If the Dead Rise Not

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Extract

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That I have fought with beasts at Ephesus after the manner of men, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not again? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.

– From the 1559 Book of Common Prayer

Part One

BERLIN, 1934

CHAPTER 1

It was the sort of sound you hear in the distance and mistake for something else: a dirty steam barge puffing along the River Spree; the shunting of a slow locomotive underneath the great glass roof of the Anhalter Station; the hot, impatient breath of some enormous dragon, as if one of the stone dinosaurs in Berlin's zoo had come to life and was now lumbering up Wilhelmstrasse. It hardly seemed like something musical until you guessed it was a military brass band, but even then it was too mechanical to resemble man-made music. Suddenly the air was filled with the clash of cymbals and the tinkling of frame glockenspiels, and at last I saw it – a detachment of soldiers marching as if intent on making work for the road menders. Just looking at these men made my feet hurt. They came clock-stepping along the street, their Mauser carbines shouldered on the left, their muscular right arms swinging with a pendulum-like exactitude between elbow and eagle-embossed belt buckle, their grey steel-helmeted heads held high and their thoughts, assuming they had any, occupied with nonsense about one folk, one leader, one empire – *with Germany*!

People stopped to stare and to salute the traffic jam of Nazi flags and banners the soldiers were carrying – an entire haberdasher's store of red and black and white curtain material. Others came running, full of patriotic enthusiasm to do the same. Children were hoisted onto broad shoulders or slipped through a policeman's legs so as not to miss anything. Only the man standing next to me seemed less than enthusiastic.

'You mark my words,' he said. 'That crazy idiot Hitler means to have another war with England and France. As if we didn't lose enough men the last time. All this marching up and down makes

me sick. It might have been God who invented the devil, but it was Austria that gave us the Leader.'

The man uttering these words had a face like the Golem of Prague and a barrel-shaped body that belonged on a beer cart. He wore a short leather coat and a cap with a peak that grew straight out of his forehead. He had ears like an Indian elephant, a moustache like a toilet brush, and more chins than the Shanghai telephone directory. Even before he flicked the end of his cigarette at the brass band and hit the bass drum, a gap had opened around this ill-advised commentator, as if he were carrying a deadly disease. And no one wanted to be around when the Gestapo showed up with its own idea of a cure.

I turned away and walked quickly down Hedemann Strasse. It was a warm day, almost the end of September, when a word like 'summer' made me think of something precious that was soon to be forgotten. Like freedom and justice. 'Germany awake' was the slogan on everyone's lips, only it appeared to me that we were clock-stepping in our sleep towards some terrible but as yet unknown disaster. This didn't mean I was ever going to be foolish enough to say so in public, and certainly not when strangers were listening. I had principles, sure, but I also had all my own teeth.

'Hey you,' said a voice behind me. 'Stop a minute. I want to talk to you.'

I kept on walking, and it was not until Saarland Strasse – formerly Königgrätzer Strasse, until the Nazis decided we all needed to be reminded about the Treaty of Versailles and the injustice of the League of Nations – that the owner of the voice caught up with me.

'Didn't you hear me?' he said. Taking hold of my shoulder, he pushed me up against an advertising column and showed me a bronze warrant disc on the palm of his hand. From this it was hard to tell if he was local or state criminal police, but from what I knew about Hermann Goering's new Prussian police, only the lower ranks carried bronze beer tokens. No one else was on the pavement, and the advertising column shielded us from the view of anyone on the road. Not that there was much real advertising

pasted on it. These days, advertising is just a sign telling a Jew to keep off the grass.

'No, I didn't,' I said.

'The man who spoke treasonably about the Leader. You must have heard what he said. You were standing right next to him.'

'I don't remember hearing anything treasonable about the Leader,' I said. 'I was listening to the band.'

'So why did you suddenly walk away?'

'I remembered that I had an appointment.'

The cop's cheeks flushed a little. It wasn't a pleasant face. He had dark, shadowy eyes; a rigid, sneering mouth; and a rather salient jaw. It was a face that had nothing to fear from death since it already looked like a skull. If Goebbels had a taller, more rabidly Nazi brother, then this man might have been him.

