of your life and this must make this even harder for you. I also understand your uncle, Uli Seeler, is serving with the 3rd Panzer Division in France.” He stopped to look up at Stefan, and then back at Christopher. “Your uncle certainly has no doubts where his loyalties lie. You yourself would make a fine addition to the Wehrmacht. Perhaps you might like to speak to someone about serving your country as your uncle does.”

“Where do we go from here?” Stefan asked, ignoring the last statement. He was looking around the room, seemingly unable to look at Voss anymore.

Voss’s face changed. “Report to this address,” he said, drawing a small piece of paper from his pocket. “You will be expected to be there at 8 am tomorrow morning. You may ask for me.” He stood up and put his hat back on. “I expect you will be more accommodating as time progresses and I’m sure you’ll see that we mean the best for the population of the island. Oh, and you may drive down tomorrow morning.” He strode out of the kitchen and towards the door, where Stefan let him out. Christopher came to the door as Rebecca came down the stairs, staying out of sight. Christopher had the piece of paper in his hand and waited until the car had left before reading it. The address was the Durrell’s mansion in St Brelade.

The next morning, Christopher and his father arrived at the gates of the mansion at about ten minutes to eight. The sentries at the door shouldered their rifles and approached the car window. Christopher’s father announced that they had arrived and the guard waved for the gates to be opened and they drove through. It was the first time they had been in the car for almost two weeks. A few days after they had arrived, the Germans had barred all civilian use of cars and tractors and suddenly bikes were very valuable items. Christopher’s heart filled with dread as he looked around at the grounds of the Durrell’s former mansion and saw where Rebecca had lived with Jonathan. It was a sizeable

house, but was dwarfed by the mansion itself, now the official residence of Dr. Gottfried Von Stein, the Commandant of the German occupying forces on Jersey.

Stefan pulled the car to halt and turned to his son. “Remember Christopher, this is not the place for rebellious words, keep them in your heart.” Christopher nodded and held his breath, for his hands were shaking. The sentry led them inside. There was no sign of Lord or Lady Durrell, just German soldiers strolling around the beautiful gardens. The sentry led them inside the foyer and told them to wait. They stood on the polished marble floor, looking at the paintings of Lord Durrell’s ancestors and the portrait of Hitler, newly installed beside them. Captain Voss came down the stairs to greet them, once more wearing a smile which went unreturned. He led them into a small office upstairs and sat them down. He regretted that Dr. Von Stein had not the time to see them and that he would keep it short. Their job would be to translate the ordinances passed down from the German occupiers to the States, the ruling political council on the island. They would be required to translate these ordinances, but not to explain them. For their work, they would be well paid and would receive the privilege of the use of one car for their family. Neither Christopher nor his father spoke during the meeting, instead merely nodding as they were informed of their new duties. The whole meeting took less than five minutes. Captain Voss told them that they would start work the next day in an office building in town.

So Christopher and his father began their new enforced role. There were no other fluent German speakers on the island, with the exception of Alexandra, and both were happy to keep her as far away from the Germans as possible. It wasn’t long before the news of what Christopher and his father were doing got out. They were in the pub one evening after work when Dewey Leonard, a local fisherman, now unemployed like hundreds of others due to the German ban on all fishing boats leaving harbor, approached them at the bar. He was drunk, blind drunk. “Traitors,” he hissed, “profiting from the invasion of the island. You’ve been waiting for them to come for a long time now, haven’t you?”

Christopher went to step forward, but his father put an arm across him and looked at his son. Christopher stepped back. “I can assure you we’re not happy that the Germans have occupied the island. The sooner they leave and we can return life to normal the better,” Stefan said. The other people in the pub stayed

silent. Christopher and his father soon left. Two days later they found the tires on their car slashed outside the office. Christopher confronted Dewey, sober this time, on the street a few days later, but he swore he was on the other side of the island visiting his mother that day, so Christopher let him go. They never reported the incident.

In early September Christopher found out that the Durrells were still living in their house, but were now sharing it with the Commandant and his staff. Rebecca wanted to visit them or even to send a letter offering her condolences, but Christopher asked her to leave them alone and she eventually agreed. Those were the beginnings of the worst times most of the islanders had ever known. But even with all that was going on around them, Christopher had Rebecca and she had him, and that was enough.

Chapter 15

It was towards the end of October that Christopher saw the ordinance about the Jews cross his desk. All Jews on the island were to register at the Chief Aliens office in St Helier. Christopher read down through the document, his pulse quickening with every line he read. Jews were defined as any person that belonged at any time to the Jewish religion, or who had more than two Jewish grandparents. People on the island who had never considered themselves Jews would be included. Christopher felt his hands turn to blocks of ice holding the paper in front of him, and he struggled even to gesture towards his father. There were no German soldiers in the room with them. They were left to do their work alone. They did it well, taking stock of every chicken, cow, hen and pig on the island and what each farmer was growing, translating letters to and from the people for the Commandant and, of course, translating whatever decree Von Stein happened to want to pass down that day. There had never been anything about the Jews until then. Somehow Christopher had convinced himself, and Rebecca too, that the Nazis would treat the Jews on Jersey differently. Christopher's father walked over to him, and picked up the sheet of paper, written in German and signed by Von Stein at the bottom. His face seemed to whiten, but then regain its color quickly. He handed the sheet back to Christopher.

"One thing's for sure," Stefan said. "Rebecca is not registering." Christopher nodded. Stefan heard the door opening behind him and saw Lance Corporal Steiner come in. Steiner was from Frankfurt, a young, handsome man, only a little older than Christopher. He was perpetually cheerful and that day was no different.

"How are we this morning, gentleman?" he said.

"Do you know anything about the order for the Jews to be registered?" Christopher asked, ignoring his question.

Steiner looked at them both, staring at him. "What need have you to worry about that?" he smiled. "It's just a part of the process of cleansing the population."

“What do you suppose will happen to the Jews on the island?” Christopher asked.

“Who knows? But for the time being it’s important that we know who they are, so that we can watch them.” His smile had barely faded since walking through the door. “It’s so good to have some fellow Germans here; it makes our job so much easier.” Neither man reacted. “The British are a most civilized nation of people, not like the Slavs. I was in Poland, you know, when the invasion took place. Those people,” his face changed as if he had smelt something foul. “Those people are very different. They barely have running water. And the Jews there, they’re as close to beasts as I’ve ever seen, more like vermin.” Stefan and Christopher both looked on in silence as he spoke. “The British are very different however. It seems a shame we have to fight them. I’m sure one day we’ll all be on the same side.”

Christopher looked down towards the pile of documents in front of him, his entire body tensing.

“Don’t worry about the Jews, Christopher. They certainly don’t worry for you. They’re the cause of all this war anyway.” Steiner put his hand on Christopher’s shoulder and Christopher looked up at him. He tried to smile at him but couldn’t. “Are you feeling all right, Christopher?” Steiner said.

“He’s not been well all day,” Stefan said. “Is it all right if he goes home? He only lives a few streets away.”

“Of course, it seems like you’re almost finished for the day anyway.”

Christopher didn’t wait for any further permission and nodded his head as he picked up his belongings. He waited until he was out of sight of the office building and ran around the corner, knocking into John Baines, a once wealthy farmer, as he rode around the corner on his bike. Christopher fell back against the curb, jutting out his arms to break his fall. John reached down to help Christopher back to his feet. Several German soldiers who had seen the collision were looking at him. They all knew who Christopher was and took steps towards them, casting harsh glares at John. Christopher did his best not to scowl back at them. He reached across to John and shook his hand. He waved back to the soldiers who returned to their conversation. John looked at him and left without a goodbye.

Rebecca was in the kitchen, reading her books, those poetry books she read and re-read, when Christopher burst in. The radio was off. It was rarely on in those days: the proscribed radio stations spewing Nazi propaganda were of little interest to either of them. Some people on the island dared to listen to the BBC still, although on pain of incarceration, or the threat of worse.

“You’re home early,” she stood up, smiling. “Did the Nazis let you out early? What is it? Attila the Hun’s birthday?”

Christopher did not respond to the joke. “The Jews on the island have been ordered to register. There was an ordinance passed down today. I translated it myself.”

Rebecca’s entire face seemed to melt. Her shoulder slumped down and she put her hand to her face, letting it slide down across her mouth. She balled her fingers into a fist and turned towards the window. “Where do I have to go? When?”

“By the 24th. Next Thursday. They set up some office downtown but don’t worry. You’re not registering. That’s not going to happen.”

“I’m not ashamed of who I am.”

“I know, Rebecca.” Christopher took her face in his two hands. “They have this....” Christopher looked away and around the room, searching for the words, “.... idea, this perverted notion that Jews are vermin, rats or the like.”

“What about my father? He’s registered as a Jew, he’s on the voting lists. He’ll have to register for sure.”

“I don’t know about your father. I can’t do anything for him.”

“Oh, no.” She began to cry. He took her in his arms and she buried her head in his shoulder. She drew her head up to speak again. “I have to see him. I have to tell him.”

Christopher felt the anger inside him rise as he remembered Cassin, holding the shotgun, forcing him to write the letter. He and Rebecca had discussed that night many times and, although Rebecca fully believed him, she couldn’t hate her father for it. It was as if hatred was beyond her, an emotion she wasn’t capable of feeling. She hadn’t been to see him in the few months since

the Nazis had arrived, but she thought of him often, alone in that house in St. Martin, surrounded by the short-lived gains of her courtship with Jonathan-his retirement plan now gone awry.

“Okay. Let’s go and see your father, together, today.”

They set off on their bikes, out towards St Martin. The roads were full of German soldiers. They were everywhere, hundreds of them, scuttling around on motorbikes and trucks. Christopher stared at their weapons, casually slung over their shoulders. There would be no chance of saving Rebecca if they identified her as a Jew, there could be no resisting them. But how would the Nazis know? There were no synagogues on the island. Rebecca could pretend to be someone else, could take someone else’s identity, maybe even Sandrine Mallard, gone to England with her family. Well, maybe not Sandrine, but there were many others. *There were ways around this, no need to panic*, he told himself as they rode past another truck of German soldiers. There were cows on the road ahead and the soldiers had jumped out. Christopher stepped off the bike and walked ahead of Rebecca, weaving through the soldiers littering the road. Rebecca walked through the soldiers with her head high.

It was five o’clock when they arrived at the house. A grey curtain of clouds was drawing in over the coast from the sea. They dropped the bikes in the driveway beside the brand new car that never left the driveway, a gift from Jonathan Durrell to his mother in law to be that never was. Rebecca knocked on the door. They were both able to hear the gentle music wafting through from inside. Rebecca knocked on the door again. They waited for another thirty seconds, neither of them speaking, until the door finally opened. He looked at her and then at Christopher.

“Hello,” Rebecca said. “Can we come in?”

He smirked at her. “So, it’s true then. You stayed, with him? There are twenty thousand Germans on the island now. You have plenty to choose from.”

“Can we come in, father?”

He waived slightly at the door and it shuddered from side to side under his weight. “If you must,” he shrugged, holding the door open to the wall.

Christopher smelt the whisky as he passed, but could not bring himself to look at him. The hallway was clean, and the mirror above the side table was

brand new, the remnants of the price tag still clinging to the corner of the frame. Rebecca led them into the living room. Christopher felt like he was returning to the scene of a crime. There were a couple of whisky glasses strewn around the tables and the ashes from last night's fire were still in the fireplace, but, apart from that the room, was well kept and clean. Rebecca took a seat, the armchair beside the fire where Cassin had made Christopher sit. Her father was in the armchair opposite and Christopher sat on the couch facing the fireplace itself.

"I'm glad to see that you're keeping the place in good order," Rebecca began.

"It's been easier since your mother left," he said, without betraying any regret in his voice.

Rebecca swallowed hard and looked at Christopher. "We're not here for a social call."

"Oh no?" Cassin said, feigning surprise as his face hardened. "Say what you have to say and leave me alone. I've no wish to see you again, not after the way you betrayed your own family. The sight of you disgusts me." His face contorted as he spat out the words.

Rebecca's face reddened and she began to cry. Christopher went to her but Rebecca waved him away. "I really don't care what you think of me, because I know you've never cared for anyone your whole life, not me, not Peter, not mother, not even yourself. I'm just here today to tell you that the Germans are going to order that all Jews on the island are to register."

Cassin's lip curled up and he looked away. He took a deep breath and let it out and then he looked at the empty glass beside him. "Is that it?"

"Come on, Rebecca, let's go." Christopher stood up, but Rebecca ignored him.

"What do you mean 'is that it'?" Rebecca leant forward in her chair. "The Germans want all the Jews on the island to register. Don't you care?"

Cassin's eyes slithered down to the floor. He didn't speak. Rebecca still stared at him, as if imploring him to say something, to do something, but he didn't. He just reached into the cabinet beside him and took out a crystal decanter. He took off the top and poured himself a drink.

“I really think it’s time we left,” Christopher repeated.

Rebecca got up, as if in slow motion. Her eyes never left her father, yet his only glanced towards her. Christopher took her by the hand. Just as they were walking out, they heard his voice.

“Rebecca...” he said, and she looked back at him, waiting for words that never came. Cassin just stared at his daughter and she at him before Christopher took her hand to leave.

A few weeks later, Christopher read through the names of the people registered as Jews on the island of Jersey. There were several he had never known as Jews and who had been known to regularly attend the local Anglican church. At the top of the list, he saw the name of Pierre Cassin and the note below that his family had been thought to have been evacuated to England before the invasion.

Chapter 16

Rebecca rarely left the apartment. She and Christopher managed to fool themselves into believing that she could go on doing that forever, or at least until the British forces retook Jersey. But as time went on the ordinances coming down from Dr. Von Stein became more and more draconian. Curfews came earlier and more freedoms were curtailed. Hitler had seemingly become obsessed with the defense of the Channel Islands and, in 1941, massive building works began to be built with slave labor brought in from the continent. The workers built gun emplacements and anti-tank walls on the beaches, and hundreds of bunkers and batteries that jutted grey out of the green hills overlooking the coast all around the island. The conditions the slave workers lived under belied the apparent good intentions of the countless Nazi officers who Christopher and Stefan saw in their office.

Christopher first saw the Todt workers, named after the founder of the forced labor organization, Fritz Todt, in February of 1941. They arrived only as a few dozen, but, by the year after, their numbers would swell to hundreds. Christopher stood on the street watching them file past. There were probably forty of them, and they walked as the closest thing he had ever seen to the horrors of hell in front of his eyes. The workers had no proper shoes and their ragged clothes betrayed their bony, starving bodies, swelling joints and gaunt white skin. They coughed and wheezed as if trying to clutch onto the very air around them. Christopher tried to catch eyes with them, to show that not all the world despised them, but it was almost impossible. Their eyes were uniformly fixed on the ground in front of them. Rebecca, who was a few feet from Christopher, reached into her pocket for a piece of bread and held it out to a worker shuffling past, a young man, probably no more than 18 years old. She had just managed to slip the tiny morsel into his hand when the guards saw them. The nearest German soldier ran towards them and struck the young worker in the head with the butt of his rifle just as he stuffed the bread into his mouth. His body crumpled to the ground like an empty sack, flopping onto the pavement. Rebecca screamed and the guard forced her back with the flat side of his rifle. Christopher tried to grab at it but felt himself held back by another soldier behind him. Rebecca and Christopher both found themselves forced backwards,

away from the road. The other workers picked up the young boy and carried him somehow, as they hardly looked as if they could carry themselves. The workers shuffled on and all that remained was a pool of blood on the pavement, which moments later washed away with the coming of the rain.

Many times after that, Christopher and Rebecca stood outside their apartment, watching for the guards to look away to give the Todt workers whatever food they could spare. Sometimes they were able to and they watched the worker devour the pieces of bread or whatever they happened to give them. But all too often the guards forced them back and the workers would just stare down at the ground in front of them with defeated grey eyes.

It was a hot rainy night in July when Christopher arrived home with the letter his father had given him. Christopher felt his tattered dirty clothes sticking to the sweat on his skin as he walked in. Soap was rare, and new clothes were a memory by that time. Rebecca was sitting by the window staring out into the rain. Christopher greeted her, but if Rebecca answered him he didn't hear. She didn't turn to face him, just stared out the window at the street below. He went to her, putting his hand through her hair and onto her neck. She looked up at him and forced a smile. "I can't take this anymore," she said

"You can't take what?" he said, even though Christopher knew what she was going to say. She hardly had to speak. Her eyes told him.

"This isolation, this stunted life." She stood up and put her arms around him, letting her head drop into his chest and then looked back up at him. "I have ambitions. I want to get married, to you." She smiled.

"This isn't the time for wedding talk. What would we make the cake out of, sand?"

"I know. I know that can't happen until the Nazis leave. I just never thought they'd be here even this long."

"Rebecca, you need to be patient. Once the war ends..."

"I'll be able to leave the house again? I'm going insane in here."

"You know we have to be careful. If the Nazis catch you with no ID papers... we've been through this a million times."

“I know, I’ll have to register as a Jew, but what are they going to do to me then?”

“You really want to take that chance? You’ve seen the way the Nazis treat the Todt workers. Do you want to end up like one of them, a walking skeleton, a slave?” Christopher felt the hairs on his arms stand on end as the image of Rebecca as one of the Todt workers flashed through his mind.

Rebecca held his gaze for a few seconds before she spoke again. “My life seems to have stopped since the Nazis arrived.” Christopher felt his heart contract like a balled fist in his chest as she spoke and she saw it. “No, I didn’t mean that. I’m happier now with you than I’ve ever been. It’s just that you’re the only good thing in my life. I want to go to University; I want to have a job and a life and children. I want to have children with you and be your wife.” She led Christopher over to the couch and sat down so close to him she was practically in his lap.

“We can have all those things. You can have your education one day. I want children too, but this is no time to bring a child into the world, not here, not now.”

They sat there in silence for a few minutes. He ran his fingers through her hair, but she turned away once more to stare out the window at the sprinkle of rain falling outside. It was hard to know if it was the best time to show her the letter from Uli that his father had received. It was probably the first letter that any islander had received since the enforced blockade of the island had begun, since the Nazis had arrived. It weighed heavy in his pocket and he swayed back and forth, deciding whether or not to tell her. She looked at him and knew there was something wrong.

“What’s the matter, Christopher?”

“Nothing is the matter.” Her blue eyes were huge as she looked at him. It was hard to see anything else in the room. “I got a letter from Uli, smuggled through on one of the transports by one of the German soldiers.”

“Being German does have its benefits here after all. What does it say?”

Christopher reached into his pocket and handed the envelope to her. She held it in her hand for a second before opening it. She smiled as she read the first line.

27rd June 1941

Stefan, Christopher, Alexandra, Tom and Rebecca (I hope),

I hope everyone is well. If the people on the chain of getting this letter to you are as good as their word, this should reach you by the time I reach Russia. We received the orders last week and we are to ship out tomorrow. The other officers are talking about this being the final push to win the war and that this could be all over by Christmas. The Russians are a disorganized rabble, and should be easily defeated by the combined forces of the Reich, or so everyone says. In my mind I can't help thinking of another overconfident general called Napoleon and what happened to him on his excursion into Russia but we will see.

I miss home more than I ever thought possible, I long to see Karolina and hold Stefan. I think about them all the time, and sometimes find myself staring at the photos she sends me for hours at a time. Stefan is running around now supposedly and even has a few words. Karolina tells me that he knows who I am by my photographs and can point at them and say "Papa." That is enough to make my heart melt and to forget there is anything else in this whole world.

I can't say I enjoyed my time in France. I suppose it's difficult for the people here to see that we're here to prevent bloodshed and loss of life, not to cause it, but I don't suppose they'll ever understand. Maybe if we do win this war, which everyone says we will, they will appreciate us some day and we can all live in peace alongside one another. I just don't know. I'm just a soldier, although now I'm a Major myself. They must be running out of people if they're promoting me. But I'll just do what I always do, keep my head down and run when the bullets start flying. Please try not to worry about me.

I hope you are all well and I hope that Tom hasn't joined the British Army! No but seriously there are some words of warning I have to impart. From the last of Christopher's letters that I received before Jersey was taken it seemed that Rebecca wanted to stay, to be with him. And while that filled me with joy I must warn of the laws that the Reich has regarding Jews, some of whom have already been sent off for resettlement in the East. Just be careful, Rebecca, if you

read this. If anything happens I will use as much influence as I can as I have friends in the SS, some quite high up, but there is only so much I can accomplish. Keep your head down and this will all blow over eventually.

I will try and write again soon but I don't know how good the postal service in Russia is going to be.

Love to all,

Uli

Rebecca let the letter drop into her lap and continued to stare out the window. The thirty seconds before she spoke drew out excruciatingly but Christopher waited for her to begin. "I can't believe Uli is fighting for the Nazis. I can't believe he's one of them. He was such a kind person."

"He still is."

Rebecca brought her eyes to his and he could see her breath quickening, the fear infesting her. "They've begun sending the Jews away? For resettlement in the East? What does that mean?"

"I don't want to find out."

"No seriously what does that mean?" Rebecca said and began visibly shaking. Christopher took her and held her tight. "You said you'd look after me, Christopher."

Christopher took her head and held it under his chin, his arms cradling her. "I will, Rebecca. I won't let anything happen to you."

Chapter 17

It was a year later, July 19th 1942, when Christopher met Dr. Wilhelm Casper, the new Commandant of the German garrison on Jersey. Christopher was working in the office in St. Helier that the Germans had provided for them on a day like any other. They had not heard from Uli in the year since he had been posted to Russia, and only knew that he was still alive through reports from the clerks working in Dr. Casper's office, who were able to check on his status. Uli was still listed as active and serving on the Eastern Front. They were the only people on the island who had received any news of the outside world since the occupation had begun. Rebecca was still hiding in the apartment and had barely left in months. The other Jews on the island were by that stage, completely disenfranchised, having had their businesses confiscated and their freedoms curtailed to the point that they were only allowed to leave the house once a day, between the hours of three and four in the afternoon. Rebecca was still as optimistic as Christopher imagined anyone in her situation could have been. As Christopher held her at night he noticed the bones jutting out, tightening against her skin. They had both lost weight. Everyone had, even the German soldiers themselves.

Steiner walked in, a somber look on his face, and threw the orders down in front of Christopher who sat at his desk going through that day's ordinance.

"What's this?" Christopher asked.

"Dr. Casper wants to see you, immediately."

Christopher looked across at his father, the flecks of grey clearly visible in his hair, his thin face weathered like the rocks on the shore. Stefan reached out to his son, grabbing the cuff of his shirt, but Christopher shrugged him off.

"What is this about?" Christopher's father said. "I'm sure that any query Dr. Casper has can be ironed out with me. I see him several times a month, albeit briefly..."

Steiner shot eyes across at Stefan. "The orders were quite clear. He wants to see the boy." The words hurt. Christopher was 6 months younger than Steiner.

Christopher stood up and nodded to his father. "I'll be back in a few minutes, I'm sure this is nothing more than a trifling matter," he said in English. "Isn't that right Steiner?" he said in German.

"What, what are you talking about?" Steiner said, casting a glare at Christopher.

Stefan tried to force a smile as Steiner led Christopher out the door. Christopher had never been called to see the Commandant before. His father had, but not like this. Christopher immediately thought of Rebecca as he walked down the stairs and onto the street. He looked down at Steiner's pistol, safely holstered on his waist and he thought to grab it and shoot, to run back and find her and....

Steiner held the door open for Christopher and he climbed inside the car. The journey out to St. Brelade, to the Durrells' mansion, was about fifteen minutes. The only other cars on the road were German troop transports. Steiner sat beside Christopher for the duration of the trip, but neither man spoke. The fifteen minutes seemed to last years and Christopher was sweating heavily as the car finally arrived at the gates of the mansion where the Durrells still lived, although in a tiny corner and cordoned off from the rest of the house. Christopher hadn't seen them since the day of the evacuation, over two years before. The gates opened and the car moved slowly up the driveway, coming to a halt just outside the main entrance to the house. Steiner got out and Christopher opened the door himself, stepping out onto the gravel in the summer sun before Steiner could move around the car in time. Christopher could feel his heart beating, could almost see the bulge of it through his faded white shirt. His feet crunched on the gravel as Steiner led him into the house and upstairs. Steiner told him to sit down outside the Commandant's office, which had once been one of seven guest bedrooms in the house. Christopher sat down on the soft red velvet of the couch and waited. His shirt was sticking to his back. He imagined Rebecca at home, the guards coming for her. He imagined her in this house, where she could have lived. The door opened.

Dr. Casper stood at the door and extended a hand to Christopher. He was a stout, almost portly man with a round face and thinning hair sprinkled across the top of his rounded head. Christopher felt the strength in his wrist as he shook Christopher's hand.

“Herr Seeler, good to meet you. Come through into my office,” he said in English.

Christopher nodded and walked through, taking a seat in an antique wooden chair facing the large desk. Hitler’s portrait watched over the wood paneled room.

Casper sat down and looked across at Christopher for a few seconds before a smile appeared on his face. “We really appreciate the work you and your father do for us here on the island. It is most important that the people know that we are not here to enslave them or anything of that nature, and it is most fortunate that we have pillars of the community such as your father and yourself working with us.”

“Thank you,” Christopher said, resisting the urge to ask him to get to the point.

“My predecessor, Dr. Von Stein, set up an efficient system here on the island and, despite some difficulties, I think we are achieving our goal as a model of German occupation here.” Casper smiled again and Christopher did his best to reciprocate. “There are always problems however. You are aware of the laws in the German Reich concerning the Jewish population, are you not?”

Christopher’s blood froze. He managed to nod his head. “Yes, Herr Commandant.”

“Please understand that this is not my decision, this has been passed down by my superiors all the way from the Führer himself. You understand that, don’t you?” Christopher nodded despite the muscles in his neck feeling like steel rods. “There has been much pressure on me from above to register and control all the Jews on the island. Not just some of them, you see, but all? You understand, don’t you?” he said smiling once more. Christopher’s legs were shaking and he could see the fabric on his trousers waving like a flag in the breeze. “It’s very important that we have the full co-operation of everyone on the island on this matter, particularly such close colleagues as the likes of yourself and your father, don’t you agree?”

“Of course, Herr Ca-, I mean Dr. Casper.”

Casper laughed to himself and dropped his eyes to the desk before clamping them back onto Christopher. “Let’s not stand on the ceremony of titles

here, Christopher, I want you to think of the German occupying forces here as friends, after all, are we not all German?" Christopher did not answer, just stared as he imagined soldiers breaking down the door of the apartment, wrenching her out. "Anyway, it's been brought to my attention that there are several Jews on the island that have not registered with the pertinent office. It is of utmost importance that these Jews be registered with the proper authority. I'm sure you understand this as much as the States, your local government, does, and it was with this in mind that they gave their co-operation to us in this matter. It didn't surprise me that little protest was raised. They realize what an important job this is." Christopher felt the skin in his face, clammy and cold. Casper smiled again. "I have a letter here. I can't say who it's from you understand." He held up a sheet of paper in the air. "Before I read it, is there anything you want to tell me? I understand mistakes can be made, but for you and your father to retain your jobs and the privileges that go along with them, I do expect a certain amount of loyalty." Christopher just stared, his entire body heaving. It was taking everything within him not to cry in front of him. He tried to make out the writing through the paper, but couldn't. "I won't ask you again, Christopher. Have you anything to say to me?"

Christopher looked back at him and mouthed the words once without making a sound before they finally came out. "No, I don't, Dr. Casper."

"You disappoint me, Christopher, really you do, and you also leave me with the job of finding someone else on this island to do your job, as well as that of your father." The smile had faded. Christopher's whole body was shaking through his torso and down his legs. "Would you like to hear the letter? Yes? All right, *Dear Dr. Casper*, blah, blah, blah..." Casper's eyes moved down the page. Christopher looked down at the envelope, torn open on the desk, there was no stamp; it had been hand delivered. "Here we are, *I have to inform you that the Jewess, Rebecca Cassin, did not in fact leave the island as previously stated. She has since the occupation been living with Christopher Seeler in his apartment in St. Helier.*" Casper put the letter back down onto the table. "They have a way about them, don't they, the Jews? They have a way of looking into you, almost seeing your soul, what your weaknesses are. I don't blame you, Christopher, I feel sorry for you. You really should be treated by a doctor for this sickness she has inflicted upon you. The person who wrote this letter has done you a service, just as I am going to do by not telling my superiors about this."

Christopher stared back across, his fists balled into iron knots below the table. “What are you going to do with Rebecca?” The words came as a whisper that caught in his throat. The sounds mutated so much that he was surprised that Casper understood him at all.

“What are we going to do with Rebecca Cassin? Nothing. We’re just going to see to it that she’s registered and then, of course, she will be subsequently bound by the rules concerning all Jews on the island.”

“What about resettlement...?” Every guard was down now.

“Enough questions, Herr Seeler. Unfortunately I have had to relieve not just you of your position with us but your father also. It is regrettable, but necessary.” Casper stopped and the door opened. “That will be all, Herr Seeler.”

Christopher sat there, didn’t move for ten seconds until Casper looked up at him again and then bumbled to the door and down the stairs and out onto the gravel of the driveway where the car was waiting for him.

Chapter 18

Those last six months they had together were a strange mix of joy and fear, trepidation and contentment. They rarely spoke about their present, the scarcity of food, the deportations, and Rebecca's complete lack of freedom. She almost never left the apartment and could not visit anyone, as she was only allowed to be out for that one solitary hour in the day. They spent their days wading through the past and dreaming of a shining future. Christopher stayed with her most of the day, as there was little work available. Christopher's father would often stay with them and Alexandra and Tom also. Rebecca rarely mentioned her father, although she was sure it was not him, but the Durrells who had denounced her, as some kind of delayed revenge for the shame she had brought on their family. If she were deported, the shame might leave with her, but she wasn't angry at them, not like Christopher was. The thoughts of revenge surged through him, only soothed by her reassurances that anything he did would be futile. There was no gain to be had from vengeance, especially when they would never be sure who had informed the Nazis. She amazed him. He longed to confront them, but was afraid of what he might do if he did meet them, particularly as they had the protection of the German garrison, a protection that he and his father no longer had. The walls of the apartment and the island itself seemed to close in further and further, gripping them from all sides.

The deportations began in September of 1942. A number of Jews were taken, as well as hundreds of non-Jersey born citizens. There seemed no reason why Rebecca was not chosen to leave. As non-born natives of the island, the Seelers were also eligible, but were passed over for deportation, perhaps as some remnant of the protection they had never sought, but once enjoyed, but perhaps not. The Nazis seemed to have little logic in their decision-making.

The letter arrived on 12th January 1943, typed in brief, formal language and signed at the bottom by Dr. Wilhelm Casper. Rebecca had been selected for deportation to Germany. The boat was scheduled to leave on 13th February. She was told to gather one bag of belongings and to be at the Savoy Cinema, at 2 pm on that day. That was all. Christopher tried to go to Dr. Casper, but he refused to see him or his father. Captain Voss feigned sympathy but promised nothing.

There was nothing he could do, he explained. There was no court of appeal. The decision was already made and had come down from the Führer himself and who could question the Führer himself?

It was easy to fake it, to pretend that the day would never arrive, to live in denial, and that is what they tried to do, at first. They tried to pretend that everything was the same, but as the day got closer, her demeanor changed. They went through the plans about escaping; trying to get to France or England, but that was impossible. They tried to think of somewhere she could hide for the duration of the war, but who knew how long that was going to be. There was nowhere, and with little enough food to keep themselves alive, no one was willing to hide Rebecca. The acceptance of what was to happen gradually came over them and the mourning began. They didn't know what was to happen to her, but there were rumors everywhere of concentration camps and slave labor. They saw film of the camps in the local cinema and saw well fed, happy-looking Jews bounding around, busy with outdoor activities and healthy pursuits, and while Rebecca was filled with brief hope, even in his wildest dreams Christopher couldn't believe it to be true. Rebecca cried for several days in a row, only happy when he was holding her. But then she stopped. It was as if she emerged from a fever with a new clarity and began taking risks, for as she rightly pointed out, what had they to lose? They began leaving the apartment together and went to visit Tom and Alexandra, Christopher's father and their other friends still left on the island. There were so many goodbyes. Those still brave enough to listen to the BBC had heard of the Allied victories in Stalingrad and El Alamein and assured her that the war would be over before long and that she and all the other deportees would be back soon. There was nothing else to say.

Christopher awoke early on the morning of Friday the 12th of February 1943. Rebecca was already awake, sitting by the window, watching the orange glow of the sunrise as it came up over the sea and flooded the streets below them. She turned to smile at him as he opened his eyes, somehow knowing that he was awake. She tiptoed back towards him across the cold floor, barely covered by the thin carpet and put her arms around him. Christopher felt her kiss him but couldn't respond and, as he looked into her eyes the pain inside grew and he heard himself whimpering. She held him against her for a minute or more before pushing his head back. Rebecca took his face between her two hands, drying his tears with her thumbs.

“Oh, be quiet now Christopher. Don’t cry. We’ll be together again when all this is over and then nothing will ever come between us again.” She even smiled.

“This is all my fault,” he said. “If it wasn’t for me, you would have left and you would have been safe in England.”

“Christopher, you are the best thing in my life, the only thing I’ve ever had that was truly worth living for. There is no life for me without you. Don’t you see? This isn’t the end for us.” She leaned down to kiss him and they made love, under the covers, safe against the cold of the morning all around them in the room. They lay there in silence for a few minutes afterwards, holding each other, her thin, frail body against his.

“I want to go out,” she said jutting her head upwards. “I want to go out walking along the cliffs. I want to see the island and the sea. What are the Germans going to do to me if they catch us? Deport me?”

Half an hour later they were on the street, she on the crossbar of his bike as they cycled past columns of German soldiers and out of the town into the countryside towards Christopher’s father’s house in St. Martin. It was cold and Christopher felt the scythe of wind cut through him. They arrived at Christopher’s father’s house and Rebecca stumbled slightly as she got off the crossbar of the bike. She pitched forward, almost falling onto the road and Christopher threw the bike down, tried to catch her, but she righted herself and smiled up at him, taking his hand as they walked to the door. Stefan was there, and took her into his arms, holding her under his chin, kissing her on the top of the head. He looked every one of his forty-eight years.

There was no small talk. Stefan prepared the tea in silence. It was watery, weak, the tea leaves almost completely drained of flavor.

“I’m here to say goodbye. It’s tomorrow that I leave and...”

“I know that Rebecca, I know why you’re here. I’m just so sorry we couldn’t do anything to prevent this.” Stefan said as he sat down.

“It’s my fault,” Christopher said. “If I had told Casper that Rebecca was a Jew, if I had told him...”

“If you had betrayed Rebecca, you mean?” his father replied.

“Christopher, this is no one’s fault but the Nazis themselves. Rebecca, you have to be brave. You were always such a brave girl. The strongest person I ever knew.”

Rebecca drew her head up and looked at him. She reached forward to Stefan and hugged him. Christopher sat back and watched them embrace. His father was silently crying.

They stayed for lunch, a thin turnip soup that Stefan had managed to concoct. They talked about the future and how the Seelers themselves were likely to be deported to Germany at any time. They talked about the possibility, or the seeming impossibility of escape or finding places to hide on the tiny island, and food to sustain them while they hid there. The conversation fell silent until Rebecca began to smile again.

“I see the old tree house is still hanging on,” she said. The wooden structure, built over a morning by Uli almost twenty years before was clinging to the tree he had nailed it to. It was completely weather-beaten by that time, the original paint all but faded to the wooden grey underneath, but it was still there, despite the wind and the rain sweeping in. It still stood. They talked about the times they had there and the golden sun of their youth for an hour or more and then left to walk the beach together, promising to come back to say goodbye to Christopher’s father later.

Their clothes were faded and old, hardly able to keep the cold out and they huddled together as they walked down to the beach. Rebecca looked at her father’s house at the end of the road, held the look, turning her head as they walked past. “Wait here,” she said. Christopher went to protest but stopped himself and kissed her on the cheek instead. “I’ll only be a few minutes,” she said, and slipped out of his grasp.

Christopher walked down to the end of the road to where barbed wire writhed around fence posts hammered into the ground. It had been a while since they had been here, more than a year, not since the barbed wire was put in place and the mines laid down along the beach. Somehow Christopher found it hard to imagine a full-blown amphibian invasion of Jersey on the beach by his father’s house in St Martin, but the Germans had. Christopher stood there for ten minutes, staring out at the sea until Rebecca emerged once more. Her face was grim determination, no sign of sadness.

“What happened?” Christopher asked.

“He’s on the same ship as I am tomorrow. We’re being deported together.”

They walked along the line of barbed wire as it snaked along the coastline. They followed it for several miles, just walking. It was enough just being there and together. On their way back they were able to make it down through a gap in the wire to the Angry Horse, but the sea was too rough and the beaches they played on as children were strewn with mines. They made their way back as the evening drew in and the grey of the clouds turned black over the sea. The rain came down, swept in on the cold wind and they shivered together as they tramped back up the road towards Christopher’s father’s house.

Tom and Alexandra were there as they arrived and they embraced Rebecca with tears in their eyes. Christopher’s father asked them to stay, but Rebecca refused. They spent another hour there with Stefan, Tom, and Alexandra, but it was so hard to find the joy that they had all shared for so long. It seemed only a matter of time before Tom would be the only one of them left on the island and somehow Christopher felt worse for him to be left behind. Though Alexandra cried for most of the time and there were few smiles on their faces, Christopher felt bathed in love.

They made their way back into town before curfew, set at 8 pm at that time. They passed by some troops on the way back. The only thing they could take away from him, the only thing he really cared about was those last few hours with Rebecca, so Christopher made sure to look as casual as he could as he passed and not hurl the hatred at them that was burning a hole inside of him.

They arrived back at the apartment and locked up the bikes outside. They made their way upstairs and tried to act as normally as they could. Rebecca prepared dinner of some carrots, a potato and some thin soup cooked in some seawater for extra flavor as the salt had long since run out. He held her as she cooked, his face buried in the back of her neck. They ate the meal and sat together under a blanket on the couch, as they did many nights, but this was very different. Neither spoke and their grip was that much tighter than it ever had been before.

Christopher fell asleep at around four, the heavy yoke of tiredness overcoming him, robbing him of his final hours with her and the final sunrise they could have had together. They woke up at around noon. Rebecca packed

her bag. Christopher couldn't watch her. It was too much. He walked her down to the Savoy where her father and the other Jews were waiting, herded together by enough German troops to guard hundreds. The soldiers stood back wordlessly, glaring at the Jews as they arrived. There were thirteen altogether. Rebecca was the thirteenth. Christopher nodded to Cassin and motioned for him to come over. Cassin edged his way out to Christopher. He looked like a very old man. He was drunk.

"Look after Rebecca. She is still your daughter. This is your chance to make up for the past." Christopher held out his hand. Cassin didn't answer him, but nodded his head, shook Christopher's hand. Christopher turned to Rebecca, the same frightened girl he had found by the beach almost twenty years before. He took her in his arms but the German officer came over. It was Voss. He glanced at Christopher, but didn't acknowledge him.

