

## CHAPTER 13

BERLIN, GERMANY - 1933

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Fraser never had Riefenstahl's address when they had their intense but short-lived affair two years earlier. They met at restaurants and ended up in his room at the Adlon. They wrote briefly for a couple of months, but at the time Fraser sent his letters in care of Harry Sokal's studio since Riefenstahl was shooting a film on location in Italy.

Her last letter suggested nothing was to come of their short time together. Riefenstahl confessed she had met someone while working on the film. She thanked Fraser for the special time they shared in Berlin. Unfortunately they had different lives. Events conspired to separate them. She would fondly remember their passionate interlude.

The same ending as with Harriet. Why then was he still interested? Because Leni wasn't Harriet. Because she was still stuck in his thoughts. He couldn't leave without attempting to make contact. If she was married or involved he would graciously retreat.

No one answered calls placed to Harry Sokal's office. So he took a taxi to see what he could find out. The studio still displayed a sign. A single automobile was parked outside. The glass in the front door was smashed. Fraser stepped on the broken shards on the floor. The office area was a mess of overturned chairs, emptied files, and papers covering the floor.

"Anybody here?" Fraser shouted.

"Who's there?"

"It's Marc Fraser. Is Herr Sokal here?"

Sokal came out of his office carrying a box which he set down on a desk. "Ah, Herr Fraser. What brings you here?"

"What happened?"

"A visit from the SA. A final visit of warning it would seem. Didn't take their prior threats seriously enough. Unless I want to end up in one of their camps, I have no choice. I'm leaving Germany. I told you what might happen to Jews. Didn't expect it be this bad so soon. The Nazis have been in power only months and this," he said spreading his arms to convey the destruction. "It's worse in the studio. All the equipment, cameras, lighting, everything is all wrecked. Why are you here, Herr Fraser?"

"I'm so sorry, Herr Sokal," Fraser said. "Since I could not reach you by telephone I came to inquire if you have an address or telephone number for Leni Riefenstahl."

Sokal fixed Fraser with a glare.

"Sure, I'll give you her number. When you see her, tell the bitch she can rot in hell. She's probably fucking some Nazi these days."

"What did she do to make you feel that way?"

"She knows I'm Jewish. Says she doesn't have anything against Jews yet now she is working for the Nazis. For Hitler himself. She's directing some propaganda film to glorify these monsters. Working with that malignant clubfooted dwarf Joseph Goebbels. Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Can you image a more stupid title? I tried to get her help to use her influence before all this happened. Wouldn't even take my calls."

Sokal returned to his desk and scrawled a note which he handed to Fraser.

"Here's her number. Don't know your relationship from before but count yourself lucky that nothing came of it. Leni's only out for herself. Always has been. She'll fit right in with the Nazis."

Fraser left bewildered. Leni was a creative artist. The Nazis in every way rejected real art. What the hell was she doing working with them? He decided not to ask Sokal if she was currently involved in a relationship.

He called after returning to the Adlon. "Leni, this is Marc. Marc Fraser."

"Oh my god! Marc? So good to hear from you. Where are you?"

"In Berlin. The Adlon of course."

There was silence for a moment before Riefenstahl said, "Of course. Fond memories, Marc. So much has happened since our time together. I assume you're still living in Paris?"

"Yes. Spent most of the last eighteen months travelling throughout France."

"Yet here you are back in Berlin. Perhaps just to see me?"

"Well I would like to see you, but I can't lie. I came back to interview Adolf Hitler."

"Have you met the Führer yet?" She sounded excited about that.

"As a matter of fact I have. A couple of days ago. Listen, Leni, I'm not intruding into your personal life am I? If you're involved with someone I'll understand."

"No, I'm not involved with anyone. The affair I wrote to you about never worked out. Should have come back and reconnected with you. But that's life. What about you? Is there someone back in Paris? Even if there is can we have dinner for old times' sake?"

"Absolutely. And no there is no one special back in Paris. Are you free tonight?"

"Oh yes. That would be nice. The restaurant there at the Adlon, about seven?"

"Wonderful. I'll see you tonight, Leni."

By her tone he could easily see how the evening might end up. Both were still affected by the memory of those two weeks. He could sense it in her voice. He hoped Sokal was wrong about her working with the Nazis. No matter his physical attraction to Riefenstahl, that would be difficult to overlook.