'I don't believe you,' the cop said, and, snapping his fingers impatiently, added, 'Identification card, please.'

The 'please' was nice, but I still hardly wanted to let him see my identification. Section eight of page two detailed my profession by training and in fact. And since I was no longer a policeman but a hotel employee, it was as good as telling him I wasn't a Nazi. Worse than that. A man who had been obliged to leave the Berlin detective force because of his allegiance to the old Weimar Republic might be just the type to ignore someone speaking treason about the Leader. If treason was what that was. But I knew the cop would probably arrest me just to spoil my day, and arrest would very likely mean two weeks in a concentration camp.

He snapped his fingers again and glanced away, almost bored. 'Come on, come on, I haven't got all day.'

For a moment, I just bit my lip, irritated at being pushed around yet again, not just by this cadaver-faced cop but by the whole Nazi state. I'd been forced out of my job as a senior detective with KRIPO – a job I had loved – and been made to feel like a pariah because of my adherence to the old Weimar Republic. The Republic's faults had been many, it was true, but at least it had been democratic. And since its collapse, Berlin, the city of my birth, was hardly recognizable. Previously it had been the most liberal place in the world.

Now it felt like a military parade ground. Dictatorships always look good until someone starts giving you dictation.

'Are you deaf! Let's see that damned card!' The cop snapped his fingers again.

My irritation turned to anger. I reached inside my jacket for the card with my left hand, turning my body just far enough around to disguise my right hand becoming a fist. And when I buried it in his gut, my whole body was behind it.

I hit him too hard. Much too hard. The blow took all the air out of him and then some. You hit a man in the gut like that, he stays hit for a good long while. I held the cop's unconscious body against me for a moment and then waltzed him through the revolving door of the Deutsches Kaiser Hotel. My anger was already turning to something resembling panic.

'I think this man has suffered some kind of a seizure,' I told the frowning doorman, and dumped the cop's body into a leather armchair. 'Where are the house phones? I'll call an ambulance.'

The doorman pointed around the corner of the front desk.

I loosened the cop's tie for effect and behaved as if I were headed for the telephones. But as soon as I was around the corner, I walked through a service door and down some stairs before exiting the hotel through the kitchens. Emerging into an alley that gave onto Saarland Strasse, I walked quickly into Anhalter Station. For a moment I considered boarding a train. Then I saw the subway tunnel connecting the station with the Excelsior, which was Berlin's second-best hotel. No one would ever think to look for me in there. Not so close to an obvious means of escape. Besides, there was an excellent bar in the Excelsior. There's nothing like knocking out a policeman to give you a thirst.

CHAPTER 2

I went straight into the bar, ordered a large schnapps, and hurried it down like it was the middle of January.

The Excelsior was full of cops but the only one I recognized was the house detective, Rolf Kuhnast. Before the purge of 1933, Kuhnast had been with the Potsdam political police and might reasonably have expected to join the Gestapo except for two things: One was that it had been Kuhnast who had led the team detailed to arrest SA leader Count Helldorf in April 1932, following Hindenburg's orders to forestall a possible Nazi coup. The other was that Helldorf was now the police president of Potsdam.

'Hey,' I said.

'Bernie Gunther. What brings the Hotel Adlon's house detective into the Excelsior?' he asked.

'I always forget that this is a hotel. I came in to buy a train ticket.'

'You're a funny guy, Bernie. Always were.'

'I'd be laughing myself but for all these cops. What's going on here? I know the Excelsior's the Gestapo's favourite watering hole but usually they don't make it quite so obvious. There are guys with foreheads in here who look like they just walked out of the Neander Valley. On their knuckles.'

'We got ourselves a VIP,' explained Kuhnast. 'Someone from the American Olympic Committee is staying here.'

'I thought the Kaiserhof was the official Olympic hotel.'

'It is. But this was a last-minute thing, and the Kaiserhof couldn't put him up.'

'Then I guess the Adlon must have been full as well.'

'Take a flick at me,' said Kuhnast. 'Be my guest. Those oxtails from the Gestapo have been flicking my ears all day. So some shit-smart

fellow from the great Hotel Adlon coming around to straighten my tie for me is all I need.'