"All right," he said. "We need to get moving now." He pulled Rebecca back and away from Christopher but Rebecca motioned for him to come back. Christopher leaned in to her.

"Next time, I see you, we're getting married. The next time..." A German soldier cut her off, forcing her onwards. But she said it again. "You hear me, Christopher? The next time we meet." Christopher nodded, barely able to see through the tears burning down his face.

The thirteen were marched down to the harbor. Christopher walked alongside them. He wanted to be strong for her, but it was more than he could bear. They marched straight out and onto the ship. Rebecca turned to Christopher, standing alone on the jetty. She was on the gangplank and shouted something back to him, but it was lost in the wind. He saw her red face, saw her tears one last time before she disappeared inside. Christopher put his hands up to his face, his entire body on fire. He stood up to watch the ship as it left. There was no one else there. He stood on the jetty completely alone, watching the ship as it moved away until it disappeared into the grey of the horizon.

Chapter 19

Auschwitz-Birkenau 1943

It was all over in a few minutes. There was no more noise from the crematorium. The screams had faded into silence. Christopher was moving side to side and then pacing back and forth in some kind of attempt to control the shaking infesting his body. The yard was empty now. Christopher steeled himself, trying to extricate the horror of what he had just witnessed. There had been no way of knowing that this was what went on here, or that this is what he would find. He heard Muller's voice directing the Sonderkommandos and saw him looking over. He breathed deeply in through his nose, trying to slow down his heart, blackened and damaged by what he had just seen. Christopher felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around immediately and saw Friedrich. "It takes a bit of getting used to, Herr Seeler," Friedrich said. "These ways are so much more humane than they used to be."

"More humane for the prisoners?" Christopher blurted.

Friedrich looked back at him, squinting his eyes as if not able to comprehend what Christopher had just said, before a slow smile spread across his face. "No, no, that is an irrelevance. More humane for the SS men, tasked with this important duty. There were too many affected in the early days, before we streamlined the process. You will get used to this, Herr Seeler. There is strength in you that I can see, that all who meet you can sense. Use it and you will be doing the Reich a great service here."

"Yes, Herr Rapportführer."

"Excellent, now get to work. You are needed inside the changing room. Make sure all valuables collected are put into the appropriate boxes and piles, and, above all, make sure that they all find their way back to the Reich, and not into the filthy hands of the prisoners themselves."

Christopher nodded, saluted, and found the strength to walk back into the crematorium, following the path that the people had taken just minutes before. Muller and Breitner were already inside, directing the Sonderkommandos as

they sorted through the piles of clothing. Flick arrived with several prisoners, each carrying a separate box. Breitner did the talking, reminding the Sonderkommandos to go through all pockets to check the lining in each coat, to turn out every suitcase, and to place the currency in one box, gold and jewelry in another, watches into another. Christopher walked among them, watching each as he went by, trying to look officious and fearsome. Coats were taken down off the hooks where their former owners had left them and neatly folded clothes were flung into piles. Christopher picked up a child's doll, ragged and worn with one eye missing, its blonde hair streaked with dirt, and placed it back down on the little girl's clothes who had left it. The SS men walked up and down, shouting at the prisoners sorting through the goods, urging them to go faster, faster, and watching them to see that they didn't pocket any of the valuables for themselves. It was all done with speed and efficiency. Boxes of shoes, coats, underwear, wallets, eyeglasses, gold and jewelry, bottles, medicines, food and, of course, cash, were placed on trolleys, ready for transportation back to the warehouses that Christopher was to oversee. The SS officers were pleased at what obviously had been a good morning's work. Christopher made his way past the guards and prisoners and through the now cleaned out dressing room, and saw the box full of dolls by the door, collected and sorted along with everything else, waiting to be 'redistributed back to the Reich.' Nothing was not worth stealing.

Christopher walked out into the yard as more SS men moved in. The Sonderkommandos made their way into the gas chambers to transport the bodies, the 'stiffs', as the guards referred to them, upstairs to be burnt. Christopher thought of the thousand or so corpses, freshly murdered, and had no intention of waiting around to see what happened next. He hurried each of the prisoners along as they jogged towards the warehouses, the carts packed with the boxes they had sorted themselves. He watched them as they pushed the carts, perhaps twenty of them, towards the warehouses. A voice came from behind him. "You know what they call the section where we sort through the goods? The section you're now in charge of?" Breitner said.

Christopher looked at him, wondered about the tone in his voice before replying. "No, I don't."

"They call it Canada, the land of untold riches," Breitner sneered, revealing brown, chipped teeth. "You probably didn't know that."

“Thank you, Herr Breitner,” Christopher replied and began to walk back towards Canada, following the last cart as it departed from the crematorium.

There were no markings on the warehouses. There was no sign above the door for the warehouse that held the shoes or the glasses of the recently murdered, yet the Sonderkommandos seemed to know almost instinctively what warehouse to bring each pile of stolen goods to. They never made a mistake. Christopher thought about Rebecca as he walked up and down the lines of warehouses. Every so often he would stop and look inside, gesture to the SS guards on duty or frown at the prisoners working inside. There was no way they could have killed her as soon as she arrived at the camp, was there? He shook these images from his mind, forcing himself back into the moment. Rebecca was alive, he told himself, and he would find her. He would not allow her to share the same fate as those people. The more he thought about her, the more the panic set in, so he tried to wipe his mind clean of her. There was nothing he could do, not yet, not until he gained the confidence of the administration here. He turned and walked back down the line of warehouses and walked inside one, where prisoners were sorting through spectacles, bottles and what seemed to be medicines. Christopher nodded to the guard on duty, who saluted back. Christopher was looking at the piles of tiny brown and white bottles littered across the wooden tables. None of the twenty or so women working in the warehouse looked up at him. He walked over, fighting the urge to introduce himself to the prisoner working at the table. Most of the prisoners in Canada seemed to be women, better fed than the others he had seen in the main camp, and, no doubt, content to have avoided more arduous and dangerous work. He picked up one of the bottles, but the writing on the white label was in Czech. He found another, written in German, *‘Take once daily, for rheumatoid arthritis.’* Christopher put the bottle back down with a shaking hand. It fell onto its side and rolled off the table, hitting the concrete floor with a crack as it smashed. The guard in the corner whirled around and started to shout something but Christopher held his hand in the air. “Take no notice; that was my fault.” The woman at the table stared up at him, her brown eyes swimming with fear. Christopher looked back down at her and then at the guard who had turned away once more. He held her stare for a few seconds. She had thick, brown curly hair and her weathered face could have been beautiful in another time or another place. “What is your name?” he asked

The woman seemed surprised to be asked such a question, and looked

around and back up at Christopher before answering. “Katerina Lehotska.” She answered in a thick Czech accent.

Christopher still stared down, not knowing what else quite to say. “Work hard and stay safe, Katerina. I am the new Obersturmführer of this section. You can tell the other workers that things are going to change around here.” Christopher immediately regretted what he said and felt an icicle of fear sliding down his spine. Katerina looked puzzled and brought her eyes back down to the broken bottle on the floor. Christopher resisted the urge to pick it up himself and walked back towards the door. A gunshot cut through the air and Christopher hurried towards the sound of it. He saw Breitner outside. “What was that?” Christopher asked. Breitner shrugged his shoulders. Christopher ran past him and into the warehouse where the shot had come from. The dead body of a woman in her thirties was strewn on the concrete floor, her head pumping out ugly black-crimson blood. “What happened here?” Christopher demanded. An SS man stepped forward as he placed his pistol back into its holster.

“I saw her place a ring into her pocket, Herr Obersturmführer,” the soldier said with the air of a man boasting to his boss about a job well done.

Christopher gritted his teeth as he looked down at the corpse. None of the other workers looked up, all still sorting the jewelry on the tables in front of them. Christopher looked at the guard, but knew that there was nothing he could do. The frustration burned within him. “Get this body out of here!” he shouted. “Let this be a lesson to you all, there will be no stealing here.” He stormed back out, but there was nowhere to go, nowhere to escape. There were only the wires and the warehouses, the crematoria and the shadows of the prison hospital. Christopher stood back as several Sonderkommando jogged inside and emerged carrying the corpse of the middle-aged woman. Once outside, they threw it onto the cart with the nonchalance of the fishermen Christopher had watched in Jersey as a child slinging their nets, writhing and wriggling with grey-scaled fish onto carts to be brought to market. The woman’s body was taken away. The guard stood back at his post as if nothing had occurred. Christopher walked back inside the warehouse, making sure to step over the pool of blood, coagulating on the warehouse floor. The soldier who had killed her was standing back against the wall. He saluted as Christopher approached him. “Now hear this,” Christopher explained. “These prisoners here are skilled workers.” The soldier looked completely perplexed. “There should be no summary executions here. If

there is a problem, if someone has stolen, you will come to me. I don't want the guards taking the rules of the camp into their own hands. That way only anarchy will follow and it is of vital importance that we maintain discipline at all times. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Herr Obersturmführer," the soldier saluted again, seemingly convinced.

Christopher nodded at him and, as he turned around, saw that the Sonderkommandos were cleaning up the pool of blood. The other workers, eight of them, all women, looked straight ahead. Christopher stared at the backs of their heads, amazed at their fortitude. Christopher saw that one of the women's heads was bobbing back and forth, only slightly, like a cork on the end of a fishing rod in a pond. She was crying. Christopher had the urge to go to her, to tell her that he was Obersturmführer in charge of these warehouses now and that they would all be safe, but knew that no one could give that assertion, not here. The smell of blood, of death, was thick in the air and it followed him outside and as he walked down towards the crematorium once more. Breitner was standing outside the last warehouse, carrying a small box full of what seemed like tiny gold nuggets.

"Herr Obersturmführer," Breitner called out. Christopher approached him. "You should probably take these. The last Obersturmführer here insisted on handling all the gold and jewelry himself." Christopher looked inside the box. It was full of gold teeth.

Christopher took the box from Breitner, felt his body numbing. "Thank you, Herr Breitner. I'm sure in a few days time I'll be up to speed with all the processes."

Breitner ignored what Christopher said and gestured towards a man standing beside him. "There is someone else you will need to meet, Herr Obersturmführer." Christopher noticed a particularly healthy looking prisoner, in a black uniform, now standing behind Breitner. "This is Ralf Frankl, chief Kapo of the Economic District." Frankl nodded. He was a stout, strong-looking man with pockmarks on a brutal face. Christopher nodded in response.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir," Frankl said with a heavy Bavarian accent. "I am here to help you maintain discipline at all times."

“How do you explain what just happened in warehouse 6?” Christopher asked.

“These Jewish dogs have to be kept in line, Herr Obersturmführer. Force is the only thing they understand.”

“What were you sent here for Frankl?”

“Double murder, Herr Obersturmführer,” Frankl replied, looking surprised at the question.

“You’ll fit in well then.” Christopher muttered under his breath in English. The two men looked at him both perplexed. “Well, Frankl, I am in charge here now and there will be no summary executions, no executions without my say-so, is that understood?”

Frankl’s eyes opened wide. “But Herr Obersturmführer...”

“Don’t make me repeat myself, Frankl,” Christopher said and walked away, leaving the two men to argue among themselves.

Christopher went to his office at the end of the line of warehouses, there for the express purpose of counting the booty looted from the murdered. He sat down with the box of golden teeth, three boxes of cash and three boxes of watches, necklaces, earrings and other assorted pieces of jewelry surrounding him. It seemed a paltry return for the murder of over a thousand people and he wondered how much the Sonderkommandos, prisoners, guards and his own subordinates had skimmed off the top for themselves. He sat there for the rest of the afternoon counting the Reich marks, dollars, pounds and other monies of the people he had seen on the train that morning. He divided it into neat bundles, wrapped in elastic bands and placed them into a suitcase. There was a safe behind his desk and the code for the door was written down in one of the drawers. He placed the suitcase full of cash along with the jewelry, also in suitcases into the large safe, which was about three feet wide and as tall as he was. He locked the door behind him and returned to his desk, to stare out into space for what seemed like hours.

Chapter 20

Christopher arrived back at his room after eight o'clock. Flick had told him before he left the office that today had been a very normal day. Many days were much busier. So the murder of a thousand people was normal. The hatred for the Nazis burned through him, but he controlled it immediately, smothering the flames inside as they ignited. Control was the key. Lahm was out and Christopher was thankful for that as he took off his jacket. There was a letter on the bed and a flame lit inside him as he recognized the writing. He picked it up, almost able to smile as he tore at the envelope. He drew out the letter and lay it flat on the bed as he sat down. It was from his father.

22nd September 1943

Christopher,

We have missed you whilst you were in training. We are settling in better now, although Alexandra still misses Tom she understands that it is not forever. We are doing as well as possibly can be expected. Berlin is different from the city that I grew up in but we are gradually finding our way and I am sure I will have regular work soon. Alexandra is now working in a local factory. Cousin Harald has been very good to us since we were released from the hospitality of the Reich. It is wonderful to finally get to know Karolina and little Stefan is a joy. I hope that your new posting is what you wanted and expected it to be. I'm sure if you remain calm and focused you will achieve your goals and the Reich will be much the better for your efforts. We are well. Do not worry about us. I received a letter from your uncle yesterday. He is safe and well and fighting bravely on the Eastern Front. He is due back on January 28th for three days of leave. You are in our thoughts always.

Your father,

Stefan Seeler

That was all. Christopher read it and re-read it. The censors were everywhere. Christopher almost laughed at how his father had referred to the

internment camp they had been kept in, and then released from, after only a few days. The other foreign born, non-German citizens deported from Jersey with them had not been treated nearly as leniently, and would likely be there for the rest of the war. There could be little truth either in the offhand way in which he had referred to Alexandra's feelings about Tom. It had been difficult to see her in the pain that the separation from Tom had caused her.

The door opened, and Christopher resisted the temptation to immediately hide the letter and instead just looked up with what he hoped was not a guilty face. It was Lahm. He smiled at Christopher.

"What a day that was. How was your first day in the camp? What are you doing again?"

"I'm in the Economic Agency."

"So, you're the man to know then. What's it like?"

"What's what like?"

"Canada, the land of untold wealth, we've all heard the rumors."

"It's just a lot of warehouses. I'm just trying to do my job like everyone else."

Lahm looked disappointed with both the answer and his new roommate. "Have you had dinner yet?" he asked.

"Yes, I ate earlier."

"Would you like to come for a few drinks tonight? There are a few of the boys getting together later. There's a movie on too, or a showing of some play, I'm not sure what's on tonight."

"Okay," Christopher said.

"Great, we're playing cards later on too. It'll do you good to wind down; sometimes the work here can get pretty stressful."

Christopher folded up the letter and placed it on the top shelf of his locker and followed Lahm out of their room. Lahm was smaller than Christopher, blonde, and about twenty-two years of age.

“What do you do here, Lahm?”

“I work in the main camp, here in Auschwitz. My duties vary from day to day but I mainly work in Blocks 10 and 11. It’s not an easy job, but I find it satisfying, you know, to be doing something so important for the Reich.”

“What goes on in Blocks 10 and 11?”

“They’re the punishment blocks.”

Christopher walked beside Lahm as he led him out into the yard outside their block. The lights of the camp were casting down harsh beams of white and Christopher raised a hand above his eyes as they went. Auschwitz was silent, the thirty thousand or so prisoners, only a few hundred yards away, making little sound. Christopher breathed deeply, evenly, trying to calm himself, trying not to seem like an imposter. He wondered about the conversation he’d had with Breitner and the Kapo, Frankl. Was it too soon to stand out? He remembered the words of Friedrich and knew that by showing any kind of sympathy to the prisoners he was risking his own life, and more importantly, the chance to save Rebecca’s. But it was impossible to do nothing. How could he do nothing and still be himself, still be human? There had to be some way of affecting this. He was only one man, but he had some power, and there would be money. He thought of the masses of currency he had seen just that day. There would always be money.

Lahm led Christopher across the yard. There were SS men passing them on all sides, milling back and forth. Most were slovenly dressed, their collars open and shirts untucked, some seemed drunk, meandering from side to side. Lahm greeted several of them and introduced Christopher to one as they reached their destination. Christopher tried to be as cordial as he could as he shook the man’s hand, and walked behind him and Lahm, who immediately engaged in conversation. They led him to an open room at the end of the hallway where seven or eight SS men sat around a wooden table. There was money in the center and each man held cards in front of his face. The room was full of a thick haze of cigarette smoke, and there were beer glasses and bottles of vodka strewn all over the table. Lahm was greeted by all as he walked in and he smiled back. “Everybody, this is the new man over in the Economic Department, Christopher Seeler. Where are you from again, Seeler?”

“Berlin, originally but I grew up in Jersey.”

“Jersey, isn’t that in Britain?” a soldier answered from across the table.

“Not anymore!” the man beside him shouted before Christopher could answer and they all erupted laughing.

Lahm sat down with a smile, Christopher beside him. “Do you play cards, Seeler?”

“Not well.”

“Perfect, and working in the Economic Department too, you’ll fit in very well here,” the same SS man who had made the comment about Jersey said, and they all laughed again. “Deal that man in.” The comedian’s name was Ganz. Christopher laughed too as they threw the cards at him. Two hours later and having said almost nothing, Christopher had almost doubled his original stake in the game and the other SS men’s faces were not as friendly as they had been when he sat down. Ganz dealt the cards again. There were seven of them at the table, all drunk, all smoking. Christopher felt his eyelids heavy and the cards blurry in front of him.

“Hey, new guy, you gonna give us back our money?” Sturmer, one of the guards said. He was a thin blonde haired man, about Christopher’s age and the smile he flashed at Christopher was less than friendly. He ground his teeth and closed his mouth.

“Can’t accept the way the cards fall?” Lahm slurred and stared down at his cards, avoiding the glance from Christopher.

Christopher looked at his hand, and the glass of vodka in front of him on the table. It slid down his throat and began its assault on his stomach lining. He looked around the table. His father had taught him this game. It wasn’t about cards, but people. If they could see through him at the card table, why couldn’t they see through him during the day, in the camp? He pushed another pile of chips out into the middle, raising the ante. The cards in his hand were nothing, but that didn’t matter, it wasn’t about them. He studied the faces through the smoke. There had been little talking during the hands for the last hour or so, just drinking. Christopher watched as the faces around the table dropped as each man folded and it was just he and Lahm. Lahm went to put down his cards and smiled, picking them back up.

“I think that you’re a fake. I can see through you,” he said, and

Christopher felt the chill run through his entire body. Lahm's serious face gave way to a mischievous smile. "Let's see what you have." Christopher just looked back at him. Lahm laid down his cards, three kings and a pair of sixes. He reached out and gathered the money in, sweeping it back towards himself with outstretched hands. "In fact, don't even bother showing me your cards. I know you don't have anything."

Chapter 21

He dreamt about her. She was on the beach in Jersey, the wind sweeping through her hair and he could see her, but only as a dark outline of the grey sky, and as he ran towards her, she turned to him and smiled. The blue of her eyes shone through the dark and outwards, bright until he could see nothing else. Her face was in front of him, soft and smooth and beautiful, and she was laughing as she skipped towards the Butterfly's Table as a child. He followed her down to the sea, boiling and booming, throwing white water high in the air, but she was not there.

Lahm was still asleep as Christopher awoke. The picture of Rebecca came to him again, as it did every morning upon opening his eyes. The bare floorboards were cold as he stood up and he quickly pulled on a fresh pair of socks and the grey trousers of his SS uniform. They slid on easily; more comfortably than they had the previous week or even the previous day. He approached the mirror in the corner of the room above the simple sink covered in Lahm's shaving materials and soap. Christopher looked into his eyes and ran a gentle finger along the length of a bloodshot vein, poking through scarlet, in the pool of grey white. There was a great pressure in his chest, a weight inside him and he could barely move back to the bed to sit down to pull his boots on. He stood back up and made the effort to shave before buttoning up his shirt and pulling on his jacket. Lahm didn't stir from his sleep as Christopher shut the door behind him and made his way down the hallway to the latrine. There were two other SS men in the bathroom. One nodded to him as he brushed past, but the other man ignored Christopher and continued washing his hands, scrubbing them harder and harder under the hot water.

It was a cold October morning, the smell of the coming winter heavy in the air. Christopher tried to imagine how it would be for the prisoners when the snows came. He had stolen brief glimpses inside their living quarters, had seen them huddled together, four prisoners in a cot made for one, their emaciated bodies huddling together to try to stave off the cold. He thought of them and he thought of Rebecca again. Auschwitz, with its massive prisoner population and its centralized administrative unit, seemed like the best place to begin the search.

Perhaps she was in the camp; perhaps he could see her, but then what? Christopher walked around, past the Blockführer's office to the front gate and flashed his papers to the SS guard on duty, who yawned as he bade him to walk through. It was almost eight o'clock and the first shipment was due in less than an hour. Christopher cursed himself for oversleeping; once the train arrived there would be no time for anything other than murder and theft.

The block housing prisoners' records and the lists of those murdered as enemies of the Reich was just inside the main gate and Christopher had no real reason to be there. SS men were not encouraged to wander around the camp. Christopher's role as Obersturmführer in the Economic Department gave him some leeway, but not to be nosing around in the camp's records for a Jewish prisoner. There was another guard at the door and Christopher presented him his papers. The guard looked at them and then back at Christopher.

"You're a long way from Birkenau, Herr Obersturmführer. What are you doing down here?"

Christopher took deep breath of cold air into his lungs and stared back at the guard trying to look as casual, even bored, as he possibly could. "Listen, I've got plenty of better things to be doing, my Rapportführer over in the Economic Section wants me to speak to...a Karl Liebermann."

"The head of prisoner records?" the guard sneered. "Herr Liebermann is a busy man."

"And so am I," Christopher looked at the guard, straight into his blank green eyes.

The guard shook his head and stood aside to let Christopher pass. The door the guard had directed him to was open, but Christopher knocked on it before pushing it open. Liebermann was sitting at his desk and looked up as though Christopher had just caught him doing something he shouldn't have been. Christopher smiled as he took the chair in front of Liebermann's immaculately clean desk before he could even say anything.

"Who are you and why are you in my office?" Liebermann said. He was in his late forties and had a healthy double chin and rounded glasses falling onto the tip of a straight nose.

"My name is Obersturmführer Seeler, and I need your help." Christopher

stopped, waiting for a reply but Liebermann sat back in his seat, didn't say a word. "I heard you were a man with power in the camp, power that could help solve a little problem that has come up for me." Christopher looked at Liebermann, again waiting for him to reply, but he didn't, so Christopher continued. "I am looking for a particular prisoner and I don't know if she is in this camp or..."

"She? Obersturmführer Seeler, why are you looking for this prisoner?" Accusing eyes met Christopher's across the desk.

Christopher took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Yes."

Christopher pursed his lips and placed the cigarettes back in his pocket. "I suppose I can wait."

"If we could get back to the business at hand, Herr Seeler..."

"Ok, we're all busy, I understand." Christopher held his hand up and leant forward, placing both hands on Liebermann's desk as he spoke. "You could say that I have a vested interest in this prisoner. Her family contacted me, made me an offer for information." Christopher smiled, hoping that Liebermann would reciprocate, but again he didn't, instead shifting in his seat before putting a meaty hand up to his chin.

"This is highly irregular. These people we deal with here are enemies of the state, you know that, Obersturmführer Seeler."

"I understand my role and your role in this camp and I ask you to understand this, Herr Liebermann; this Jew is rich, very rich. The idea that I have any attachment to this.... person is laughable."

Liebermann looked back across at him and down at the desk between them. "Sifting through prisoner records would take time," Liebermann replied.

Christopher felt the bulge of cash in his pocket from the wages he had just received. He took his hand out, left the notes on the table. Liebermann's eyes moved to the money and back up to Christopher, and then back again. Christopher felt the sweat pooling in his palms.

“I don’t accept bribes, Herr Seeler.”

“I don’t offer bribes, Herr Liebermann.”

Liebermann took a piece of paper and placed it down on the desk on top of the wad of bills. “I’ll see if I can find this person in our camp. Have you a name for this mysterious lady?”

“All the details are here.” Christopher replied and pushed a piece of paper across. “There is no time to waste. The family will not pay much for news of a dead daughter.”

“Come back tomorrow morning and I’ll see if we have some news for you.”

“Excellent,” Christopher said, and he felt the flame inside him once more. “I’m sure you are busy and I need to get to my own duties.” Christopher got out of the chair and made for the door.

“Herr Obersturmführer, I’m sure I don’t need to mention the sensitive nature of this matter.” Liebermann said, as Christopher reached the door.

“Of course not.” Christopher replied and walked out and down the corridor.

The next shipment came less than an hour later and the gruesome spectacle played out in much the same way as before, as the screams of the murdered were drowned out by the roar of the engines of the trucks. There were more for the gas chambers later that day and more for the women of Canada to sort through. Christopher had not the strength to leave his office the rest of that day. He was disgusted at himself for feeling a sense of hope in a place where it could not exist. His quest seemed so tiny, so utterly inconsequential in the face of all of this death, like chipping away at the edge of a glacier with an ice pick. He was determined, more determined than ever, to rescue her, but it didn’t seem like a satisfactory end, even if he could somehow smuggle her out of the camp to escape. He had no idea how he would do that, even if he did find her, but one thing at a time. He would find her first, and then worry about what the next step was to be. He was trapped here himself, trapped in this SS uniform, masquerading as one of them. He tried to remember the words his father had left him with; to always remain true to who he was, to not let the perverted ideals of the SS invade his being and corrupt his soul, but that was already proving

impossible. He was already changed. What good was it to find her but lose himself?

The rest of the day drew out slowly and painfully, like pulling an arrow out of an open wound. Christopher ceded the power to Breitner and remained in his office, counting and recounting the pile of currency that found its way to his desk. They brought the wooden crates of gold and jewels in, and, after a while Christopher did not even acknowledge them. There were locket with pictures of dead loved ones, beloved of people who would never see them or anyone again. All dead.

Christopher did not join Lahm and the other SS men later on for what seemed to be their nightly drinking session, instead claiming a stomachache. He lay in bed, not able to sleep at the thought that Rebecca might be in the camp herself, clinging onto life. Each day of life in the camp was likely to be a prisoner's last, it seemed. There was no guarantee of being alive next month, next week or even the next day for them. He had already waited as long as he dared. There was no time to waste.

The next morning came and Christopher returned to Block 24 in Auschwitz, at the same time he had been there the previous morning. The guard seemed to be expecting him this time and waved him through. Christopher's nerves were on fire as he walked down the corridor to Liebermann's office and he wiped the sweat from the palms of his hands before he knocked on the door. He pushed on it, not waiting for permission to enter, and Liebermann was as he had left him the previous day, sitting behind his desk, papers neatly stacked on each side. Christopher resisted the temptation of asking him, at least before he had sat down in the chair.

"Is there any news?"

"You seem very eager," Liebermann answered.

"If you knew the sums of money being spoken about, you would be too."

"Well, I did have occasion to search for your acquaintance yesterday." Liebermann looked up at Christopher. "There is no record of anyone named Rebecca Cassin, from St Martin, Jersey, ever being admitted to this camp or the camps adjunct to it."

"So what does that mean?"

Liebermann laughed. "I should have thought that much was obvious, Herr Obersturmführer. Rebecca Cassin, is not, nor ever was, here."

"What about the other camps?" Christopher asked.

"I have no idea," Liebermann said, putting his head down. He drew a piece of paper from a pile beside him and began to scribble on it. Christopher didn't move. Liebermann looked up again. "I have no idea where your friend is, Herr Seeler."

"She is not my friend, Herr Liebermann," Christopher felt his fists tighten underneath the desk at Liebermann's sneer. "Is there a way we can check the other camps?"

"Good day, Herr Obersturmführer."

"Answer the question," Christopher barked.

Liebermann looked angered by Christopher's tone of voice. "That would be a massive undertaking, a waste of my time. Now please get out of my office before I have you reported." Christopher made his way to the door, barely able to carry his own weight. He looked back at Liebermann and felt the absence of all hope as he made his way out of Block 24.

Chapter 22

Anger coursed through Christopher and the intense hatred for everything around him began to infest him like a swarm of locusts gnawing away at his insides, stiffening his gait until he had to drag each leg behind him. Every breath burned in his lungs and the urge to rip off the uniform was almost impossible to resist. He slammed the door behind him as he walked in to the office, where Breitner, Muller and Flick were attending to their paperwork. They all looked at him and he was immediately aware once more that he was under the spotlight. He was the new Obersturmführer in Canada, only in place a few weeks, and if he didn't produce results he would be replaced, and likely shipped off to the eastern front. He looked at the ledgers on his desk and the figures from the previous day's shipments. There were another two due that day, from Czechoslovakia. Christopher thought of the people, huddled together on the cattle trucks, their throats raw from thirst, clinging to the children who would soon be dead. He stood up.

"Get in here, all three of you." The three men looked at one another and jumped up out of their seats. They stood to attention in front of his desk. Christopher remained seated. "What is this I read? We had seven executions in the last week?" He looked at the three men, who seemed puzzled. "We killed more than one per cent of our workers in the last week?" Christopher stood up. "How can we possibly operate efficiently if we keep killing off our experienced workers?" The three men remained silent. "Why did this happen? Muller, perhaps you can explain."

"The executions are carried out by the guards, Herr Obersturmführer, we have very little to do with that...."

"Don't give me that. We oversee the operations in the Economic Department." Christopher had to stop himself from calling it 'Canada'. "We make the rules there. What were the prisoners executed for?"

"Some for stealing jewelry, some for stealing food." Muller was calm as he spoke. Breitner was playing with his pen, looking down at it as Christopher spoke.

“There will be no more executions without my say-so.”

“You’ve already made that clear, Herr Obersturmführer,” Muller replied.

“Yet I see that there was another execution yesterday. Have the guards been informed?” Christopher asked.

“Perhaps you should address them yourself,” Breitner said.

An hour later, the head of the guard unit in Canada was in Christopher’s office and with him six others to pass on the new regulations. The guards did not react as Christopher spoke to them. They did not question the orders they were given and saluted after Christopher had finished speaking. Christopher made his way down to the railway station, as he knew he must do for more shipments than not, and witnessed much the same scene as he did before. Less than a hundred were spared to be worked to death, while the remainder of the thousand people on the train was selected for instant death. Christopher walked through the changing rooms, overseeing the Sonderkommandos as they pawed through the clothes left behind by the soon to be murdered, who were at that stage packed into the gas chamber. Christopher left the changing room as the gas was poured into the adjacent gas chamber, the sounds of screaming more than he could bear. He walked back to the warehouses and watched as the mountain of clothes arrived. He watched the women, their heads bowed as they worked. Christopher could only imagine the yoke of the prospect of instant death that they worked under on a daily basis. And these were the lucky ones. He walked over to a table where several women sat, sorting through undergarments. He watched as one picked out a diamond necklace, sewn into the hem of an old pair of trousers. She held it up before walking back to a table behind her where she dropped it into a wooden box. She sat back down. Christopher walked over to her. Her long black hair was tied back. It was unusual to see prisoners anywhere in the main camp with long hair but for some reason it was allowed in Canada. There seemed no logic to it, or to any of this. She did not look up as Christopher stood next to her.

“Well spotted,” Christopher said. “That seemed well hidden.” The woman did not answer. Christopher bent down. “What is your name?”

She looked up at him, drawing her eyes away from his as soon as they met. “Helena Barova, Herr Obersturmführer.”

“Have you heard about me, Helena?” Christopher asked, sure that none of

the guards could hear him. Helena looked back at him, this time lingering on his face for several seconds. The other women glanced over through slitted eyes. "Have you heard that things are going to change here?"

"I just do my work here, Herr Obersturmführer," Helena whispered, glancing at his eyes for a split second and then away.

"Tell the others; tell the other women, there will be no more summary executions without my express say so." Helena looked back at Christopher as if he were insane. "There are new rules here. Tell the others." Christopher drew his head back and walked out of the warehouse.

Christopher kept his head down as he walked past the prisoners milling around, carrying suitcases or pushing carts overloaded with clothes. There was no need to avoid eye contact with the prisoners, however, as their eyes were all fixed on the ground as he walked past them, as if afraid that a look from him could finally finish them off. He opened the door to the Economic Agency office and glanced across at Muller, who was sitting at the desk, going through some ledgers. Christopher walked past him and into his own office, shutting the door behind him but then thought better of it. He pushed the door back open and approached Muller at the desk.

"We haven't really had the chance to speak yet," Christopher began.

"No, Herr Obersturmführer, not yet."

"I think in order for us to maintain the most beneficial system to the Reich, we need to understand one another."

"Of course."

"Where is my predecessor? What happened to him?"

"Obersturmführer Groening? He was transferred to the front. He applied for the transfer himself. He said that the nature of this work wasn't to his liking."

"What about you Muller, is it to your liking?"

"Yes, I'd say that it was. I was a bookkeeper before the war. This is the work I know and the best way for me to serve the Führer." Muller stared up at Christopher, seemingly completely convinced by his own assertions. Christopher picked up a paper clip from the desk and pressed it into his hand. He looked

around the room and out the window. The view was only of the side of the warehouse next door. Christopher thought of the ladies working inside.

“Is this your family, Muller?” Christopher asked as he picked a framed photograph up off Muller’s desk of a woman in her late thirties, sitting in what was obviously her Sunday dress, with two blonde girls standing on either side behind her. Christopher stared at it for a few seconds before he handed it back.

“Yes, my wife and two daughters in Hildesheim. Have you been there, Herr Obersturmführer?”

“No, no I can’t say that I have. I hear it’s a very beautiful place.”

“It is. I look forward to the day this war ends and I can return there.”

Muller smiled, the first time that Christopher had seen him smile. “Thank you, Muller. Now let’s get back to work. Heaven knows we have enough to do.” Muller nodded and picked up the ledger once more and began poring through the lists of murdered. Christopher looked at him for longer than he wanted to before catching himself and walking back towards his office. He closed the door behind him. The safe, full of money and jewelry, was the first thing he saw. He sat down at his desk, directly in front of it, but could still feel it behind him. He ran his hands through the papers on his desk in some futile attempt to distract himself, but Rebecca came to him once more. What was the point of coming here and not doing everything he possibly could to find her? Escape was going to be difficult for him as well as her, even if he could somehow find her in the network of camps. He didn’t know how many camps there were, or even where they were, just that this camp was now the biggest.

He looked around at the safe and the ledger he had written, which no one else had checked. He looked at the figures he had written. There were thousands of American dollars, Reich marks, francs and every currency he had ever heard of, sitting in that safe. A tiny fraction of that would be enough. He looked towards the door and then out the window. His hands were clammy and moist now and he rubbed his fingers over his palms. Friedrich had warned him about corruption but what punishment could they give him worse than what he had already seen? What was worse than the corruption of his soul? It wasn’t stealing if he didn’t use it for himself. There was no other way. He turned around and looked at the safe once more. He reached across to touch it, hesitated and then he heard a knock. Christopher whirled around in his chair and set himself just in

time to see Rapportführer Friedrich open the door. Christopher stood up to salute. The Nazi salute settled him, the blank look on his face making him feel less like the boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Friedrich saluted back with a more casual wave of his arm and took his seat in front of Christopher's desk.

Friedrich laughed as he began. "It's been quite the baptism of fire for you these past few weeks, Seeler." Christopher nodded, his face taut and unmoving. "The organization of the Economic Agency has improved, even in the short time since you've arrived. I hear you've instituted new rules for the guards there and established your authority over your sphere of operations." Christopher was trying not to squirm. "I understand that you've banned on the spot executions. What's the reason for this, Herr Obersturmführer? Are we to let the prisoners do as they please? There is a huge importance in making sure the prisoners know that stealing will not be tolerated."

"The workers are aware of the penalties for stealing, Herr Rapportführer. The guards were executing some of my best, most productive prisoners, oftentimes with little cause. I thought it better to impose a system whereby I would arbitrate the situations that present themselves. That way we can..."

"And how many executions have there been since you instituted this new system?"

"Well none, Herr Rapportführer. There has not been the need for any executions."

Friedrich shifted in his seat. He looked uneasy. "I understand that you want to assert your authority over the section, but it is I, as head of the Economic Agency, who should be making these decisions."

"Of course, Herr Rapportführer, but you are so busy. You have much more important duties to perform than the minor matters of executions and the like." Friedrich leaned forward, resting his chin on his palm, and putting a finger up along his face. He looked like he was going to speak, but Christopher cut him off. "I also am on the ground. Canada, as the guards refer to my section, is where I spend most of my time. I am in a better position, literally, I mean, to make those on the spot decisions. "

Friedrich sat back in his chair. He looked tired. "Perhaps. I have an

enormous job here, massive responsibilities.” Friedrich looked at Christopher as if he was trying to see through his eyes.

“Everyone is aware of the enormity of your role in the camp’s administration, Herr Rapportführer, and many of us are modeling ourselves on your example.” Christopher stood there for a few seconds looking at Friedrich before he spoke again. “Was there another reason that you came to see me, Herr Rapportführer?”

Friedrich sat back in his chair, placing his hands together in front of him. “Yes, there was, Herr Obersturmführer. There is much currency in the safe, yes?”

“Yes, there are suitcases full of dollars, pounds, Reich marks, and several other currencies.”

“All sorted, accounted for, and ready for their return to the Reich?”

“Of course, Herr Rapportführer.”

“Good, good, because I have another job for you.” Friedrich paused for a few seconds to look at Christopher before he began again. “The monies will need to be transported to Berlin. This is to be done with minimum fuss and with utmost secrecy. Your predecessor was trusted with this task and so far you’ve proved yourself to be an exemplary SS officer.” Christopher felt disgust at being described as such, but didn’t show it. “I want you to transport that money to Berlin. You will drive, alone, once every second week to transport the suitcases to SS headquarters in Berlin, where you will meet a contact, who will relieve you of the suitcases and apportion it towards the war effort.”

“Yes, Herr Rapportführer.” The thoughts and possibilities of being out of the camp for one day every two weeks flooded through him, the possibilities of seeing his family and Uli’s son, perhaps even Uli himself. Leave was still months away. The drive to Berlin was almost six hours; he might even be able to stay overnight.

“You are not to tell anyone about these trips. If anyone does inquire as to the purpose of these journeys you will tell them that you are reporting to SS headquarters about the progress of the Economic Department here in Birkenau. Is that understood?”

“It is, and thank you, Herr Rapportführer.” Christopher stood up behind his desk and clicked his heels together as he saluted.

“No need for that. You will make the journey tomorrow and then every other Thursday. You will leave at 6 am and make your way to official SS headquarters in Berlin where you will ask for Standartenführer Kohl, who will relieve you of the suitcases. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Herr Rapportführer.”

“That will be all, Herr Seeler.” As Christopher rose to his feet, Friedrich stood to salute and Christopher held his arm up. There was a picture of Hitler on the wall, and Christopher made sure Friedrich noticed him saluting towards the Führer himself. Friedrich smiled and closed the door behind him. Christopher remained in the same position, his arm outstretched, staring at the door long after Friedrich had left. His breath quickened as he thought of the safe behind him and he glared at the photograph of Hitler, watching him. But he was the only one. There were no other checks in place. There was no way for him to be caught, was there?

