

# Somewhere in the World

A Novel

by

Fee-Christine Aks

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## Early August 1942.

“So, you are still around? Your friend took good care of you – until now.”

Gunnar Berger laughs sneeringly. Kalle and Dieter hold her by the arms, Detlef and Markus are holding back Axel.

“Do you know, what we do with Jews?” Gunnar hisses at her.

She keeps still.

Gunnar takes out his knife. The blade glistens dangerously in the sunshine.

“Sharp as a razor”, he states proudly and carefully runs his finger across the blade.

“Hey, scared yet?”

She can tell that Gunnar enjoys her horror. He has a brutal grin on his broad face when he puts the knife to her throat. She can feel the cold metal on her skin. She is scared to death and paralyzed.

„I guess poor Paul won't have his little Jew girlfriend much longer“, Gunnar sneers.

“Let her go!” Axel screams, trying to escape the grip of the two older boys.

“Oh well, I almost forgot about you.”

Gunnar straightens his cap, takes the knife off her throat and steps towards Axel, who stares at him, trying to suppress his anger.

“You Socialists will be next, I promise you”, Gunnar smirks and points the knife at Axel's nose.

“To make it easy, I should make it quick, right?”

He points the knife down to Axel's throat.

“Do it!” Axel sighs.

“Are you still mad at me?” Gunnar asks. „Believe me, your Maria is doing great where she is now – if she is still alive.”

Axel's blue eyes are sparking, “You murderer!” he lets out.

Gunnar and his uniformed boys laugh.

“Oh stop it!” Gunnar laughs. “What did I do? I just gave Captain Brügge a little hint.”

He grins meanly and enjoys Axel's look that is filled with hatred. The younger blond that's a little smaller and has blue eyes, looks angrily at the older, big blonde with dark eyes, wearing a uniform. If it was up to him, Axel'd be jumping at Gunnar's throat.

„Poor little Axel“, Gunnar mocks. “How is your father doing? Is he already eaten up by worms?”

Despite the knife, Axel is trying to escape the steel-like grip of the Hitler boys. "Oh, how mean of me", Gunnar plays concern. "What a shame, that you didn't get Sonne yet."

Axel's eyes are like poisonous arrows ready to kill Gunnar a thousand times.

"Hope it's not too hot for your father in hell", he snarls back.

Gunnar's eyes narrow. "You red pigs!" he screams. "You killed him!"

Axel remains silent. Gunnar finds his mean grin back and slowly turns the blade on Axel's throat, enjoying himself.

"Liza! Liza!"

She is shaken up and opens her eyes. It's Rebecca.

"Did you have bad dreams?" she asks worried.

Liza nods.

"About Gunnar", she says quietly.

Rebecca sits down next to her on the pallet, puts her arms around her and gives her a piece of bread, since she slept through the barrack's breakfast.

"Was it bad?" she caringly asks.

Liza nods and starts to eat.

"He wanted to cut Axel's and my throat."

Rebecca makes a face.

"He made Axel angry", she Liza continues. "Seven years ago Maria was picked up, you know? And Gunnar reported her."

Rebecca listens quietly, her look is pitiful.

„And then he started again with Axel's father" Liza murmurs, while she is getting dressed.

Bernhard Sommer was shot in the early summer of 1933 at the last meeting of the Social Democratic party in Hamburg, when SS and SA-Storm 25 raided the hall. It was a bullet from SA-Gruppenführer (section commander) Sonne's weapon that killed Axel's father.

Axel has sworn revenge to the man, whose storm troop gained notoriety for being real active when it came to attacking Hamburg's left wing. The thought of commander Sonne, his brother or others from Storm 25, like Gunnar Berger's father, still sends chills running down her spine. Everybody was afraid of Sonne and his troop. All people in Hamburg started shaking, when they heard this brutal crowd singing their song of the flag and their closed ranks miles away.

"You're doing all right?" Rebecca wonders carefully.

Liza nods.

"Well, we have to go soon", Rebecca states.

Liza nods again. She is done.

"Everyone out!" they hear the voice of a guard, today it is Wachmann Leipelt.

The door is torn open. Light enters. It looks like it is going to be a beautiful day outside. They stand up and line up in double rows. Liza walks next to Rebecca. Outside in the square the others have already gathered. Among the women, Liza quickly finds her mother who is back from the meal counter, where she served this morning. After a while, she spots her father and her brother Léon over at the men. Like every day they greet each other with a silent look.