'I'm not taking a flick at you, Rolf. Honest. Here, why don't you let me buy you a drink?'

'I'm surprised that you can afford it, Bernie.'

'I don't mind getting it free. A house bull's not doing his job unless he's got something on the barman. Drop by the Adlon sometime and I'll show you how philanthropic our hotel barman can be when he's been caught with his hand in the till.'

'Otto? I don't believe it.'

'You don't have to, Rolf. But Frau Adlon will, and she's not as understanding as me.' I ordered another. 'Come on, have a drink. After what just happened to me I need something to tighten my bowels.'

'What happened?'

'Never you mind. Let's just say that beer won't fix it.'

I tossed the schnapps after the other one.

Kuhnast shook his head. 'I'd like to, Bernie. But Herr Elschner won't like it if I'm not around to stop these Nazi bastards from stealing the ashtrays.'

These apparently indiscreet words were guided by an awareness of my own republican-minded past. But he still felt the need for caution. So he walked me out of the bar, through the entrance hall and into the Palm Court. It was easier to speak freely when no one could hear what we were saying above the Excelsior's orchestra. These days the weather's the only really safe thing to talk about in Germany.

'So, the Gestapo are here to protect some Ami?' I shook my head. 'I thought Hitler didn't like Amis.'

'This particular Ami is taking a tour of Berlin to decide if we're fit to host the Olympic Games in two years' time.'

'There are two thousand workers to the west of Charlottenburg who are under the strong impression we're already hosting them.'

'It seems there's a lot of Amis that want to boycott the Olympiad on the grounds of our government's anti-Semitism. The Ami is here on a fact-finding mission to see for himself if Germany discriminates against Jews.'

'For a blindingly obvious fact-finding mission like that, I'm surprised he bothered checking into a hotel.'

Rolf Kuhnast grinned back. 'From what I've heard it's a mere formality. Right now he's up in one of our function rooms getting a list of facts put together for him by the Ministry of Propaganda.'

'Oh, those kinds of facts. Well, sure, we wouldn't want anyone getting the wrong idea about Hitler's Germany, now, would we? I mean, it's not that we have anything against the Jews. But, hey, there's a new chosen people in town.'

It was hard to see why an American might be prepared to ignore the new regime's anti-Jewish measures. Especially when there were so many egregious examples of it all over the city. Only a blind man could have failed to notice the grossly offensive cartoons on the front pages of the more rabidly Nazi newspapers, the David stars painted on the windows of Jewish-owned stores, and the German Only signs in the public parks – to say nothing of the real fear that was in the eyes of every Jew in the Fatherland.

'Brundage – that's the Ami's name—'

'He sounds German.'

'He doesn't even speak German,' said Kuhnast. 'So as long as he doesn't actually meet any English-speaking Jews, things should work out just fine.'

I glanced around the Palm Court.

'Is there any danger that he could do that?'

'I'd be surprised if there's a Jew within a hundred metres of this place, given who's coming here to meet him.'

'Not the Leader.'

'No, his dark shadow.'

'The Deputy Leader's coming to the Excelsior? I hope you cleaned the toilets.'

Suddenly the orchestra stopped what it was playing and struck up with the German national anthem, and hotel guests jumped to their feet to point their right arm towards the entrance hall. And I had no choice but to join in.

Surrounded by storm troopers and Gestapo, Rudolf Hess marched into the hotel wearing the uniform of an SA man. His

face was as square as a doormat but somehow less welcoming. He was medium in height; slim with dark, wavy hair; a Transylvanian brow; werewolf eyes; and a razor-thin mouth. Returning our patriotic salutes perfunctorily, he then bounded up the stairs of the hotel two at a time. With his eager air he reminded me of an Alsatian dog let off the leash by his Austrian master to lick the hand of the man from the American Olympic Committee.

As it happened, there was a hand I had to go and lick myself. A hand that belonged to a man in the Gestapo.