Christopher’s hands were shaking as he turned the dial on the safe. The acids in his stomach seemed to be eating him from the inside. He stood up. There was a noise behind him, someone coming in. The noise diminished, and he heard the sound of the camp orchestra, welcoming the workers back after a day in the factories. The sound of Wagner swelled the air around him. He knelt back down in front of the safe and thought of Rebecca. He reached up to draw down the window blind. The safe opened easily. There were several suitcases piled high, one on top of another. He picked off the top suitcase, the one full of US dollars. He had filled it himself. He had filled them all. The sound of the boiling hot blood flow booming through his ears and the music of the prison orchestra drowned out the sound of the suitcase opening, so that the clack of the lock was barely audible. He placed the suitcase on the table and drew his hands apart to open it. It had not seemed like money before, not money that he could spend. It had never seemed like actual currency to him, just units to be counted and accounted for, but these hundreds of crinkled used bills held together with rubber bands were different. Somehow they were different. He reached into the case and drew out a wad of bills and held it in his hand for a few seconds, and then placed it onto the table. The bills came off easily, several hundred dollars, his breath felt strong and uneven, and the sweat on his palms was running along

and onto his fingers. He tried to count the notes, pressing them down under his thumb but every noise from outside drew his eyes to the window adjacent to his desk. A prisoner, one the Sonderkommando, shifted past, pushing a cart piled high with pots and pans. The sharp noise of metal grinding against metal snapped Christopher back into the moment. He pushed the bills into his pocket and replaced the wad in the suitcase. He put it back into the safe with gentle hands and pushed the door shut again.

He could not remember having stolen before, not even as a child. The money felt heavy in his pocket, his feet like concrete as he stood up, and the pistol on his hip smacked against the table making a loud noise. The others were all there, Muller, Flick and Breitner, as he walked out.

“Is there something wrong, Herr Obersturmführer?” Flick asked.

“No, why should there be?”

“No reason, you just look a little...unwell,” he said as if searching for the words.

Christopher raised his wrist to a clammy forehead. “It must have been something I ate, that fish for lunch.” Breitner looked at Muller, holding his gaze for a second, and then down at his work, but none answered and Christopher walked past them out the door. Evening was setting in, the air growing cold as the sun died. He climbed onto the bicycle outside his office and made his way along the warehouses of Canada and past the prison hospital and the gypsy camp, past the men’s camp. He cycled on the other side of the road as he approached the women’s camp. He made his way past the hordes of emaciated, wretched figures barely identifiable as women themselves, returning from their day’s services to the Reich. He peered into the family camp, where the propaganda films he had been shown had been filmed, and then past the quarantine camp down to the main gate. He was outside Birkenau, cycling down towards Auschwitz. The land around the camp was barren, stark against the grey sky above. There was not a tree or a bush to be seen, just marsh and meadowland stretching out on either side.

It was a further five minutes to the gate of Auschwitz and just inside the main gate was the administration building. It was the same guard outside the door and Christopher nodded at him, as if to imply that they were friends now, but the guard looked at him as if he’d never seen him before. It was the third

time that Christopher had presented his papers on the way down here. The guard waved him past. The door to Liebermann's office was closed and Christopher looked down the empty hallway for any sign of life. He pressed his ear against the door and heard the shuffling of papers along with the thumping of his own heartbeat. He didn't wait for an answer after knocking and pushed the door open. Liebermann threw a glance up at him.

"What are you doing here, Obersturmführer?" Liebermann's rounded cheeks turned a crimson hue. "We've already been through this..."

"Well there have been fresh developments with my search," Christopher interrupted as he sat down at the desk. "I need you to find this woman. And I need it done soon."

"Have you any idea how busy I am here and how much time that would take?" Christopher threw the wad of banknotes down on the table.

"No, I don't. How much time would it take?" Christopher put his shaking hands down into his lap.

Liebermann looked at Christopher and then down at the money on the table in front of him. His chin was rigid and he took a deep breath in through his nose. "That's hard to say, to search the whole camp system...and there are new camps coming up all the time." He looked up at Christopher, his face more calm now. "It would be a difficult task."

"I have faith in you, Herr Liebermann." Christopher stood up and took a piece of paper out of his pocket. "Here are the details you'll need, and I'll call into you when I can. I have to go to Berlin tomorrow but I expect some kind of news on Friday when I get back."

Liebermann pursed his lips together and looked down at the money again. "I'll see what I can do."

Christopher got up to leave, a hope renewed inside him and the acids in his stomach settling at last. He turned around to thank Liebermann and the money was already gone.

Chapter 23

Christopher was fresh as the alarm rang, having shrugged off the attentions of Lahm and the other SS men who were in the cinema and drinking the night before. Lahm was still asleep, curled up in his uniform above the covers. One of his boots was by the door and the other still on his foot, but Lahm had taken off his belt and set it down on the table in the middle of the room. Christopher picked it up to place it on the chair when he noticed the chips in the baton, and the teeth marks. The belt slipped out of his hand back onto the small wooden table. Lahm stirred at the noise, but quickly fell back asleep. It was still dark outside, the shine of the searchlights illuminating the cold air. There was little activity other than the lights and the shadows of sentries patrolling the wire. The car was waiting for him, a convertible two seater. There was to be no support, no armed guard, no others were to know why he was going or where. There was no preparation to be made. It was a few minutes up to the office in Birkenau and once there, Christopher filled the trunk of the car with the suitcases full of money. There were four suitcases. Christopher signed them out and marked off the ledgers but there was no one else there to check. It was all down to him and his word. His word as an SS man was to be enough, or was it? Perhaps this was a test. The gas tank was full and Christopher pulled the top down, the chill of the morning air biting at his exposed cheeks. He started the car and left.

Obersturmführer Seeler presented his papers at the front gate and showed his orders. His car was not searched and the guard yawned as he waved him through. Christopher nodded and drove past and clear of the gates onto the long empty road stretching beyond. It was strange that a world still existed outside. The camp seemed to envelop everything in his mind whereby it was the entire world. He had only been there a few weeks, but it seemed hard to remember a time before the selections, the gassings and the executions. The memories of his old life, his life before robbery and death had become his daily currencies, were fading quickly like ripples expanding in a black pool, fading into nothing. It was to be a six-hour drive to Berlin and the prospect of that much time alone with his own thoughts scared Christopher. The pressure within his chest was building again and he drove for a few minutes until he thought it safe enough to pull over. He stopped the engine and silence fell upon him. The only sound was that of his

breath, ragged and torn. Everything was grey; the sky, the land, the bare trees and the uniform on his back. He sat back on the seat, gasping for air, trying to swat away the memories as they came to him, trying to keep the picture of Rebecca in his mind, desperately trying to believe that she could still be alive and that he could find her. He thought of his father and sister and seeing them in his father's cousin Harald's house where they were staying. The deep breaths filled his lungs with cold air and he started the car again.

The streets of Berlin were busy, clean and ordered, full of well fed and seemingly contented people. It seemed like a hundred worlds away. Christopher pulled up outside the Headquarters of the SS and Gestapo. There was no need for any ceremony. He asked for Standartenführer Kohl at reception and was asked to sit down by the pretty blonde receptionist. Kohl took less than a minute to arrive. He was a tall wiry man with grey hair extending into a greased widow's peak. He shook Christopher's hand with an overly firm grip. "So, you're the new man in Auschwitz?" Christopher could think of nothing to say so he just nodded. "How much have you got this time?"

"Well, we have so many different currencies..."

"No, no, let us worry about that, how many suitcases?"

"Oh, four suitcases this week."

"Times are good in Auschwitz then?" Kohl said with a smile and Christopher managed to smile back. They walked out to the car together, Kohl making small talk about Christopher's trip as they went. They unloaded the cases as if they were taking them out of the back of the car after a vacation and brought them inside and up the stairs to Kohl's office. They set them down on the floor by Kohl's desk and Christopher stood there, waiting for something else to happen. Kohl looked at him. "Thank you, Obersturmführer Seeler."

Christopher looked back at him. "Can you sign for them so that I've something to show my superior?"

"Of course, show me the ledger." He signed it with a slapdash scrawl and handed it back. "We'll see you again in two weeks. And keep up the good work."

Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler's office was on the same floor and Christopher nodded to his secretary as he walked past, noting to himself to speak

to the secretary next time he was here. Christopher left SS Headquarters, feeling as if he'd just been mugged. It was just after one o'clock as Christopher walked out onto Stresemannstrasse. He had not been given an exact time to be back. He had not been given instructions about his return at all. There was no one he had to call or check in with. It was he alone. Harald's house was less than half an hour away and on the way back towards the camp. His hands were wet as he laid them on the steering wheel. He hadn't expected this level of autonomy. There should have been someone there with him, watching him, making sure he didn't abscond with the money, but there wasn't, and there was no one to stop him seeing his family.

Christopher felt ashamed to be driving through the city in his uniform and pulled up the top on the car even though it had turned into a fine day. Harald lived in a large, five bedroom house with his wife, his children having grown up and left years before. There was room for Christopher's father and sister, but surely no room for contentment, particularly for Alexandra, completely isolated from Tom. Christopher approached the door and somehow felt nervous. He hadn't seen them in almost three months. Harald's wife Steffi answered, "Isn't this a wonderful surprise, what are you doing here? You father will be so happy, come in, come in, Christopher, look at you in your uniform, don't you look handsome?" He didn't feel handsome. She threw her arms around him. Christopher stepped inside the house where he had stayed himself for his first few weeks back in Germany. But that was a lifetime ago now. "Stefan, Stefan, you'll never believe who's here." Stefan walked out and the pain in Christopher's chest moved up. Stefan took him in his arms and Christopher could see the look in Steffi's face. "I'll leave you two to talk," she said as she edged away.

Christopher stood there with his arms around his father for a minute, or maybe more, before he broke back away to look at him. His hair was almost completely grey now, his blue eyes shining through against the lines on his face. "Is Alex here? How is she?"

"No, she's at work. She's doing as well as can be expected. What on earth are you doing here? Is everything all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine, I was sent up to Berlin on.... on an errand." Stefan looked back at him, the puzzlement plain to see in his face. They walked through into the dining room where they sat down at the table, Stefan at the head.

Christopher didn't speak, looked down at the white tablecloth. There was a color to the house he hadn't seen since he had joined the SS, bright flowers captured in paintings and orange curtains over the windows.

"Christopher, are you all right? You seem..."

"The camp where I work is called Auschwitz-Birkenau, or Auschwitz II." It suddenly felt cold and he lowered his voice to a whisper. "Is it safe?" Christopher said as he looked out towards the kitchen where Steffi was.

Stefan looked at his son and then around towards the door. "As safe as anywhere, I suppose. You look ill, Christopher. Have you eaten?"

"I've no time for that, I shouldn't even be here." Christopher sat back in the chair, took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a few seconds.

"Is there news of Rebecca?"

Christopher brought his hands up to his head. His forehead felt hot, clammy, yet cold. "No, no news. Well, I do know that she was never in Auschwitz. I just have to find out where she is now." It was hard to talk, the words sticking in his throat as his voice became thicker. "Father, what do you think has become of our house in Jersey? Do you think that the little tree house is still there?"

"I do, Christopher." The pause lay heavy in the air. "The house will be there, waiting for us, after all of this ends."

"It doesn't seem possible. It doesn't seem possible that places like Jersey exist anymore."

"They do, son." Stefan seemed to be waiting for his son to speak, but Christopher just sat there, trying to get the words trapped inside him out. "How is your new posting? Is it where you need to be? Are you able to help with the resettlement of the Jews at least?"

Christopher's eyes flashed over to his father. "There's no resettlement," he said, concentrating on each word, fully aware of his oath of silence to the SS. "There's only murder. Auschwitz-Birkenau is a death camp. It only exists for the purpose of murder and theft. And I'm in charge of the theft, the robber in chief. That's what I was doing in Berlin this morning, depositing the funds of the

murdered with the Reich.”

The blood was draining from Stefan’s face and he looked down at the table. “Is it a punishment camp? Are the inmates being executed criminals?”

“Their only crime is that they’re Jews, or political prisoners, or gypsies or Soviets. It’s murder. I’ve been there less than a month and I’ve seen almost forty thousand die, herded in on trains and gassed by the hundreds.” Christopher locked eyes with his father. “Women, children, the elderly, they’re the first to go. Those fit enough to work are kept until they’re executed on a whim or starved to death. And I’m one of them. I walk amongst the butchers, the murderers there, eat my meals with them, drink with them at night.”

Bewilderment came across Stefan’s face. “How can this be?” he whispered. “You’re not one of them, Christopher.” His jaw tightened. “Listen to me. You’re not one of them. You’re there for a reason.”

“I don’t know if she’s still alive. I don’t know if I can do this. I never thought the camp would be like this.” His eyes were moistening as Rebecca came to him. “No one else questions it. They’re all completely convinced that what they’re doing is right. I have no one to confide in.”

“You have me and the rest of your family. How many prisoners do you oversee?”

“About six hundred, almost all women.”

“Are you able to look after them at least?”

“To some extent. I’ve banned summary executions, and my commanding officer seems okay with that, he only seems to care about keeping the money flowing.”

“Well, then, you’ve got to use that power, whatever power you have to make things better, even in some tiny way. And to find Rebecca.”

“How can I? What can I do? One person? There are thousands of SS there, with the whole country behind them. There’s nothing I can do. I can only hope to find Rebecca and even then, I’ve no idea how I’m going to get her out of that hell. That’s what it’s like-hell. No worse place on the earth.”

“You have to be strong, for the ladies you oversee, for Rebecca, for

yourself. There are always ways to influence things. You're in charge of the money? Money is influence."

Christopher looked at his watch. "I have to go. I have to go back there. Is there any news from Uli?"

"No, but no news is good news."

Christopher stood up, his father did the same. "Tell Alex I said hello. I'll be coming to Berlin on this day, every two weeks. I'll come back, at the same time."

His father hugged him, held him tightly for longer than usual. "I'll be here waiting for you." He took Christopher, his face between his two hands. "Don't forget who you are."

Chapter 24

The days wore on with no news of Rebecca. She was always with him, hovering in his mind like a mist he could sense and smell, but not touch. He saw her face in every woman in Canada. He tried to stay among the women in Canada, to leave the selections to Breitner, who was always eager to be seen by the officers at the train station. Breitner was 31, almost six years older than Christopher, and had been a member of the SS for three years. It must have galled him that a younger man, raised outside the Reich, took the position he saw rightfully as his. But his work was sloppy, the accounts and ledgers rushed and often incomplete. Breitner had had problems with alcohol in the past, but seemed sober now. He never engaged in the drinking sessions that the rest of Christopher's colleagues seemed to have almost every night. Christopher never saw him after work, never knew what he did, never knew what moved him. Other than Friedrich, the officers never visited the offices or the warehouses in Canada where Christopher spent most of his time, as far away from the killing as he could keep himself. But he couldn't sever himself from the grip of death. The crematoria were only a few hundred yards away on either side, and the smell of freshly burnt flesh lay heavy in the air, all the time.

It was a convoy of Slovak Jews, about eight hundred. They were in the changing room of Crematorium 3, sufficiently calm after the lies of the SS men. It was good for Christopher to be seen close to the action. He had noticed the looks of a few of his fellow SS men in the last week or so. So he walked along the benches in the changing room, about two hundred feet long, watching the people undress, trying desperately not to make eye contact with them. An SS man named Northen, a guard from Hamburg, walked with him, barking orders between chatting to Christopher. Christopher tried to walk ahead of Northen, but every time he did, the SS guard would catch up. He was telling Christopher about his dog. Christopher smiled as Northen spoke, wishing he would stop. As he went on, a small middle aged man with a greying moustache, dressed in a white shirt with a thick brown tie, stood up and took Christopher by the arm. He was much smaller than Christopher, only up to his shoulder.

“Excuse me sir, but we're not meant to be here.”

Christopher pulled his arm away. "I'm sure you're where you're meant to be." He thought to say the standard line about the hot bowl of soup and a life of labor on behalf of the Reich in front of him and the rest of the prisoners, but he couldn't do it. He looked at the man's brown eyes. In just a few minutes he would suffer a horrific, agonizing death. Christopher had seen the piles of bodies by the doors of the gas chambers, all desperately trying to force their way out into the air, to force themselves back into life. "Calm down sir, everything is in order."

But the man grabbed his arm again. "No, you are an officer, I must speak with you. I'm very concerned about what's going on here. We were meant to be on a train to Switzerland, we were to be released there. We have all paid for this right. We have all paid a lot of money for this and were promised safe passage to Switzerland."

"This is only a stop on the way to your final destination," Northen interjected. "You're here to shower and be fed. The Swiss Government has spoken to our administrators at length about this. We have to make sure there are no lice, no infectious diseases on any of the passengers before they are transported." Northen looked at Christopher, a twinkle of mirth in his eye but Christopher's insides convulsed. Christopher had not been outside in the yard when they were brought in, had not heard the latest round of lies.

"We are from Czechoslovakia. Why were we brought northeast? Why were we brought away from the logical route through to Switzerland? It doesn't make any sense."

Northen slapped the man's arm away from Christopher and shifted his holster to the front to show an air of menace, but the man snatched for the gun and a shot rang out. Christopher saw the bullet burrow into Northen's chest and the spurt of blood that came out and then the man trained the gun on him. Christopher dove to the ground as he felt the bullet graze his arm and braced himself for the pain. Panic spread through the changing room and screams rang out in the enclosed space. Half-naked bodies moved and merged together and clothes flew through the air. Christopher was on the ground as the man disappeared into the crowd. There was no pain in his arm, just a slight burning sensation. He was too far into the changing room to see, but Christopher heard the door slam and knew that the other SS men had fled. There was a Sonderkommando about ten feet away, also lying on the ground and to his right,

Northen lay gurgling his last few breaths. Christopher drew his pistol. The screaming was subsiding now and the crowd of people that he had expected to attack him was just watching. The man was nowhere to be seen. The lights went out and the screaming began again. It was absolutely dark. There was the sound of another gunshot and Christopher threw himself onto the concrete floor again. The floor was cold against his cheek. Several seconds passed before he heard the voice next to him. The Sonderkommando had crawled over to him.

“Where is he?” the Sonderkommando said.

“I don’t know. I don’t think there’s any SS left inside. Northen is finished.” Christopher couldn’t see the Sonderkommando’s face in the dark, but he doubted that he was upset about Northen. “Let’s try and make for the door.” The two men stood up and felt their way along the wall towards the door, but it was over a hundred feet away and there were eight hundred people in the changing room with them. Christopher dared not speak aloud as he moved, and he could hear the Sonderkommando whispering prayers under his breath. Then the doors flew open and the harsh glare of searchlights penetrated the black.

“All remaining SS guards and Sonderkommandos are to exit the changing room immediately!” Christopher recognized the voice of Kommandoführer Kuntz, the head of the detail that worked in Crematorium 3. The crowd parted and Christopher dashed past the huddling masses of people and through the door along with the Sonderkommando and several of his colleagues. It was nighttime outside. There were ranks of SS men milling about, fully armed. Christopher saw Lahm, his rifle pressed against his chest. There were several heavy machine guns being moved down towards the door. Christopher put his hands on his thighs, bent over, trying to catch his breath. Lagerkommandant Höss, the head of the entire camp, was standing in front of him. Höss nodded towards him and Christopher pressed the pistol back into his holster and saluted. He heard the clump of a grenade going off in the changing rooms, then the pounding of machine guns, which were almost loud enough to obscure the screams of the people caught in the blood bath. Christopher stood alone in the yard, the lines of SS men moving past him to join in the massacre, the Sonderkommandos lined up at the side. He felt the rip in his uniform where the bullet had almost hit. There was the sound of more gunshots and still the armed SS poured down the steps into the changing room. Lagerkommandant Höss stepped back towards him.

“You were inside there, Rapportführer?”

“Yes, Herr Lagerkommandant.” Christopher’s heart rate was slowing, his breathing almost normal as he spoke.

“What happened?”

“One of the prisoners snatched Sturmann Northen’s pistol and opened fire. I’m pretty sure Northen is dead, Herr Lagerkommandant.”

“And how close were you, Rapportführer?”

“I was directly beside Northen, Herr Lagerkommandant.”

Höss noticed the tear on Christopher’s sleeve, and reached out to touch it. “I see you had a close shave yourself.”

“You could call it that, Lagerkommandant.”

“Rapportführer, I need to attend to this matter in front of us here, but I want to speak to the officers here in the yard afterwards. Stay close by, I want you to stand with me as I speak to them.”

Christopher milled around the yard listening to the sounds of massacre for the next few minutes. It was all over quickly. It was just a matter of killing them all. The SS men emerged from the changing room, the smoke billowing around them, some covered in blood. Christopher was ashamed at himself for his first thought was of the cleanup operation in the changing room and how it would have to be ready for the next day. It took several minutes for all of the troops to come out of the changing room. Once they did, the Sonderkommandos went back down to herd the few remaining prisoners, those who had managed to hide behind pillars to avoid the carnage, into the gas chamber, for there was no escape for anyone once they entered the changing rooms. Christopher walked towards the entrance to the changing rooms in Crematorium 3. Kommandoführer Kuntz was standing at the top of the steps looking down.

“This is some mess,” Christopher said. “We’ll be up all night cleaning this up.”

Kuntz looked around at him, seemingly surprised to hear him saying such a thing. “You’re the new man in Canada? You were right there when it happened, right?” He gestured down towards the changing room. “You’re lucky to be alive.” He scratched at the tuft of hair underneath his hat. “Maybe not

lucky, maybe you were good.” He proceeded downstairs into what must have been a disgusting pit of blood and gore. Christopher stepped away.

Fifteen minutes later Christopher stood beside Lagerkommandant Höss as he addressed the crowd of officers in front of him. Friedrich was there at the front, along with Kommandoführer Kuntz of Crematorium 3, Kommandoführer Strunz of Crematorium 4 and Kommandoführer Roehrig of number 5. There was a crowd of about 20, with Breitner, Flick and Muller skulking at the back. All twenty stood in rapt attention as Höss spoke.

“Tonight is an example of what can happen when we let our guard down,” he began. “The Jew is always looking for any chance to save itself, to inflict damage on us. Let this be a lesson to one and all that a lack of vigilance will end in tragic consequences. The death of a young sturmann tonight should be a lesson to all of us. His lack of alertness to the dangers the Jew presents was his undoing, but conversely, Obersturmführer Seeler’s quick thinking and alertness in the face of great danger is an example to us all.” Christopher felt Höss’s hand on his shoulder and the shame of the warm feeling it gave him. “Without Obersturmführer Seeler’s quick reactions this could have turned into a wider tragedy. His instincts as an SS man were solid and served him when he needed him most, these same instincts that every SS man in this camp should possess.”

Christopher stepped back and Höss spoke for several more minutes about security procedures, and then left as the Sonderkommandos marched back inside the changing room to clean up the mess of blood and what remained of hundreds of people who paid for and were promised safe passage to Switzerland. Their blood-soaked, shredded clothes were piled on carts to be transported across to Canada, though Christopher doubted they would find much that hadn’t been destroyed by grenades and gunfire. The body of the man who had killed Northen was found and dragged outside. He had died along with the others in the hail of gunfire. Christopher wondered if it was a better or worse fate than the gas chamber. The result was the same. His body was hung up in the men’s camp in Birkenau, a few hundred yards away, with a sign around his neck that read, *‘Look at me! See what happens to those who try to escape, and now the other 800 on my transport are dead too!’*

Chapter 25

She was from Slovakia, a small town near Bratislava, and Christopher didn't notice her at first. She was just one more of the hundreds of women he oversaw. Christopher was walking through the warehouses in Canada, on the endless rounds he made, watching the prisoners, watching the guards. There were twenty or thirty women in the room, sorting through the enormous pile of clothes piled in the corner. He felt the tug on his arm. She was probably around twenty years of age, but it was hard to tell. Her face was creamy white skin leading up to high cheekbones and piercing green eyes. Her brown hair was tied up at the back, but came down in a curl at the front. There was a beauty to her that he had not seen in a long time. Not in this place. The guard in the corner glared across at her and went to shout something before Christopher held up his hand. Christopher reached down and brushed her hand off the sleeve of his jacket. Then she spoke in a whisper that only he could have heard. None of the other women poring through the piles of clothes looked up. "Herr Obersturmführer, can I speak to you?" Christopher looked back towards the guard, who was now looking out through the open doorway at the rain driving onto the ground outside. Christopher walked on. As he turned around, she was still gazing at him. "Herr Obersturmführer, please." Christopher walked back towards her. The guard was still looking away.

"What is it?" He pursed his lips. "You've no reason to be speaking to me. Get on with your work."

"Please, Herr Obersturmführer, if I could just speak to you for a few seconds."

Christopher looked at her for a few seconds, her eyes were pleading with him. This was his section after all. Why should he not be allowed to speak to his workers? "What is it?"

"My name is Martina Culikova, please to tell you that my sister is arriving on the train this afternoon. She has her two children with her. Please, Herr Seeler, they say you are a good man."

"Who says this?" he snarled, and thought to strike her across the face as

much from the real anger inside him as from the act of being ruthless and cruel. But his hand remained steady at his side.

Her green eyes dropped like stones and fear drew across her face. “It’s just that she would make a wonderful worker. She was a seamstress back in Malinovo. She arrives this afternoon.” Martina grabbed Christopher’s arm once more, pressing her face into the sleeve of his SS jacket, the tears leaving tiny dark marks on the grey. “Her name is Petra Kocianova, she arrives this afternoon.”

“How dare you?” Christopher roared. “How dare you assume such things?” He felt the red hue in his face rise and suddenly he was very hot. The other prisoners glanced up from their work and Christopher could feel the guard staring. One word from Christopher and he would kill her instantly. Just as easily Christopher could kill her himself, just draw his pistol and fire. There would be no judgment passed, just one more body to dispose of. Martina was shaking, her whole body in convulsions as the waves of tears jarred her. The guard was walking across, his pistol in hand. Christopher held up his hand and the guard stopped. Christopher looked around the room. There were two other guards and perhaps 25 other prisoners, all had seen and heard what happened. “Come with me!” Christopher shouted, and took her by the arm. The lady next to Martina whimpered and grasped for another overcoat, running her fingers through the lining faster than Christopher had thought possible. The guards nodded and re-holstered their pistols. Martina Culikova had stopped crying, as if resigned to her fate. Her body gave out as Christopher dragged her and she fell but Christopher didn’t stop. She got back to her feet to save herself being dragged along the rough concrete floor. She was so light, like dragging a naughty child. Christopher’s breath quickened as they stepped out into the driving rain.

Christopher was walking, dragging her behind, with no idea what to do next. He knew what he would have been expected to do by both the prisoners and the guards. Where had the prisoners gotten the idea that he was a good man? That was tantamount to a death sentence here. There was no room for good here, no place for pity or remorse. The rain ran down his face, mixing with his own tears. There were few people around, just some prisoners scuttling about, pushing carts overloaded with clothes, suitcases, porcelain vases, ragged human remains. None looked at him. He could not bear to look back at her, but just kept

walking, feeling the weight of her behind him. He heard her try to speak, but couldn't make out the words. They went past several warehouses. Christopher peered in the open door of each, but no one looked out. Satisfied, he dragged her around the side of the second to last warehouse and she immediately fell to her knees and closed her eyes. She raised her hands and took off the headscarf she wore and her brown, straggly, filthy hair came free.

Christopher looked around. There was no one. "Who told you that I was a good man? I am an SS officer." The feelings of anger and sympathy in him were almost impossible to comprehend.

Martina's eyes popped open and she looked up at him, the rain running down the smooth skin of her forehead in rivulets down the sides of her face. "They say you are different," she whispered.

"Who says this?"

"The ladies in Canada. They say since you arrived the executions have stopped. They say that you are the one who handcuffed that monster, Frankl." She was still fully expecting to die. Christopher drew his pistol, his hand shaking so much the gun almost slipped out and onto the ground. As she saw it, she shut her eyes again. The pain in him was building again. It was almost unbearable.

"Why did you approach me like that, in front of the other prisoners, the guards?"

"I had to do something to save my sister and her children. I would rather die here than not try." She took a deep breath.

"What was her name?" Christopher asked as he replaced the pistol back in his holster.

She opened her eyes again. "Petra Kocianova, she's from Malinovo, she's coming with her two sons, Patrik and Karel. If you could...."

"On your feet." Christopher was almost a foot taller than her. "Never approach me again like that in front of the other prisoners." He took a deep breath before he continued. "Go into the warehouse next door, where they are sorting the eyeglasses." Christopher gestured towards her striped uniform. "Rip the edges of your clothes and sit down in the mud before you go in." Martina did as he told her and scratched at her own face leaving a long red line across the

white of her cheek. "Come on." Christopher undid his belt and dragged her back around and into the warehouse. Christopher knew the guard on duty. It was Ganz, the card player. He nodded at Christopher, who smiled back. Christopher threw Martina down on the floor in front of him.

"What's this?" Ganz asked.

"She thinks she can grab my uniform in front of the others, thinks she can ask me for favors," Christopher sneered. "I drew my own favors from her." Christopher smiled and Ganz laughed. "Put her back to work." Ganz grabbed her by the scruff of her neck and dragged her towards one of the sorting tables. The other ladies didn't look up from their work as he threw her to the floor. Christopher stood there, staring at her as she raised herself to her feet, but then caught himself. Ganz gestured to him once more, but Christopher gestured that he had to go and walked back out into the pouring rain.

It was still raining when the shipment came in. Christopher had seen no one, done nothing, just sat in his office since that morning. The damp of his hat was cold against his skin as he put it on and slipped his arms into his coat. Breitner was preparing to go down to the train station with Flick when Christopher emerged from his office.

"I'm going to go down for the selection this afternoon." Breitner and Flick looked surprised, but Christopher just nodded. "Breitner, you stay here and go over yesterday's ledgers." Breitner stood still for a few seconds before slipping his coat off and murmuring something about being glad he wasn't going out into the rain. Christopher walked past the two men without acknowledging Breitner further and Flick followed after him. Flick drove them down in the car, but Christopher didn't say a word during the short ride. Flick looked nervous.

"Is there something wrong, Herr Seeler?" He looked genuinely concerned.

"No, I'm fine. It's just the pressure of the job." Christopher tried to smile. "There's always something to worry about." He wanted to go on, to actually talk to this man, but he stopped himself.

They arrived at the train station a few minutes late. The selections had already taken place. There would be no time to decide. If he were to do it, it would have to be now. He knew where he would find her, the line where women with children were automatically put. The two men got out of the car and

Christopher dispatched Flick towards the suitcases that the Sonderkommandos were hauling off the train. The rain had thickened and the smell of damp was everywhere. Christopher looked around at the other SS guards as he made his way over towards the Sonderkommandos. The line of healthy adults selected for labor was moving off towards the main camp in Auschwitz, while the other line waited. Christopher stopped and walked over towards the camp doctors, who were hurrying back towards Auschwitz having made their selections. He stopped one, a tall fit-looking middle-aged man. "I'm looking for a prisoner," he shouted, his voice almost lost in the pounding of the rain. The doctor gestured towards the Rapportführer on duty, a huge man with a black baton in his hand. Christopher stopped and looked around at the SS men barely holding back wet snarling dogs. There was no reason to risk his own life for this. There was no point to it. This wasn't what he had come to this hell to do. This wasn't smart. He turned back towards the station, back towards his duties and, as he went, he looked at the line of people, ragged and cold, huddled together. "Herr Rapportführer, I am Obersturmführer Seeler, from Birkenau. I work in Canada."

"Ah, the new Dollar King?" The Rapportführer smiled, letting the baton fall by his side.

Christopher hesitated. "Yes, I suppose you could say that. You have one of my prisoners."

"What? Who?"

"Her name is Petra Kocianova. She is one of my ladies in Canada."

"What's she doing mixed up with this lot?" He tilted his head as he asked, the rain flowing down the angle of his cheek.

"She was transferred out and then came back with her children. She's one of mine though." The SS man looked towards the prisoners. "I would really appreciate if you did this for me. I wouldn't forget it." Christopher stared into the dark brown circles of his eyes.

"This is most irregular."

"I would be very grateful if you did this for me, very grateful."

The Rapportführer looked at him and nodded his head. "All right then, my name is Heinrich Schwarz. I expect something in return for this."

“Of course,” Christopher nodded.

“And Obersturmführer,” he called out as Christopher jogged towards the line of prisoners who were already being loaded onto the trucks. “The children, they stay with me.”

Christopher stopped, opened his mouth, tried to think of something as Schwarz stood there, but there was nothing, nothing he could do. He nodded and walked on, his heart aflame in his chest. He called out to the line of people moving towards the crematoria, called out her name. She was about his age, with long brown hair and stained white porcelain skin. Her two children huddled close to her, one holding each leg. “Petra Kocianova?” She nodded. “Come with me.” She looked around at the other prisoners for some kind of indication but there was none and she moved to get out of line, her children clinging to her. “No, sorry, just you.”

She looked back at the two boys. “What about my children? I won’t leave them.”

Christopher swallowed hard. “We will see them later. You can see them after their shower and disinfection. They are going to be taken to our kindergarten, just behind where your living quarters will be. You’ll be able to visit them every day.” The lies tore him inside. The line was moving off now, and he could feel the weight of the stare from the officer in charge. There were only seconds left to do this. Christopher tried to smile. “We need to get you away from here.” The two boys were crying now, clamping their arms around her thighs. He gestured towards an elderly woman. “Will you take care of the boys, mother?” The old woman nodded and went to take the two boys but they moved around their mother’s legs to get away from her. The line had moved on. Rapportführer Schwarz was walking towards them shaking his head. “Please, you need to come with me, right now.” Christopher’s voice was shaking.

“I won’t leave my boys.”

“Come with me, right now!” Christopher shouted and grabbed at her arm. The old woman managed to grab a hold of the younger boy, who looked about three years old. Petra looked down at her sons and knelt down to hug them. She whispered something to them and gripped them tight to her. They stood there in the driving rain, watching as her sons were taken away and an hour later Christopher took her up to Canada. Christopher led Petra into the warehouse as

the workday was ending. The guard on duty scowled as Martina Culikova hugged her sister and Christopher walked out of the warehouse, knowing that her children were already dead, their bodies soon to be consumed by the flames of Crematorium Four.

Chapter 26

The children stayed with him. The act of saving Petra Kocianova seemed futile. He saw her in the warehouse over the following days, her face lifeless and ashen. There seemed little point to any of it. The only thing to do was to wait for news of Rebecca and then extricate himself from this horror. Who would ever believe what he was here to do when he could tell no one? All the murderers would be making their contritions once all this was done, and one more from him would not be noticed. He was guilty, by association or otherwise, and that guilt was starting to erode him inside. There had to be more he could do. There had to be more than just preventing the casual murder of his workers. The beatings still continued. There was no way he could stop them, and the ladies in Canada regularly limped into work with gaudy purple bruises covering their faces.

He had been counting the hours until his next trip to Berlin, but when the day arrived, it greeted him with little relief. Nothing was enough now. His mouth was dry as he awoke, the taste of whisky still on his breath. Drinking with Lahm and his friends seemed the only way to sleep now. It was easier to go along with them, easier just to drink than to resist the constant goading. Lahm was asleep as Obersturmführer Seeler pulled on his uniform. The jackboots slid on easily. They fitted him like a second skin and made little noise as he walked out into the morning. The winter air bit at his exposed skin and he lifted the lapels of his SS coat. The sound of prisoners marching to work and the SS soldiers and Kapos snarling at them as they went, permeated the air, and somewhere Christopher heard the distinctive crack of a rifle. Christopher felt the pain rising in his chest. There was a starling on the hood of the car. He stopped to look at it, tilting his head to get a better look at its grey brown feathers. Its plumage almost shone in the dull early morning light. It had a sprig of green in its mouth that twitched and shook as it moved. Christopher watched and followed it through the air as it took off until it disappeared into the sea of grey sky above.

Christopher thought of the children all the way to Berlin, the way they had clung to Petra's legs, longing for the protection that she could no longer provide. He tried to assure himself that he had done a good thing, that he had saved a life,

that it was better that she survive, but it was no good. He cried for them as he drove, white-hot tears down his face. He thought of the boy shot in the face at selection and the man that had killed Northen. He thought of Rebecca, trying to push aside all else, trying to remember the times before all of this, when the sun cast long beams through the kitchen of his father's house, illuminating Rebecca's hair as spun gold.

They were all there as he got out of the car outside cousin Harald's house. Alexandra ran to him and swallowed him in an embrace and his father after her. He looked up to the house as Karolina stepped out with little Stefan holding her hand. The pain inside subsided, washed away. He felt Alexandra kiss him again and he broke free to make his way up towards the house and he picked up his cousin, embracing Karolina once Stefan was in his arms. Just for a second everything that he was embroiled in, the storm of murder and death, was forgotten, but as he put Stefan down again he noticed the black glare of his jackboots and the pain was restored. Alexandra came up from behind him to take his hand and led him inside. Harald and Steffi were there, standing just inside the door.

"Welcome to the returning hero." Harald smiled.

Christopher managed to smile back. "I'm so happy to see you all. I just wish I could stay longer. I have to get back to the camp."

"Come on, you can join us for a cup of coffee at least," his father said. Alexandra pushed him into the living room where he sat at the head of the table. She sat down beside him with his father on the other side. Karolina smiled and hugged him before claiming she had to take Stefan out for a walk. Harald and Steffi made their way into the kitchen. Stefan closed the door so they could talk in private, and Alexandra's face changed.

"Oh, my God, Christopher, are you all right?"

"Of course I am, what are you talking about?"

"It's your skin, you look ill," she said as she raised a hand to touch his cheek. "You look grey, cold."

"Thanks. I'm fine. It's a long journey here." He smiled. "How are you? How is your job? You must be missing Tom terribly."

Alexandra looked down at her hands, clasped together in front of her on the tablecloth. “There’s not a moment that goes past in the day when I don’t think about Tom, or you, or Rebecca. I just wish things were the way they used to be, the way they should be.”

“They will be again,” Stefan interrupted. “We just have to get through these times.”

“Father told me about the camp,” Alexandra said.

Christopher looked at his father with accusing eyes, the old flashes of anger returning for a brief second.

“Were you planning to keep it from her?” Stefan replied.

Christopher looked at Alexandra. She looked thin, the lines on her face far more pronounced than they should have been for a 23 year-old. Her eyes had dulled and her hair was lifeless and limp. He picked up the empty cup in front of him and held it up, regarding the intricate patterns on the china. They were still silent when Steffi came in with the pot of coffee. She set it down on the table with a smile and backed out slowly without saying a word. Stefan picked up the coffee pot and poured for each of them. He spoke again. “Are you safe there?”

“Yes, quite safe. I am getting quite adept at hiding my true self.” Christopher tried to smile, but instead felt the pain inside contorting his face. “As long as I keep the money flowing I will be safe.”

“Is there news of Rebecca?” Alexandra asked.

“No, not yet, my contacts are still looking.”