A new, very young guard, by his uniform presumably an SS-Sturmbannführer, yells a couple of commands. They have to greet like Nazis in order not to appear conspicuous.

“Counting!” the new guy bellows.

One after another, everybody shouts out their number.

“580”, Liza shouts.

“581”, Rebecca shouts.

Mother is D-579, Father is D-577 and Léon is D-578. The number was tattooed on their right forearm. 580 – that is hers. This number will always belong to her, it is a part of her; because names don’t mean anything here, nothing at all.

A second SS-Man appears and hands a written notice to the new guy. He nods and gestures the SS-Man to continue.

Liza knows, what is coming now. It is like every day. They group them in commandos. Luckily Rebecca is in Liza’s commando, just like Mother.

“Dismiss!” The young man in the brown uniform sharply shouts. The skull badge on his collar gleams in the sunlight.

They walk over to the brickyard. They have been manufacturing bricks every day for the past fourteen months. Work has become routine. Liza and Rebecca sit next to each other. Across from them sits Liza’s mother. She smiles quickly before she concentrates on her work. Liza starts working as well, silently. Her hands know already what to do.

“For your tender hand”, Paul said once, when he gave her a small silver ring for her birthday. Back then, they didn’t know that just half a year later she had to hand the ring over when she and her family were registered as inmates here. But even if he had known, Paul certainly would not have hesitated.

Yes, Paul; that nice and understanding Paul Kirchhoff who has been her dearest friend. She has had a crush on him like forever, still has – even though she does not see any chance to ever meet him again.

The Nazis destroyed everything. They didn’t stop before families or friendships.

Axel’s father is dead – murdered by Nazis. They separated Axel and Maria, Pauline Weiß and Peter Reichberg, Paul and herself.

Liza likes to remember the good times, when the Nazis weren’t in power yet. How they all played in the yard and the street or ran down to the river Elbe’s beach

and splashed their bare feet in the muddy water. It was such a good time, every day was better than the other. Back when they all were still together.

But then everything changed: Hitler came to power. All freedom was abolished. They – the Jews – got it a lot harder than before.

With horror Liza remembers the day when she witnessed how Johanna Grünberg, a Jewish girl from Maria's and Pauline's class, and her parents were beaten to death by Sonne's SA-Troop. Sonne's troop was one of the worst, if not the worst in all of Hamburg.

Ever since the homicide of their chief of staff Ernst Röhm in 1934 the SA doesn't exist anymore. The Sonne brothers were heart stricken. But just a couple of days later, the former SA-commander worked for the Gestapo and his brother who had just been promoted to SA-commander, became Obersturmführer SS (Senior Storm leader in the SS).

In their new functions they are almost worse than before. SS-Sonne always pulls his gun and pulls the trigger, when he thinks he sees a Jew. Usually he assumes right. Gestapo-Captain Sonne has arrested people almost instantly killed, most of the time with some paltry excuse, to save trouble with the transport, documents or expulsion orders.

Liza still imagines clearly how the Sonne brothers, nicknamed "blood brothers" in SA-times already, picked up Peter Reichberg and his family. That was over three years ago. Nonetheless she still sees it exactly in front of her eyes, like it was yesterday: how Peter and his parents were pushed in the street, their hands up; how Peter's older brother Jan didn't walk fast enough for SS-Sonne and without further ado got shot down by the Obersturmführer. Like a rabbit. How Sonne's brother had the corpse packed on the truck.

Liza still sees Pauline's face drowned in tears. She had loved Peter. The Nazis tore them apart. Numerous friends have been forcefully separated. Axel's girlfriend Maria Goldberg was taken by the Gestapo in April 1934. Gunnar Berger reported her. Liza still has Axel's desperate face in front of her, when the truck left at dusk with Maria's family.

Axel grieved hardly for Maria. He became much quieter and gloomy; and filled with hatred. The Nazis not only took his father; also his girlfriend that was put in a KZ (concentration camp) or maybe even killed.

Liza has prayed a lot for Maria, that she was doing fine, that she was going to survive. She was brought to Dachau, it was rumoured. Just like the Müllers, who were brought there in August 1936, because they cheered too loud for Carl Lewis at the Olympics. That was how they attracted the Blockwart's (block warden) son attention.