He was waiting at a secluded table as she walked into the restaurant. She looked spectacular in a black knit dress that showed her trim figure and long legs. A black felt hat with a white feather and smart black pumps set off her outfit. Men's heads turned as she walked over to his table.

They kissed carefully to preserve her lipstick then embraced tightly for several moments before sitting down.

"This is marvelous seeing you, Marc. I forgot to ask, how did you get my new telephone number."

"From Harry Sokal. I paid him a visit."

"Oh." That was all she said then looked down to avoid eye contact.

"His place was wrecked. SA thugs paid him a visit. Said he had been threatened before they destroyed his studio. He also said you were now working with the Nazis. Didn't tell me what that meant. So I guess I'll just ask. Are you working with them, Leni?"

She hesitated before answering. Tilting her head back and chin out somewhat defiantly she said, "Yes, I suppose you could say that. In a couple of months I'll be directing the filming of the National Socialists German Workers' Party rally in Nuremberg."

"My god, Leni, how did you get involved with such a thing? Working with these Nazis?"

"Circumstances beyond my control, Marc. I was working on a project financed by Harry Sokal. Since he was a Jew he felt he must leave Germany. Production on the project was immediately discontinued. Harry abandoned the entire crew and cast."

"What are you saying? You're blaming Sokal? Wasn't it the fault of the Nazis? Their stupid anti-Semitic racial policies? They're a bunch of thugs, Leni. How the hell could you blame Sokal?"

"Harry was just using that as an excuse."

"An excuse? Christ, I just saw what these assholes did to his studio. You're blaming Sokal for saving his life over financing a movie?" Fraser tried to contain his anger by still raised his voice.

“Of course not. He shut down production because I wouldn’t succumb to his romantic advances. He’s pursued me for years.”

Fraser was dumbfounded with her ridiculous rationale. He just shook his head conveying disbelief.

“Marc, the Führer himself demanded I do it. How could I not agree with my other work on hold? The Führer was so taken with my directing of *Das Blaue Licht* that he said I was the only one to capture the spectacle of this year’s largest of all party rallies now that he was Chancellor. Besides being Chancellor the Führer is most persuasive. You met him. Did you not feel his magnetic personality?”

Fraser took on a fierce expression. “Magnetic personality? More like mentally disturbed. Unstable. Demented even. Certainly scary. Anything but magnetic. He’s the head of this monstrous regime. Do you have any idea what the hell is going on, Leni?”

“I didn’t come here to be lectured, Marc. I thought we’d have a nice dinner, talk about art, enjoy each other’s company. You apparently want to argue politics.”

“Listen, Leni. I visited one of the Nazis’ concentration camps. The prisoners were not criminals, simply people the Nazis saw as political opponents. No trials just locked away. You should see this place. Every German should see this place. Farm animals have better living conditions.”

“If it’s so bad why would they let a foreign journalist tour the place?”

Good question. Fraser could only image it was Hermann Göring’s carelessness bred of extreme hubris.

“Because the Nazis no longer care what anyone thinks. They’re in complete power. They want to invoke fear. Your dear Führer now rules by decree. No parliament, no courts to worry about. A dictatorship.”

Riefenstahl grabbed her hat and handbag then stood. “Sorry you feel that way, Marc. It was a mistake seeing you again. Good luck, but goodbye.”

Devastated that Riefenstahl had so completely gone over to the dark side, Fraser did not even stand as he watched her stride

out of the restaurant. How could he have so misjudged her? Was she that venal or conveniently naive? She certainly wasn't stupid. But no one living here could ignore what was going on in Germany.

He looked her up vaguely hoping to maybe rekindle their brief love affair. Prepared that she may have moved beyond whatever they had momentarily shared. But not this. Discovering her collaboration with Adolf Hitler was incomprehensible. Unforgiveable. His anger made it easier to dispel any latent feelings for Leni Riefenstahl.

In no mood for dinner he decided to take a walk. The night was clear and warm. Get a last impression of Berlin before leaving the next morning. This brief trip was enough to provide a sensational series of pieces of how far Germany has descended into a society unrecognizable from just a few years ago. The interviews with Hitler, Göring. The photos from Oranienburg Concentration Camp. The list of prominent Jews of science, the arts, business that felt compelled to leave Germany. Leni Riefenstahl's acceptance of the new regime in spite of its obvious criminal underpinnings was all too typical. The vituperative stories he would send off for publication once he was back in Paris would make it unable for him to return to Germany. That suited him just fine.