“I’m sure she’s out there,” Stefan said.

“I hope so. What of Uli?”

“Nothing, no letters, no word from the Wehrmacht. He’s still on the Eastern Front.”

“How many people are dying in the camp?” Alexandra said, raising her hand to her mouth. “I just can’t believe it. I cannot believe that they could do this. It’s monstrous. I knew the Jews were gone, but nobody ever talks about them, as if they just disappeared into nothing.”

“I’ve seen close to sixty thousand die, maybe more. That’s in the eight weeks I’ve been there. It’s like no circle of hell I ever could have imagined. Somehow finding Rebecca doesn’t seem enough anymore.” Alexandra was visibly shocked. It felt good to talk about it, like pouring water over the massive fire inside. “I’ve tried to help the ladies that work for me. There are six hundred of them. I’m trying to keep them alive.”

“But now you want to do more,” Stefan asserted.

“Yes, I have to.”

“But what if the SS find out that you’re helping the prisoners?” Alexandra asked.

“I’ll be executed.” Christopher looked at his sister as she began to cry. “But I think that I’d choose that over doing nothing. I couldn’t live the rest of my life knowing that I did nothing.”

There was silence in the room, the only noise that of the cars on the road outside until Stefan broke the quiet. “Is there anyone in there you can talk to? Any confidant? What do the other SS think of what goes on there?”

“There’s no one. The other SS think they’re doing a job for the Reich, for the world. They’re deluded enough, poisoned enough, to believe what they’re doing is justified.” Christopher looked around the room and took a sip of coffee. It was too hot and it burnt his lip. “It’s amazing what years of conditioning and propaganda can achieve, and I often wonder if I’d be the same as them if I’d been subjected to the same.”

“You could never be like them.” Stefan said.

“I don’t know. If I do nothing, I’m no different than they are. Carrying out orders, that’s all the other SS men are doing there. There are plenty of killers, people who love what they do there, but most of the SS are passive, just doing a job, a job where the end product is the ashes of innocent people.”

Alexandra went to speak but stopped, as if the words refused to leave her mouth. She put her head into her hands. Christopher reached over to her. Her hand was cold as he held it on the table.

“So, what are you going to do?” his father asked. “You’re right; you do

have to do something.”

Christopher bit down on his lip as he looked into his father’s eyes. “I really don’t know what I can do. I do have the money, and there are no checks. There’s no one after me to check the money. There’s a river, a monsoon, of money flowing through the camp.”

“Use it,” Stefan said.

“I think we should slow down here, Christopher could be executed,” Alexandra asserted. They both looked at her. “I just think he needs to be careful.”

“I’ve already banned any summary executions in my section of the camp. There have been no workers shot in my warehouses for a month.”

“That’s good. Is there anything else?” Stefan asked.

“There has to be something I can do for them.”

“You’re right, Christopher, there has to be.” Alexandra said.

Chapter 27

Christopher sat perfectly upright, absolutely still, outside Lagerkommandant Höss's office. It had been surprisingly easy to get the appointment. It seemed the Lagerkommandant was eager to meet up with him once more. Christopher coughed and smoothed out his collar, although he knew it was absolutely pristine from the time he had spent pressing and repressing it. He ran his hands over the smooth skin of his face and smiled across at Höss's secretary who smiled back. Höss's office was just outside the fence of Auschwitz I, and right beside the administration building where the Economic Agency's official but rarely used offices sat. The door opened. It was Höss.

There was nothing extraordinary about this man, the Commandant of all of this. He was of medium height, smaller than Christopher. He had a full head of brown hair. There was nothing striking or outstanding about his face, no scars or war wounds. He was completely average, a man in his early forties, the type of man one passes on the street without passing a glance at or paying any attention to, yet he was the master of all this horror and death. Christopher felt physically ill just looking at him, but he smiled and gave the rigid Nazi salute. Höss nodded his head and gave a lazy salute back to the young Obersturmführer. Christopher entered the room as Höss directed him and took a seat in a plush red leather chair, one of three facing Höss's massive leather-topped desk. The portrait of Hitler was looking down on them as Höss began.

"I was in Berlin last week," he said, lighting up a cigarette. He offered Christopher one from a sterling silver cigarette case. Christopher accepted and reached in. The initials engraved on the inside of the box were not Höss's. "I met with Standartenführer Kohl, of the SS headquarters. I believe he is your contact?"

"Yes, yes, he is. I've met him twice now." Christopher looked at Höss across the table, the smoke from his cigarette billowed into the air. His eyes were unreadable. Christopher wondered how much Kohl was skimming off the top for himself, and wondered if Höss was after the same thing. "I've not had the chance to meet him properly yet..."

“Yes, he’s a charming fellow. I’ve known him quite a while now. Are you a member of the Party yourself, Seeler?”

“No, I’m not.”

Höss picked a file off the desk in front of him. “Yes, I remember seeing that in your file. You’re from....”

“Jersey, Herr Lagerkommandant.” Christopher was sitting rigid, stiff as an oak tree. He thought of the dead, the festering bodies awaiting cremation and felt his insides tighten.

“Yes, of course. You were liberated in 1940. No divided loyalties, I hope?”

“None whatsoever, Herr Lagerkommandant.”

“Of course not,” Höss said throwing down the file. “There’s no room for that here, where the most important work in the entire Reich is taking place. Standartenführer Kohl tells me that production is up, significantly up, since you began here.” Höss didn’t change his expression, his eyes fixed on Christopher’s. “Berlin is happy, and that makes me happy.”

“I’m glad, Herr Lagerkommandant.”

“Yes, I joined the party in 1922 myself.” He was looking past Christopher now, as if peering back to those halcyon days.

“I read about your record in the last war, how you were one of the youngest non-commissioned officers in the German Army, and I know you started off as a concentration camp guard yourself in ‘34.” Höss didn’t answer, seemingly happy to let Christopher continue. “My own father served in the war also, I’m grateful now for my opportunity to serve the Fatherland.”

Höss pushed the smoke out of his mouth. “I’m glad to see such dedication. I have been most impressed by the work you’ve done in the Economic Agency so far. But, as you know, I am a busy man. What is it that you’ve come to see me about today?”

Christopher raised his hands in front of his face and pressed his fingers together. “There’s been something troubling me ever since I arrived in the camp.”

The Lagerkommandant's face didn't change as he sat back in his leather chair. "And what might that be, Obersturmführer Seeler?"

Christopher paused for a few seconds, Höss's words swirling around him. "Corruption, Herr Lagerkommandant." Höss's eyes widened and then narrowed in less than a second and a scowl began to crawl across his face. "Now I have no idea what went on in my department before my arrival, and I certainly don't want to pass judgment on my fellow SS soldiers who operate in the Economic Agency, but I have heard some things, and seen some things also." Christopher glanced down at the cigarette case, but then jerked his eyes back upwards as if they were burnt by the sight of it. It took him a couple of seconds to look the Commandant in the eyes again.

"It's a sickness," Höss said shaking his head. "I have little doubt that it's a disease spread by the Jew himself, the sickness of greed. It's true that some of the men have succumbed to it. It's up to men like you, dedicated SS officers to provide the example these men need."

"That's what I'm here to speak to you about."

"Go on."

"There has to be a tighter system of checks and balances put in place. Too much wealth is being lost before it has the chance to make it back to the Reich, to where it can do the most good." Christopher put his hands back in his lap and looked up at the portrait of Hitler on the wall and then back at Höss. "There needs to be someone on the ground with access to the ledgers, to the monies, to the warehouses, and who can watch over the prisoners, and yes, the guards themselves, to make sure that any improprieties are stubbed out as soon as they occur." Höss let a smile spread across his lips, but Christopher kept talking. "I have been watching the entire Economic Agency, every minute of every day since my arrival, and I think that the results have been evident. But it's still not enough. I estimate that ten per cent, or more, of all the wealth to be apportioned to the Reich never arrives. I have worked out that for every two thousand prisoners that pass through the crematoria on a daily basis we only collect about forty thousand Reichmarks, not including the gold and jewels the prisoners are carrying. Logic dictates that the prisoners are carrying more than this. They have to be. I want to make it my job, my responsibility, to make sure that none of this wealth is lost."

“Is this not already your job, your responsibility?”

“It’s one of the many roles that I undertake, but I want to be custodian of the ledgers, to check and re-check the staff, the guards and the prisoners themselves.” Christopher sat forward as he spoke, he could almost feel the fire in his eyes. “I need a mandate to search any guard or any locker, any truck, and under any bed of anyone I suspect of stealing and hoarding wealth meant for the Reich.”

“You want to take personal responsibility for all of the issues with corruption in the Economic Agency?”

“Nothing would make me happier, Herr Lagerkommandant.”

Höss looked at Christopher through opaque eyes. “Corruption has been a problem in the camp for too long now. I was speaking about it only last month with Herr Himmler himself.”

“I would like to make weekly reports about it, to you only. There should be no one else involved. It’s too important an issue.”

“An interesting idea, Herr Obersturmführer,” Höss said as he stubbed out the cigarette. “It’s certainly something I would like to think about.” He pressed his lips together before he continued. “A young committed officer like you could do much to stem the insidious hand of corruption.” Höss stood up and held out his hand. “Well done, Herr Obersturmführer, give me some time and I will get back to you.”

“There is something else, Herr Lagerkommandant.”

“You have my attention, Herr Obersturmführer. You have had my attention since that night you showed your bravery in Crematorium 3.”

“Well, what I wanted to ask about was the children passing through the camp.”

“What about them?”

“I was considering that we might be able to repatriate some of them, the babies perhaps, the ones that have not been poisoned by the Jewish ideologies and lies yet, so that we may impose some of our Aryan ways upon them, to purify them as it were, like a mission of mercy.”

“I understand what you’re saying, and I’ve had that thought myself before, but the sad fact of it is that they are just as much enemies of the Reich as their parents. It’s in their blood. They have no choice. A Jew will always be so, nothing more, nothing less. They must be eradicated.”

Christopher forced the bile down his throat. There was no answer for that, at least not now. “I understand that, but how about the young children, the three, four and five year olds. They could be put to work in the factories, cleaning out pipes, getting into machinery, their fingers can reach places adult hands cannot.” Christopher held his hands up. “I mean, what chance do we adults have?” He smiled. “It’s just economic sense. I think in logical terms, Herr Lagerkommandant, and that one thing that I cannot stand is waste.”

“A compelling argument indeed, Herr Obersturmführer, but unfortunately Jewish blood is Jewish blood.”

“We keep hundreds of able bodied Jews every week to work for the Reich. I just don’t see the sense in there being an age limit, that’s all. I think in black and white, economic terms. It’s my father’s fault; he is a very logical man.” Christopher felt ashamed for mentioning his father’s name in this place.

Höss smiled. “I have very much enjoyed meeting you today, Christopher. You are an exemplary young officer, with many good ideas. The idea of making the children work? Well, again, it’s something we could give thought to. But now I must bid you goodbye.”

Christopher smiled, shook the Lagerkommandant’s hand and clicked his heels together to give the Nazi salute. Höss did think about it for three days, and then Christopher received the memo that he was to head up a task force to investigate corruption in the camp and to have recommendations in place for a new system to prevent monies being siphoned off at source within two weeks. There was no mention of the children and his idea to make them work, not yet. Christopher looked out as the sun was setting over the horizon. He thought of Rebecca, the children that he couldn’t save, and the thousands of faceless murdered that he had seen pass through this place. For the first time in a long time, he felt hope within him.

Chapter 28

The guards greeted Christopher as he walked into the dull, smoky grey room. They were all there; Lahm, Ganz, Meyer, Schlegel, Dreier, Bruns, Mohr and Greune, as well as two other SS that Christopher hadn't met before. Christopher's seat, between Lahm and Ganz, was left empty and he sat down. The table was littered with the usual mix of cigarettes and all kinds of booze pilfered from the stores. Greune pushed a glass of whisky across to Christopher, which he accepted with a smile.

"I trust we are all well tonight, gentlemen," Christopher began. He was greeted by a series of grunts from around the massive table. "And I hope you're all ready for me to take your money." He laughed. A few smiled, but most remained transfixed on the cards in front of their faces. There was a large pile of money in the middle of the table, mainly Reichmarks, but there were also British pounds, US dollars and Polish zloty peeking through. Christopher looked around the table, sipping a glass of whisky, waiting for the next hand. "I don't think I can stay too late tonight," he said. "I have to be up early tomorrow morning for a meeting with some of the top brass." None of the men around the table looked up. "I'm setting up a new anti-corruption committee, sanctioned by the Lagerkommandant." Now all eyes were on him. Several of the men had put their cards down, but none spoke. "I'm going to be heading up the committee. The Lagerkommandant asked me to take charge." Christopher made sure he made eye contact with each man around the table as he spoke. "Now, I know that my findings won't affect any man here," he looked down at the pile of bank notes and then back up at Lahm and then Dreier. Still no one spoke but none dared look away from Christopher. Obersturmführer Seeler put down his glass of whisky and smiled. "If you have any doubts, any questions, come to me. If there's anyone you know who might have been engaged in anything that might look illegal, speak to them. Warn them. Tell them to lay off, for a few weeks at least, until the Anti-Corruption Committee has done its work." Ganz pushed out a deep breath and Christopher reached across to put his hand on his shoulder. "I've no desire to put any of my mates behind bars, boys, in fact quite the opposite. Tell your friends what's happening. Of course there's no need for me to tell any of you this. I just thought.... in case you had friends around the

camp...”

“Yes, we understand,” Lahm said. Christopher picked up his glass of whisky again, watching the golden brown liquid swirling around. There was no more talk about the Anti-Corruption Committee that night.

The first meeting of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Anti-Corruption Committee was held in the administration building the next morning, just a few doors down from Liebermann’s office. Christopher sat at the head of the table. Outside the window, the first tiny snows of the season were floating down. Breitner sat directly to his left. Christopher noticed he had pressed his uniform especially for the meeting. Flick and Muller were there, and, opposite them, sat the Kommandoführers Kuntz, Strunz and Roehrig, the heads of the crematoria and at the opposite end of the table, away from the others, sat Jan Schultz, the head of the Sonderkommandos in Canada. Christopher began the speech he had been rehearsing in his head for the previous week. “Thank you for coming here today, gentlemen, for the first meeting of our committee. I will keep this short, as I know you are all busy and there is a train arriving in less than an hour that we will all need to attend to.” Christopher looked around the room. “I want to particularly thank the KommandoFührers Kuntz, Strunz and Roehrig from taking time out of their busy schedules to attend.” The three men nodded. “I have summoned you here today because you are men I know I can trust, and, in matters of this importance trust is absolutely essential. Word is that we will have a new Lagerkommandant soon, as Herr Höss will be moving to Berlin to take a more direct role in the war effort. It is our job to prepare the camp for the new Commandant, to show him that we are the SS men who are not prepared to put up with the insidious cancer of corruption that is slowly taking a hold of all corners of Auschwitz-Birkenau. A successful anti-corruption campaign will lead us all onto great personal glory, as well as securing the future of the camp in its current guise. Let’s not forget, gentlemen, why we are all here, to further the ideals that our Führer himself has passed down to us, and to secure the future of our world and our civilization.” Christopher looked down at Schultz. His face was stoic, rendering absolutely no emotions. “I have asked the head of the Sonderkommando unit in the Economic Agency zone to attend today. Now I know that several of you were surprised at his inclusion in the committee, but I think in order for us to be successful we need to work with the prisoners.” Christopher spoke for another twenty minutes, about checks and procedures, about secrecy and punishment for transgressions. Each man had a dossier in

front of him that Christopher had compiled himself, with explicit instructions on each stage of their operations. Christopher noticed Kuntz shifting uneasily in his seat as he read through the papers. The meeting was over in less than an hour. Each man left clear about, if not entirely happy with, their new set of instructions. Christopher stayed in the room for a few minutes after, making sure they had all left before he went down the hallway to see Liebermann. He didn't bother knocking on the door, just pushed straight inside.

“Liebermann. I trust you've heard who the new head of the anti-corruption taskforce in the camp is?”

Liebermann looked flustered as Christopher sat down in front of his desk. “Yes, I did hear that. Congratulations on your new appointment. Who on earth saw fit to give you of all people such a role?”

Christopher smiled. “None other than the Lagerkommandant himself. He knows a good SS officer when he sees one.”

Liebermann shook his head. “Perhaps it is best that he moves to Berlin after all.”

“You know me too well, Herr Liebermann, but I know you too. Let's not forget that. Now that I'm head of the Anti-Corruption Committee...well?” Christopher shrugged.

Liebermann laughed. “Don't try to strong-arm me, Herr Obersturmführer. Don't forget who your superior officer is.”

“Of course not, Herr Hauptsturmführer.” Christopher looked back at Liebermann. “I want what you want, to serve the Fatherland and the Führer.”

“Indeed,” Liebermann said looking down at his papers. “And speaking of your service of the Fatherland and the Führer I may have some news of your prisoner.”

“Where is she?” Christopher snapped, trying to hold himself back.

Liebermann sneered. “I've managed to find some prisoners from Jersey, in a camp in Baden-Württemberg. I don't know if your friend is there among them, not yet anyway.”

Christopher resisted the jibe about her being his friend and continued as

casually as his thundering heart rate would allow. “When will you find out?”

“I have written another letter. I should receive reply within a week or so, depending.”

Christopher stood up, his legs wobbling under his own weight. “Very good then, I will check back with you in a few days. Keep up the good work, Herr Hauptsturmführer.” Christopher walked out of the office, love and hope burning through him. There was a thin layer of snow on the ground and, just for the matter of a few seconds, he forgot where he was and that he was going to assist in the murder of thousands of innocent people that day.

The day passed like any other. The snow was soon churned over by the footprints of the thousands of new prisoners who arrived that day as they trudged to their horrible deaths. Christopher watched the children as they went. Where was the word from the Lagerkommandant about them? Should he go to the head of the factories himself? He knew he had to be patient, but the agony of watching them file into the changing rooms was becoming too much to bear and he made his excuses to go back to his office where he sat for several hours, poring through reports and files, ledgers and records, anything to distract himself.

It was the end of the day, dark and cold, and the snow was falling again when he left his office to see Schultz in Crematorium 4. Christopher reached for his long coat and tucked the collar up to cover his ears as he made his way out into the dark outside. Work was officially over for the day, but there were still Sonderkommandos tending to their own duties. They all saluted him as he walked past. The warehouses were empty, the ladies from Canada returned to their bunkhouses a few hundred yards away. Christopher looked up at the guard towers. He was close enough to see the condensation from the guard’s breath as he turned the searchlight down along the wire. Christopher waved upwards and was just able to discern the wave back. The yard outside Crematorium four was deserted but for a couple of Sonderkommando pushing carts of suitcases towards the warehouses in Canada. Christopher pushed the door open and walked into Crematorium 4. The Sonderkommandos’ quarters were upstairs and by the standards of the rest of the camp they were luxurious. The Sonderkommandos were given bunk beds, one each, with clean sheets in heated dorms. They ate their meals alone and blind eyes were turned to allow them to steal as much booze as they could ever drink. These were their rewards for the work they did,

as well as the right to live one more day themselves. Schultz was not there. Christopher asked the Sonderkommando, a young Polish boy, probably no more than 19 years old, where he was and was told to check the hair-cutting room, downstairs near the ovens.

Schultz whirled around as Christopher found him. There were four other Sonderkommandos with him, all experienced in their jobs, most of them having worked in the crematorium for 2 months or more, which was around the life expectancy of a Sonderkommando. All five men stood in a line in front of a bench at the back wall. Their faces betrayed something. "Herr Obersturmführer, what brings you down here?" Schultz began. Christopher did not answer. "Have you come to check the progress of the Anti-Corrupt..."

"What's going on here?" Christopher said.

"Not a thing, Herr Seeler," Schultz again spoke. Christopher heard it, the faintest gasp, and wished he had never walked into that room. He drew his pistol, his hand shaking.

"What's going on here?" Christopher said, his voice louder now. "What was that?"

"I didn't hear anything Herr Obersturmführer," one of the other Sonderkommando, a Pole called Becker, said.

Christopher thought to shoot him, to run out to get help, to call Strunz, the head of Crematorium 4, but he did none of those things. "What do you have back there? Stand away, stand away or I will shoot all of you!" The men parted and he saw the crumpled body of a little girl, perhaps eight years old, lying on the bench, her chest expanding as she gasped for breath. Her long brown hair fell almost to the floor in straggly knots, half covering her filthy face. She was wearing a grey man's shirt. "Where did she come from?"

"She was in the last shipment," Schultz said. "We found her in the gas chamber, underneath her father's body." He was walking towards Christopher now and Christopher trained his gun on him, aiming right at his face. "She was alive. Still alive after the gas poured in." He was still approaching, now only a few feet away.

"Stop right there, Schultz. I will shoot you right in the face. I swear I will." Schultz stopped six feet short. Christopher's hand was visibly shaking and the

tears were welling in his eyes.

“She survived the gas. The first person any of us have ever seen do so. She must have been trapped in a bubble of air. It’s a miracle; there’s no other explanation for it.” Schultz stopped. “Are you going to shoot her?”

“I will shoot you, Schultz.”

“Go ahead.” Schultz said, standing still, his hands out in front of him.

“Don’t make me do this, Schultz, all of you will be dead in minutes if I report this. I just have to...”

“We all know that, Herr Obersturmführer. All our lives are in your hands, even hers.” Schultz let his arms fall to his side, staring directly at Christopher, his icy blue eyes strong. Christopher couldn’t speak, could only stare and those few seconds seemed longer than some years of his life. The men at the back were standing still and the girl coughed again. One of them turned to her and knelt down to press his ear against her chest. He said something in Polish. One of the other men knelt down beside them and began compressing her chest and then blowing air into her mouth. But still Schultz stared at Christopher and still Christopher pointed the gun at his face. The prisoner drew his mouth away from the girl and she began to cough and splutter on her own.

“Is she going to live?” Christopher asked.

“Maybe, we don’t know. Tomas is a doctor,” Schultz said, gesturing towards one of the men. “Tomas, how is she doing?”

“Her lungs are damaged, but I think she’s going to make it.”

“It’s all up to you now, Herr Obersturmführer. Do you kill her? Kill us? Or just walk out of here and pretend you never saw anything?” Schultz said.

Christopher looked at Schultz and then the other four men until his eyes finally came to rest upon the girl. He pressed his gun back into its holster. “What are you going to do with her? Have her work in the Crematorium burning stiffs? You know there’s no place in this camp for children.” He brushed past Schultz towards the girl, stopping about three feet short. “First thing we need to do is get her out of here. There are too many guards around.” The others looked at him, but he moved past them, knelt down beside her. Her heartbeat was faint to his

touch and her chest heaved as her lungs scratched for air. “Let’s get her over to my office.”

“How are we going to get her over there?” one of the men asked.

“Get a cart,” Shultz said. “Heap it up with whatever clothes you can find. We’ll put her under there. Get some clothes for her too.”

“But the changing rooms have been cleared,” the man said.

“Well, then improvise. Go, all four of you, and be quick.” Schultz ordered.

Christopher had his hand on the girl’s chest, feeling the rhythm of her breathing, in and out. Schultz was standing behind him, but Christopher didn’t turn around. “Herr Obersturmführer, you should probably stand at the door in case...”

“Schultz, if you breathe a word about this....”

“Of course not, Herr Seeler, I would be just as culpable...”

“Don’t interrupt me, Schultz. If you tell anyone, I will have the entire Sonderkommando unit sent to the punishment block where you will all be tortured and starved to death.”

“Yes, Herr Obersturmführer. This never happened.”

They waited in silence for the next several minutes, with Schultz tending to the girl, while Christopher waited by the door for any guards that might have been walking past, but there were none and the only sound was of the girl’s fractured breathing. “Do you know what her name is? Where she’s from? Was she in the last shipment from Prague?”

“She hasn’t spoken; she’s barely been conscious, but yes, she was in the last shipment.”

“What the hell are we going to do with her once we get her back to my office?”

“Could you get her into the children’s block in the family camp?”

“I could try.” Christopher had never seen the children’s block, but had heard it was one of the worst in the entire camp. The children there died like

flies or were picked off for medical experiments or by sexual predators. Many of the Kapos had their own little boys or girls they kept for themselves. Christopher looked down at the nameless little girl and wondered whether a quick death might be better than that.

There was a knock on the door and the whispered voices of the other four Sonderkommandos filtered through. Christopher opened it. They were carrying sheets and clothes from their own quarters. One of the men said something in Czech and then Christopher heard some Polish. Schultz spoke in German. "Where is the cart?"

"Outside the main door," Becker said. "There's no one out there." Christopher looked at his watch. It was past 8 o'clock and most of the guards would be off duty. But there were always guards, and the searchlights. The girl was covered over in blankets and coats within a few seconds and two of the men picked her up with gentle hands, one holding her shoulders, the other her feet. Christopher opened the door and looked up and down the dull concrete hallway before he bade them to come through. There were no guards and they stepped outside and placed her on the cart, on top of more clothes, and then heaped some more over her.

"We don't need five men to push a cart full of clothes. Tomas, is she okay?" Christopher asked.

"She just needs to rest, needs liquids. But I think she'll be fine. It truly is a miracle."

"Save the religious exhortation," Christopher snapped. "Schultz, push the cart, the rest of you back to your quarters." Schultz pushed the cart and it wobbled through the thin covering of slush and snow. It was several hundred yards to Christopher's office. A guard passed by. Schultz pressed his eyes to the ground. They kept going. The girl began to cough, the sound clearly discernible through the clothes. "Is she choking?" Christopher whispered to Schultz, walking beside him.

"I don't know." There was a group of guards standing underneath an awning by the first of the warehouses. They were pushing the cart directly towards them. There was no way around.

Christopher strode on towards the guards, leaving Schultz to push the cart

alone. "Evening, boys," he said. "I see the snow is setting in. Do any of you have a cigarette?" One of the guards who Christopher knew from Canada offered him one.

"You're working late, Herr Obersturmführer," another guard said.

"Yes, no rest for the wicked. Did you hear about the new Anti-Corruption Committee?" Each man nodded. "Yeah, my advice would be to be careful for the next few weeks." Christopher watched as the cart trundled past and could hear the rasping sound from below. Schultz began coughing loudly. None of the SS men looked at him. Christopher waited until the cart had passed before throwing down the half-smoked cigarette. "Just be careful boys, with a new administration coming in, we all need to watch ourselves." The men nodded and thanked him and he left to catch up with the cart. He walked five yards behind Schultz until he knew he was out of sight of the guards and then caught up. They moved in silence. The coughing had stopped. Christopher knew she was dead. They reached the office and pushed the door open. They brought the pile of clothes inside, still no noise from within, and laid her out on the floor. It was dark in the office, the only light the silver beams from the searchlights outside streaming through the windows. Christopher pushed his ear to her chest. She was still alive. He smiled and looked at Schultz who smiled back. The girl coughed again and her eyes opened. Christopher pushed her hair away from her face as she lay on the floor of the office, just in front of Breitner's desk.

Chapter 29

There was a jug of water in the corner and Schultz put the cup to her mouth, the liquid dribbling down her chin as she coughed again. The lights in the office were off and both men were completely silent, the only sound that of the girl's breathing. She was wearing a shirt that one of the Sonderkommandos had given her and her bare legs twitched in the half-light of the office. Christopher motioned towards the blanket draped over Flick's chair and Schultz covered her up. There was a pair of pants for her among the blankets and Schultz helped her into them. The adrenaline of earlier was clearing and Christopher was thinking, trying to find some solution to a situation that seemed impossible. There was simply nowhere for her to go. Schultz certainly couldn't take her back to the Sonderkommandos' quarters. They had been lucky to get her out of the crematorium at all. Where would he keep her? How would he get out of the camp? There was only one way out, the prisoners said, and that was through the chimneys of the crematoria. Christopher put his hand on the girl's forehead; it was cold to the touch but getting warmer. Her parents, her entire family, were probably dead now, their bodies heaped in the crematoria or already crammed into the ovens. Was there any real mercy in saving her? He picked up the cup of water and dripped it into her mouth. Schultz began to speak, something in Czech.

"Does she hear you?" Christopher whispered.

"I don't know."

Her eyes flickered, opened and looked up at Christopher through the dark. She was alive, truly alive. "She's awake. Ask her what her name is." Christopher elbowed Schultz, decrying the half-second hesitation before responding. "Do it." Schultz looked at him and then down at the little girl, whose eyes were now fully open. He reached down and stroked her cheek before asking her name in Czech. They stared at her for a few seconds but she said nothing. "Ask her again," Christopher demanded.

"She's terrified. Her family is all dead, and now she's here all alone..."

"Anka," she said and both men stared down at her. Christopher smiled and

reached down to smooth back her hair. He took her hand, warm in his.

“You can leave now, Schultz.”

“Are you sure, what are you going to do with her?”

“Well, you can hardly bring her to the crematorium with you, now can you?” Christopher looked at him. “I’ll take care of her. Go back to your quarters.” Schultz looked at him and then down at the girl. He reached down and touched her face once more and leaned down to her ear. Christopher could hardly make out the muffled whispers in the language he didn’t understand, but he did hear his name. Schultz stood up. “What did you say to her?”

“I told her who you were.” Christopher could see his eyes through the dark and saw that his hands were shaking by his sides. “I told her that she would always be safe as long as she was with you.”

Christopher opened his mouth to speak, but no words came, and instead he just watched as Schultz walked out of the office. She began to cough again and Christopher held her up, sat down beside her, held her to him and felt her arms spread around him. He sat there, letting the seconds unfurl, waiting for her to stop, to take her arms away, but two minutes later they were still there stuck together. He brought his arms away and detached hers and saw the tears on her cheeks, silver in the moonlight. She said something. Something low that, even if Christopher had spoken Czech, he would probably not have made out. He felt Rebecca, as if she were in the room with them, watching him.

“I’m sorry, I can’t understand you.” She spoke again, and he knew by the inflection in her voice and the look of bewilderment on her face that she was asking him something, and he knew it was about her parents. He was glad not to be able to answer and he looked away. “Now you stay right here.” He took one hand off her and pointed to her chest and then towards the floor. “You stay here. I will be back in a few seconds.” He stood up. Outside, the cart was gone, as he had hoped. Christopher fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette before throwing it down without lighting it. He looked up and around. There was nothing and no one. He stood still for a few seconds listening, before pushing open the door to the main office with his shoulder. Anka was still sitting, exactly as he had asked her to. She hadn’t moved or made a sound. Christopher picked up the blankets where Schultz had left them and opened the door to his office. He dumped the blankets on the floor and went back to her. “We’re going to go in here now, into

my office,” he said, reaching out to take her hand. She curled her fingers around his and stood up and they went together. Christopher laid out the blankets just in front of the desk in his small office and wondered about risking his, and perhaps Rebecca’s, life for this little girl whom he’d not even met an hour before. He flattened down the blankets and gestured for her to lie down, but she didn’t move. “Come on,” he said, and he knelt down. She was crying loudly now. Christopher looked up at the window at the night outside. He put his arm around her and she embraced him, her arms around his neck. “Shhh,” he said, his finger to his lips. “You need to be quiet, Anka.” She drew her head back, her eyes watery and afraid. “It’s okay, I’m here. I won’t let anything happen to you.” The words came easily. He hugged her again and got down on his side, his black SS jackboots sliding on the floor. He took off his SS jacket and put it across her as an extra blanket and lay down, taking her into his arms and held her until she fell asleep.

Christopher awoke with the dawn, his arms still around Anka. She was warm, still alive, the first thing he checked. He looked at his watch. It was just after seven. There was another meeting of the Anti-Corruption Committee in two hours and he would be gone most of the day. There were two shipments coming in. Muller, Flick and Breitner would be in and out of the office. He looked down at Anka, her eyes still closed as she stirred in her sleep. Was there any hope? Any point in this? Christopher pushed her dirty, matted hair away from her face. There had to be some way of hiding her until he could smuggle her out of the camp on his next trip to Berlin. His father could take her, could find somewhere for her. It was five days until his next trip to Berlin, five long days to hide her, but where? Perhaps Schultz could hide her during the day, or he could ask some of the ladies in Canada to hide her. His body ached from sleeping on the floor as he pushed himself up. Anka still slept. He sat in the seat in front of his desk and stared at her for twenty minutes or more. Then he heard a knock on the door. Anka opened her eyes at the noise and Christopher shot out of his seat. Christopher tried to calm himself, to stay still but knew the person must have heard him.

“Obersturmführer Seeler?” Friedrich’s voice poured through. “Are you inside there?”

“Yes, Herr Rapportführer, just give me a second, I must have fallen asleep at my desk last night.” Anka’s eyes were wide open and she sat up. Christopher

put a finger to his mouth and looked around the room, his eyes going from the overstuffed closet to the safe to the desk in less than a second. Christopher put his hands together and raised his finger to his lips again. The girl seemed to understand the gesture.

“Herr Seeler, I only wish to speak with you briefly.”

“Coming, Herr Rapportführer.” Christopher lifted Anka to her feet and off the blankets. He threw them over his chair and motioned for her to crawl under his desk. He walked to the door, smoothing back his hair before he unlocked it. Christopher opened the door a few inches and looked out at Friedrich’s face.

“What is the hold up, Seeler? Why is this door locked?”

“Nothing Herr Rapportführer, I just wanted to be presentable,” Christopher replied as he tried to slip through the door into the office. But Friedrich blocked him. They were face-to-face, inches apart.

“I’d really rather talk in your office, Seeler.”

Christopher smiled. “I’d rather we didn’t if you don’t mind, it’s a mess in there.”

Friedrich’s expression grew cold. “I am requesting we do not speak out here. What I have to discuss is of a sensitive nature.”

“But Herr Rapportführer...”

“Seeler, don’t make me ask again, I won’t speak about this out here.” Anger was spreading through his face, tightening his jaw and reddening his pale skin. Friedrich pushed against the door and Christopher had no choice but to give way. Christopher just had time to glance back at the front panel of his desk. Anka was completely hidden behind it. Christopher moved backwards and stood in front of the desk, but Friedrich sat down, dragging the chair two or three feet from where the girl was cowering. Friedrich looked at him, obviously waiting for him to sit in his seat for the meeting to begin. Christopher walked around and sat down, his hands shaking as he pulled the seat out and brushed the blankets to the floor.

“I see you had a late night.”

“There’s always so much work to do.”

“And I hear you’ve volunteered to do more.” His tone was sharp as he spoke. Christopher had not seen him like this before, had never seen fear in his eyes before.

“I assume you’re referring to my activities with the Anti-Corruption Committee?” Christopher felt Anka moving, felt her brush against his trouser leg, and he shifted in his seat.

“I am surprised you would set up such a committee without referring to me, your direct superior.”

“I apologize, Herr Rapportführer. I should have included you in any plans I made, it’s just that I know how busy you are, how much responsibility you shoulder.” Friedrich’s face didn’t change and he cupped his hands together. Christopher leant forward and he felt Anka clutching his leg underneath the desk. “There are some things that I would like to show you in the warehouses...” Christopher stood up.

“Sit down Obersturmführer.” Friedrich growled. “Don’t forget who the ranking officer is here, even if you’ve got your nose up the Lagerkommandant’s back side.”

“Herr Rapportführer, in no way does my position as a part of the Anti-Corruption Committee lead me to any false beliefs about my status in the camp. I am just an accountant, and that’s what they needed.” Christopher coughed, and took a deep breath. “I do apologize for not involving you in the process further, but it’s a process that has barely begun as of yet. There is plenty of room for your input should you wish to supply it.” Anka was tight around his right shin now, and he could feel the shudders through her body as she tried not to cough. “If you want to join any of our meetings...”

“And what exactly will be the methods that the Committee will be employing?”

“We will be tightening security at all points during the process of repatriation of goods to the Reich. The checks will begin from the...initial selection all the way to the final process of loading the goods to be sent back to Berlin. The system which my predecessor put in place is too... loose, there are too many holes.” Christopher voice was shaking, his hands clammy with sweat.

Friedrich looked across the desk at him for a few seconds before he began

again. “What of these checks? What can my guards expect?”

“We have been given full access to all personal property, lockers, closets and all other spaces to carry out searches for any contraband. If the individual guard is not stealing, then he has no reason to worry.” Christopher’s breath had quickened and the words clattered all over one another as he pushed them out.

“I see.” Friedrich pursed his lips, seemingly satisfied. He sat up straight in his chair and then he seemed to hear it, the cough from beneath the desk. He looked across at Christopher, who felt the bead of sweat run down his back. “Did you...”

“If that’s all, Herr Rapportführer....”

“What was that?” Friedrich stood up and darted to the window. Christopher jumped up, feeling Anka’s grip fall away beneath the desk. “I’m sure I heard something,” Friedrich continued.

“I didn’t hear anything.”

“No,” he said, holding his hand in the air. Christopher could clearly discern Anka’s breathing against the silence. “Do you hear that, coming from outside the window?”

“What? From outside? Do you think it’s a prisoner?”

“There’s only one way to find out,” Friedrich said and bounced out of the seat. Christopher followed Friedrich out of the office and around the side of the building into the cold of the morning. The sun was in the sky casting a dull yellow onto the camp below.

“It must have just been a prisoner walking past, believe me, Herr Rapportführer, this happens all the time. I get a lot of traffic outside my window.” Friedrich looked up and around. The chill of the morning almost froze the sweat against Christopher’s skin. “I have a meeting at 10 am with Kommandoführer Strunz in Crematorium 4 regarding the new procedures we wish to put in place. Would you like to sit in on it?”

“Yes, yes I would,” Friedrich said after a few seconds hesitation. “In his office at 10?” Christopher nodded and saluted as Friedrich walked away. Christopher followed him around the wooden prefab and watched him walk

towards the crematoria and then ran inside. Muller, Breitner and Flick hadn't arrived yet but that would not be long now and he burst into his office and reached under the desk. Anka said something as he pulled her out and he held her in his arms, one hand underneath her and one on her head.

"I can't take this," he heard himself say in English. "You did so well, darling. You did so well." The tears were welling in his eyes now, the fear giving way to relief. He kissed her cheek, and then again and bounced her up and down in his arms in tiny movements. He put her down and held his finger to his mouth again and looked at her face. Her light brown eyes flickered in the morning light. Christopher drew the blind down. Her skin was dirty and her lips were chapped and cut, yet she was so beautiful. "Now, Anka, you have to wait here, while I get you some food, and while I work out where you're going to be today." She seemed to have some idea of what he was trying to tell her and sat down in the seat Friedrich had just occupied, which Christopher pushed away and out of sight of the window.

Christopher fumbled the key as he locked the door to his office from the outside. There was a shipment of prisoners due in about an hour. Christopher scrawled a note and hung it on the outside of the door of the main office. It was an order, telling them all to go directly to the selection and oversee the processes there. They would understand, would think it was part of the anti-corruption activities. The bike Christopher used to travel to Auschwitz was locked up under the awning outside the wooden prefab that served as the office for the Economic Agency. It was ten minutes to the canteen in Auschwitz, a long time to leave her alone. Christopher thought better of it and jogged over towards Crematorium 4. The air was cold, biting against his face as the wind reared itself against him. The Crematorium yard was full of Sonderkommandos, pushing carts of clothes, goods and dead bodies back and forth to be dispersed and disposed of as befitted their use. There was no sign of Schultz, but Tomas, the doctor from the night before, was there, pushing a cart brimming over with open-mouthed naked corpses. Christopher stopped him, trying not to look at the contents of the cart. "Where is Schultz?" Christopher demanded.