Hans Schönemann, with whom they have played Soccer in the yard sometimes, was a Communist and has been brought to Buchenwald concentration camp in November 1938.

One month before that, and just a couple of days before the Synagogues burned, besides from the Reichbergs, also the Schönfeldts disappeared. Their little store had been plundered and burnt by the SS.

“Get up!” Rebecca’s voice interrupts her thoughts. Liza stands up and tries to come to her senses.

SS-Scharführer (troop corporal) Baldt paces through the rows with an important look on his face. He is their Commando’s leader and the most hated guard in the entire camp at the same time. Whenever he feels irritated – or drank too much – he pulls his gun almost as quick as the Sonne brothers. He is also the one that drives the weak ones to work by kicking and beating and allows the same to other guards.

Liza remembers how he had the fingers of that elderly woman with the friendly, brown eyes shattered. She couldn’t form as many bricks, because she had gout.

The very same evening that woman disappeared from the barrack, where she had a pallet next to Liza’s mother. Mother whispered to Liza, that the old woman was sent on, to the east.

Liza notices that she is starting to shake. She tries hard to keep it together. Do not attract attention. Do not give any reason. Always keep your head down. Never ever look into Baldt’s eyes. He not only likes to beat. There are rumors that he likes to have female inmates keep him company in the evening.

She almost feels how Baldt comes closer. She feels queasy and puts her head down even further, almost on her skinny chest. However she feels how Baldt is passing and giving her a strange look. Then it’s over. Liza takes a deep breath.

“Sit down!” it sounds from the door.

They continue working. With her busy hands at work, she starts dreaming again.

How Paul asked her, if she wanted to go with him to the DOM, the large fair-ground on Heiligengeistfeld in the city. How they rode the Ferris wheel together and how he kissed her. A couple of years earlier, while they were still all together, he gave her a gingerbread heart. It had written on it “For my Darling”.

He took her to the haunted ride and carousels. It was so nice – until Gunnar and his Hitler boys came along and they had to run away from them.

How they almost ran into SS-Sonne. They ran home like being hunted by the devil. That was one week before Hitler’s troops invaded Poland and the war started.

A day later they had a strange encounter with Herr Braun, Paul’s and Pauline’s hideous neighbour.

Herr Braun already joined the Nazi party in November 1932. He had numerous disputes with Paul’s father, because they were not supposed to play football in

the yard or play with marbles on the sidewalk in front of house No. 18; or if the yard door could stay open or closed...

Paul's father always won those word battles, of course. In return Herr Braun always tried to harm Max Kirchhoff. In the summer of 1934 Herr Braun joined the SS and from that moment on always marched around the streets in his black uniform. And of course he became even more presumptuous when it came to Paul's father.

Because he reported the Müllers, Reichbergs, Schönfeldts and Hans Schönemann to Gestapo-Sonne, the simple SS-Sturmmann (storm trooper) Arthur Braun was promoted to a Scharführer SS (troop corporal in the SS). Paul and Axel always made fun of that dubious career when they were among themselves.

„One day“, Paul said derisive, „he will stand in front of dear Adolf himself and will demand the dictatorship, because he 'cleaned out' our street.“

Yes, Paul.

Liza sighs in silence. He always appealed to her. Funny, loyal and understanding Paul – just an all-around great guy he was. He learned a great deal from his father and never believed what the Nazis said about the Jews. He is also tall and strong. He guarded her like a brave Lion from Gunnar and his boys.

And he can be real affectionate as well...

Liza feels a pleasurable shiver running down her spine, when she thinks about his beautiful blue-grey eyes and the loving way he always looked at her.

He is quite handsome, she reflects, while she imagines his pretty face in front of her, framed by dark chestnut brown, curly hair. She can almost feel his presence and his pleasant smell. But when she looks up, it is just Rebecca sitting next to her, busy working.

Rebecca doesn't have anybody anymore. Her parents are dead. They both died quickly one after another of Tuberculosis. Rebecca has been an orphan for more than ten years.

Before she came to Neuengamme one week before Liza herself, Rebecca lived with her aunt that was half Jewish in a part of Hamburg called Barmbek. Her aunt wasn't home when they arrested Rebecca. Rebecca hopes, her aunt made it onto a ship to America, but who knows, what happened to her?

Rebecca said that the uncertainty is the worst part about it. Liza sighs, her eyes wander through the room. She knows where her family is. Across the table sits her mother, she looks up as well. Their eyes meet for a second. They exchange an encouraging smile.