He walked south from the upscale Unter der Linden Boulevard with no particular destination in mind. Leni Riefenstahl was upsetting on many levels producing an increasingly foul mood. How could he have misjudged her so badly? It would take some time to sort out.

Eventually he came to a bar. He would have a drink. Bid farewell for good to Berlin. Maybe see what the barkeep thought about things. Could he find one good man among these Germans that had not fallen into step with Adolf Hitler?

He was surprised to encounter two *Sturmabteilung* Brown-shirts outside as he left the stylish bar. Their type seemed better suited to the working class areas of Berlin. Perhaps they were officers. He wasn't familiar with the SA's insignia of rank, but

recognized their unit affiliation because of their all-black kepi caps with a stupid skull and bones insignia like fucking pirates. They belonged to Hitler's personal contingent of guards, the *Schutzstaffel*, the SS. Both men appeared slightly drunk, smoking cigarettes.

Fraser walked past them when one reached out and grabbed his arm.

"Why did you not salute?" the one still holding Fraser's arm said. His speech was slurred.

Fraser decided to play the foreigner feigning he did not speak German.

"I'm sorry. I don't speak German. I'm an American," he said in English. "*Ich spreche kein Deutsch.*"

The other SA officer responded, "That is fine. I speak English. What kind of American are you?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know what you mean. I'm a journalist." The SA officer's English was poor so he may have misunderstood.

"Ah, a journalist. The Jews run the newspapers in American. You work for a Jew?" The tone was belligerent. The other SA officer still clutched Fraser's coat sleeve.

"No. I work for William Randolph Hearst. He's not Jewish. Do you know the name?"

"Sounds like a Jew name. Maybe his family name is Hearstein. Changed it to sound less Jewish."

The two SS laughed.

Fraser said nothing, trying to present a passive expression as much as he wanted to punch these assholes in the mouth.

"Your name?"

"Fraser."

"Are you a Jew? You look Jewish."

"No. I'm not Jewish."

"They all say that. Papers."

"You're not police. Why should I?"

The two SA officers looked at each other in disbelief that someone was talking back to them. The one holding Fraser's

sleeve removed his hand and drew a Luger pistol from his holster.

"So I believe you are a Jew. Hans, keep your gun on him."

"Papers. Now!"

Fraser took his passport from his coat pocket and handed it over. Didn't think they had stooped to arresting foreign journalists yet. But he was not so sure his status would protect him from physical attack.

"Herr Marc Fraser. American passport. Ah, and what is this? Ah, a French visa. You live in Paris, Herr Fraser?"

"Yes."

"The French are pigs. A decadent race. Homosexuals, perverted art. Jews run things in France just like in America. I still think you might be Jewish, Herr Fraser. You will come with us."

"Where to?" His tone more defiant.

The SA officer doing the talking swung his right hand hard in a backhanded blow across Fraser's right cheek.

The blow stunned Fraser but did not knock him down. It did mean he was in for a bad time. The same officer then grabbed his arm and pulled him along the sidewalk.

"Shoot him if he tries to escape, Hans. We are going to find out who Herr Fraser really is."

The blow had not done much damage but Fraser faked a more pronounced effect. After walking a short distance down the block, Fraser was shoved down an alley. They were not detaining him for questioning. This was to be a beating. Shades of those dirty cops in Los Angeles. The difference here being the SA had free reign to do as they pleased.

"That's far enough. Up against the wall," the officer that struck him said.

"I say you're a Jew. An American Jew. Living in decadent Paris. Maybe a homosexual Jew. How about we see if you're a Jew? Let's see if you've been circumcised. Undo your pants and show us your cock, Herr Fraser."

Fraser shook his head no.



“Easier on you if you do it. If we have to strip off your trousers we will make it most painful. Now drop your pants!”

The other officer still held the Luger on Fraser. The one doing the talking now extracted a weighted sap, a beaver-tailed leather-bound weapon with lead shot in one end. A nasty device capable of breaking bones with relatively little force. Fraser knew of the weapon often carried by Los Angeles police. He was in for a very bad beating unless he could talk his way out this.

“Listen, I’m an American journalist. I even have a letter here from Minister Göring.”

The SA with the sap said, “I think you’re a lying Jew. That will make it all the worse on you.”