CHAPTER 3

As one of the house detectives at the Adlon I was expected to keep thugs and murderers out of the hotel. But that could be difficult when the thugs and murderers were Nazi Party officials. Some of them, such as Wilhelm Frick, the minister of the interior, had even served a prison sentence. The Ministry was on Unter den Linden, right around the corner from the Adlon; and Frick, a real Bavarian square head with a wart on his face and a girlfriend who happened to be the wife of some prominent Nazi architect, was in and out of the hotel a lot. Probably the girl, too.

Equally difficult for a hotel detective was the high turnover of staff, with honest, hardworking personnel who happened to be Jewish making way for people who turned out to be much less honest and hardworking but who were at least apparently more German.

Mostly I kept my nose out of these matters, but when the Adlon's female house detective decided to leave Berlin for good, I felt obliged to try and help her.

Frieda Bamberger was more than an old friend. From time to time we were lovers of convenience, which is a nice way of saying that we liked going to bed with each other, but that this was as far as it went, since she had a semi-detached husband who lived in Hamburg. Frieda was a former Olympic fencer but she was also a Jew, and for this reason she had been expelled from the Berlin Fencing Club in November 1933. A similar fate had befallen nearly every Jew in Germany who was a member of a gymnasium or sporting association. To be a Jew in the summer of 1934 was like some cautionary tale by the Brothers Grimm in which two abandoned children find themselves lost in a forest full of hungry wolves.

It wasn't that Frieda believed the situation in Hamburg would be any better than in Berlin, but she hoped the discrimination she now suffered might be easier to bear with the help of her gentile husband.

'Look here,' I told her. 'I know someone in the Jewish Department of the Gestapo. A cop I used to know at the Alex. I recommended him for a promotion once, so he owes me a favour. I'll go and speak to him and see what's to be done.'

'You can't change what I am, Bernie,' she said.

'Maybe not. But I might be able to change what someone else says you are.'

At that time I was living on Schlesische Strasse, in the east of the city. And on the day of my appointment with the Gestapo I'd caught the U-Bahn west to Hallesches Tor and walked north up Wilhelmstrasse. Which was how I'd run into that spot of trouble with the policeman in front of the Deutscher Kaiser Hotel. From the temporary sanctuary of the Excelsior it was only a few steps to Gestapo House at Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8 – a building that looked less like the headquarters of the new Germany's secret state police and more like an elegant, Wilhelmine hotel, an effect enhanced by the proximity of the old Hotel Prinz Albrecht, which now accommodated the administrative leadership of the SS. There were few people who walked up Prinz Albrecht Strasse unless they really had to. Especially when they had just assaulted a policeman. Perhaps for that reason I figured it was the last place anyone would think of looking for me.

With its marble balustrades, high vaulted ceilings, and a stair as wide as a railway track, Gestapo House was more like a museum than a building owned by the secret police; or perhaps a monastery – just as long as the order of monks was one that wore black and enjoyed hurting people in order to make them confess their sins. I entered the building and approached a uniformed and not unattractive girl on the front desk who walked me up a stair and around a corner to Department II.

Catching sight of my old acquaintance, I smiled and waved simultaneously, and a couple of women from the nearby typing pool fixed

me with a look of amused surprise, as if my smile and my wave were ridiculously out of place. And of course they were. The Gestapo hadn't existed for more than eighteen months, but it already enjoyed a fearsome reputation, and this was why I was nervous and why I was smiling and waving at Otto Schuchardt in the first place. He didn't wave back. He didn't smile, either. Schuchardt had never been the life and soul of the party exactly, but I was pretty sure I'd heard him laugh when we were both cops at the Alex. Then again, maybe he'd only been laughing because I was his superior, and as we now shook hands I was already telling myself I'd made a mistake and that the tough young cop I remembered was now made of the same stuff as the balustrades and the staircase outside the department door. It was like shaking hands with a deep-frozen undertaker.

Schuchardt was handsome, if you consider men with white blond hair and pale blue eyes handsome. As a blond-haired, blue-eyed man myself, I thought he looked like a much improved, more efficient Nazi version of me: a man-god instead of a poor Fritz with a Jewish girlfriend. Then again, I never much wanted to be a god or even to enter heaven, not when all the bad girls like Frieda were back in Weimar Berlin.