Further down in the drafty room a commando of men is working. Liza recognises her father that pushes bricks in the furnace. Her brother Léon picks up the ready molded bricks from the women and stacks them next to the furnace.

Alongside Father there is a dark haired boy working.



Paul!

This thought strikes her both scared and excited. But then the boy straightens up and turns his head in her direction. He is older than Paul, but somehow looks a lot like him.

Now he notices her look and smiles friendly at her. His smile also reminds her of Paul. On impulse she smiles back. It is odd, that she has never seen him before in all the twenty-three months she has been here already.

Rebecca nudges her. "Hey, don't dream. Or you will get in trouble with Baldt."

Liza jerks and goes back to work.

Paul always smiled at her like this. When he comforted her, when they greeted each other or even when they were just talking – he always had a smile for her. He gave his beautiful smile and kind words to everyone; well, almost everyone. Nazis excluded.

For her, he always had extra endearing terms. Liza sighs deeply and starts dreaming again. Without her memories she would not have survived this long in the camp – almost two years. Plenty of people don't even make it two weeks.

But we got fortunate, Liza thinks. Until now, that is. We are all still alive, none of us was beaten or kicked, and we are all healthy.

One barrack is put under quarantine. Everybody that got infected with epidemic typhus has to stay there.

Liza moans quietly and looks contemplative to Mother, to Rebecca, then to Léon and Father. Luckily they all were spared this terrible epidemic that causes the camp commander quite a headache.

But she always has had a good constitution and good health. Besides scarlet fever she never had anything. Admittedly she won't be like this very much longer. The winter is cold. The barracks aren't heated and the wind blows through cracks and crevices. Numerous people got the cold.

Mother has had a fever for three days. Guard Leipelt was at least gracious enough to let her lay in bed. She even got an extra lunch for her mother. Liza is almost thankful for his help. How he assigned her to count her mother's number. And it worked out.

Lunch break.

Today she has lunch duty. She overslept this morning and Rebecca filled in for her so she could sleep a little longer. Liza is thankful for that. Now it is her turn. She has to get soup from the prison camp's canteen for twenty-three women, among them Rebecca and Mother, and herself.

She adds the last brick she has done to the other bricks and leaves the brickyard together with Rebecca. She walks instantly to the canteen counter and waits for the soup kettle.

"So here we meet again", somebody says behind her suddenly. Paul?

Scared and happy at the same time, she turns around.

No, not Paul; but it is the young man that looks so much like him. His voice is just as warm as Paul's. Like sunshine.

"Lutz Neumann", he introduces himself. "Communist."

He points to the red triangle that is sewn to his striped clothing. It is well visible on the left side of his chest, right over the heart, and there is a second one on the right trouser leg.

"Liza Giesemann, Jew", she replies.

In contrast to the plain political prisoners she has an additional yellow triangle underneath the red one, so it looks like a six pointed star shines on her chest.

Lutz nods shortly, smiles at her and waits together with her.

"How long have you been here?" he asks hushed.

"Almost two years", she responds.

He raises his eye brows. "Dear Lord!" he mutters horrified. His bluish grey eyes look at her sympathetically.

"I got here only yesterday", he continues. "They caught us, when we were getting groceries at a Jewish store."

Others come closer to get some soup.

"So, how old are you?" he wants to know and examines her in-depth.

"Fifteen", she answers.

He briefly touches her cheek and sadly looks at her.

"You should have gone to get dancing lessons", he murmurs. „Instead they sent you here."

She sighs. He is right; she had her whole life in front of her.

"Yes", she says quietly and then asks "Well, how old are you?"

"Just turned nineteen", he replies. „Next year I was supposed to start medical school." Angrily he kicks up a pebble stone that flies away describing a high arch.

"There!"

The cook slams the kettles in front of them. Liza takes one, Lutz takes the other.

"No. 5", Lutz says quietly, as they walk side by side across the square towards the barracks.

"No. 7", she responds.

SS-Scharführer Baldt meets them halfway. Liza is rooted to the spot and lowers her head. After a short moment and still a little hesitant, Lutz does the same.

Baldt walks past them in a few meters distance. Liza has a bad feeling in her stomach, when his look brushes her. For a brief moment she thinks that the man in his well ironed uniform will stop and talk to her. Yet when he sees Lutz and the two steaming kettles, he abruptly turns around and quickly walks away.