“No, here’s the pass to inspect one of your detention facilities.” Fraser produced the paper from his coat pocket and handed it to the SA.

The one called Hans with the gun said, “What’s it say, Otto?”

The SA with the sap looked up from reading the paper then proceeded to tear it up.

“Like I thought, a lying Jew.”

Like his old boxing mentor had taught him about street fighting, look for an opening to seize advantage. As the officer tore the paper into small pieces Fraser kicked him viciously in the knee. Heard the joint give way with a sickening sound.

The officer screamed in pain. Fraser caught him from falling backward by grabbing his necktie near the knot at the collar then pushed him hard into the second officer with the drawn gun. As the injured officer collided with his colleague, the Luger discharged. At point blank range, the 9mm round exited the lower abdomen of the officer narrowly missing Fraser.

The wounded officer fell back toppling then landing on top of his colleague. Fraser quickly retrieved the sap. Still holding the Luger, the trapped officer tried to dislodge the dead weight of his companion. Before he was able to free himself and take aim on Fraser, Fraser swung the sap as hard as he could catching the officer over the ear. The impact made a sickening impact sound. The man was immediately knocked unconscious.

Now what to do? The man shot in the abdomen was semi-conscious, evident by his muted groaning. The exit wound was disgoring a copious amount of blood by the look of his soaked shirt and pooling on the ground. Feeling the chest of the man he knocked unconscious, he too was apparently alive but his breathing seemed shallow to Fraser. Better if they did not live to tell who attacked them. Although he had no remorse for these two thugs, it was not in Fraser to finish them off.

However, Fraser's sense of morality did not extend to getting them help. Even if he were to make an anonymous call, he still had to successfully get out of Germany. There could be no justification for his actions. At best, he would end up in a Nazi concentration camp. He needed to buy as much time as possible. Best if they did die of their injuries.

Fortunately they were in the shadows well into the alley from the street. No one walked by at the end of street but he still needed to conceal the bodies as quickly as possible. The alley was L-shaped so it seemed better to pull the bodies around the corner further yet from the main street. Trash cans and empty crates filled this unlit part of the alley.

Fraser removed the neckties from both wounded men. He tied their wrists behind their backs. Their ankles were secured by the leather shoulder straps that connected to their waist belts. Handkerchiefs were ripped in half then knotted together as gags should either recover full consciousness.

Best he could do to give himself time to escape Germany. It might provide him several hours before their discovery by someone dumping trash in the morning. Then again it was only an issue if either man lived and was able to provide the name of their assailant.



Like so many other German Jews even in 1933, Marc Fraser would now have to leave Germany to save himself from the Nazi police state. He could never return while the Nazis remained in power. Would have to fabricate a less extreme reason for leaving than the failed assault and perhaps his killing of two SA of-

ficers. Even in safe circumstances outside Germany he did not want to advertise what happened.

Returning to the Adlon Hotel, he settled his bill claiming he had an early train to catch in the morning. Packing quickly, he descended the stairs and left through a back entrance avoiding the front desk. It was only ten o'clock at night so taxis were available, but he wanted to leave as little a trail as possible so he walked the two kilometers to the Lehrter Bahnhof rail station.

He was looking for the next train out of Berlin, hopefully heading west, but at least out of Berlin. Unfortunately it was many hours to the German border. If either of the wounded officers were found and able to talk there might be a nationwide alert for him.

Checking the train schedules he was in luck. There was a train at midnight leaving for Hamburg. Arriving in Hamburg at four in the morning, there was a train leaving an hour later for Amsterdam. That was another five hours, mostly within German borders. Within that time the SA officers would surely be found. If they were able to identify Fraser by name then it was a matter of how efficiently the borders could be alerted. Should have killed the bastards. But he wasn't going to be captured. For that eventuality he brought along one of the assailant's 9mm Luger pistol.

The trip was tense, particularly the layover in Hamburg, but uneventful. The conductors checking his papers made no facial reaction indicating that he was a person of any interest.

Looking up the SA insignia of rank once back in Paris, Fraser realized that the officer shot was a Sturmbannführer, the other a Sturmhauptführer, like the Oranienburg commandant. Mid-level ranks equivalent of a major and captain respectively. That would mean a significant challenge to the new ruling party and their paramilitary storm troopers. Fraser realized with dread that it would probably mean reprisals on some innocent group, most probably the Jews. A troubling thought.