He ushered me into his little office and closed a frosted-glass door, which left the two of us alone with a small wooden desk, a whole tank corps of grey metal filing cabinets, and a nice view of the Gestapo's back garden, where a man was carefully tending the flower beds.

'Coffee?'

'Sure.'

Schuchardt dropped a heating element into a jug of tap water. He seemed amused to see me, which is to say his hawkish face had the look of one who had eaten several sparrows for lunch.

'Well, well,' he said. 'Bernie Gunther. It's been two years, hasn't it?'

'Must be.'

'Arthur Nebe is here, of course. He's the assistant commissioner. And I daresay there are many others you'd recognize. Personally, I could never understand why you left KRIPO.'

'I thought it best to leave before I was pushed.'

'You're quite wrong about that, I think. The Party much prefers pure criminalists such as yourself to a bunch of March violets who have climbed on the Party's bandwagon for ulterior motives.' His razor-sharp nose wrinkled with displeasure. 'And of course there are still a few in KRIPO who have never joined the Party. Indeed they are respected for it. Ernst Gennat, for example.'

'I daresay you're right.' I might have mentioned all the good cops who'd been kicked out of KRIPO in the great police purge of 1933: Kopp, Klingelhöller, Rodenberg, and many others. But I wasn't there to have a political argument. I lit a Muratti, smoked my lungs for a second, and wondered if I dared mention what had brought me to Otto Schuchardt's desk.

'Relax, old friend,' he said and handed me a surprisingly tasty cup of coffee. 'It was you who helped me to get out of uniform and into KRIPO. I don't forget my friends.'

'I'm glad to hear it.'

'Somehow I don't get the feeling you're here to denounce someone. No, I don't see you as the type ever to do that. So what is it that I can do for you?'

'I have a friend who is a Jew,' I said. 'She's a good German. She even represented Germany at the Paris Olympiad. She's not religious. And she's married to a gentile. She wants to leave Berlin. I'm hoping I can persuade her to change her mind. I wondered if there might be a way in which her Jewishness might be forgotten, or perhaps ignored. I mean, you hear of these things happening sometimes.'

'Really?'

'Well, yes, I think so.'

'I wouldn't repeat that hearsay if I were you. No matter how true it might be. Tell me, how Jewish is your friend?'

'Like I said, in the Olympiad of—'

'No, I mean by blood. You see, that's what really counts these days. Blood. Your friend could look like Leni Riefenstahl and be married to Julius Streicher, and none of that would matter a damn if she was of Jewish blood.'

'Her parents are both Jewish.'

'Then there's nothing I can do to help. What's more, my advice to you is to forget about trying to help her. You say she's planning to leave Berlin?'

'She thinks she might go and live in Hamburg.'

'Hamburg?' Schuchardt really was amused this time. 'I don't think living there is going to be the solution to her problem, somehow. No, my advice to her would be to leave Germany altogether.'

'You're joking.'

'I'm afraid not, Bernie. There are some new laws being drafted that will effectively denaturalize all Jews in Germany. I shouldn't be telling you this but there are many old fighters who joined the Party before 1930 who believe that not enough has yet been done to solve the Jewish problem in Germany. There are some, myself included, who believe that things might get a little rough.'

'I see.'

'Sadly, you don't. At least not yet. But I think you will. In fact, I'm certain of it. Let me explain. According to my boss, Assistant Commissioner Volk, this is how it's going to work: a person will be classified as German only if all four of his grandparents were of German blood. A person will be officially classified as Jewish if he is descended from three or four Jewish grandparents.'

'And if that person has just one Jewish grandparent?' I asked.

'Then that person will be classified as being of mixed blood. A crossbreed.'

'And what will all of that mean, Otto? In practical terms.'

'Jews will be stripped of German citizenship and forbidden to marry or have sexual relations with pure Germans. Employment in any public capacity will be completely forbidden, and property ownership restricted. Crossbreeds will be obliged to apply to the Leader himself for reclassification or Aryanization.'

'Jesus Christ.'

Otto Schuchardt smiled. 'Oh, I very much doubt that he'd be in with any sort of a chance for reclassification. Not unless you could prove his heavenly father was a German.'