"Inside, in the changing rooms." Christopher felt the touch on his arm as he went to walk away. "How is that item, from last night?"

"Doing fine," Christopher replied, looking into his brown eyes. The touch fell away from his and he continued inside.

Christopher soon found Schultz, who gathered what food he could find, more than enough for the girl's breakfast and they made their way to Christopher's office together in silence. They only spoke as Christopher unlocked the door and pushed it open. The office looked empty, and for a second Christopher thought she had been found, that the guards were coming for him, but then saw her hiding under the desk. The semi-dark of the office made it harder to find her. The blind in the office was permanently down now. Schultz spoke in Czech and Anka poked her head out, almost smiling as she saw them. She murmured something back to Schultz and they spoke again, and then the tears came. Christopher knelt down, offering her the food, which she stuffed into her mouth, chewed three or four times and swallowed.

"What are you talking about?" Christopher asked, looking up at Schultz.

"Her parents, her brothers. She was asking where they were." Schultz's words were slow and deliberate.

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her I didn't know, that she had to stay close to you, to keep quiet and we would try to find them." Christopher stared at him. "What was I meant to say?" Schultz said.

"Forget it. Does she know the danger she's in?"

"I don't think she understands."

"I don't think any of us do," Christopher answered in English. Schultz looked at him, obviously unable to understand what he was saying. "Never mind," Christopher continued. Anka was still crying and he took her in his arms, conscious of Schultz watching him. "Can you look after her during the day? I can't."

"Can I take her into the crematorium? No, I can't. Have you seen what I do in there?" Schultz said, before he remembered himself. Christopher felt ashamed as Schultz apologized for his tone.

"I have meetings all day. I have to attend to the currencies coming in this afternoon. There will be men in and out of here all day. If she makes a sound..."

"Is there somewhere in the warehouses?"

“No, there are guards all over the place in there, and with the new Anti-Corruption Committee they’ve been told to search through all warehouses twice daily.”

“So what options do we have?”

“We have to leave her in here. I’ll try to get her out of the camp next Thursday.”

“Five days is a long time to stay alive here.”

Christopher didn’t answer. Schultz spoke to her once again in Czech and she hid under the desk. Christopher peeked under and held his finger to his` mouth. Schultz left first, leaving Christopher alone with her. Her coughing had almost cleared, the only sign that she had survived the gas chamber almost gone. Christopher reached under the table and she crawled out to him. He held her for a few seconds and kissed the top of her head. “Stay safe Anka, I will be back as soon as I can.”

Chapter 30

Christopher thought of Anka, Rebecca, and little else during the morning's meetings. The information was laid out in the dossiers and most of the meetings consisted of his placating the various officers, convincing them that morale would not be destroyed among the troops and reassuring them, without words, that they would not end up in jail themselves. The first searches were to be carried out that afternoon by a unit brought in from another camp and would be of the SS men's quarters and their personal lockers. Then each prisoner working in Canada or the Crematoria was to be searched after their work. Christopher just hoped that Schultz and the others had managed to spread the word among the prisoners themselves. For any guilty SS men, there would be a judge and jury but, for any prisoners, only the executioner awaited. Friedrich had stayed quiet during the meeting in Crematorium 4 and despite Kommandoführer Strunz's confident assertions and seeming relish for the process, Christopher knew that they were all as guilty as one another.

Christopher made it back to his office just after midday, carrying with him the remnants of his own lunch to share with Anka. He immediately locked the door behind him as he walked in. The offices outside were empty, Flick, Muller and Breitner having obeyed the orders he had left. She was asleep under the desk, just as Christopher hoped she would be. She awoke with a jolt, but seemed to calm upon seeing him and attacked the food he brought. He sat with her, holding her, his hand on her wrist. Her heartbeat was strong and even, the coughing less. The clock on the wall dragged him away from her. He began to work when she was hidden underneath the desk, where he had given her some ledgers and pencils to keep herself amused.

It was barely two hours later that Christopher stood behind the troops as they bustled into the SS men's living quarters. Flick stood beside him. Breitner was up front, directing the anti-corruption task force, giving them needless orders as the SS men looked on. There were about fifty men tasked with searching the SS quarters. It took almost three hours. There were shouts every so often when one of them would find contraband bank notes, jewelry, or even alcohol and come out of the room brandishing whatever they had found like a

trophy before it was boxed away as evidence. Christopher wondered who would skim the evidence boxes once the court martials were finished. Christopher tried to avoid the looks from the SS men as they passed by. There were twenty-seven arrests. No one that Christopher knew, just SS men that had been too greedy. One had a box of watches in his locker. Another had eight gold teeth hidden in his clean socks. Most of the men had heeded the warnings, all over the camp they had found jewelry in the trash, gold coins thrown under barracks and banknotes strewn about the yard outside the SS men's quarters. But the take was still big enough to impress any superior and it was a triumphant first day for the Anti-Corruption Committee.

The checks on the prisoners were done during and after the day's work. Prisoners were forced to strip naked in front of the guards and deposit their clothes on a table while they were searched. The prisoners' quarters were almost destroyed in the searches, but nothing was found. There were no executions.

The overall take of valuables and currency that day was enormous, out of all proportion to the amount of prisoners liquidated. It was obvious to anyone who looked closely what had happened, but no one was asking questions, not Christopher nor the staff on the Anti-Corruption Committee, not Friedrich or even Lagerkommandant Höss himself. All the officers in Berlin would see would be the enormous influx of wealth coming from Auschwitz. It would be Christopher's job to maintain the flow.

It was after five o' clock and the anti-corruption troops had ravaged the entire living quarters of most of the SS men and prisoners stationed in Auschwitz. The piles of contraband were driven away in trucks to be stored as evidence in the trials that would follow. Most of the men could expect jail terms, some might be shipped off to the eastern front. Christopher felt no satisfaction at this justice he had meted out. It was disturbing, but somehow he felt the opposite. Somehow he felt like a traitor. He lit a cigarette and walked away from the living quarters his thoughts focused on Anka once more. He needed to get back to her. Breitner walked over to where he was standing.

"Are you happy with the work done today, Herr Obersturmführer?" Breitner asked.

"As happy as one can be, having fellow SS men arrested."

"Yes, no one likes a rat do they?" Breitner looked at Christopher and

moved away.

Christopher arrived back at the office. It was empty, as it had been all day, but there was no way that he could keep it so for the next four days. The smoke from the crematoria billowed into the darkening sky outside. There was no escaping the death that surrounded him like a cloak, tightening every day. Yet somehow she had survived. The others had spoken of a miracle, as if God had come down, touched her, kept her alive for some reason that only He knew about. But there was no God here. That was the one thing Christopher was sure about.

She was in the corner, hidden under the blankets, when he came in. Only when he spoke did she drop the blanket to reveal herself. The phone rang, piercing the silence. Christopher looked at it and then Anka. He was frozen, trying to listen for the sounds of the SS men coming to take them both away. But there was nothing, only the shrill sound of the telephone. His hand was shaking as he picked up the receiver.

“Obersturmführer Seeler?” came the voice on the other end of the line. It was Liebermann.

“Hello, Herr Hauptsturmführer.”

“I have news for you. Come immediately.” He hung up.

Christopher felt the ice inside him and reached up to rub some nonexistent sweat from his face. He held his hands out to the little girl who was still in the corner. “You stay there. Understand?” His breathing was quickening again. “I will be back as soon as I can. I will bring food, and some water. We can wash you.” She looked completely perplexed and whispered some words in Czech. “I will come back,” he said once more as he closed the door behind him. The key turned as he locked the door and he was almost outside before he realized he had left it in the keyhole. He walked back, and picked it out, trying to compose himself.

Darkness was descending, the light of the day fading into the gritty blackness of night in the camp. The electric lights and searchlights that ran along the wire were flickering to life. He rubbed the condensation off the seat of his bicycle and climbed onto the saddle, almost tripping over his own feet in his

haste. Christopher was sweating as he reached the first checkpoint, to leave Birkenau. The guard made a comment, which Christopher acknowledged with a smile, although he had not heard it. If Rebecca was arriving, he could get her and Anka out together somehow. There had to be some way of smuggling them out in the car, or, at worst, getting Rebecca into Canada where he knew she would be safe. Anka was small enough to fit in the trunk. The car was never checked. The guards all knew him, all trusted him. Why couldn't he do this?

Christopher threw down the bike outside the administration building in Auschwitz, his legs still burning from the ride. He took a few seconds to pick up the bicycle and to try to compose himself, smoothing down his hair and taking a few deep breaths before he walked up to the entrance. The guard nodded to him as he went past. Christopher knocked on Liebermann's door, waiting for a reply before he pushed it open. Liebermann motioned for him to sit down.

"You're the talk of the camp today, Seeler," Liebermann said, looking past his spectacles at Christopher. "A young Obersturmführer, only here two months and already heading up an Anti-Corruption Committee? Your progress has been quite astounding."

"I'm just doing my best to serve the Reich and the Führer himself."

"Oh yes, I forgot about that, the Führer himself, of course, of course," he said looking down at the papers in front of his desk.

"So you have news for me?"

"Oh yes, the reason I called you down here. You'll forgive me Seeler; I am old man, not a young firebrand like yourself." Christopher was about ready to reach across the table and strangle him when he began to speak again. "I received a phone call from an old colleague of mine, working in a camp called Ilag V-B Biberach. It seems he has your Ms. Cassin." Liebermann sat back in his chair, waiting for Christopher's reaction.

Christopher felt the acids burning in his stomach and his heart was on fire, but he didn't show it. He took a deep breath and leaned forward. "So she's alive?"

"It does seem so."

Christopher could barely hold back the questions as they came to him.

“And when can we get her transferred here? That was the deal.”

“I’m very much aware of what the deal was Herr Obersturmführer,” he said and moved forward, clasping his hands together. “She’ll be arriving on the last train on Wednesday.”

“This Wednesday? In three days time?”

Liebermann nodded.

Christopher bit down on his lip, trying to hold in the smile. “Where’s she coming in from?”

“Does it matter?”

“No I don’t suppose it does. She’s getting here on Wednesday evening, not Thursday, because I am going to Berlin on Thursday morning, first thing. I’ll be gone all day.”

“What is it? You need to be here, to welcome her?”

“Just stick to the details please, Herr Liebermann.”

“I’d watch my tone if I were you, young man,” Liebermann said pointing at Christopher across the table. “How would it look if the new golden boy, the head of the new Anti-Corruption Committee, was seen to be giving bribes to a senior officer?”

“How would it look for a senior officer to be seen taking bribes?” Christopher snapped. “Listen, I’ve already told you, I don’t give bribes. What time is that train getting in on Wednesday, Herr Hauptsturmführer?”

“Five thirty. I’ve had Ms. Cassin put onto the list to be transferred directly to the facility in the Economic Agency for sorting through the goods to be repatriated to the Reich.”

“Excellent. That concludes our business here, Herr Liebermann. Let me commend you on the good work you’ve done here. If you ever need anything from me.....”

“Oh don’t you worry, Seeler. I won’t be shy about asking.”

When Christopher returned to his office later Anka was still there,

sheltered underneath his desk. The smile burst across his face as he saw her. He held his arms wide. "Come here, Anka," he whispered. "I've had the most marvelous news my darling." He was speaking in English for some reason. She seemed puzzled and murmured something back. "I'm sorry Anka, I don't speak Czech," he said, switching to German again. "But I heard today that Rebecca is alive and being transferred here." He reached down and picked her up, taking her in his arms and embracing her. "Oh, maybe there will be some reward at the end of all this misery, for us both." He brought her head back to look at her face, still dirty and unkempt, her hair falling over her face. "I'm going to get you out of here, Anka. I'm going to get you away from this. I swear I will."

Chapter 31

He washed her hair the best he could in the bowl of water he had brought in and used a cloth to wipe the dirt from her face. She cried as he washed her and grasped onto him afterwards, mumbling something in Czech that Christopher was happy not to understand. When she settled down to sleep, Christopher finished his work, totting and checking the numbers from the day, numbers that were sure to please Höss and set expectations for whomever the new Lagerkommandant would turn out to be. The numbers were up more than ten per cent from what they would usually have been. His superiors would be happy that the goods and monies they were stealing were not being stolen. He and Anka slept on the floor of his office again, this time with pillows and blankets appropriated from the stores to ward off the winter cold clawing at the window. After Christopher had turned off the light, after they had settled down to sleep, the searchlights would pass by the window outside, illuminating the room so that Christopher could fully see Anka's tiny face as she slept, his arm around her.

He thought of her life before the camp, as he watched her sleeping, imagined that she was from a small village outside Prague, and saw her playing with her friends, her brothers. He imagined her coming home to her parents, her father lifting her high into the air and hugging her before planting a kiss on her cheek and placing her at the dinner table. But it was useless. Her family were all dead now, her home taken over by settlers brought in from the Reich or jealous neighbors. What life was there for her now? If he could get her out of here, get her to his father, he could hide her, keep her safe until all of this was over. Once he and Rebecca got out, together, they could take her, raise her as their own, and give her the life that was stolen away from her. There were still places like the beaches of his youth in the world. There was still happiness to be found.

Christopher woke with the dawn and the chill of the air in his office. Anka was still asleep. She seemed to sleep all the time. He drew his arm away from her and stood up, the only sound the crackling of his joints. He stood there looking at her, the irrationality of hope filling him with an unfamiliar feeling. He felt Rebecca with them.

More snow had come during the night, tingeing the warehouses and

crematoria with a beauty undeserved of a place like this. Christopher wiped the snow from his bicycle seat and set off towards his living quarters in Auschwitz. Lahm was awake as he arrived. He was standing in front of the mirror, shaving. He turned his head as Christopher walked in.

“Where were you last night?” he asked before turning back to face the mirror.

“Oh you know, there’s so much work to be done at the moment. I suppose I fell asleep at my desk again.”

Lahm did not reply, instead focusing on the straight razor in his hand as he drew it down his face, exposing the skin underneath the foam. Christopher went to his locker and laid out fresh clothes. The two men were silent for a minute or more before Lahm spoke again.

“Yes, it must be very tiring work, turning in your fellow SS men.” He was still facing the mirror.

Christopher looked up at his eyes in the mirror. “I have a job to do, just like you have yours. Just like your job, mine isn’t always the most pleasant. I mean, you can hardly enjoy working in the punishment block, can you?”

“I do. I enjoy giving these vermin what they deserve. There is no such thing as an innocent Jew.”

Christopher swallowed and paused, feeling his heart rate quickening. “Well, many people would not enjoy that work, but it is important for the security and future of the Reich,” Christopher countered. “My job is the same. I did everything I could to protect my SS brothers. If some of them were too stupid to heed my warnings, well, I can’t be held responsible for that. I didn’t ask for this job, Lahm, I’m just trying to serve the Führer in the best way that I can.”

“By locking up men with wives and families?”

“The orders on corruption come directly from Himmler himself, are you going to question him? Who is next? Are you going to question the Führer himself?” The words tasted sour coming out of his mouth. He said them as someone else, as if he were stranger in his own skin.

Lahm put down the razor and wiped off his face. He rested his arms on the side of the sink and glared at Christopher in the mirror. He turned around and put on his shirt and when Christopher looked at him again, his expression had changed. "I knew some of the men arrested, Seeler."

Christopher felt good about the arrests now, for the first time, as if there was finally some justice. "Were they guards in the punishment blocks?"

"Some of them, yes."

"Why didn't you warn them? I told you to warn them." The words had changed. He was inside himself now, enjoying the words as they came.

Lahm raised a hand to push back his short blonde hair. "I thought I did. I couldn't see everyone. I thought I told most of the guys."

"They probably heard but didn't believe you. You tried, Lahm, we both did, and that's all we can do." Christopher picked up his clothes and walked out of the room to the showers and could feel the smile spreading across his face as he went. Rebecca was a constant in his mind now. He could feel her breath on him, the softness of her hair against his neck. The thought of seeing her brought him a happiness alien to this place, even though he would have to shield her from death every day that she was here.

Christopher had the remnants of his breakfast in his pocket as he trudged past the warehouses in Canada towards his office and Anka. He heard the noise from a hundred feet away. It was the Kapo, Frankl. He dragged one of the ladies out by her long straggly brown hair and threw her down in the snow. He shouted something Christopher couldn't make out and pulled out his baton. Christopher's blood froze as it did every time he saw this. Frankl drew the baton up and brought it down on the woman's head. The sound of baton on skull came as a crunch and the nausea came instantly to Christopher. The urge to run forward to grab Frankl's arm and throw him back on the snow was like a dog snapping inside his chest, but he knew better than to cede to it. Christopher quickened his pace but barely enough that anyone watching him could notice and Frankl brought the baton down again. Blood splattered onto the white snow. Two prisoners walked past, pushing a cart full of pots and pans. They were oblivious to the spectacle in front of them, forcing themselves to completely ignore Frankl and the screams of the woman as he hit her again and again. She was holding her hands up and Frankl connected with the palm of her hand. She screamed again.

The seconds it took for him to reach them seemed like hours, much longer.

“Frankl?” Christopher said when he had finally reached them. “What’s going on here?” He was completely calm, his voice absolutely smooth, absolutely even.

Frankl whirled around, his nostrils flared, his face vicious and unforgiving. He coughed before he spoke, his arm still raised to strike the woman who lay prone at his feet. “This wretch, thinks,” his breathing was heavy, the words struggling to get out. “This wretch thinks she can fall asleep at the table, while she’s working.” He looked to Christopher for the permission to continue, to beat her to death, or however close to her death his whim would lead him.

“And you respond to problems by disabling my workers, Frankl?” Christopher shook his head. “If she falls asleep, by all means slap her to wake her up, march her outside in the snow with no shoes on, but don’t disable her. For every worker you kill I have to find another and that means more work for me. Do you know how busy I am, Frankl?”

“Of course, Herr Obersturmführer, it’s just that....”

“Frankl, I appreciate the...thorough nature of the work you do here but you need to think things through.” Christopher was trying not to look at the woman on the ground, but he could still hear her whimpering and the broken sound of her breathing. Two more prisoners moved past, this time pushing an empty cart. Christopher called them across. “Pick up this prisoner, bring her down to the hospital.” The woman was bleeding heavily from her head but her eyes were open. There might still be hope. The prisoners picked her up and placed her on the cart. Christopher turned to Frankl. “Just remember that this operation depends on the workers, Frankl, and so do our jobs here.” It took all the will Christopher had to pat Frankl on the shoulder before he directed him back into the warehouse he was supervising.

Breitner, Muller and Flick were in the office as Christopher arrived. They were all at their desks and each man raised his head as Christopher spoke. “There’s a shipment coming in an hour or so. I want you three out there, watching everyone and everything.” None answered, merely nodding their heads. The snow had begun anew outside. Christopher looked at each man, and then at the locked door to his office. He moved towards the door. Breitner watched him reach into his pocket for the key and slide it into the keyhole.

Christopher turned around and Breitner put his head down again. Anka was under the desk as he walked inside. Once the door was closed, Christopher moved to her, putting his finger to his lips. She nodded and put her own finger to her tiny lips. She came out from underneath the desk and knelt down beside him as he sat down. He worked and she drew, in absolute silence for an hour or more, until Christopher heard the sounds of Muller, Breitner and Flick getting up from their desks outside. Christopher got up from his desk to go out to them and delivered some words of encouragement as they set out. Muller stopped to speak to him when the others had left.

“I saw what happened earlier with Frankl, I was passing by.” His face was somber and he pursed his lips as he looked at Christopher.

“Oh, did you? I can’t have my workers being...”

“Frankl is an animal,” Muller breathed out. “The word is that he hates you, because he can’t exact his own blood lust anymore.”

“I’m certainly not threatened by him,” Christopher laughed mirthlessly. “I am an SS officer, he is just a Kapo.”

“He has killed more prisoners in here than any other Kapo I’ve ever heard of. The previous Obersturmführer let him run wild. He must have killed four, five, ten prisoners a week. I’ve seen him beat prisoners to death with a shovel for the gold fillings in their teeth.” Christopher didn’t answer, just stared back. “Anyway, I just thought you should know.”

“Thank you.”

Muller put on his hat and went to walk out into the snow before he turned around. “Oh, and there was one more thing. I think you might have mice in your office. I could have sworn I heard some noise coming from inside there earlier, before you arrived.”

The blood drained from Christopher’s face, his body cold as a corpse. “I’ll check into that. Thank you again, Muller.”

Christopher put his hand on Anka’s head as he sat down in the chair behind her desk. She looked up at him, almost smiling and he picked her up and put her into his lap. He pushed back her hair as he spoke to her in a whisper.

“What’s wrong with these people, Anka?” Christopher breathed out a heavy, hot breath. “Thursday morning will come, even if it doesn’t seem like it ever will. We can start to live again, because this isn’t life, Anka. This is just the absence of death.” He held her to him and kissed the softness of her cheek. “Oh why didn’t I do this sooner? Why did I let so many die?” Anka leant back in his arms and took the lapels of his SS jacket. She looked happy, as if sitting on her father’s knee on a visit to his office. She whispered something to him in Czech and he smiled and nodded his head, the tears bulging in his eyes.

Chapter 32

Every minute was a minute closer, both to Rebecca's arrival and Anka's liberation from the camp, but the minutes drew out like razor blades. Christopher had prepared the way for Rebecca the next day. She was to be immediately placed into one of the work groups in Canada. The suitcase he had prepared for Anka sat in the corner of his office. It was just big enough to fit her tiny body inside. He had cut air holes, but would leave it until the last minute to pad it out, just in case. It was Wednesday morning, Anka's last day in the camp, Rebecca's first. The assignments for that day had already come through. The shipment that Rebecca would be in was coming in at 5.30, around an hour after the setting sun extinguished the grey light of winter in the camp. The thought of seeing her filled his heart with a joy he had scarcely believed existed anymore and he hugged Anka close to him as she awoke.

Christopher pulled on his jacket as he stood up. Anka knew not to make any noise. She would be safe here for just one more day. This would work. He bent down to hug her before he left. Christopher picked her up and held her in his arms for thirty seconds before putting her back down onto the floor. As he put his hand on the doorknob, he heard her call to him. She waved and he walked out with a deep smile on his face. He ran a finger across his unshaven chin. He had a meeting in Auschwitz with the other members of the Anti-Corruption Committee at 10. They were to collate the results from the first week to present to the Lagerkommandant. The committee had proven a great success. No one had asked why there had been so few arrests and such a massive increase in revenues coming into Canada. No one seemed to care. Christopher left Anka to go back to his dorm to shower and shave. He had not seen Lahm since their conversation the other morning and he wasn't there as Christopher arrived in the room. Christopher wasted little time getting showered and changed and went straight to the mess hall to wolf down his breakfast, making sure to pocket some food for Anka. He made his way back to Canada and his office, which was still empty, as always at this time. He gave Anka her breakfast. It was a routine, one he would miss when she left. But then there would be a new routine, with Rebecca.

All the members of the committee were at the meeting, along with Friedrich, who was officially there as an observer. Christopher stood up to address them. His hands were shaking. He put them behind his back. The tension within him eased as he spoke about the numbers, the figures behind the activities of the committee. Schultz came late, and sat alone in the corner. Christopher saw them all in the room, Anka, Rebecca, and even his father and his sister. His thoughts were independent of his words as he addressed the committee seated before him. His thoughts were for the people in the room only he could see.

The meeting ended with handshakes and backs being slapped but Friedrich seemed less happy. He got out of his seat with a sour look on his face and left without a word. No one shook Schultz's hand, and he went back to the crematorium to assist in burning the bodies of the freshly murdered. The report was ready and Christopher would be the one to present it to the Lagerkommandant. There was talk of a promotion for him, and that the committee might be installed on a permanent basis, but Christopher didn't care about any of it. Muller, Flick and Breitner made their way down to the train station to oversee the first selection of the day and Christopher went back to the office for no other reason than he wanted to see Anka, to tell her about the meeting and what had happened. She was under his desk drawing on the pieces of paper he had left for her. He made sure that no one was looking when he emptied her pot outside and came back to her, taking her on his lap as he sat down behind his desk.

"We're nearly there, my darling," he whispered in English. "This time tomorrow we'll be on the road together. Don't worry. I won't keep you in that suitcase the whole journey. We can hide you in the back seat. Won't my father be surprised?" He hugged her, pressing her head into his chest and kissed the top of her head and felt her arms spread around him.

There was a rap on the door and Schultz's voice bled through. "Herr Obersturmführer?"

Christopher opened the door just wide enough to see the Sonderkommando's face. "What is it?"

"Can I speak to the child?" Christopher nodded and let him past. Schultz knelt down to the girl and put his hand behind her head, stroking her hair. "How is she?" he asked.

“She’s doing very well under the circumstances. She cries sometimes.”

“Don’t we all?” Schultz answered without taking his eyes away from Anka. He began to speak to her in Czech. Christopher tried to make out what he could, but there was nothing there for him. Schultz pointed at Christopher and Anka smiled. He spoke for a minute, or maybe more. Anka was smiling now and said something back to him. Schultz stood up. “I told her. She knows.”

“What does she know?”

“She knows you’re taking her away from here tomorrow. I told her she had to be quiet when you brought her out. I told her that we would always be there for her and that you were going to keep her safe.”

“What was that she said?”

“She is excited. She is looking forward to seeing her family again.”

Schultz took her in his arms and hugged her and then was gone. Christopher stayed in the room, watching her eating the lunch that he had brought her. It was after one o’clock. Rebecca would be nearing the end of her journey from Biberach. There would be a lot of explaining to do. Rebecca would not be expecting to find him. There could be no emotional reunion. He would have to keep his distance. His mask couldn’t slip, not now.

Anka finished the bread and milk that he had brought her and Christopher wiped her face with the handkerchief from his pocket. She smiled at him. He left soon after, and as he closed the door, he watched her crawl under the desk. He held the door ajar, staring at the empty space where she had been, before finally closing the door and walking out into the snow outside.

The crowd had gathered in the yard outside Crematorium 4, but Christopher was long past the stage where he could even watch this. The false hopes the SS officers instilled in the people tore at his soul. Breitner was milling about in the yard, ledger in hand. Christopher saw him approaching.

“There was a call for you earlier, Herr Obersturmführer. Rapportführer Friedrich wanted you to meet him down in the administration building, right away.”

“All the way over in Auschwitz?”

“That’s what he said to me. I believe he’s down there waiting for you now.”

What could Friedrich want with him? Was this something to do with Liebermann? Surely he couldn’t have said something? He would be just as guilty as Christopher. The fires began within Christopher’s body. There was snow on the ground and the roads were still being cleared off. It would be difficult to get all the way down to Auschwitz on his bike, but there were always cars to be borrowed. He made his way through the crowd of people cowering together to stave off the cold. He made sure not to make eye contact with any of them. He made his way inside the crematorium to Kommandoführer Strunz’s office. Strunz was at his desk poring through papers. He agreed to lend Christopher the keys to his car and Christopher made his way back out of the crematorium through the crowds of people about to be murdered. He felt himself brush up against them as he moved but kept his head down. It was too much to look at them.

Christopher ran to the car and cursed as the engine failed to start first time. He was just about to get out and look for a mechanic when the engine finally revved into life. It was less than five minutes to the main gate at Auschwitz and, although Christopher knew the guard on duty, he still flashed his credentials as he passed through. A light snow was falling, drifting down on a gentle wind. Christopher pulled in and parked the car beside the Administrative Building, just inside the main gates. He leapt out of the car, barely remembering to shut the door behind him and ran up towards the door, only stopping when he knew he was in plain sight. It was difficult to saunter the last few steps up to the door. Christopher made his way down the hallway towards Liebermann’s office, feeling a chill in his blood as he approached the door. Christopher knocked and waited for the word to enter.

“Obersturmführer Seeler?” Liebermann looked annoyed to see him. “What are you doing here?”

“I got a message to meet Rapportführer Friedrich down here....”

“What? I know nothing about that. I haven’t seen the Rapportführer at all today.”

Christopher felt the palms of his hands wet with sweat. “Thank you Herr Hauptsturmführer, I’ll check with the secretary.” Christopher paced down the

hallway into secretary Aumeier's office. Aumeier was sitting at his desk with his feet up as Christopher walked in. He didn't take them off as Christopher came in. "Aumeier, is Rapportführer Friedrich here?"

"No," Aumeier looked perplexed. "Should he be? Frankly I'm surprised that you're down here yourself with what's going on this afternoon."

"What?"

"The searches going on in Canada today. They were due to start at, well, about ten minutes ago. I would have thought that you would have wanted to have been there to oversee them, particularly when they go through your offices." Aumeier smiled. Christopher's blood was ice inside him and the nausea in his stomach suddenly made it difficult to stand.

"Oh, yes." Christopher managed a smile somehow. "I didn't want to get in their way. I'd better be going now." Aumeier held up his hand and Christopher was gone. He was dead. They would find Anka and he was dead. He realized why he had been sent to the other side of the camp. This was Friedrich's revenge, together with Breitner. But what did that matter? The last office was empty, the phone sitting on the desk and Christopher stole inside, closing the door behind him. There was only one tiny chance. He called Crematorium 4, the phone seeming to take hours to connect. Kommandoführer Strunz's assistant answered.

"Hello, this is Obersturmführer Seeler, is Schultz there? I need to speak to him most urgently." Christopher heard the sound of the phone dropping and Schultz's voice came on. The Kommandoführer's office was right beside the incineration room. Christopher didn't wait for him to speak. "Have the searches begun?"

"Searches?"

"Canada is being searched, as we speak. Friedrich is behind it. I'm down here in Auschwitz; I was drawn away on purpose. You've got to get to Anka."

The line was silent for two excruciating seconds. "I hear the troops. The searches are beginning. I.... I'm going to get her."

"The door is locked...." Christopher said, and then nothing. Schultz was gone. Christopher cranked the phone, and then again. But there was no response

and he ran out of the office past the guard, almost losing his balance in the slip of the snow. He threw the car door open and slammed down on the steering wheel as the car failed to start again. The curse he roared was raw, painful in his throat, and he turned the key again, this time starting the car. The wheels skidded on the snow before they found the traction of the road and all he could think of was Anka. He slowed the car to go out the gate and then accelerated as much as he dared back towards the gate at Birkenau. His entire body was shaking as the warehouses of Canada came into sight. The soldiers were tossing them and there were blankets, clothes, tables, pot and pans, and countless boxes of what had formerly been personal goods littering the snow outside. Christopher pulled up outside, fifty yards from his office, and saw the troops entering the main door. He was too late. There was no chance to stop them now. He turned around to run, but there was nowhere to go. He walked towards the office and watched as Flick, Muller and Breitner were marched out and the troops poured inside. He felt the hope draining from inside him and the deep pool of mourning and rage which instantly replaced it.

There was one chance. He had to be officious. He approached the door of the office and looked for the commanding officer; it was Friedrich himself. "What's going on here? I wasn't informed of this," Christopher said.

Friedrich looked surprised to see him but didn't mention it. "Standard searches that happened everywhere else in the camp. No one is immune, not even the head of the Anti-Corruption Committee."

Christopher pushed past him and inside. The troops were tearing the office apart and were in the process of breaking down his door as he came in.

"I have the key!" Christopher shouted, but the SS men ignored him and kicked the door in. Several of them burst inside and Christopher rushed in behind them. The window had been broken in the office and shards of glass littered the floor and they ran around his desk. Nothing. Where was she? Christopher heard a gunshot outside, then shouting. He ran out and an SS man was prodding Schultz forward, towards Friedrich, and Flick and Muller looked on with Breitner, who was standing next to Friedrich and another officer Christopher had not seen before. Frankl came around the corner and Christopher heard her. He was dragging Anka by the arm. Frankl looked directly at Christopher and then at Friedrich.

“We found these two behind the offices. It seems the head of our Sonderkommandos was trying to hide this one,” Frankl said and Friedrich nodded and withdrew his pistol. He held it to Anka’s head and pulled the trigger and her head jerked downwards and then up again, the spurt of blood staining the snow and spilling onto Friedrich’s boots. Her body fell. Friedrich leveled the gun to Schultz’s forehead, Christopher heard Schultz say something in Czech and saw the tears rolling down his face as Friedrich pulled the trigger. Schultz’s body collapsed in the snow beside Anka, his eyes still open, her hair saturated in black blood. The pain in Christopher’s chest was more than he could bear and he bent over double, unable to stand, and he ran behind the wooden office building and vomited, the grief and guilt washing through his entire body like a wave. He felt like he was going to drown.

“Are you all right, Herr Obersturmführer?” one of the soldiers asked with a sneer on his face and Christopher realized that he wasn’t going to shoot him.

He managed to raise his head to look at the SS man. “Yes, it’s just, you know, seeing the blood from the little girl.” The soldier shook his head and mumbled something under his breath about desk jockeys and joined the rest of the men milling around outside the warehouses.

Chapter 33

The searches took less than fifteen minutes, and the troops moved on to search the crematoria before the final light of day faded. The effort of not grieving was tearing Christopher apart and his whole body was shaking as he went into what remained of his office. Christopher balled his fingers into steel knotted fists and a tear broke out and slid down his cheek, but he wiped it away as quickly as it had come. His desk had been cleared, the papers all over the floor, and the shelves opposite torn down. The suitcase that he was to pad for Anka was opened and turned upside down, and the glass was still all over the floor from where Schultz had broken in to try to save her. The safe behind his desk, packed with suitcases full of money, remained unopened. He closed the door behind him, the cold air of winter seeping in through the broken window. He turned over his seat and placed it behind his desk. Then he heard the door opening. Friedrich turned the chair over and sat down opposite Christopher.

“I have some questions for you, Herr Obersturmführer,” Friedrich said looking at the broken window and then around the room. “My men tell me that the window was already broken when they came into the office.”

Christopher felt the pistol at his side, had his hand on it. He hesitated for a second before reaching past it, into his pocket for a cigarette. Friedrich was still looking at him. “I have no idea about the window. Were any of your men checking the outside?”

“No, they were all at the front of the building. It was only due to the Kapo, Frankl, that we found Schultz and that child he had been hiding. How on earth does that happen?”

“Once more, I have no idea. Perhaps you should be having this conversation with Kommandoführer Strunz. Schultz must have smuggled her out of the children’s camp and kept her in Crematorium 4.”

“She was not from the children’s camp. She wasn’t tattooed.”

“I wish I could help you, Herr Rapportführer, but I have no idea what happened with Schultz and that girl.” Christopher looked down and saw the

childish drawing on the floor underneath the window, covered in broken glass. He twitched in his seat. "I received a message to meet you down in Auschwitz, Herr Friedrich, just before the searches began."

Friedrich stared back at him and at the smoke billowing into the air from Christopher's cigarette. "So sorry about the mess, Seeler, but no one is above the law here. I realized that the only place that hadn't been searched properly was here. Now, that's hardly fair, is it?"

"No, Herr Rapportführer, I don't suppose that it is." Christopher's teeth gnashed down as he spoke, his jawbones almost burrowing out through the skin on his face.

"So let's go back to the window. It seems that Sonderkommando Schultz broke it. I spoke to the guard in the tower nearby but he didn't see anything. Why would Schultz do such a thing Herr Obersturmführer?"

"I can only imagine he wanted to take advantage of the confusion in the camp and break into my office to steal some of the valuables that he thought might have been inside."

"With a young girl in tow?"

"Who knows how the Jewish mind thinks, Herr Rapportführer?" Christopher stared back across at him.

Friedrich stared at him for five seconds or more before he finally spoke. "Well, soon we won't have to worry about that anymore, will we?" Friedrich said, raising himself to his feet. His boots crunched on the broken glass and Anka's picture below. "Well, I will oversee the rest of the searches today. You have quite enough to do here." He left. Christopher watched him close the door behind him before he got out of his seat. He walked around his desk to the window and reached down for the picture, picking it up by the corner before blowing tiny specks of glass off it and onto the floor. It was a new one. She had drawn it that morning. Christopher looked at the farmhouse and the sun high in the sky above it, the cows in the fields and the stick figures outside and saw his tears falling onto the page.

Christopher took a deep breath of cold air into his lungs and forced himself upright. He was an officer, and had to be seen to be taking charge. He walked out into the main office where Muller and Flick were picking papers off the

floor. Breitner was nowhere to be seen, presumably still at Friedrich's side helping to direct the searches. Christopher called for someone to replace the windowpane in his office and had several of the Sonderkommando come in to help with the cleanup; so that in less than an hour it was just like it had been before, except that everything was different now.

The time was approaching. It was five o' clock, the train due in half an hour and he went to the bathroom, looked at himself in the mirror, but only saw Anka's bloody hair on the snow. He wondered if Rebecca would recognize him. He hardly recognized himself now. His time in the camp had changed him. He was so many people now. Would she still know him or were the scars too deep? Could she still love the person he had become, in the uniform of an SS officer? It didn't seem like the places where he had known her could possibly exist anymore, not in a world that could create somewhere like Auschwitz-Birkenau. And what of her, how had her own experiences changed her? There had always been an uncommon strength in her. She would need every bit of it here. He looked at his watch and it was time to leave. Christopher straightened his back and coughed, putting his hand in front of his face. It was still him looking back in the mirror.

Christopher made his way down to the train station with Muller. Breitner was already down there as they arrived but Christopher didn't even look at him. He didn't want him to sully this moment. The doctors arrived, conspicuous by their white coats. They were the ultimate power here. They were the ones who decided who should live or die. It was important that there should be no mix-ups, so Christopher made his way down to where they were standing, waiting for the train to arrive. Some of the Sonderkommandos from Canada were there, and Christopher looked at his feet wondering if he could ever be as truly noble, as truly brave as Schultz had been. He pictured him running through the snow towards Christopher's office, seeing the troops already there, knowing what chance he had of succeeding and still refusing to give up on the girl trapped inside, still refusing to give up on Christopher himself.

The smoke of the train came into his sight, grey against the black of the night, and the engine pierced into view, pulling into the train station. She was on this train. The Sonderkommandos threw back the heavy doors on the boxcars and the shouting began. The bewildered prisoners dropped down onto the gravel and he scanned the crowd. Christopher walked back and forth watching for her

through the dim light the lamps provided. There weren't many women on the train, mostly middle-aged men and children. They formed into lines, separated by sex, the doctors at the front of each, choosing who looked most fit to work and those who were only fit to die. Christopher saw one of the administrative staff, pacing back and forth with a clipboard, ready to call out the names, and he heard him shout, "Rebecca Cassin, Rebecca Cassin." The comfort in hearing her name quenched the horror inside him, if only for a few seconds. There was no answer to her name. He moved between the two lines of people, calling her last name this time. "Cassin, Cassin." Christopher saw a hand go up, but couldn't make out anything else and ran towards the arm being held up by Pierre Cassin. Christopher felt his heart exploding within his chest. Cassin looked older; his face even more lined than before, as if every drink he'd ever taken was finally exacting revenge. His facial hair was gone and he looked thinner, but he looked as healthy as Christopher remembered him being, not like most of the prisoners here. Pierre Cassin stepped out of line and Christopher stopped, puzzlement and dread flowing as two tributaries into the river within him. The administrative man was talking to him and Cassin shrugged his shoulders. Christopher walked over. Cassin didn't look at him.