I sucked the smoke from my cigarette as if it were mother's milk, and then stubbed it out in a nipple-sized foil ashtray. There was probably a compound, jigsaw-puzzle word – assembled from odd bits of German – to describe the way I was feeling, only I hadn't yet figured one out. But I was pretty sure it was going to involve words like 'horror' and 'astonishment' and 'kick' and 'stomach'. I didn't know the half of it. Not yet.

'I appreciate your candour,' I said.

Once again his face took on a look of pained amusement. 'No, you don't. But I think you're about to appreciate it.'

He opened his desk drawer and took out an oversize beige file. Pasted on the top left corner of the cover was a white label containing the name of the subject of the file and the name of the agency and department responsible for maintaining the file. The name on the file was mine.

'This is your police personnel file. All police have one. And all ex-policemen, such as yourself.' Schuchardt opened the file and removed the first page. 'The index sheet. Every item added to the file is given a number on this sheet of paper. Let's see. Yes. Item twenty-three.' He turned the pages of the file until he found another sheet of paper, and then handed it to me.

It was an anonymous letter denouncing me as someone with a Jewish grandparent. The handwriting seemed vaguely familiar but I hardly felt up to the task of trying to guess the author's identity in front of Otto Schuchardt. 'There seems to be little point in me denying this,' I said, handing it back.

'On the contrary,' he said, 'there's every point in the world.' He struck a match, put the flame to the letter, and let it drop into the wastepaper bin. 'Like I said before, I don't forget my friends.' Then he took out his fountain pen, unscrewed the top and wrote in the REMARKS section of the index sheet. 'No further action possible,' he said as he wrote. 'All the same, it might be best if you were to try and fix this.'

'It seems a bit late now,' I said. 'My grandmother has been dead for twenty years.'

'As someone of second-grade mixed race,' he said, ignoring my

facetiousness, 'you may well find, in the future, that certain restrictions are imposed on you. For example, if you were to try and start up a business, you could be required, under the new laws, to make a racial declaration.'

'Matter of fact, I'd been thinking of starting up as a private investigator. Assuming I can raise the money. Being the house detective at the Adlon is kind of slow after working Homicide at the Alex.'

'In which case you would be well advised to make your one Jewish grandparent disappear from the official record. Believe me, you wouldn't be the first one to do this. There are many more crossbreeds around than you might think. In the government there are at least three that I know of.'

'It's a crazy, mixed-up world we live in, for sure.' I took out my cigarettes, put one in my mouth, thought better of it, and returned it to the pack. 'Exactly how would you go about doing something like that? Making a grandparent disappear.'

'Frankly, Bernie, I wouldn't know. But you could do worse than speak to Otto Trettin, at the Alex.'

'Trettin? How can he help?'

'Otto is a very resourceful man. Very well connected. You know that he took over Liebermann von Sonnenberg's department at the Alex when Erich became the new head of KRIPO.'

'Which was Counterfeiting and Forgery,' I said. 'I'm beginning to understand. Yes, Otto was always a very enterprising sort of fellow.'

'You didn't hear it from me.'

I stood up. 'I was never even here.'

We shook hands. 'Tell your Jewish friend what I said, Bernie. To get out now, while the going's good. Germany's for the Germans now.' Then he raised his right arm and added an almost rueful 'Heil Hitler' that was a mixture of conviction and, perhaps, habit.

Anywhere else I might have ignored it. But not at Gestapo House. Also I was grateful to him. Not just for my own sake but for Frieda's, too. And I didn't want him to think me churlish. So I returned his Hitler greeting, which made twice in one day I'd had to do it. At this rate I was well on my way to becoming a thoroughgoing Nazi

bastard before the week was out. Three-quarters of me, anyway.

Schuchardt walked me downstairs, where several policemen were now loitering excitedly in the hall. He stopped and spoke to one as we went to the front door.

'What's all the commotion?' I asked when Schuchardt caught up with me again.

'A cop's been found dead in the Deutscher Kaiser Hotel,' he said.

'That's too bad,' I said, trying to keep in check the sudden wave of nausea I was feeling. 'What happened?'

'No one saw anything. But the hospital said it looks like he might have suffered some kind of blow to his stomach.'