"Yes, this one is with me," Christopher said, gesturing to Cassin and Cassin's eyes bulged as he recognized him. Christopher took him by the shoulder and walked him away from the line, past the doctors and the guards with their dogs, but still Cassin didn't speak. They were far enough away when Christopher turned to him, speaking in English. "Where is Rebecca? Is she on this train?"

"No. I, I don't know what you're talking about.... why would Rebecca be on this train?"

"She was meant to be transferred here, on this train. What the hell are you doing here?" he shouted. One of the SS guards looked across at him, holding his stare for a second, and then back at the prisoners.

"I got orders to transfer. I wasn't in a position to refuse." Cassin said, seemingly unable to look at Christopher. Cassin looked terrified, as if Christopher was about to kill him any second.

"But you're not meant to be here! Where is Rebecca?"

Cassin paused and looked up at Christopher and then down at the ground

in between them. Christopher asked the question again and Cassin shook his head, wide eyed. “Rebecca is gone.”

“What?” Christopher felt the pain twist inside him and his eyes were hot. “What are you talking about?” The SS guard was looking again. Christopher didn’t care.

Cassin cringed as if Christopher was about to hit him. “They killed her. I’m sorry. They transferred me here.”

The officer in charge of the site walked over. “Who is this prisoner, Obersturmführer?”

Christopher immediately stood firm and straight, his instincts kicking in. He saluted. “He is a transfer going into my section in Canada, Herr Hauptsturmführer.”

“So he is your responsibility then?” Christopher nodded in reply and felt his heart dead in his chest. “Well then, get him out of here before I lump him in with the others. He looks old, not of much use in this camp.”

“He is highly skilled, Herr Hauptsturmführer. Thank you.” Christopher took Cassin by the shoulder again and led him back towards the car they had driven down in, and the pain for Rebecca, for Anka, filled his entire body. Pierre Cassin. He was all there was left of her, the only other person in this godforsaken place who knew what it was to have their life touched by her.

Chapter 34

The shared car ride with Breitner and Flick offered no chance to speak with Cassin. Christopher was opening the door before the car had come to a stop and was dragging Cassin by the arm towards his office. Cassin looked across at the smoke from the crematoria, the barbed wire and the guards. He looked into the last warehouse where the ladies were sorting through the mass of shoes. The office was empty, the darkness of night upon them. Christopher flicked on the light switch. There were no words between them as Christopher unlocked the door to his office. The window had already been replaced and the glass on the floor was cleared away. There was nothing left of Anka. Her drawing in his pocket was the only sign that she had ever existed. Christopher directed Cassin to sit in the chair opposite him and he took his seat behind his desk. Every move Cassin made was guarded now. He sat in the chair as if he were made entirely of stone. Christopher stared at him for a few seconds and put his hand to his face. He said the words and asked the question he was so afraid to ask.

“What happened to Rebecca?” Cassin stared back at him, seemingly unable to get the words out. “Tell me.” His voice was lethargic, his throat and eyes sore and tired.

“They killed her.”

“Who? Who killed her?” Christopher managed to say before the force of the tears behind his eyes burst and they flowed down his face. His head was on the desk and he felt the papers against his face. He spread out his hands and tried to think of her but the picture of her as an adult was somehow blurred, and when he saw her it was as a child. The six-year-old girl he had found. He stood up. Cassin was just staring at him, still had not answered. Christopher looked down at the uniform he was wearing, at the uniform that he wore every day now for her. He reached into the drawer in his desk. Everything had been replaced from earlier and somehow the bottle had remained unbroken. The glasses had been among the litter of broken shards on the floor so he walked out to the main office. There were several glasses sitting on the men’s desks. Christopher took two. He laid them out on the desk and took the half full bottle of whisky in his hand. He poured each of them a generous glass and took out his pistol and

placed it beside the bottle on the desk. Cassin took the glass of whisky and looked at it. “Go on, drink.” Christopher said, the tears still thick in his eyes.

Cassin looked at the brown liquid in the glass and raised the glass to his lips, knocking half of it back in one swig. “The camp guards took her away.” It had been more than five minutes since Christopher asked the question.

“What happened? When?”

“What am I doing here? Is this your revenge? Why don’t you just get it over with?”

“I’m asking the questions! What happened to her?” Christopher snarled and took a sip of the whisky. It hit his empty stomach like a fireball, swirling around with all the other agonies there.

Cassin looked up at him and drank from his glass. “It was in the late summer. We had been at the camp for a few months. It wasn’t that bad there, not compared to some of the stories of places that we’d heard about.”

“Had you heard about here?”

“Only in whispers from prisoners who had been transferred out. This is the hub of the murder that you Boche perpetrate. I always knew...”

Christopher sat back down. “What happened?” he interrupted.

“The conditions in the camp were nothing I couldn’t handle. We were fed and were forced to work but nothing too strenuous. Nothing I couldn’t take.” Christopher wondered what work a man who had never worked a day in his life could take. “But then a new Commandant came in and things changed. Food rations worsened and the beatings began. Rebecca never was one to abide by what she saw as... unjust behavior.” Cassin coughed and looked into Christopher’s eyes across the table. He finished the glass of whisky and Christopher poured him some more. “There was a prisoner, also from Jersey. She was from one of the families that had been deported to be interned there, not Jews, just those that had fought in the first War, Sergeant Higgins’s daughter, Anna.” Christopher nodded. “She was not strong like Rebecca. One of the guards took a liking to her. He began to harass her, all the time. With her father ill, Anna had no one to stand for her. No one except my Rebecca of course.”

“Your Rebecca?” Christopher said and then stopped himself. “Keep going.”

“One morning, at the end of August the guard tried to force himself upon her. Rebecca was on her way to work when she found them. We heard the screams of the guard from the other side of the camp. It was only a small place with less than a thousand prisoners. The guard stumbled out from behind the barrack holding his head, blood pouring through his fingers from where Rebecca had struck him with the spade she was carrying. Then we saw Anna limping out from behind the hut with her arm over Rebecca’s shoulders. That was it.” Cassin looked down.

“What do you mean, that was it?”

“They took her away. She was executed.”

Christopher was frozen, the tears gone. A strange mix of agonizing pain, utter failure and pride for who she was filled him and he sat there staring at the desk, unable to feel his body, as if he were sitting there as someone else. The only thing he could hear was the sound of Cassin reaching forward to finish off the bottle of whisky. The effort of raising his eyes the three inches or so until they rested on the gun on the desk was almost too much for him. He could kill him here and now. No one would ever question him. In fact, it would help his cause, deflecting suspicion. Killing Cassin here and now could help him save others. Christopher placed his hand on the cold metal of the pistol. Cassin looked up at him, their eyes meeting. Cassin stopped, the glass in mid-air.

“Did you see this happen? Did you see her die?”

“I was hardly in the position to make such requests.”

“Were you close to her in the camp? Did she speak of me often?” Christopher asked.

“We were close. Our hatred of everything you people stand for united us. Everyone in the camp, all the people from Jersey drew strength from her. I don’t know where she got it, certainly not from her mother. God only knows where she is now....”

“I don’t want to hear about that. Tell me about Rebecca.” Christopher had raised the gun and was pointing it at Cassin. He had the whisky glass in his other

hand and brought it to his lips.

Cassin shifted in his seat, his eyes visibly widening. He let the almost empty whisky glass fall to his side. “I didn’t speak to her much about you. I never wanted to hear it and she knew that. I could lie to you...”

“Why not? You’ve done it so many times before.”

“I did her speak about you to the other prisoners.” Christopher saw the sweat on Cassin’s forehead as he pushed himself backwards in the seat. He was staring into the barrel of the gun. “They would say things about you, because you were German...” Cassin coughed and looked directly at the barrel of the pistol. “But she always spoke up for you and told them your nationality didn’t matter, even in times like these.”

Christopher felt the urge to tell this man why he was sitting here in an SS uniform, imagined how good it would feel if someone else here knew his real intentions, his real self. “I am an SS officer,” Christopher said, his voice cracking as he spoke. The gun shook in his hand. “That’s who I am now.”

“Why did you bring me here?” Cassin asked. Christopher could see the blood draining from his face.

“I never wanted *you* here.” Christopher snarled. “Why would I ever want *you* here? I tried to have Rebecca transferred here and they sent you. Some sick joke that is. With the story I told them I suppose they thought that you were the consolation prize. That if I couldn’t ransom her back to the family that you could fetch a similar price.”

“A ransom? Back to whom? The Durrells? I don’t understand.”

“Shut up, just shut up.”

They sat there in silence for a few seconds. Cassin raised the glass to his lips once more and finished it. “What are you going to do with me? Is this your revenge?”

Christopher looked at him and saw Anka’s head jerking backwards as the bullet burrowed into her skull and the tears on Schultz’s face as Friedrich murdered him. He tried to picture Rebecca as she died but withdrew from it as too painful. His hands were sweating in the cold room. The glass of whisky on

the desk in front of him was empty. This would prove to the other SS men that he was committed to the cause. This would give him the freedom to help people who deserved life. He felt his finger squeeze around the trigger. Cassin saw his eyes and pushed back in his seat. Christopher placed the gun down on the desk. "You will be assigned to the work group I oversee, here in the Economic Agency. Life in the camp is hard, but I will protect you. As long as you work you will be safe and I will do my best to keep you alive." Christopher stood up. "What can you do?"

"I can do anything you want."

"Just do your best. If anyone ever finds out the reason you're here then I will have my revenge. In fact if you ever tell anyone that we knew each other or that I knew Rebecca you will die. Do you understand?"

"Yes, of course," Cassin said looking down at the floor.

"There is no law here. Not for the prisoners anyway. Respect me and I will protect you, as much as I can anyway."

Christopher poured one last glass for himself and passed the bottle to Cassin.

Chapter 35

It was still dark as Christopher awoke but he hadn't really slept. His movements were slow and labored as he climbed out of the bed and placed bare feet on the cold floor. The emptiness inside him had spread throughout his body. He felt like an old man. Lahm was asleep above him. Christopher left the light off as he got dressed. His eyes were used to the darkness by now. He was dressed in the matter of a minute or so and went to shave in the communal bathroom. There had been no snow overnight so just the grey slush of yesterday remained, churned and dirtied. He trudged through it to the car he had the privilege of using on these mornings of his trips to Berlin. Thoughts of Rebecca, and Anka, accompanied him on his journey. The searchlights and lamps lit the way enough for him to see the faces of the prisoners, roused from their sleep to begin work, lining up for roll call, the life and energy extinguished from each face, each person as a walking corpse. The car stopped with a skid and Christopher got out to look for the spot where she had died, where Anka had been shot, along with the man who died trying to save her. The blood was still there, a darker pool of black against the brown-grey slush around it.

The car was packed and ready to go in ten minutes. There were six cases, each so full of banknotes that they were hard to carry, and he strained as he piled them one on top of another in the car. There was no mission left now. Christopher Seeler was just an SS man, trying to do his job, and to stay alive. There was no purpose left for him, no reason for him to ably assist in the murder of so many innocent people. He could take the car and keep driving, drop off most of the money in Berlin and desert. He could try to pick up Alexandra and his father and make for the Swiss border with all the bribe money he could ever need. But he looked down at the black stain of Anka's blood and that didn't seem enough.

It was still dark and Christopher still felt nothing as he drove out and beyond the gates into the dead landscape beyond. He thought about the pistol on his belt and what he could do with it. He could kill Friedrich and then the pain might end. He could kill himself and all this would end. The car slowed as he pulled off to the side of the road and he was completely alone, perhaps fifteen

miles outside the limits of the camp. It would only take them a day or so to find his body in the woods here. They would search for him all right once the money had not been turned in. The pistol was heavy, cold in his hand and the barrel was ice against the soft of his temple. The weight of it against his skin felt right, as if this was the only way left now. How could he be a part of this now? It was better to end it this way rather than to assist in the horror of the camp. He closed his eyes, his head rocking back and forth, waiting for the bullet that would end all this. But he let the pistol fall into his lap. For the first time since he was a child he saw his mother, as the woman she might have been now, grey haired and slightly wrinkled, like an older version of Alexandra, and he put the pistol back into its holster. Christopher looked up and down the road. There was no one. The key to the trunk slid in easily and the cases opened just the same. He took a little from each, reminding himself to adjust the ledgers. When he had finished he had three large wads of American and British currency, about the equivalent of three thousand American dollars.

Alexandra cried when Christopher told her about Rebecca. Stefan leaned forward, his head in his hands, elbows propped on cousin Harald's dining room table, Christopher heard the snuffle from inside his hands and saw his head convulse back and forth. Christopher watched them for a few seconds in silence before he felt their arms around him. He stood up and buried his face in his father's shoulder and felt Alexandra with her head under his armpit clinging to him. They stood in that embrace for several minutes before Christopher finally broke away.

"There is something else I need to tell you about," he began. Christopher stared into space as he spoke, a feeling of lethargy overtaking him once more, whereby it became an effort even to speak. He told them about Anka, about Schultz, about their murders.

Christopher watched as Alexandra and his father struggled for the words. It was Alexandra who spoke first. "Christopher, what you did was very brave, but if you had been caught..."

"If I had been caught instead of Schultz, I would be in jail right now, or possibly executed but he is dead, murdered in the blink of an eye. He knew the risks, but he still tried to save her. He still did it."

"Christopher, I don't want you to risk your life," Alexandra said and

looked at her father.

“You need to stay safe, Christopher, there are so many dangers there.” Stefan flashed his eyes across to Alexandra and then back to his son. “These men you told us about, Friedrich, Breitner, Frankl, Lahm, they seem like monsters. They wouldn’t have a second’s hesitation in turning you in.” Stefan raised a hand to his head and breathed out.

“I know that, but why did I join the SS, Father? Was it to further the cause of the Third Reich, to serve the Führer?” Christopher’s voice was shaking as he spoke.

“Of course not, Christopher, but...”

“I’ve already made my decision, I’ve decided what I’m going to do,” Christopher said, cutting off his father. “I’m going to need your help, I won’t be able to do this without both of you.”

“What about the security system in the camp? You’re an accountant for God’s sake, not a commando.”

Christopher somehow managed to smile. “Security system? You’re looking at it as far as the funds are concerned. Diamonds, gold, that’s a different story. They’re transported separately. But cash, that’s my job. It’s my job to gather, count, document and transport cash. There’s no one else, at least not right now. I have the ear of the Lagerkommandant. I am head of the Anti-Corruption Committee, and I hear the model I introduced is being adopted in other camps.” Christopher took Alexandra by the hand. “Listen, I know it’s dangerous, but I can’t do nothing. I can’t just be an SS officer. Especially now. I owe Rebecca that much. I owe Anka and Schultz that much.”

“There is one thing that I insist upon,” Stefan interjected.

“What would that be?”

“That you wait. There seems to be too much consternation in the camp right now, too much suspicion and jealousy. Wait until the new Lagerkommandant comes in, until you get to know him, until he trusts you the way Höss did. Just do your job, like everyone else, for a month or so, and then when the New Year comes, we’ll see about your plan. That will give me time to prepare the way.” He reached over and took Alexandra’s hand.

Chapter 36

It was the 5th of January 1944 when Christopher met with Rudolf Herz, the head of the metal works at the Krupp factory in Auschwitz III, the industrial complex set up around Auschwitz to feed off the slave labor of the inmates. Herz shook Christopher's hand as he opened the door and offered for his secretary to take the leather briefcase Christopher was carrying. Christopher declined with a smile and took a seat. The briefcase came down with a light thud on the thinly carpeted floor. Herz was a balding, fat man in his late fifties. There was an almost empty whisky tumbler on his desk and he immediately offered Christopher a drink, which he accepted. Christopher held the glass to his lips and looked up at the massive portrait of Hitler above the desk. He brought his eyes down to Herz's.

“So, business is good these days, I trust?”

“Oh, yes, even though the costs are going up, never down, always up.” Herz laughed but shook his head at the same time. “First they charge us 7 Reichmarks for a Jew, then 9, now 12. I mean how much is one Jew worth really?”

“That depends on the Jew I suppose.” Christopher laughed and Herz joined him, his face turning an unhealthy looking puce as he did so.

“Yes, but I can't complain, I suppose, at least we have a goodly supply of Jews. They wear out quickly don't you know?” Herz laughed again.

“I suppose they'd last longer if you fed them a bit more,” Christopher laughed.

“We all have our orders, Herr Obersturmführer.” His laughter was dying now. “I can't contravene the rulings of the SS. You should know that better than most.”

“Believe me, I do. I tried to convince my commanding officer otherwise once. It wasn't a pretty sight let me tell you.” Christopher laughed once more and Herz joined him. “But seriously, we're all just trying to make our way the

best we can, and all the while serving the Führer, awaiting that final victory.”

“Of course, which brings us back to the business at hand today; to what do I owe the pleasure, Herr Seeler?”

“Yes, to the business at hand. Do you mind if I smoke?” Herz gestured for him to continue and pushed an ashtray across. Christopher took out a silver plated cigarette case and glanced up at Herz to smile.

“Very nice,” Herz commented.

“Thank you,” Christopher said, shaking the match out. He took a deep drag and puffed the smoke out above Herz’s head. “We were talking about labor earlier, such a delicate issue for employers. My grandfather was an industrialist himself, made furniture. I remember the stories from when I was growing up, complaining about workers, unions, rights. But, of course, that’s not something we have to worry about anymore is it?”

“Not as such, no.”

“Anyway, with the turnover of workers here you’re in constant need of able bodied prisoners, correct?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say the need is constant but some of the guards here can be quite brutal. There’s very little one can do to stop that.”

“Yes, indeed, I understand that,” Christopher said, puffing out smoke. “Is there ever a need for child workers in the factory? I heard that they’re required from time to time.”

“Sometimes, yes. We spent some time cleaning out the machines last year. They’re smaller, so obviously good for getting into those little spaces.”

Christopher thought to ask where those children were now but thought better of it. “So, if you were to request a consignment of children, it wouldn’t be completely out of the ordinary?”

“As I said, we do require some from time to time. Where are you going with this Herr Seeler?”

“Well, what if I was to say to you that I needed a consignment of children myself for a business venture on the outside?”

“Your grandfather wants to use child labor from the camps?”

Christopher sat back in his chair and blew a shaft of smoke into the air. “No, my grandfather is long since retired. This is a lovely office you have here. What is this carpet, Persian?”

“Yes, I had it brought in from my home.”

“Yes, most tasteful. You do seem like a man who enjoys the finer things in life.” Christopher flashed a half smile at Herz and then looked back around the room. “Yes, you’re very astute Herr Herz, very astute indeed. But for those not directly associated with the SS, coming across Jewish child labor is difficult.”

“You can’t just...”

“Oh that’s all taken care of. My contact has friends everywhere, friends who have assured him that they won’t stand in the way of commerce.” The cigarette was twitching in Christopher’s hand so he brought it down below eye level. “So what my contact needs are some workers, workers that you could, indirectly, provide.”

“And how might I do this?” Herz leaned forward, clasping his hands together over the desk.

“Well as we discussed earlier, it wouldn’t be entirely out of the ordinary for you, as a businessman, to place an order for a consignment of Jewish children, perhaps forty or forty-five who would otherwise be liquidated, to be transferred over here directly from the ramp in the main camp.”

“No, not entirely.”

“If that truck, carrying those children, or workers, were to be redirected to an outside location without the knowledge of the camp authorities?” Christopher shrugged his shoulders.

Herz leant back, feigning outrage. He wasn’t doing a very good job. “This is outrageous! What kind of a businessman do you think I am?”

“One who knows a good opportunity where everyone is a winner.” Christopher stubbed the cigarette out. “You would only have to sign the papers and lodge the order. We would take care of everything else, including paying the fee for the workers, of course. There would be no costs incurred to the factory

itself whatsoever. I know you're the man to come to, a man who can make a decision that's going to stick, a man who makes his own mind up." Christopher stood up. "I'll leave you for now, as I'm sure you'll want time to decide. But I'll need an answer within a day or two. I don't mean to rush you; it's just that my contact's need is great and we've a few other offers to consider." Christopher left the briefcase on the chair where he was sitting. He walked towards the door, glancing back at Herz before he continued.

Herz's voice interrupted his progress. "You're head of the Anti-Corruption Committee, aren't you?"

Christopher stopped and shook his head. "Not anymore," he said and continued out the door.

Since Friedrich had installed himself as chairman of the Anti-Corruption Committee meetings had become shorter but more regular. Christopher sat between Muller and Flick as Friedrich took his seat at the head of the table beside Breitner. It was rare that any of the heads of the crematoria showed as they had at the beginning and there was no representative of the prisoners. Friedrich went through the order of the day. There had been no arrests the previous day. There had been no arrests for weeks. The meeting progressed as they always did now, with lists of numbers. There were few confiscations now, the meetings more concerned with glorifying the achievements of the Economic Agency. There was no such thing as enough, and all Friedrich ever wanted was more. Christopher read the numbers from the ledger, which, even with the money he was constantly skimming now, was prodigious. The killing was gaining pace. More and more trains were arriving and there was more and more booty to be stolen and counted. Times had never been busier.

The meeting ended and each man stood up. Friedrich motioned for Christopher to come over. Friedrich waited until the last man had left before he began to speak.

"A few months ago, when you first arrived, you put in place a new system in Canada whereby on the spot executions were barred."

Christopher felt his insides harden and ice down his back but he merely nodded and pursed his lips together. "Yes, it's been very successful. The numbers are there to prove it."

“Yes, well, I was thinking about that. Some of the men are getting frustrated by the lack of discipline. This is the only section of the entire camp where such rules exist.”

“This is also the only section of the camp where it is our prisoners’ jobs to handle valuables all day long. If we start killing off our own workers, production will undoubtedly suffer. The turnaround since I’ve taken charge is evident in....”

“I spoke to the guards and the Kapos earlier this morning. The decision on the guilt or innocence of a prisoner will be taken by them, on-the-spot and if needs be, they will carry out whatever punishment they see fit.”

“I have to insist that this doesn’t happen. My workers are some of the most skilled in the camp. If I were to lose some of them, the entire system would break down. Now what is the new Lagerkommandant going to say if the numbers in the Economic Agency suddenly begin to fall?”

Friedrich’s face tightened, the grey skin of his cheeks pulled taut over his cheekbones. “The decision has already been made, Seeler.”

Christopher smiled and stood back. “I don’t mean any disrespect, Herr Rapportführer. It’s just that things are working so well at the moment, why change?”

“These are not workers. These people, if you can even refer to them as that, are vermin, enemies of the state, who want to destroy everything decent. If you can’t see that, Herr Seeler, perhaps you would be of more use to the Reich elsewhere.”

Christopher swallowed and looked into Friedrich’s eyes. “Thank you for letting me know, Herr Rapportführer.” He walked away.

Christopher saw the pool of blood in the middle of the warehouse, but the body had been removed. Christopher knew the woman who worked in here, knew who had been killed, and knew that it had been because she had rejected the guard’s sexual advances. The women in the warehouse didn’t look up as he walked back and forth. Though Christopher wanted to beg their forgiveness he said nothing. There were two guards on duty. Christopher took out a packet of cigarettes as he ambled towards them. He smiled as he caught their eyes and motioned them both towards him. A scream from another warehouse pierced the cold grey air.

“Hey boys, how are we doing today?” Christopher proffered the cigarettes to them and each accepted. They both nodded as if contented yet bored. “Great, good to hear it, just a quick question for you,” he looked at each of them as he spoke, clouds of smoke swirling into the air above them. “What happened here?”

“We caught one of these bitches with her hand in the box,” the first guard, Schlesinger said. Christopher knew him; he was from Hamburg. The other guard, Hauser, was his cousin.

Christopher nodded and took a drag from the cigarette. “Oh, okay. It seems funny though.”

“What seems funny, Herr Obersturmführer?” Hauser asked.

“It just seems funny that they’d want to steal used eyeglasses, because that’s all they sort in this room.” Christopher looked around the warehouse. There were eight women, one less than that morning, sorting through a mountain of eyeglasses. Christopher looked down at the pool of crimson coagulating in the filth of the floor and then back at the men. Neither of them spoke but their eyes did not move from his. “You like working in the Economic Agency, don’t you?”

“Of course, Herr Seeler,” Hauser replied.

Christopher smiled and pulled on the cigarette once more. “Of course you do, boys, now get this blood cleaned up, it’s disgusting.”

The air cut at Christopher’s skin like a blade as he walked outside. Christopher could feel his heart beating faster as he went, the adrenaline in his blood throwing each foot forward faster than usual so that he almost burst into a jog. The atmosphere in the warehouses had changed. No one looked back at him as he peered into each warehouse as he passed by. There was fear everywhere. Christopher threw down the cigarette and heard the scream and the thud of Frankl’s baton against the young girl’s skull. He twitched as he watched her crawl out of the warehouse he was passing and through the snow, her hands desperately reaching out to Christopher for help he could no longer give. Frankl hit her again and her head went down. He hit her again and again, her head collapsing under the pressure of the blows and Christopher walked away back to the office.

Christopher’s hands were shaking as he reached into the safe for the bottles of booze he had been hoarding. He took out a bottle of whisky and

poured himself a stiff glass. The telephone receiver was cold in his hand as he picked it up and it rang several times before the person on the other end picked it up. The appointment was set.

Lagerführer Fritz Ekhoﬀ was second only to the new Lagerkommandant of the entire camp complex, Arthur Liebehenschel. And since Arthur Liebehenschel had proven impossible to meet with since his arrival in November, Ekhoﬀ was the only man above Friedrich's head that Christopher could meet. Ekhoﬀ ushered him into his office. They had only met on brief occasions before. Ekhoﬀ was a tall muscular man with dark stubble and a firm handshake. He did not return the smile Christopher flashed at him.

“What is it, Seeler, things not going well down in the Economic Agency?”

“No, Herr Lagerführer, things are going wonderfully well. We seem to set new records every month just so we can break them the month after.”

Ekhoﬀ took his eyes off the papers he was going through on his desk to glance at Christopher and then stood up to stretch his back. “Glad to hear it. If production slips you will certainly be hearing from me. Now what is it that you want?”

Christopher coughed and then continued. “I can see you're a busy man so I'll get to the point. I want to change a Kapo in the Economic Agency.”

“How many Kapos do you have down there?”

“Well we have several but there is one with more power than the rest, far too much power if you ask me. It would be an excellent lesson to the others if he were demoted. He is abusing the power that we have given him and is now a threat to production.”

“Who is this man?”

“Ralf Frankl, Herr Lagerführer.”

“Why did you come to me and not Rapportführer Friedrich?”

“Rapportführer Friedrich is an excellent leader and the figures in the Economic Agency speak for themselves but he isn't close enough on the ground to see what I see. He has so much responsibility, so much pressure, almost as much as you do yourself. I feel that he is too attached to this Kapo, and it's up to

me to cut away the dead wood.”

Ekhoff laughed and shook his head. “Uwe Friedrich attached to a Kapo, eh? Now I’ve truly heard it all. What do you propose to do?”

“Just demote him back to the general population, and have someone else installed in his place.”

“Fine, do what you need to.”

“Thank you, Herr Lagerführer. This is something that is long overdue.” Christopher stood up and shook Ekhoff’s hand again. Christopher turned to leave before the Lagerführer interrupted him.

“You do know what will happen to this Frankl when he is put back into the general population, don’t you? He won’t last an hour.”

“Oh, is that right?” Christopher said and walked out.

Chapter 37

It was the next day when the knock on the door came. Christopher was at his desk. The door opened before he could answer. Friedrich glared at him and returned his salute with a look of contempt. He sat down before Christopher could offer him a seat.

“What seems to be the matter, Herr Rapportführer?”

“The orders for the transfers came through this morning, Herr Seeler.”

“Oh, I was looking to speak to you about that, but, with your extra responsibilities I couldn’t find a time when you would be available.”

“Why did you have Frankl removed? Is it from some misplaced affection for the prisoners? Because if there is any of that in you, Seeler, I will have you shipped off to a punishment division on the Eastern Front so quickly that you’ll be hauling bodies by the end of the week.”

“It was a simple case of him being here too long.” Christopher paused and reached back into his mind for the lines he had been practicing. “Why do you care what happens to Frankl?”

“He was good for discipline.”

“We don’t have discipline problems in Canada. Since the new system was put in place by the Anti-Corruption Committee, we’ve had hardly any losses. There is no need to execute workers here, and the more experienced they are, the better they do their jobs and the better that we all look, especially you.”

“Why did you go to Ekhoff? He has no interest in this section so long as the money keeps flowing.”

“That’s exactly why I went to him, to bring the interests of this section to his attention.” Christopher leant forward and held up an empty glass. “Would you like a drink, Herr Rapportführer?” Friedrich didn’t say no, so Christopher took the bottle out of his desk drawer and poured out a glass of vodka. Friedrich took the glass and swirled the clear liquid around a few times before knocking it

back in one.

“No matter what the reason, these decisions are mine.”

“I agree, but I wasn’t sure you could see how lazy Frankl had become.” Christopher looked directly into Friedrich’s eyes as he spoke.

“I wasn’t aware of any laziness on his part.”

“I saw it, many times. Again, you can’t be everywhere at once. That’s why the lower ranks exist, to help out the decision makers such as yourself.”

Friedrich laughed. “Very convincing, Seeler.” He placed the glass down on the desk. “You always have a story, don’t you? You’d make a wonderful actor I think. Let’s see how your acting abilities help you out on the Eastern Front.”

Christopher felt his blood run cold, and his back stiffen, and wondered if it was the look on his own face that was causing Friedrich to smile. “Herr Rapportführer, what use would an accountant be on the Eastern Front?”

“I’m sure they’ll find some use for you, Herr Obersturmführer. Just like the two guards you had transferred there this morning, Schlesinger and Hauser I believe were their names? I’m sure they’ll be just thrilled to see you again.”

It couldn’t end like this. There was too much still to do. Christopher grasped his wallet in his pocket and the picture that Anka had drawn inside it. The orders still hadn’t come back from Herz for the truckload of children. There was too much to do to have this man’s ego stand in his way. “I’m sure there’s something we can do to work this out, Herr Rapportführer. The Lagerkommandant thinks I’m doing a wonderful job here.”

“No, Seeler, the old Lagerkommandant thought you did a great job here. I will admit I did too, at one time, but you’ve gone over my head for the last time.” It was hard to tell if Friedrich was doing this for personal pleasure or not. Either way, the smirk on his face was fixed now.

“I can assure you, Herr Rapportführer I have nothing but the utmost respect for you and for every decision that you make...” Christopher felt the pistol in his holster. There was still so much to do. There was nothing he could do on the Eastern Front, no reason for him to even be alive there.

Friedrich shook his head. "I have a ready-made replacement for you, someone who will obey my orders, someone who has the inside knowledge of the organization of this section of the camp."

"So, it seems the decision has already been made." Christopher heard his voice harden and poured himself a shot of vodka. He thought of the money in the safe. How much would it take to buy this man?

"Yes, I can assure you that it already has. I will be lodging the order tomorrow morning. The transfer should take a few days to process and then you'll be on the front lines, serving the Reich. You know, if I were a little younger, I'd be out there myself. I am almost jealous of you, Seeler."

"What can I say to make you change your mind, Herr Friedrich? Let me assure you that I am best off serving the Reich right here, right from this chair. There are two types of men in this war; fighting men like you and pencil pushers like me. I can't shoot a gun, but I have organized this section better than anyone before me and certainly better than Herr Breitner ever could." Christopher tried to keep the desperation out of his voice, but it was hard.

Friedrich was clearly enjoying this. He rocked back in his seat, the anger from earlier now dispersed. He didn't speak, but did motion to Christopher to fill his glass once more. Christopher felt the heat in his head. It felt as if it was going to implode. The thought of actually fighting to propagate this was more than he could bear.

"Thank you, Herr Seeler. You will certainly be missed around here." Friedrich was smiling again.

"A day or two is simply not long enough for the handover. I need longer, at least a week. I have a trip to Berlin in two days. The contact there knows me. I will have to go through all the systems with Breitner, introduce him to the Kommandoführers, the Blockführers, and the new Kapo. There is just too much work to do. Don't do this. Don't kick me out of here and have the whole section suffer because of it." Christopher stared back across at Friedrich, whose face changed. He looked down at the floor.

"I suppose that might be counterproductive. You were a good accountant after all, and I wouldn't want to fall behind."

"The one thing that Lagerführer Ekhoff said was that if production slowed

here, for any reason, he would be very displeased.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Friedrich snapped. He took a sip of vodka again and swirled it around in his mouth. “Okay, Seeler, I’ll give you a week, but if you’re not organized by then I’ll shoot you myself just to save the Russians from having to do it.”

Christopher nodded, disgusted that Friedrich’s magnanimity had forced him to feel relieved. A week would give him time to think though. “That’s the right decision for the camp, Herr Rapportführer.”

Friedrich stood up and smiled, holding his hand out to Christopher. “Thank you for the valuable work you’ve done here, Herr Obersturmführer. You’ve got a glittering future ahead of you, just not here.”

Christopher looked back at him, hesitating for a few seconds before offering a limp hand. “Give me a few days until you put that order in, until after I travel to Berlin on Thursday.”

“You’ve got until Friday morning, that’s when the order goes in.”

Christopher waited until after the door had closed behind Friedrich to pour another glass of vodka. He thought of Uli, who had been on the Eastern Front for more than two years. Perhaps they were to share the same fate and die in some nameless marshland in Belorussia. There was no more time to waste. He picked up the phone.

“Herz? It’s me, Christopher Seeler.”

“Herr Seeler, it’s so good to hear from you.” It was hard to tell if he’d been drinking yet today or not.

“Have you made a decision?”

Christopher heard him breathing on the other end of the phone before the words came out. “Yes, I have. I don’t see any reason we can’t do business together.”

The contents of the suitcase must have helped, Christopher thought to himself. “Good, I’m glad you’ve seen sense. There has been a change of circumstance however.”

“And what might that be?”

“It needs to happen this week.”

“This week? Why the rush all of a sudden?”

“Circumstances beyond the control of myself or the other party we are working with. Can you do it this week, perhaps on Friday?” Herz coughed on the other end of the phone. And then silence. “Herz, are you still there? Can you do it or not?”

“Yes, we should be able to do that.”

“I will see you in your office at 10 am tomorrow to go through the final details,” Christopher said, and hung up the phone.

There was not time for a letter to his father. The next phone call would be riskier, but what were they going to do to him now? Execute him? A trip to the Eastern Front was tantamount to the same thing. He picked up the receiver again and spoke to the camp operator, explaining it was an emergency-that his father was dying. Lying had become so easy. The operator patched him through and the phone rang. Cousin Harald picked up. Christopher heard the echo in the background and he knew that the Political Department was listening in. The surprise mingled with a genuine affection in Harald’s voice. Christopher asked to speak to his father as politely as he could.

“Not in work today?” Christopher said as he heard Stefan pick up.

“No, I’m very busy with the arrangements we were trying to organize together.”

“How is your health, Father?”

“The same. I’m still hanging on.”

“I wanted to call you about our arrangements. Things have changed. I’ve been offered a wonderful opportunity to serve the Reich directly on the Eastern Front.” Christopher paused, waiting for his father’s reaction, but there was only silence. “I’ll most likely be shipping out next week.”

“So, is our arrangement off?”

“No, but it’s going to have to be pushed forward to Friday of this week.”

“Friday? Today is Tuesday.”

“Yes, I know what day it is.” Christopher pushed a breath out. “This is the way it has to be. Can you do it?”

“Well, I suppose that I’ll just have to, won’t I?”

“Yes. It’s the only way. The same thing we discussed, but just this Friday.”

“I understand. Stay safe, my son, we’re thinking about you all the time.”

“Good luck, Father.” He hung up the phone.

Christopher took a breath deep down into his lungs and thought about Breitner in this very seat. The handover would not be easy, in so many ways. There had to be some way to stop it. Without him there to protect the ladies in Canada...There was so much to do. There were three shipments coming in that day and he had still not caught up with the work from yesterday. Christopher stood up and opened the door to the main office. Breitner and Flick were at their desks. Breitner threw eyes at Christopher and then back at the work in front of him.

“Herr Breitner, can I see you for a moment?”

Breitner raised his head, his skin a paler grey than usual. He looked across at Flick, who didn’t raise his head, and back at Christopher before he nodded and stood up.

“Sit down, Wolfgang,” Christopher said as Breitner closed the door behind him. “We’ve never really gotten to know one another too well, have we?” Once again Christopher was behind his desk.

“How do you mean, Herr Obersturmführer?”

“Socially I mean. You’re never around after dark to play cards with us. Where do you go? What do you do?”

He seemed nervous and his eyes flew around the room, resting in one corner then moving to explore another before finally coming to rest on Christopher. “I am in a different part of the barracks, quite far from you.”

“Quite far, yes, one could certainly say that much.” Christopher stared

across the table at him. Breitner's thin features contorted with discomfort that Christopher was enjoying. "Do you enjoy working here, Breitner?"

"Yes."

"But not especially, no?" Christopher clasped his hands together. "Do you feel you might be happier getting closer to the action, as it were? What I'm trying to get at is-would you be more contented to be on the front, with the rest of our brave lads? It's not everyone who's cut out for that. Perhaps you're not."

Breitner seemed to tense. "What makes you think I'm not able for that?"

"I never said that. It's just that you're not really that good of an accountant and I have to submit a report to the Lagerkommandant saying as much. There are just too many mistakes, too much shoddy work, Wolfgang, I'm sure you understand."

Breitner grimaced. "Well, that's your opinion. No one works harder than I do around here. Perhaps I'm not the politician that... some people are, but I'm a hard worker." He was struggling for words. It was a pleasure to see.

"Yes but sometimes there's more to work than just putting the hours in. This work requires skill and patience. I just had a meeting with Rapportführer Friedrich, he said very much the same thing and, unfortunately, we are in agreement over what needs to happen to you." Christopher kept the invective from his voice, though it was bubbling over inside him.

"Is that right?" Breitner was smiling now. "Herr Friedrich said that, did he?"

"Do you know something that I don't, Wolfgang?"

"No, of course not." Breitner replied.

"That will be all, Breitner," Christopher said, and Breitner left. It was clear to Christopher that the conspiracy against him was going to have to be broken before Friday morning. But how? Christopher thought of Pierre Cassin, working in Crematorium 4 with the other men, shaving hair off dead bodies to be turned into blankets and nylons. What could he do? Even if Christopher could somehow convince him, or another prisoner to kill Friedrich and somehow got away with it, a feat that seemed impossible, there would be horrible retributions. There had

to be another way.

Chapter 38

Friday morning came with dreams of Rebecca, or was it Anka? It was hard to think of one without the other. They ran together like separate streams into the same river, mingling in his mind to become one. They were with him as he dressed, shaved, in everything he did. Lahm shifted in his sleep and cast an eye towards Christopher before closing it again. There was nothing to be done about Lahm now, but that day would come. This war would be over someday and the power that Lahm yielded would be broken. All of this would end, all of this. And who would know that he, Christopher Seeler, was any different from Lahm and the others? Who would know what he had tried to do here? Christopher took Anka's drawing out of his pocket, the folds deep in the flimsy white paper. He ran his eyes over it again, the lemon sun high in the sky over the rectangular farmhouse, and in the field three brown cows. Perhaps it was her home, drawn from memory or perhaps not. He would never know. He wished he had been able to bring a photograph of Rebecca, a record of her beauty to keep for himself. Instead he looked into the mirror and saw her in his own eyes.

The snow was thick on the ground as Christopher made his way out to the shed where his bicycle was kept. The roads had been cleared already. The SS enjoyed the snow, enjoyed making the prisoners shovel it. Christopher had seen Blockführers and Kapos force prisoners to cover the road with the snow that they had just shoveled off it, just so that they would have to dig it out again. Christopher cycled past skeleton people, standing barefoot in snowdrifts as they struggled to lift shovels to plunge into the snow. He heard the screams of the Kapo as one man seemed too slow, and more screams as the SS man came across. Christopher cycled away, trying to escape the sound of what he knew was to come, but he couldn't, and the shot rang out and found his ears. But Christopher wiped it from his mind, as he always did, as he had to. He looked at his watch. It was not long now, the first shipment of the day, the children would be from the same part of Czechoslovakia Schultz was from. That would be Christopher's tribute to him.

Christopher arrived first at the office, as always, although the ladies in Canada had been working for more than two hours already. Christopher

unlocked the door to his office and saw the envelope lying on his desk. He opened it and read the letter inside again. It would be enough. He placed it back into the envelope, put the envelope into his pocket and walked into the snow outside. He wandered into one of the warehouses where fifteen ladies were rummaging through winter coats, scarves and hats. Christopher looked over toward the guard on duty, who was having a cigarette in the corner. The room was cold, barely any warmer than the air outside, and each of the workers was huddled in coats and scarves of their own, their breath plumes of icy white in front of them. Petra Kocianova was sitting in front of a large table, her sister Martina by her side. Christopher felt himself drawn to where she was sitting, and, without knowing he had moved, he was standing directly beside her. She looked up at him. He wanted to apologize to her, for saving her and leaving her in a world without her children, surrounded by pain, misery and death. His hand was resting on the table beside her and he looked away, but then felt the touch of her. She was looking up at him, her hand resting on his, and he looked at Martina. She was smiling through her tears, looking directly into his eyes.

Christopher was there as the train arrived and the prisoners spilled off the cattle carts and onto the gravel below. The shouting, the dogs, the line up and the selections began. Christopher was looking at the administrator and waiting for him to call out the orders. It seemed to take an age, but finally he did. The Krupp factory needed forty-five children, young children under the age of seven, and they began to step forward. SS men walked up and down the lines picking out the children Christopher had bought, and they gathered together in a shivering mass. Many of them cried, reaching out for their mothers, but some of them just stood silently as if somehow they knew what was going on. Then they were loaded onto the truck to take them away. Christopher watched as they crowded into the truck. There was barely space for them, but the SS men packed them in, some on top of others. They had no idea of the long journey they had ahead of them, first to the factory and then from there to the meeting point with Stefan and Alexandra in Leipzig, and then to the orphanage in the convent where Stefan had organized the purchase and furnishing of an old unused wing for them to live in. They would have food and a place to sleep somewhere the war would never find them. They would be kept as war orphans, complete with papers. Christopher stood there watching as the truck left and the children waved, shouted goodbye to the parents they were leaving behind. Then they were gone.

It was starting to snow again, tiny specks of white trickling down onto the

shoulders of the prisoners as they lined up for selection. Christopher was close enough to hear the doctors proclaiming the sentence of death, or life as slave, each decision made in five seconds or less. Christopher turned away and saw Friedrich, talking with Breitner. He walked towards them.

“Good morning, Rapportführer, good morning, Herr Breitner.”

Friedrich smirked as he turned to him, Breitner merely nodding his head. “Good morning to you, Seeler, did you enjoy your last trip to Berlin yesterday? I think I will take that particular role myself upon your departure. This time next week, you’ll be one more of our brave boys on the front line. Exciting times eh?” He turned to Breitner who was smiling now too.

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about,” Christopher began. “Have you put in the orders for the transfer yet?”

“No, not quite yet, don’t you worry though, Seeler it’s only a matter of a few hours....”

“Good, I’m glad you won’t have to waste your time. I do know how valuable your time is.”

“What are you talking about?” Friedrich asked, still sneering.

Christopher reached into his pocket and passed the envelope to Friedrich, who looked at Breitner before he opened it. Christopher watched his eyes, waiting for them to move down the page before he spoke.

“As you can see, the rumors of my transfer out of the camp have been sorely exaggerated. It seems like I’ll be staying here after all.”

“This isn’t real,” Friedrich said, holding the letter out in front of him as Breitner struggled to push his head across to read it. “This can’t be real.”

“Check the signature, and the seal. You’ll find that it’s completely genuine.” Christopher stared back at Friedrich and then at Breitner. “Breitner, the transfer we spoke about previously will be going through later on today.” Christopher looked at Friedrich. “I will expect a countersignature from you, Herr Rapportführer; we really don’t want to bother the Lagerführer with the likes of this. I will, however, be reinstating the rules in Canada regarding the execution of prisoners and resuming my role as head of the Anti-Corruption

Committee.” Friedrich didn’t speak, just handed the letter back. Christopher looked at SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler’s signature and seal at the bottom once more before folding it back into the envelope. Not bad, Christopher thought, and it only cost him three thousand Reich marks. Himmler’s secretary should have charged more, particularly as he had guaranteed to cover the letter if anyone called to check on it. Christopher would have paid double that. Christopher turned and saluted, and then walked away.

Christopher finished up the paperwork for Breitner’s transfer to the front and sat back in his seat. Friedrich would have to wait, but the Rapportführer wouldn’t bother him anymore, not after this. He thought of Himmler’s secretary and the letter it had taken him ten minutes to persuade him to write and wondered how many times he had done it for other officers with money to throw at their problems. He must have known that the house of cards was coming down. Christopher picked up the phone. Herz’s secretary pretended not to know him, even after the flowers he had sent her the previous week. She was good. Herz answered with a cough, and Christopher pictured him, the decanter already half drunk at three in the afternoon.

“I trust everything went well this morning.” Christopher started.

“Yes, yes, the truck arrived on time. The driver took them to their new quarters.”

“Excellent, I’m glad that everything went so smoothly.”

“Will that be all?” Herz asked.

“For now, Herr Herz, but you can expect to hear from me again, and soon.” Christopher hung up the phone.

It was the end of the day when he came. He was a tall man, bigger than Schultz, with broad shoulders that still bore the shadows of faded muscle. His name was Markus Klaczko. He was the head of the Sonderkommando unit, Schultz’s replacement. Klaczko sat down opposite Christopher.

“You called for me, Herr Obersturmführer?” he began.

“Yes I did.” Christopher sat back in his chair and looked out the window at the snow and the wire, the trees beyond. “Tell the other prisoners the summary executions are going to stop. If there are any problems with Kapos, guards or

even officers, I want you to come to me,” Christopher continued. Klaczko nodded his head, slowly and deliberately. “I will do my best to protect you as much as I can; I will warn you of anything that I hear, but there is only so much I can do for you. I wish I could do more.”

“I know,” Klaczko answered.

Chapter 39

New York, September 1954

“Next, I’d like to talk to you about that remarkable day in Dachau, the day the ladies from Canada saved *your* life.” Christopher adjusted the headphones and pressed his face closer into the radio microphone. “What are your thoughts on what the US soldiers did that day in Dachau; executing an estimated fifty to one hundred SS troops on the liberation of the concentration camp in April 1945?”

Christopher looked across at the interviewer, who motioned for him to talk. “Perhaps if they’d seen all the killing done in the years before, the soldiers might not have been so quick to presume that it was the answer. I can see why they did it. It was the only justice those prisoners had seen in years of torture, starvation and death. I think I might have done the same thing in their place. But I wasn’t in their place.” Christopher sat back and adjusted his tie, and looked around for Hannah, even though he knew she wasn’t there.

“Why didn’t you speak up for yourself when the soldiers rounded up the SS men? Why didn’t you tell them you were different from the others?”

“I think I was the only guard who didn’t try to speak up.” Christopher smiled.

“But there were no other guards there who did what you did, who saved three hundred and forty two children from certain death in the gas chamber, who protected the lives of more than six hundred women under their care.”

“How do you know that?” Christopher said, leaning forward. “I didn’t know their stories and they didn’t know mine.” Christopher let out a deep breath. “The truth of it is I was tired. Rebecca was dead. Even after her father told me that she was executed I still looked, but there was never any sign of her. And who’s to say I didn’t deserve to die along with the other guards for what I did. I delivered hundreds of thousands of dollars, pounds, marks, and any other currency you can name to the SS.”

“The prisoners who saved you didn’t seem to think you deserved to die.”

The interviewer's eyes were piercing as they peered across the table at him.

"No, they didn't." Christopher shifted back in his seat, thinking back to that day. He saw the young American soldier, his brown eyes reddened at the sides, his lips tight as a scar on his face, coming to him and lifting his rifle with shaking hands, aiming it at Christopher's chest. It was a funny feeling, to accept death and have life given back to you. It was Martina Kocianova who saved him. He opened his eyes to see her clawing at the soldier's face, bashing on his shoulders, and the shot meant for Christopher flew into the air above his head. Some of the other ladies pulled Christopher away, protecting him with their bodies. There was sound of more rifle shots and as he looked back, all the other SS men were dead.

"And why was it that you and the ladies under your care ended up at Dachau when the rest of the camp at Auschwitz was taken to Bergen-Belsen?"

"I had heard about the typhus outbreaks in Bergen-Belsen. The sheer numbers of prisoners arriving from the Eastern camps meant that it had become a death trap. I used the last of the monies I had appropriated from the safe to bribe the proper officials and I had the ladies in Canada, along with the few remaining Sonderkommandos, transferred, via train, to Dachau."

"These were the same monies that you used to bribe the officials to have the children taken off the trains and diverted to the factory where your father met them?"

"From the same source, yes." Christopher felt cold, alone. He thought of Hannah again.

"And what happened to this money?"

"It's all gone, long ago. If you're trying to suggest that I squirreled any of it away for myself, you're wrong. That money was only ever for one purpose."

The interviewer did not rise to Christopher's lead. "How do you reconcile the fact that the money you gave to these officials, these Nazi war criminals, may have helped them to escape, as many have?"

"That was a choice I had to make at the time. I had to deal with the situation I saw in front of me on a daily basis. If I had done nothing, there is a good chance that the people I oversaw would have died, certainly the children

we took off the trains anyway. It is unfortunate that some of these men have escaped.”

“Let’s move on to your own trial for war crimes, which took place in Poland in 1946. You had twenty former inmates testify on your behalf and your defense lawyer stated that there were over two hundred others who wished to be given the chance to speak for you; some wanted to travel from France, the United States and even Israel.”

“You’ve done your research.”

“Then, in 1947, you testified against several of your former superior officers in the Auschwitz trials in Poland, where you gave evidence against the former head of the camp Arthur Liebehenschel and your own direct superior officer Uwe Friedrich, both of whom received the death penalty for their part in the war crimes that occurred there. How did it feel testifying against your former colleagues?”

Christopher shifted in his seat and looked at the interviewer, who waved his hands at him, motioning to him about the dead air they had mentioned before the interview had started. “It was easier for some of the officers than others. I thought that certain things, certain visions and dreams would be put to rest after that.” Christopher looked up and around the grey interviewing room. The producer was in the corner, headphones on, and Christopher saw the tape recording his every word. It felt like he was on trial again. He thought of his family, and Jersey, and wondered why he had ever agreed to this. “It was my duty to those who died to do what I could on their behalf.” Christopher looked up at the window into the studio. David Adler from the American Jewish Committee was smoking a cigarette as he watched them. “The things that went on in those camps, the things that I saw myself, were monstrous, and I was.... happy to bring even some of the perpetrators to justice.”

The interviewer nodded. “Are there any guards you worked with who have yet to be brought to justice?”

“There are thousands of guards who worked in Auschwitz still walking free today. But people I worked with? Yes, I believe that my roommate, Franz Lahm, is still at large, although I never saw any of the acts that he himself perpetrated.” And as he looked across, he saw Rebecca at the window and his whole body went cold, his heart crushed in his chest. It couldn’t be. He had

dreamt this so many times. She was standing beside David, her hand to her mouth. It had to be her. It was Rebecca. Christopher saw David talking to her. He saw her too. Christopher pressed his eyelids together and wrenched them apart and looked again. It was Rebecca. She was older, but he hadn't seen her in eleven years. Her long blonde-brown hair fell beyond her shoulders to her floral dress. She was tanned, smiling, and even more beautiful than before. Christopher gasped and the interviewer looked at him, almost stopping mid question. Christopher was standing now although he couldn't remember getting to his feet and he ripped off the headphones and drew his finger to his throat and brought it back and forth. He felt clammy and cold, yet his heart was burning inside him and he was running for the door.

“All right, ladies and gentlemen, we're here with Christopher Seeler, former SS guard, and the man some are now describing as the 'Angel of Auschwitz', but right now we have to take a commercial break, we'll be right back.” The interviewer glared across at Christopher. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

Christopher didn't answer, just pushed the door open, and Rebecca was smiling at him. She turned to face him. David looked at Christopher and then her.

“Rebecca?” Christopher said. She didn't answer, just smiled and a tear broke down her cheek. He had her in his arms.

She drew back more quickly than he wanted. “I can't believe it's you! It's been so long,” she said, crying now.

“It's been eleven years, Rebecca, almost eleven and a half,” he gasped, almost spitting out the words. Her face was thin, almost as thin as when he had last seen her back in Jersey, but still perfect, utterly perfect. “You look wonderful. Where have you been for the last nine years? I thought you were dead.”

“I thought you were a Nazi. I heard you were a guard in Auschwitz. I went back to Jersey, but I only found an empty house. No one knew where you or your family were. I only found out who you really were when I read about you in the newspaper.”

“But your father said you were dead.”

Rebecca shook her head. “You believed my father, did you? I was transferred.” She wiped the tears away with her wrist and Christopher saw the wedding ring, felt his stomach clench and his heart as molten rock in his chest, but his face didn’t change. “Do you want to go somewhere? I don’t know the city too well. I’ve never been here before.” Christopher turned around to David. “David, this is Rebecca, the woman I told you about.”

David looked suitably shocked and he looked at Christopher with a huge smile before leaning forward to shake Rebecca’s hand. “It’s a pleasure, a real pleasure,” he said, and turned to look at Christopher.

“I have to leave,” Christopher said, looking at David. He turned to Rebecca. “Do you live here?”

“No, I’m flying back to Israel tomorrow morning.” She shrugged. Her mannerisms were memories in themselves and he had to restrain himself from throwing his arms around her. It felt like the natural thing to do.

“David, you heard her. I have to go.” Christopher looked at his watch. It was just after six. “We don’t have much time.” Christopher looked into the studio. The host was glaring at him now, pointing to his watch.

“Christopher, I understand but this interview is the main reason we brought you here. It’s nearly finished; we’ve barely half an hour left. This is important. You can spend the rest of your time here with this young lady after we finish.” He looked back at Christopher, who looked at Rebecca. “You can have the whole night after we wrap this up. This is a live broadcast.”

Christopher looked towards Rebecca, waiting for her final judgment. “I can wait,” Rebecca said. “I mean, I have to leave early tomorrow morning, but I can wait around tonight. Do what you need to do, Christopher.” He looked at her, his lips pressed together and then at David. “Please, Christopher, finish the interview. We can be together afterwards.” Christopher arched his head as he looked at her. “We can spend time together after the interview.” She nodded.

Christopher looked at Rebecca and then at David. “All right, I’ll finish the interview, but can we at least have a few minutes together? An hour and then I’ll finish the interview.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” David said and walked into the studio.

“So, how are you?” Rebecca asked. The smile on her face seemed genuine but there was much more behind it. She turned towards him and he moved to her, but was suddenly too close and she stepped back.

“I’m doing really well. I can’t believe you’re here. You look great, just great.” The smile on his face was almost beginning to hurt now.

“Thank you. You look great too.”

They both looked as David popped his head out of the studio. “They managed to find an old show to broadcast for now. All right, you’ve got an hour, but then back here to finish the interview.” He was still smiling, everyone was. “Now you two go and enjoy yourselves, you deserve it.”

“Thanks, David,” Christopher said and turned to Rebecca. He gestured towards the elevator. “Shall we?”

Chapter 40

“It’s been so long since I’ve seen you, I feel like everything I say should be brilliant or important,” Christopher laughed.

“Life doesn’t really work like that, does it?”

“No, not usually.” Christopher returned her smile and pressed the button for the elevator again. “How did you find me here today, and what are you doing in New York?”

“I’m over here on business.” Her smile was gone.

“Oh, what do you do for a living now?”

“I’m in marketing. I work for a firm in Tel Aviv, where I live. I read about you in the paper on Monday. I called the newspaper and spoke to the journalist who interviewed you and he told me that you were doing this radio interview today, and here I am.” She shrugged. “I can’t believe that I’d never heard of you, after all you did.”

“I was never interviewed before. I’ve never been in the newspaper before this week and I wouldn’t have been except for the American Jewish Committee bringing me over here.”

“How did they find out about you?”

“One of the children I brought out of the camps wrote to them.” Christopher paused and looked at her, drinking her in with his greedy eyes. “I’m so glad that you made it.” Christopher held out his arms. The elevator arrived. “I’m so glad you’re alive; I thought you were dead. I can’t believe this.”

The elevator attendant asked what floor they were going to.

“The lobby, please,” Christopher said before turning to Rebecca beside him. “The park is only a few blocks away, we could walk up there.”

“Okay.” She said, a morose look on her face.

“What’s wrong Rebecca?”

She shook her head. "I've hated you all these years, ever since the war. And then I find out what you did, and the whole reason that I hid myself from you all these years was a lie."

Christopher looked at her, felt his shoulders dropping. "How were you to know? You could only believe what you were told, or what the evidence told you. How did you find out that I was in the SS?" Christopher asked. The elevator attendant lifted an eyebrow and glanced sideward.

"I met my father in the displaced persons camp after I got out of Buchenwald. He told me about you. He said that you worked in Auschwitz."

"Of course." Christopher afforded himself a wry grin. "I should have known. Where is your father now?"

"He tried to look for my mother after the war, but she was killed in the blitz in London." She stared into space as she spoke.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Christopher extended his hand towards her.

Rebecca smiled at him, but did not take his hand. She turned her head to look straight ahead as she spoke. "Thanks. After he realized she was dead he found another woman. He lives in Surrey now, as far as I know, but I haven't seen him since '51."

"He never did like me, did he?" Christopher somehow managed to smile as he shook his head. "I suppose he got his wish in the end."

"I still remember the moment he told me. I couldn't believe it and I didn't at first. I cried for days. I was weak. I weighed around seventy pounds. I thought I was going to die after I found out." She stopped talking as if the next part of the conversation was too painful to touch, but then started again. "The picture of you was all that had kept me going through the camps, the thought that one day we would be together again." Christopher wanted to touch her but didn't. "It didn't tally in my mind that you could have gone from being the man you were just a few months before to being one of them." She was shaking her head now and looked close to tears. "I still went back to Jersey to look for you. I went back in April '46, but the house was empty."

Christopher raised his hands to his head. "I was still in the internment camp then. My family were all still in Germany. Even Tom had come over to

Germany to be with Alexandra then.” The frustration of Rebecca looking for him in Jersey was almost too much for him.

“No one knew where you were.” Her voice was leaden. “I should have kept looking for you but I had no money and staying in Jersey was too painful for me without you. I did try. I asked and some said that you were collaborators, but I still couldn’t believe it. It took me a long time to accept something that wasn’t the truth. I had to. It was the only way for me to go on.”

“My father was the first to go back, but that wasn’t until months after you were there.” Christopher leant up against the wall, the frustration draining him. But that was past. He brought his head back up. “You know who I am now. It took you nine years, but you know who I am now.”

She nodded her head and smiled, reaching out to embrace him. It felt wonderful.

The elevator arrived at the lobby and Christopher stood back to let Rebecca out. The elevator attendant stared around the door as they walked towards the door and out onto Broadway.

“I think it’s up this way,” Rebecca said as they turned up towards the park. It was a warm evening, the streets thick with people.

“So what happened, Rebecca? Where were you? Your father told me that you had been killed, that you had struck a guard.”

“The part about hitting the guard was true.” She smiled and turned to him. “We’ve spoken about my family now, but how are yours? I’ve thought about them so much over the years.”

“They’re fine, Rebecca, we’ll get to all that. Please, the questions about you have been burning a hole in my mind for as long as I can remember.”

“Are you sure you wouldn’t rather talk about this lovely weather we’ve been having?” Rebecca smiled. Christopher turned his head sideways to look at her, almost bumping into a large middle-aged woman who glared at him as he edged around her. Rebecca reached across to him, taking his elbow before she began to speak again. “After I hit the guard, I was brought before the Commandant of the camp. I had dealt with him before, speaking on behalf of some of the female prisoners. I was sure he was going to execute me, but he

didn't. He liked me for some reason and decided to transfer me rather than have me killed."

"I can guess why he liked you." Christopher felt his voice thick, tried to disguise the feelings behind it, to understand. But she didn't even look at him, just kept talking, and he was glad.

"I was transferred to Westerbork in Holland. Westerbork was an assembly point, a place for Jews, gypsies and political prisoners to gather before being sent off to the concentration camps to be killed. Many of the people that I oversaw in Westerbork would have been sent to Auschwitz." Christopher nodded, remembered the Dutch Jews coming through. Two of his ladies had been Dutch. "I stayed there for a few months before I was shipped out to Buchenwald. I arrived just after the winter ended, in February 1944. I was there until March of '45 when I was shipped out with several thousand others. We were put on a train. They were taking us to be gassed, trying to kill us while they still could, but I managed to escape after a few days, going back and forth between stations. I hid out in the woods until some British troops found me. That was in April 1945."

Christopher thought of where he was then, being arrested in Dachau despite the protests of the prisoners, who sent a delegation to speak to the American officers on his behalf. He looked across at her and they walked in silence for a few seconds. The sign for 58th street came into their view. Columbus Circle and the park were directly ahead. "What was it like in Buchenwald? How bad was it?" They were crossing the street as he asked.

Rebecca shook her head and Christopher saw the tears come. "It's hard to talk about it here on the street. I want to tell you, Christopher, I want to tell you everything. But it's hard."

"I understand." They walked across Columbus Circle to the entrance to the park and continued through in silence. "Why didn't I find you? I'm sure the people I had searching for you would have checked the camps you were in."

"The Commandant of Biberach made me change my name so that I couldn't be traced by his superiors."

"So he really did like you?" It was hard to look at her now. Christopher had seen when officers took a liking to female prisoners enough times in the

camp himself.

“I suppose he did,” she said, looking at the ground.

“What did you change your name to?”

“Rebecca Klein. I chose it at random, but that was my name for the remainder of my time in the camps, not that your name mattered.”

“So when I had your father transferred to Auschwitz he really did think you were dead?”

“Yes, I suppose at that time he did think so. The Commandant at Biberach had me transferred that night. He wanted the guards to think that I had been executed too. I never saw any of the prisoners there again, not until after the war anyway.” Rebecca looked up along the street and took a breath and turned to Christopher. They were slowing now, their steps languid and faint against the flow of people around them. “Christopher, all that you did in Auschwitz, organizing the release of the children, bribing officials, smuggling out children yourself, were you ever scared?”

Christopher let out a laugh and shook his head. “I was terrified, all the time, constantly afraid from the moment I woke up in the morning to when I fell asleep at night.” He was looking at her now as he spoke and she turned her eyes to his as they walked along, the trees enveloping them overhead. “The worst part was not having an ally, someone to talk to, to be able to tell someone the real reason that I was there. After a while the Sonderkommandos and the ladies in Canada realized who I was, but I could never truly let them in. It was just too dangerous. I had to keep them at a distance. But was I scared? Yes, I was. The fact that I got to see my family every two weeks was what saved me. I don’t think I could have gotten through without their support.”

“Yes, how is your family? I think about them all the time.”

“Not me, no?” He laughed.

“The SS officer?” Rebecca smiled. “No, I tried to put you out of my mind, Christopher. I didn’t know what to think.”

“But you know now. You know who I am now.” The thought that his plan to get Rebecca back had separated them was jagged in his heart. He tried to hide

it. It was hard to tell if she noticed or not but she must have known.

“Yes, I do, but answer the question.” The old mischief was in her eyes, or at least a version of what was once there.

Christopher smiled and shook his head. “It’s good to see that age hasn’t changed you, that...everything that happened hasn’t changed you.”

“I never said that my experience hadn’t changed me.” Her smile faded and they were silent for a few seconds. “Anyway, anyway, anyway, how is your family?”

“Yes, my family, they’re splendid. They’re all back in Jersey.”

“All of them?”

“Yes, they eventually all made it back, some later than others.” Christopher felt the words stall within him and had to push them out. “Yes, well, they’re all back there now. Alexandra went back to Tom after the war. They live just outside St Helier. They have six kids now.”

“Six kids?”

“Yes, six, you could say they’re making up for lost time. It seems every time Alex turns around these days she’s pregnant again. I think Tom only has to look at her to impregnate her.” They both laughed. “They deserve it though, for everything they went through.”

“They’re great people. I’d love to see them again.” Christopher tried to jump in, but Rebecca continued. “What about your father? I’ve missed him so much all these years. Breaking up with you was so much harder because of him. The thought of never seeing him again made it even more painful.”

“I never realized we broke up. I thought we were still together after all these years.” Christopher smiled at her again and could see she was fumbling for the right words. “I know. You thought I was a Nazi,” he said. Her smile was the signal for him to continue. “My father is doing very well. I saw him last week. We live together with my daughter and my nephew Stefan.”

“Wait, you have a daughter? The newspaper article never mentioned that.” Her eyes were wide, her amazement visible.

“I wanted to keep her out of the newspaper. I didn’t want to get her involved in this.”

“What age is she? What’s her name?”

“Her name is Hannah, she’s eleven. She’s back in Jersey with my father and her cousins. I spoke to her last night long distance.” Christopher heard Hannah’s voice again in his mind and it warmed him.

“She’s eleven?”

“Yes, she’s adopted. She was one of the children I took out of the camp. The head of the Sonderkommandos at the time, Klaczko, brought her to me, the night before I was due to go to Berlin. He had smuggled her out of the crematorium, hidden in an old coat.” Christopher grimaced at the thought of the baby in the coat, something he had never sanctioned at the time. Klaczko just brought her to him. He shook his head at the impossible bravery of that. “The next morning I took her out of the camp in the car, brought her to my father in Berlin.”

“How did she stay quiet when you were driving out?”

“Hannah was only a baby, maybe around a year old at the time. I gave her some vodka, some of the really good stuff. She never made a sound.” Christopher smiled to himself. “She was too young to go to the safe houses or the orphanage we had organized so my family took her in. They raised her for those first few months. That was in October ‘44. Hannah was the last child I got out of Birkenau. It all fell apart after that. She’s Hungarian. We searched for any family she might have had left after the war, but it was impossible.” He pictured his daughter as a baby as he spoke, with the family that should have raised her. “There were no records of who her family were or even of what her name was. Alex used to bring her to visit me when I was in the internment camp, after Dachau. And when I got out, when Alex went back to Jersey she left Hannah with me. I adopted her as my daughter. She was absolutely everything to me, my savior. I don’t think I would have made it through if it wasn’t for her.”

“What happened to the prisoner, Klaczko?”

“He died. He was murdered by the SS.” Christopher looked out in front of him, felt the pain as he remembered Klaczko. He and the Sonderkommandos he had worked with were all dead.

“I would love to meet Hannah someday.” Rebecca’s face was pure as she spoke, utterly sincere, and Christopher thought about the possibility of her meeting Hannah.

“I’m sure she would love to meet you too. She’s heard all about you. I’d say she’d probably think you were a ghost.” He smiled.

“Who says I’m not?”

Christopher poked her in the shoulder with a rigid finger. “Nah, you’re no ghost.”

Rebecca smiled and stopped a young man in a grey suit walking past. “Excuse me sir, do you have the time on you?” The man smiled at her and offered the answer; it was 6:45. Rebecca thanked him and turned to Christopher again. “We should turn back. You have an interview to get to.”

Christopher looked at her for a few seconds. “Do we have to?” Rebecca nodded and turned around to walk back. Christopher stood still, watching her from behind as she went and the swish of her dress in the warm air. They were walking through a tunnel of trees, the branches intertwining overhead and the light of the evening sun sprinkling shards of light down through layers of leaves. He was still watching her as she turned around, her blue eyes sparkling as she spoke.

“Am I going to have to drag you back there?”

“I think so, yes.” But he started walking after her. She turned to him, smiling and stood still as he caught up to her.

“I can’t believe you’ve got a daughter.”

“Have you any kids yourself? I noticed the wedding ring.” Christopher felt the pained smile on his face as he asked.

“No, we’ve no children.” She looked out ahead, towards the end of the pathway and the exit out of the park. “I miss Jersey. I think about it all the time. Tel Aviv is wonderful, right on the Mediterranean, the beaches, the sea, just like Jersey, but there’s something missing, you know?”

“Me?” Christopher smiled.

“The Nazi war criminal you mean? No, I don’t think so.” Christopher smarted as she said it. He hadn’t expected to, but he did and she saw it.

“I did it for you, Rebecca.”

“I know that, I know that now,” she said and reached across to take his hand. It felt wonderful. She squeezed his palm and released, leaving his hand dangling by his side. “So the years have been good to you, Christopher, a few greys at the side,” she said, brushing her knuckles to the side of his head, “but you look good. How do I look?”

“Wonderful,” he answered. He stopped, expecting to say something else, but nothing came.

She smiled. “I used to think about that day you found me in the hedge down by my parents’ house when I was in the camps. Funny, isn’t it? The only thing I ever thought about other than you and Jersey was food. Those were the only things that I ever thought about, not the war, not what I was going to do afterwards, not how I was going to bring the monsters running the camps to justice, just those three things. But even then, I never thought about you as much I would about getting a piece of bread, or a potato. It’s a strange, horrible thing to be always hungry, always cold. A friend of mine, Emily Rosenfield, died and left me her spoon. She said it would save my life. I used to carry that spoon with me everywhere I went so that I would be ready.” She looked at Christopher but he didn’t know what to say. She had a strange smile on her face. “I ate it all, wood, leaves, grass. I learned to look for the juiciest pieces of grass, the ones with the most ‘meat’ on them. It hardly seems real now.”

Her voice seemed hollow as she spoke as if it wasn’t her talking, but some pale reflection of the person he knew. “It’s funny but I don’t think I would have made it through if I’d had what people think of as ‘normal’ parents. Their bad parenting gave me the best possible training for life in the camps.” Rebecca moved close to him, interlocking arms with his, she whispered, “I never thanked you for what you tried to do, what you did, for me. Thank you, Christopher.”

Christopher felt her warmth against him. “Oh Rebecca, I never had a choice. How could I leave you there? I had to do what I did. I never had a choice in any of it. I couldn’t not do it.”

Chapter 41

The light of the evening sun reflected off the windows of the cars and Christopher felt a drop of cold sweat down the center of his back. He undid the top button of his shirt, lit a cigarette and offered one to Rebecca. She shook her head and they walked on, crisscrossing through the traffic until they were back on Broadway. They had not spoken for a minute or longer. There was almost too much to ask and far too much to say. Christopher looked down at her hand, swinging loosely by her side and desperately wanted to take it. He drew a deep pull into his lungs and began to speak again.

“So, you’re married? Whatever happened to Jonathan Durrell?”

“He died in ’47, in a motorcycle crash on the island. I hadn’t seen him since I left.” She turned to Christopher again. “Let’s not talk about him. That’s ancient history now.” She ran a hand through her hair, letting it fall down to the side. Christopher felt his heart turn inside him. “You never got married yourself? What happened, Christopher? There must have been a line of eligible ladies all the way from the house in St. Martins down to St. Helier. None of them ever managed to snare you, no?”

“No. They had a tough act to follow, you know?” He turned to her but she didn’t look at him. Christopher took another drag on the cigarette. The weight of the silence between them was suddenly huge and he broke it. “There were women, of course, but there was never anyone truly special. I was raising a young daughter, and, with little Stefan in the house, I was practically raising two kids with my father. I wanted a mother for Hannah; I still do, but I didn’t want to fake it. I couldn’t.” Christopher looked at Rebecca again, waiting for her to talk, wishing that she would redirect the conversation but she didn’t. “It took me a long time to get over you and to accept the fact that you were dead. I don’t suppose I ever really did.”

“I’m not dead, Christopher.” Her words were soft, not more than a whisper.

“I can see that, but we still haven’t fully ascertained whether you’re a ghost or not.” He smiled but she didn’t. Christopher looked at his watch. The

interview was starting again in less than ten minutes. He threw down the cigarette.

“I’d been doing so much better lately; I thought I’d made a breakthrough in my life. I was so much happier until I read about you again. Everything I’ve based my life on these past nine years has been a mistake. I survived the camps but I left a massive part of me behind. When I finally began to believe that you were SS, the last part of my innocence died, because the memory of you was the only evidence I had that love really existed in the world, and that there was a life to be lived afterwards that would be worthwhile, that could be a real tribute to all the people I saw die.” The tears were coming down in great swathes now. Christopher put his arm across her shoulder and kissed the top of her head. They stopped on the street. “I’ve tried to live my life as a tribute to those people, that’s why I’ve lived the way I have since. It’s all been for them.” Rebecca put both hands up to her face. Christopher reached down, tried to take them away, but she kept them in place, locked against her face. “Now I come to meet you here and all this is revealed. I knew I should never have come, I should have left things the way that they were.”

“No, Rebecca, you’re wrong. Finding out that you’re alive is the greatest joy I could ever have.”

She took her hands away from her face and looked at him. Her eyes were dewy and wet. “Finding out that I’m alive and married, Christopher? I’m married, Christopher.”

“I know you are, Rebecca, but just the thought that you’re happy and alive is enough for me.” It wasn’t easy to lie. His insides were heavy and it was becoming hard to breathe.

“Is it? The thought that I’m lavishing in my perfect marriage, that’s enough to keep you happy until you die of old age wondering how the girl you became an SS officer in Auschwitz for is doing in over in Tel Aviv with her husband?” Her voice wavered as she pushed out the words.

“No, of course not,” he looked at her, directly into her blue eyes. “But it’s up to me to construct my own happiness. I can’t rely on you for that, not anymore. Maybe I could come over to Israel, some of the kids live over there, now. They write to me all the time inviting me over...”

“Yes, that sounds just perfect. You could watch Ari and I play happy families together. If you’re lucky he may even be around long enough for you to have a proper conversation with.”

“Does he know who I am?”

“No, if Ari ever found out that I was with an SS officer...I don’t even know. Maybe he wouldn’t even care,” she said, turning away. “We need to get you back to your interview.”

“Oh, I don’t care about that.”

“I do. You said that you’d be back there and you’re going back.” She strode away, back toward the studio.

Christopher stood still, feeling her words course through him as he watched her walk away and just for a brief second, he contemplated letting her go, and never seeing her again, about knowing that she was alive and that being enough. He walked after her. He had to jog to catch up, and she turned to him as he began to speak again. “I’m not saying that what I went through was anything compared to what you did, I never would, but after the war I had to build a new life for myself too. Everything had been focused on finding you, and the wonderful life that we were going to have together, on the life that we deserved to have. But when I found out you were dead, everything else died too. I did the things I did because I thought you were watching over me all the time and that was what you would have wanted me to do. And I’ve thought about you every day since.”

“It’s not my fault. What happened after the war isn’t my fault.” She began walking again and he beside her.

“I know that. I never thought that it was. I’m not looking for anything from you, Rebecca. How could I be? An hour ago I thought you were dead. I don’t know that I’m not going to wake up from this in a cold sweat and realize that this was all some dream.” Christopher felt the people passing them on the street looking at he and Rebecca for the first time and realized how oblivious he had been. He raised a hand to his head and looked back at her.

“It’s no dream, Christopher, believe me, it’s very real.” She seemed almost angry as she spoke.

Best to get back to safe ground, he thought to himself. The husband was his buffer, the limit to what he could hope to achieve. It was best to establish boundaries. “So tell me about your husband, when did you get married?”

Rebecca shook her head and gritted her teeth through a closed mouth. “We were married on April 9th 1950. I really don’t want to talk about that though, Christopher.”

“Talking to me about your husband isn’t being unfaithful.”

“Okay, what do you want to know? That he was a survivor too?” She was truly angry now. He knew her mannerisms so well. It was like being back in the apartment in St Helier with her again.

“That would be a start. Where did you meet him?”

“We worked together. I met him in ’47.”

“What happened to you after the war? How did you end up in Israel?” The words were coming quickly now. Somehow that made it easier.

“We don’t have time to talk about this. Your interview is starting again in five minutes.”

Christopher looked at his watch and looked at her. “I don’t care about that. This is more important.”

“No, Christopher, this is no good. I shouldn’t have come here today. All this is doing is opening up old wounds.” They were outside the building the studio was in. “You were fine without me and I was fine without you. We’ve survived.”

Christopher ran his hand through his hair. “Rebecca, just knowing that you made it through, that you survived the camps, makes me so happy. I had thought all these years that I was a failure and that the one thing that I’d gone there to do was the one thing that I couldn’t.”

“You, a failure? All those people are alive today thanks to you.”

“That didn’t make the pain of losing you any easier. It didn’t ease the guilt I felt.” He felt the familiar geyser of pain rising inside him.

“Oh, Christopher, no.”

“You never would have been deported if it wasn’t for me. You would have been safe in England. The only reason you stayed in Jersey was to be with me.”

“Christopher, if there’s one thing in the world I’m sure of, if there is only one thing, and God knows these days it’s hard to be sure about anything, it’s that I do not regret staying in Jersey with you. That was the most wonderful time I’ve ever had. You gave me everything. I was never happier.” Rebecca tilted her head to smile and the pain in him was eased. He had longed to hear those words. “You’ve got to go back upstairs now,” she said. The tears were in her eyes again.

“I will if you stay. I’m not going back inside there without you.”

“No, Christopher. I can’t.” She shook her head. “I’m married.”

“Rebecca, I’m not trying to get you. Just come inside, I won’t go if you’re not with me.” Christopher took her by the shoulders with gentle hands. “I’m not letting you go this time.”

Rebecca turned her head from side to side and looked into his eyes. “All right, I’ll come upstairs, but only because you joined the SS to find me.” She smiled.

“All right, that will do for me.” They walked inside. The elevator came within a few seconds and the same operator looked at them as they got inside. “You have to stay where I can see you. I want you standing at the glass.”

“Yes sir.” Rebecca laughed, but Christopher didn’t crack a smile.

David met them as the elevator arrived. “I knew you’d make it back. The others here weren’t so confident, but I had faith in you.”

“Thanks, David. When am I on?”

David looked at his watch. “Oh, in about fifteen seconds or so.” The interviewer was waving his arms at Christopher who jogged inside and put the headphones on again. He leaned into the microphone and looked up at Rebecca by the window as he waited for the next question.

Chapter 42

Christopher looked up at Rebecca in between questions, during questions and most of the time while he spoke. The thrill of seeing her face was almost giddying to him. No photo he had could capture the sparkle in her blue eyes or the energy he felt when he was around her. She dragged her hair back in her hands, tying it up as she watched him. The minutes spent in the studio were an agony. He was looking at his watch all the time, begging for the end, but he did what he was there to do, what the American Jewish Committee had brought him over to do. There was five minutes left when he looked up to her again but she was no longer there. David was still standing at the glass and he looked calm. Christopher tried to draw comfort from the look on David's face, but as the seconds built into minutes, she had still not returned and the urge to tear the headphones off his head was almost unbearable. The interview ended and somehow the interviewer seemed happy.

"That was a hell of a thing you did." He was beaming as he shook Christopher's hand.

"Yes, thank you," Christopher said and looked up at the window into the studio again. David was looking worried. Christopher walked out. "Where is she, David?"

"I don't know, she said she was going to the bathroom. That was about five minutes ago. She's taking quite a long time." His smile belied the nerves beneath.

Christopher put his hand on top of his head and knew that she was gone. They searched the bathroom, but she wasn't there. They ran to the elevator and onto the street. David apologized again.

Christopher's insides tightened and he felt like punching the wall, like screaming, like grabbing David by the lapels, but he didn't do any of these things. His heart was racing as he spoke. "It's not your fault, David, really it's okay." Christopher looked up the street into the sea of people. David reached up and put a hand on his shoulder and Christopher gave him a rueful smile. Christopher lit up a cigarette and watched the smoke rise up into the thick

summer air. There was no way to keep her, not if she couldn't bear to be here with him. The sun was setting over the city and the buildings of Times Square were bathed in orange, red and gold, each window a separate reflection, like gold bars piled on top of each other. Christopher breathed deeply in through his nose, the cigarette by his side. The mourning of losing her was beginning again. He felt David pat him on the shoulder again and Christopher nodded to him as David went back into the building. He looked at the faces of the people as they walked past, but none looked back, as if he wasn't there at all. The cigarette was finished and he threw it down and stood there, motionless. Then he heard her voice, felt her arms around him as she hugged him from behind.

"I'm so sorry, Christopher. I didn't think I could stand to see you anymore. I thought it was best for both of us, for your family, for your daughter..." Her voice was low in his ear and, although no one else could possibly have heard, he felt embarrassed in front of the strangers passing them on the street, though not one looked at them.

Christopher turned around and took her in his arms. "I'm glad you came back," he said, kissing the top of her head. He wanted to say more, but stopped himself, and they went back into the building together, to say goodbye to David and the others in the radio station.

They were back on the street together minutes later. "The sun is going down, where shall we go?" she began.

"Have you eaten?"

"No, but I'd love a drink. I think we both deserve that," she said.

"We can do both. I think I know where we need to go. Come on."

They crossed the street and began to make their way across town, east along 52nd Street. "There's something we haven't touched on yet, something I wanted to ask you." Rebecca began. "I'm not sure I want to hear the answer."

Christopher turned to her. The cross street was almost quiet in comparison with the avenues and they didn't have to swerve to avoid the crowds as they had earlier. "What? You can ask me anything you want."

"It's about Uli. What happened to Uli?"

Christopher felt his jaw tighten at the name and his eyelids were heavy. “Uli died in June 1944. He was killed in some field in Russia.”

“We don’t have to talk about that.”

“No, it’s fine, it is ten years ago now. I’ve had time to deal with it. I mean, if I haven’t gotten over it by now, when will I?” He pushed out a ridiculous laugh as he turned to her, but then looked straight ahead again. “The last time I saw him was in late January of ’44, on one of my trips to Berlin.”

“Did he know what you were doing?”

“Yes, he knew, he delighted in it. He had seen too much killing. I only spoke to him for an hour, but he was changed. I suppose we all were, but it was hard to believe that it was my uncle.” Uli had been a shadow of the man he had known. He didn’t want to remember the emaciated version of Uli he met in ’44, but the vibrant uncle he had grown up with. “The light had gone out inside him. He didn’t care about the war, didn’t care about winning or Hitler or any of his objectives. He just wanted to get back to his wife and son, just wanted to get his men back safely. But he never did. That was the last time I ever saw him.”

“What happened with his son, with little Stefan?”

Christopher paused and stepped around a homeless man whose feet were jutting out across their path. The man looked up at them with filthy brown eyes, sucking from the bottle in his hand, murmuring gibberish Christopher could not understand, and just for a second Christopher thought to reach into his pocket, but changed his mind and walked on. He looked across at Rebecca again before he began to speak. “The last few months in Germany were chaos, everyone was fleeing west. I managed to get the kids, the kids I had smuggled out of Auschwitz, to a number of safe houses in Frankfurt, away from the Soviets. Alexandra went with them along with some of the nuns from the convent. My father stayed in Berlin with Karolina and Stefan as he had already been drafted into the Volkssturm.”

“Who?”

“The militia the Nazis set up to protect themselves. Kids and old men. My father was in command of a squadron of 16 year-olds.”

“Was he there when the Soviets came?”

“Yes, he was in Berlin, age 50, fighting against the Soviet tanks as they rolled into the streets. He knew that if he tried to desert they would hang him. But Karolina tried to take Stefan and leave, tried to run when the Soviet tanks arrived. The Gestapo caught her and hung her from a lamppost on the street.” Christopher stopped talking and they walked for a few seconds. He felt Rebecca beside him, could feel the warmth exuding from her, but he didn’t look down or reach to touch her. They passed onto Fifth Avenue and began to walk upwards, toward the park. “The Gestapo brought little Stefan back to cousin Harald’s house. They hanged his mother but made sure little Stefan got safely home.” Christopher grimaced and shoved out a deep breath. “Somehow my father survived and got back to the house, back to little Stefan. After the battle was over, he used the last of the money that I’d given him, to bribe some Soviet troops to let them out of Berlin into the countryside. He made his way towards Frankfurt, behind the American lines. After that he brought Stefan back to Jersey. They were there by the end of October ’46, a few months after you came looking for us.” Christopher shook his head. “I’ll never know how the old man survived; most of the Volkssturm were wiped out.”

“I’m sorry about Uli, Christopher, and Karolina and everything.”

Christopher looked across at her and then back at the ground in front of him. The day was fading, the streetlights coming to life. “Stefan is a wonderful boy. He’s fourteen now, so much like his father.”

A young couple brushed past them, their arms linked. The woman whispered something into her lover’s ear. Christopher looked at Rebecca and she at him and then away.

Rebecca was silent for a few seconds. “It’s so hard for me to think of Uli as a German soldier.

“He wasn’t SS, Rebecca.” Christopher didn’t look at her as he spoke. “I was SS. We were the ones who committed the atrocities.”

“You didn’t commit any atrocities. You weren’t one of them, Christopher.” Her eyes were adamant.

“I was an SS man. I can show you the tattoo they gave us. It’s still with me, it always will be.” His voice was weary, grey.

Rebecca reached over and grabbed Christopher’s arm. Her grip was strong

as she held him. They stopped. They were outside a bakery. Fresh cakes in the window adorned by colored lights reflected in her eyes as she spoke, the smell of bread through the open door filled their nostrils. “You were not one of them, Christopher. I know that. You were there for me. You joined the SS for me.”

Christopher tried to smile, but it came as a grimace, and he looked back at her and up the street. “We’re nearly there. You said you were hungry, didn’t you?”

Rebecca didn’t answer the question, just looked back at him. Christopher moved away, but her grip was tight on his arm. “You were not one of them, Christopher. You wore the uniform and you got the tattoo, but you weren’t one of them.”

Christopher remembered Anka, saw her in his office and her tiny body beside Schultz in the snow. “I knew you weren’t dead,” he said. “It’s hard to say why, even after I couldn’t find you, even after all the signs pointed to the fact that you were. Somehow, I knew we’d meet again.” He coughed, conscious of where he was, and the people who were brushing past them on either side as they stood there. “I would see you everywhere. I was in London only a few months ago and I thought I saw you, walking along under a black umbrella holding hands with a little girl, and I ran after you, who I thought was you, and I put my hand on that woman’s shoulder. When she turned to me and after I apologized I felt sick, a deep nausea passed through my whole body.” Rebecca let go of him, but was still staring into his eyes. “I see you every day. I think about you all the time. I feel like I’m going crazy sometimes.” Christopher looked away and up towards the park. He raised his arms. “I feel like telling the kids about you all the time, and sometimes I do talk to Hannah about you. She feels as if she knows you. But now what do I tell her? That I met you in New York, that we had dinner together and you’re alive and married and happy and you’re living in Israel?” Rebecca didn’t speak. “I feel like we shouldn’t be doing this, as if somehow this isn’t right as if we’re starting something now that shouldn’t have an ending.”

“Is there ever really any ending other than death? I mean, we both fought so hard to be alive, for this. And if I never see you again, if you walk away now and don’t let me back into your life, that wouldn’t be the end. That wouldn’t be the end of anything. I’d still go on and so would you, but that’s not what I want. I didn’t come back to you today for that.”

“What did you come back to me for?”

“I don’t know. I really don’t know, Christopher, all I can tell you is that when I heard about who you were, who you really were, and why you joined the SS, I had to come. It was all I wanted to do.”

“You don’t owe me anything, Rebecca. You don’t need to feel any obligation to do anything....”

“I know that, and believe me, I don’t. You were the center of my life, the fulcrum of the happiest times I’ve ever had. To know that you were out there and the real reasons for what you did and to not come back would have been more than I could bear.”

Christopher stared down at her staring back at him and then raised his hand to point up the street. “You said you were hungry, didn’t you?” She smiled and nodded. “Well, we can talk about all of this over dinner. This is all going to be so much easier with some food in our stomachs.”

“Yes, let’s go.” They turned to walk back up the street towards the Plaza Hotel where David and the other members of the American Jewish Committee had brought him on his first night in the city. There was a bar ahead. Christopher peered inside as they went. It was almost full, the smooth sound of live jazz music inside sliding out onto the street and following them as they walked past. Christopher thought to ask her to stop but didn’t.

“So, what’s it like being married? You haven’t really mentioned your husband much.”

“What do you want to know? Ari is a good man.” Her words were sharp, as if he had ventured onto private property.

“I think I should like to meet him someday,” Christopher replied, trying to form a picture of Rebecca’s husband in his head.

“Would you really?” Her exasperated tone did not encourage further questions and Christopher did not really want to talk about him. The boundaries were painful. It was easier to pretend they didn’t exist.

“Do you still think about our time on Jersey?”

“It seems like a dream from a previous life, as if I saw it happening to me

but never participated directly in it myself.” Rebecca held her eyes closed for a second and then opened them again. They crossed the street as she began again. “I think everyone changes as they get older; you don’t have to be a survivor of the camps to realize that our experiences change us as we get older.”

“And are you different now?”

“Because of the camps?”

“Or otherwise.”

“We all are, Christopher. We’re not the same people we were when we lived together in Jersey for those years. The camps accentuated that. I felt scarred for many years, as if I’d never be able to love again. I felt indebted to those who died there, as if when I met them again when I died they’d ask me what I did for them, and what they died for. I have a duty to them, for the rest of my life.”

Christopher took a breath through his nose. “I thought the dreams, the visions I have, would fade over time, but they haven’t.” He smiled to himself, shaking his head. “The kids, they’re used to it now, almost expecting to hear the screams from my room in the night. Hannah comes in when she hears me, gets into bed beside me and holds me until I fall back to sleep.” He could feel Rebecca’s eyes on him, but he didn’t turn to her, just kept walking. “But I wouldn’t change it. Even if I knew that I wouldn’t find you I would still go to Birkenau. Hannah wouldn’t be alive today if I hadn’t been there and that’s enough.” He felt her hand in his. “And the other kids, and the ladies from Canada, I hear from many of them. I get five, six, sometimes fifteen letters a month. They’re all over the world now; there are even some of them in Tel Aviv. I’ve spent my days here in New York seeing some of them and their families. So there’s no way I can regret any of the places I’ve been or the things I saw. But still it seems like so little.”

“It doesn’t seem fair that they knew who you were and I didn’t, and they were right there in Tel Aviv, right in the city I live in.” Her voice was distant, as if she were picturing them together in Tel Aviv.

They walked on in silence for a minute or more before Christopher spoke again. “You still haven’t answered the question.”

“What question?”

“The question I asked you about married life.”

“Why, are you engaged? Looking for advice from an old pro maybe?” Christopher didn’t pander to her, just looked back with a half-smile on his face, waiting for her to continue. “Ari is a good man, very dedicated to what he fights for. He is what the state of Israel needs, righteous and true, determined.” Her voice was unsteady as she spoke, like a candle flickering in the breeze.

“Are you happy with him?”

Rebecca held a hand to her face and brought it up to push her hair back. Her voice was heavy now. “You mean would I be happier with you?”

“No, I don’t mean that at all.” But he did. Christopher looked away, felt her eyes on him and brought his back to meet hers. His initial reaction was to smile, but her expression was earnest, completely real.

“In my mind I’ve always compared him to you, even though I thought you were something you weren’t, someone I could never love. But I felt that I had lost the ability to love like I once had, like the experiences in the camps had somehow taken that away or the amount of love I had inside was only so much and because I had given it so completely to you that I could never have it back, like it wasn’t even mine to give any more.”

“That’s not true, Rebecca, you’re still the warm, loving person I’ve always known. Of course you’ve changed. Everyone has, and everyone would have even if the camps had never existed. You can’t live your life holding back. You have to give all of yourself.”

“I did give all of myself. I gave myself to you.” She stared up at him with wistful eyes.

“And that’s it then, is it? You just give up on your whole life? Because of me and what we had?” Christopher’s voice was soft, but it was hard to keep the words from bellowing out onto the street where strangers slipped past them on both sides.

They crossed the street at 58th and made their way across towards the Plaza. Christopher didn’t speak, still waiting for an answer to his question, but Rebecca stayed silent as they walked towards the hotel and then inside.

Chapter 43

The Maître d' seemed to recognize Christopher from the previous night and led the two of them across the restaurant to a table in the corner. Christopher thanked him as they sat down. They had barely spoken in several minutes. They were directly opposite one another. Rebecca didn't look across at him as she sat down. Christopher ordered the wine.

"This is amazing." She looked around the room and back at him.

There were perhaps forty tables in the packed dining room, each covered in white tablecloths with sparkling silver cutlery. The drapes were brown as was the carpet beneath their feet. Many of the diners were in evening dress. Christopher had buttoned his top button as they moved to their table, but Rebecca had not even mentioned the notion of their being underdressed.

"I did always bring you to the best places."

"I think that this is a cut above the Red Lion in St Helier, Christopher." They both laughed. "I wouldn't say they get too many fishermen in here."

"No, I wouldn't have thought so." He paused, waiting for the right moment before he began speaking again. "What happened to you after the war, Rebecca? You still haven't told me. There's still so much I don't know."

"Do you have to know everything? Aren't some things better left unsaid?"

"I've been thinking about you every day for all these years and you were out there. What were you doing?"

"Trying to piece my life back together."

"How? Where were you?" Christopher brought the glass to his mouth and felt the red wine sliding down his throat. There was an elderly couple at the table next to them, the man had a large white mustache and was glancing over between bites of the generous steak on his pristine china plate.

Rebecca took a sip of wine and fixed her eyes on his. "I was in hospital for a while. I was probably days away from death when those British soldiers found

me. They tried to feed me from the rations they had, but I couldn't keep them down. The food they gave me made me even sicker. They nearly killed me." Rebecca was looking into her wine as it rolled against the sides of the glass. "After I got out of hospital, I was put into the displaced persons camp. There were thousands of us, all with nowhere to go, and no way to get anywhere." She looked at him but skirted around his eyes and then away. "It was there that I met my father. Some of the other prisoners had spoken to him and remembered that he was from Jersey and they brought me to him."

"What did he tell you about me?"

"He said that you were SS. He said that he had always been right about you. I didn't believe him at first, not until I saw the lists of names. And even then...." Her voice faded and then strengthened again. "It took me a long time to accept it." Christopher raised his hands to his face, his elbows on the table. "He never told me what you did for the prisoners or even if you did anything for him," Rebecca continued. Her eyes locked onto his. "Did you help him?"

"I had him transferred to the camp by mistake. I asked for a Cassin and they sent him. Some joke, eh?" But Rebecca didn't smile. "Yes, I helped him, as much as I could anyway. I gave him extra food and organized a job for him where he could stay alive." They were both silent for seconds which dragged into minutes as they both looked at the menus laid on the table in front of them. The waiter came back just as Christopher was about to speak. He was young, perhaps 22 and very tall, well over six foot. He smiled as he took their order.

It was only after the waiter left that Rebecca began again. "We stayed in the displaced persons camp for weeks. The authorities had no idea what to do with us and I didn't know what to do with myself. Without you I had nothing left to live for." Christopher felt the words cut through him and looked down at the table, his hands, but she continued. "I went to the British authorities in the camp to offer my services as a go-between for them and the rest of the refugees there. I met with some of the officers charged with collecting testimonies on war crimes and I began to help them. I wrote a list of all the SS officers I had ever encountered and began to quiz the others in the camp about what they remembered. Somehow I gained strength from that. I shrugged off everything else. It wasn't revenge. It was never about that. It was justice, only that."

Christopher let the words sink in before he asked his next question. "Did

you speak to many prisoners from Auschwitz?”

“No, I never did. I just dealt with the camps that I knew, that I was in. I suppose our lives would have been quite different if I had.”

“I suppose they would have been,” Christopher said, his voice dull and distant.

Rebecca took a breath and continued. “I collected lists and testimonies and handed them over to the authorities. But that still wasn’t enough. I got in touch with some other former prisoners I still knew. I moved to Vienna to continue my work.”

“Why Vienna?” Christopher thought of the city and imagined himself meeting her there at some random place in a city he’d never been to. But the image faded as Rebecca spoke.

“That was where Ari was from. He was a survivor too. I met him through some of the other former prisoners.” The waiter came to the table and to see if they needed anything. He immediately seemed to regret it and began to back away. Christopher thanked him before bidding Rebecca to continue. “We had successes, and we met Simon Wiesenthal and soon started working with him. Do you know who he is?”

“The Nazi hunter?” Christopher smiled. “As a former member of the SS, it pays to know people like Mr. Wiesenthal. They might still come for me one day.”

Rebecca smiled, but it faded quickly. “We joined with him for a while before we moved to Israel.”

“And you were married there?” Christopher tried to keep his voice level, tried not to betray the torment of saying these words. His acting was good. She seemed not to notice.

“Yes.”

“You never seem to want to talk about him.” Christopher was trying to picture him. He almost asked her for a photograph.

“Ari?”

“Yes, your husband. Every time I ask about him you deflect the question.”

“Do you really want to hear about him?” Rebecca was staring across the table at him, her hand on the stem of her wine glass on the table. She raised it to her mouth. Christopher didn’t answer but folded his arms, leaning forward to place his elbows on the table. A pianist began and the sounds of the music drifted through the restaurant like confetti on the wind. Rebecca looked around and then back at Christopher. She looked as if she was going to say something else, but then began again. “Earlier on you spoke about not wanting to fake it and realize that you were married to the wrong person,” she took a sip of wine and Christopher felt his heart jump and was ashamed of himself. “The fact that Ari and I are married is...not as important as it once might have been.” Again, Christopher felt the shame of his heart as it jumped. “Ari is an excellent person, very good at his job and very effective in what he does for his country. But I feel like we’re business partners more than a married couple.” Her eyes were stone as she spoke. “He’s dedicated and kind...” Her voice trailed off. “He had a difficult act to follow, you know?”

She smiled but there was no joy there and it quickly faded. “I think now that it was a reaction to you. Maybe I didn’t have the strength to be alone and Ari and I had the same determination, the same mission. Marriage seemed the logical step, but you never left me. Even if I didn’t think about you during the day I’d have these dreams where you’d come to me and we would be on the beach in Jersey and I’d reach out to touch you but you’d disappear, and Ari would ask me why I’d wake up sweating.” Christopher just looked back at her, had nothing to say.

Rebecca ran a hand through her hair and let her head drift back to look at the ceiling. She brought her head back down and locked eyes with Christopher once again. “But the dedication I feel to my country and my people is more important than anything else to me. I have to be where I am right now. There is still so much work to do, still so much healing to go through, for so many of us. I couldn’t walk out on my country now, not when it needs me most, and being married to Ari is a way of serving my country and my people.” She was looking at him again now. “It seems to me that you have the perfect life now. You have your daughter, your father and Uli’s son. Alexandra and Tom are right there with their children and you have this network of love around the world in the people you saved.”

Christopher shook his head and laughed. “Perfect? That’s a big word, Rebecca.” Christopher sat back in his chair. “It’s true what you say. I’ve been very lucky that my father and sister survived the war and little Stefan is a joy, but sometimes I feel sorry for Hannah. She has so much responsibility for someone her age. I thought that the nights where she would have to come in and sleep with me would become less as time went on, but they haven’t. I woke up last night in my hotel room, on the floor, screaming. I was begging that she would be there but she wasn’t, so I just got back into bed and shivered alone until the alarm call came this morning.” Christopher looked around at the other tables, aware of each person, but they were not looking at him. He looked back at Rebecca. “I have dreams where I’m shooting the prisoners, where it’s me feeding the crematoria, it’s me conducting the experiments and making the selections.”

Rebecca shook her head. “No, Christopher, that wasn’t you. You didn’t do any of those monstrous things. You are the only reason that hundreds of people are alive today.” She pointed her finger at him across the table as she spoke. The words felt good but only as a spattering of water on a massive fire.

“That’s what everyone tells me.” He was staring into nothing as he spoke. “I still see Anka all the time. She was the first little girl I tried to save in the camp and I saw her shot in front of me. I still see her body collapse in the snow. And she comes to me, as the teenager, as the young woman she should have been today, and I couldn’t save her, I tried to, but I couldn’t...” Christopher tried to hold back the tears, didn’t want to be crying here, with her, but it was too much. Rebecca stood up walked around the table and held his head against her.

“Oh Christopher, you did so, so much. You couldn’t save everyone, you just couldn’t.”

Christopher put his arms around her waist and then suddenly became conscious of where they were and stood up. He was in front of her. He reached down and kissed her on the cheek and walked towards the bathroom. Several people in the dining room were looking at him as he weaved through the chairs and tables. He thought of Hannah and his family in Jersey and felt the calm spread back through him, his heart rate falling as he reached the bathroom. The water from the faucet splashed down and he cooled his hands under it and brought them up to wipe his face. He thought of what Rebecca had said about Ari. He looked at his reflection in the mirror and judged himself fit to return to

the table. The food was on the table as he arrived.

“Are you feeling better, Christopher?” she asked, and he looked at her. “I just want to let you know that your actions have been recognized, not just by the people who brought you here, but in Israel too. You have no reason for guilt or shame. You should be as proud of yourself as I am of you.” She reached across the table and put her hand on his. It should have felt wonderful.

Christopher took a deep breath and then opened his mouth to speak, but the words didn't come, the thoughts in his head stopping him. Christopher felt his face tighten. He stared at her for a few seconds before he spoke and, when he did, the words flowed out of him like water. “What are you really doing in New York, Rebecca? Why are you all the way over here alone, without your husband?” The words were infused with the anger growing inside him, and her eyes were wide open now, her jaw dropping until she caught herself.

“I told you already, I'm over here on business.”

“You're in marketing, is that right? When did you stop hunting Nazis? How would you know what the Israelis are thinking about me?”

Rebecca looked back across the table at him with a tenderness in her eyes. “Christopher, what are you talking about?” she whispered.

“Is it me? Did you come here to investigate me? How long have you known about me, about what I really did?” Confusion swam through him and he felt very hot. His head was light on his shoulders and his breathing was quickened.

“I don't know what you're talking about, Christopher, but I'd really appreciate it if you stopped now.”

“What did Israeli intelligence tell you about me? Why didn't you contact me if you knew?” He felt his voice shudder in his throat. “You don't work in marketing, do you?”

Rebecca moved her head to the side, facing away from him. He was still staring at her and eventually she began again. “It's not like that, Christopher, it's not. I only found out about you a few days ago. I wanted to come here, to see you.” She reached across the table to take his hand. “I'm not here...in that capacity.” She reached across with her other hand, but Christopher was sitting

back and her hand slipped from his. “Christopher, it’s me. I’m here because I want to be....” But she stopped talking. Christopher was staring at her. She took a deep breath. “The Israelis...”

“The Mossad,” Christopher corrected her.

“I’m not here as an agent of the Mossad. I’m here as me, for you. I’ve wanted to see you, wanted to talk to you for as long as I can remember. There hardly seems a time in my life now when I wasn’t pining for you and what seems like a dream that we had together.”

Christopher ran a hand through his hair. “What could the Mossad want with me?”

“There is nothing the Mossad wants with you, perhaps for you to give them some information you might have, but probably not even that. I wasn’t here just for you. You were an afterthought, an addendum to the mission, the result of a secretary being thorough. They thought I might be able to get information from you, that there might be something you could help us with. But when I found out you would be here, that’s when I volunteered for the job. I found out about you a week ago in Tel Aviv. Ari handed me the file on you because he found out you were from Jersey.”

“You never told him about me?”

“Tell Ari that the love of my life was an SS guard in Auschwitz? No, I never told him.” Her voice was dry as she spoke, and she looked away to the side.

“How could you have not known about me? You were investigating Nazi war criminals. How did my name never come up? More than twenty people testified on my behalf at my trial.”

She shrugged. “I only dealt with the camps I was in. I never gathered or shared information about anyone from Auschwitz. We have other operatives who were there. I’d never heard of you until last week. There are thousands of SS men, and thousands of files. I never saw yours. I wish I had. I wish I had heard about you and I’m sure this would all be different.” She reached towards him but he pulled away.

The words warmed and hacked at Christopher’s heart equally and he was

dizzy. He leant forward and put his head into his hands and when he uncovered his eyes again Rebecca was no longer looking at him but around the room, sipping the red wine from the glass in her hand. She stood up and excused herself and Christopher watched her walk towards the bathroom. He followed her with his eyes until she disappeared and the thought that she was calling her husband, or even her commanding officer, crept into his mind. What was the point in this and who knew if anything she said was the truth now? But what would the Mossad have to gain from him? He knew nothing and the files they must have had on him would show the testimonies of the people who spoke on his behalf at his trial. There couldn't be any other reason that she would be here, in the Plaza hotel in New York, with him. He had to trust her. This would probably be the last time he would ever see her. Christopher picked up the knife and fork, forced himself to eat. He thought of Hannah, and little Stefan, and his father, and he thought of Rebecca, and wondered if the person in front of him was that same girl he'd met on the beach in Jersey.

Christopher turned in his seat to look towards the pianist in the corner of the room. He was young, perhaps not even twenty years of age. The music lilted and swam through the massive dining room. There was a small dance floor in front of the long grand piano. Several couples were dancing now. Rebecca was coming towards him, a half smile on her face. She reached a hand out to him. "Can I have this dance, sir?"

"I'm meant to be the one asking you, you know," Christopher replied with a diluted smile.

"Are you going to dance with me or not?" Her smile was bursting through tense lips.

Christopher held up his hand and Rebecca took it, leading him past the tables and onto the dance floor. It felt so good to hold her, as if a warmth was flowing through her into him. They stared at each other for a few seconds and she began to smile again, looking up at him. "So you're a spy?" A sputter of laughter followed the words.

"Not a very good one it seems," she replied. "No, I'm not a spy, Christopher. I just continued my work finding Nazis with the Israeli government." She looked away and then back at him. There were several tables of people that were looking at them, but Christopher was sure they couldn't hear

what they were saying.

“And here you are, dancing in plain sight, with an admitted former member of the SS.”

The song ended and the other couples on the dance floor parted to applaud the pianist, but Christopher held Rebecca tight to him. He was staring at her, into her blue eyes as the music began again and they began to dance once more. His hand on her hip tracked every move; every slight movement of her torso and his eyes hers. The confusion of earlier cleared within him and everything felt right again.

They danced for ten minutes or more in total silence before they finally returned to the table where Rebecca found her now-cold food. She ate it nonetheless. “I can’t turn down a meal now, ever.” She smiled as she put the fork into her mouth. Christopher looked at her and then away. It was after nine o’clock.

“When are you flying out?” he asked.

“The first flight is tomorrow morning, at 6 am,” she answered, and put her knife and fork down. Christopher nodded his head, not quite knowing what to say next. “I don’t care about that now,” She said, “I just want to be here now.”

“Where are you staying?”

“With friends in Brooklyn. Where are you?”

“I’m in a hotel here in Manhattan,” he answered and already the longing for her was there. The feeling of loss was with him already even though he could reach out and touch her across the table.

Once they finished the meal, Christopher watched Rebecca eat dessert. He sat back in his chair and lit up a cigarette. He offered her one, but she refused. They had only spoken of the good times past. It was almost eleven o’clock now. It seemed like their time together was already over, as if he was observing as a memory rather than participating in the moment. He leant forward to her as she began to speak. The smile was gone from her face.

“I’ve been doing much better lately, with things, with the memories and the feelings I have inside.”

“What feelings?” he asked.

“I used to hurt like you do now for a long time,” she said. She looked into her glass and then back up at him. “I had those dreams that you have. I was in Paris a year or two ago and I heard some people speaking German. I immediately went cold. I couldn’t move. The terror I felt, just at hearing them speak. I was back in the camps again, hearing the guards. I had to get off the street and be sick in an alleyway.” She looked around the room and put the glass of wine back down on the table as Christopher took another sip himself. “I know the terror, the guilt that you’re feeling. That’s not why I started doing what I do now, but I thought that bringing these animals to justice would make me feel better, so that I could at least sleep at night.”

“Did it?”

Rebecca shook her head. “No, not really. I still had the same mood swings, the same phobias of dogs and the German language.” Christopher shifted in his seat. “It was satisfying to see the murderers jailed or executed, but there will always be more. There are so many still out there.” Rebecca looked down at the white of the table and then up at Christopher’s eyes. “I think that I’m ready to leave it behind now. I can’t do this anymore. I can’t constantly be reminded of the worst times in my life.” Her voice lifted. “I see you here now and I know that the times we had weren’t some dream and that there is real happiness still to be had, even in a world which can create Buchenwald and Belsen and Auschwitz.” Christopher nodded. “It’s so easy to hate, that’s what they did. So I tried to clear the hatred out of my heart to forgive the Nazis for what they did to me.”

Christopher leant forward. “You’re forgiving them?”

“I wasn’t going to be a victim anymore, not one more day of my life. I was powerless as a victim. The SS guards and their dogs and the doctors in their white coats still had power over me, even though I was the one putting them in jail now. I found that by forgiving them I held the ultimate power and the pain stopped. Now I know that what they did to me and the people I knew is no longer going to hurt me and that my life, my happy life will be the ultimate tribute to all the people I saw die.” Christopher felt the warmth in his heart again. “To forget what happened to them, now that is something to be guilty about, but living your life, truly living your life, is not.”

Christopher stared for a few seconds and shook his head so gently he

barely noticed himself. Her blue eyes were earnest. “So you’re thinking about leaving the Mossad?” he asked.

“I’ve been thinking about it for a long time. I mentioned it to Ari, but....” Her voice faded and then came back again. “He is a wonderful person and he deserves a great life.” She took another sip of wine. “There’s so much pain still left from what we went through and I know that you feel it. The only thing to counter pain is healing and the only way to heal is to let go of the hatred and to forgive. It is the only way. When I did it, when I let go of the hatred that was still burning inside me, I felt like an incredible weight of suffering was lifted from my shoulders. I can honestly say that what I feel for those people who fell into darkness now is more pity than anything else, but not hatred, not anymore, that’s gone.”

“I am so proud of you.” He paused and took a breath before he whispered. “Can you forgive me?”

She reached across and took his hands. “I have nothing to forgive you for.” She smiled “I see that same pain in you that I felt, Christopher, and the same guilt over those we were forced to leave behind. You have to let it go. We all deserve to live the most wonderful lives we can.”

The light of midnight in the city was all around them as they stepped out of the hotel and into the street. Neither had spoken since they left the table, as if they were both afraid to mention what had to happen next. Christopher looked across at Rebecca, drinking in the sight of her, for he knew this was a scene he would play and replay in his own mind for years to come. The city lights shimmered on her tanned skin and flickered in her eyes. When she turned to him she was smiling again but the sadness was there to see in her face. They talked about Jersey and their families again for a few minutes as they wandered the city streets, neither having mentioned any kind of a destination or the fact that her flight was in less than six hours. Christopher craned his neck to look up the length of the buildings surrounding them as they went. They walked, four, five, six and seven blocks before Christopher asked her.

“So how were you going to get home, or at least back to where you’re staying?”

“You know what? I hadn’t even thought about it.” She shrugged her shoulders, exaggerating the movements as if she were a child again.

“Maybe if we don’t talk about leaving we won’t have to and this night can last the rest of our lives. Maybe this doesn’t ever have to end.”

“Maybe,” she said, looking directly ahead as they crossed the street onto the next block. “Is this going to be any easier if I leave now, or wait a few more hours?”

“Ask me that question in a few hours’ time.” Christopher smiled. They walked on. The questions were burning Christopher’s tongue and finally he broke. “So will you come to Jersey to see me? Maybe you could stay a while, a few years at least anyway.” He knew she could see the rueful smile on his face. Her eyes flirted with his before she looked away. “Last time we saw each other, on that jetty in Jersey eleven years ago, you said that next time we met, the next time we saw each other would be to get married.”

“That does sound wonderful, but you know I’m married to someone else now, Christopher.”

“Why should that stop you?” His facetious tone covered the truth.

“I...I don’t know Christopher. Who knows if we’re even meant to be together anymore?”

“Meant to be? What does that mean? I thought you didn’t believe in fate? I asked you that years ago.”

“I remember. That seems like five lifetimes ago.”

“I’m not going to push this. You know who I am now. You know what you want. Only you can choose what you’re going to do. I can’t force you and I certainly wouldn’t want to.”

“I can’t just go back to Jersey tonight and be a wife to you, a mother to your daughter.”

“Marriage is your thing Rebecca, not mine. We don’t have to get married.” He smiled and saw her smiling too but it faded quickly.

They walked on in silence for the longest minute Christopher could remember.

“Perhaps I should leave now. It must be getting late,” she said as a taxi

whirled past.

Christopher looked at his watch. It was almost 1 am, but he put his hand into his pocket without saying anything. Rebecca raised her arm to flag down a taxi and he knew that they had only seconds together now.

She turned to him. "Understand, Christopher, leaving you again is the last thing in the world I want to do, but I have to do it. I have to go." She was crying again and he went to her and took her in his arms. He felt her against him as if he could take an imprint of her on his body. "I love you, Christopher, I always have. I never stopped and I never will." Her eyes were on his now. He had his hands on either side of her neck. She broke away and held out her arm for a taxi and it pulled up.

She hugged him again and he resisted the feelings inside him driving him to kiss her, and pulled away from her. She was staring at him, the door to the taxi open now. They held each other's gaze for a few seconds. Her eyes seemed to glaze over and more tears fell. She took Christopher's hand and then let it go and got into the taxi. He was holding the door now. He reached down and kissed her on the cheek. "I'll be waiting for you, Rebecca," he said and closed the door. And the taxi pulled away, her face in the back window fading into the night.

The sky was silver grey, the dull October light leaking through the gap in the curtains as Christopher awoke alone in his bed. The sound of Hannah and the two Stefans downstairs at breakfast filtered through the wooden floorboards mingling with the whistle of the wind through the trees outside. It was nine o'clock on a Saturday morning and he was the last one up. He drew himself out of the bed. It had been better in the months since he'd seen Rebecca. The nightmares had lessened. He made his way into the bathroom and looked at himself. The flecks of grey were coming through in his stubble. Christopher smiled to himself and lowered his head to shave. Ten minutes later he was downstairs in the kitchen with his father, his cousin and his daughter and it was

she who spoke up as he walked in.

“Something arrived for you this morning.” The letter was sitting in the middle of the kitchen table. “I wanted to open it up for you, but Grandfather told me not to.” Hannah said.

Christopher tore the letter open and took out a single sheet folded in half. There were only seven words written on it.

“Who is it from?” Hannah asked. Christopher’s father was in the corner making tea. Little Stefan was seated at the table eating his breakfast. Christopher looked through the back window at the old treehouse, still hanging onto the tree where Uli had built it. His heart was a raging sea.

“Who’s the letter from, Christopher?” Stefan asked, glancing across at his son.

Christopher handed the letter to his father, a smile spreading across his face. “I want you all to come with me. I want all of us to be there.” Stefan read the letter and pushed a hand through his thin, grey hair as he finished it, letting it drop to the table. Hannah picked up the letter and scanned through it before showing it to Stef.

“What does this mean?” she asked. “*Gunde de viznay bin Butterfly’s Table nuen?* What language is that? Does that even mean anything?”

“It means that she’s here, that she’s come home,” Christopher said, and his father was smiling now.

As they rounded the corner to the beach where the iron sea was boiling back and forth, where the sand turned to pebbles, the rocks of the Butterfly’s Table came into view and she was standing there, silhouetted against the sky and turned to him, a deep smile on her face and the wind in her hair.

The End

About the Author

I'm from Dublin, Ireland. I love it there, but I love my wife even more. So, in 2008 I moved over to America with her. We had previously lived in Dublin for almost four years. That was great, but she missed home, and I liked the idea of living somewhere new. America is great, but in a different way. Maybe one day my skin will catch up and realize that getting a tan would not tarnish my Irishness. Or maybe not.

I've been writing since I was 19, way back in the late 90's, before kindles, amazon, and iPads. That was back when vampires were old guys with slicked back black hair and capes, not the Abercrombie models of today who also want to be your boyfriend. I hope you enjoyed this novel. It was an amazing experience to write. I think it's good to remember what the people in the camps went through, during and after the war. I'm constantly in awe of them.

Thank you for reading my novel.

It's not my first. If you enjoyed this you can check out some of my other work at <http://amzn.to/T9DPlv>

One last thing. This is not the last page. There's one left, and on it Kindle gives you the chance to rate this book and to share your opinions on Facebook and Twitter. If you enjoyed the book, maybe some of your friends might too. A few seconds out of your life could mean a whole lot to mine. I'd be very grateful. Thanks again.

Eoin Dempsey