Lutz's arm touches hers like unintended yet gently when they start walking again. The touch gets the chill out of her bones that set in at the encounter with the uniformed man.

"An unpleasant human being", Lutz mumbles softly.

Liza nods in silence and looks at him. He gives her an encouraging smile. His eyes almost have the same bluish grey colour as Paul's. She feels well and secure in his presence.

"Take care, Liza", Lutz says quietly, before they separate.

"So long", she smiles back and heaves the heavy pot into the barrack where the others already are assembled around the table.

She fills their plates and sits down between Rebecca and Mother. They eat in silence. When she is done, Liza takes the empty pot and brings it back to the canteen. On her way back she runs into Lutz again.

"Hello", he smiles at her.

"Hello", she smiles back.

"See you", he says. "Oh, damn! Hurry up!"

He hurries away.

Liza looks around and watches SS-Scharführer Baldt approach. His looks aren't promising anything good. Liza walks quickly; the others already are lined up. Baldt steps towards her. He has a sleazy smile on his face. She looks away and walks past him with her head held down.

"How are you?" he whispers and grabs her skirt for a second. She moves along quickly. She reaches the others right before he can get a hold of her. Quickly she squeezes through the lines to Rebecca. She looks back, her heart beating, and meets Baldt's galling look. One day I will get hold of you, he seems to be saying. She quickly looks somewhere else.

Lutz comes back from the canteen and stands with his commando. He smiles at her briefly before they are commanded to step away.

Liza walks with Rebecca to the brickyard. Initially they work in silence. After a while, Liza can't hold it anymore. She nudges Rebecca carefully.

"What's up?" Rebecca asks in a whisper.

"I just wanted to tell you, that I met a nice guy", Liza tells her.

"Where is that?" Rebecca wants to know bewildered. "In here?"

Liza radiantly nods.

"Earlier at the canteen" she tells her. "His name is Lutz."

Rebecca is happy for her.

"He's a Communist."

Rebecca smirks.

"So what? We are Jews."

Liza affirms.

“That’s a good fit”, she states with a shrug. “The two groups of people, the Nazis hate the most.”

“That’s right” Rebecca grins.

From one second to the other she becomes serious. “Oh, damn!”

SS-Scharführer Baldt is walking around the rows again. Liza works concentrated, so she doesn’t have to look up and see Baldt’s nasty smile. Suddenly she feels a hand on her shoulder. Appalled she jumps. It is Baldt!

“You’re doing that very nice”, he compliments her and has that nasty grin on his face again.

She tries to silently get on with her work. But then he leans forward and whispers in her ear: “10 o’clock, my place.”

And he’s gone.

Rebecca makes a disgusted face and looks at her with sympathy. She must have heard it all. Liza tries to concentrate on her work. When she carefully looks up, she sees that Baldt has disappeared. Only Lutz looks over from the other side of the room and gives her an encouraging wink. Liza takes a deep breath and winks back. She continues working like a machine and starts to drift away again. She sees Lutz in front of her – and Paul. Just like back then...

“*SS is marching, clear the streets!*” numerous men shout full-throated.

“It’s Sonne!” curses Paul hushed.

They push into a door way. Protected from view, they peek around the corner. The black uniformed men come closer. All of them are from the old SA-Storm 25; with only Gunnar’s father missing.

“What a bummer!” Pauline rants quietly. “The stupid door is jammed!”

Axel throws himself against the door and almost falls with it into the stairway. Quickly and quietly they emerge into the unknown stairway and close the door, just leaving a little slit to see through.

“What is this going to be?” Pauline whispers.

“Be quiet!” Paul whispers back.

His warm breath caresses Liza’s cheek. He stands behind her. She senses his presence and feels his hand around hers. Nothing will harm her. He is with her. They stand behind the door and have a clear view of the street through the slit.

Sonne’s SS-Troop 13 stops in front of the house across the street. Among them, Liza recognises her former math teacher Herr Gröhn, as well as Maria’s and Pauline’s old teacher, Herr Ziegler. Bolt upright they stand in line with the others and wait. In this beautiful day’s bright light the double S-runes glimmer cold on their black uniform collars. Silver flashes implying danger.

A truck drives up and parks about a hundred meters away. Herr Ziegler, Herr Gröhn and four other SS-men receive automatic weapons with a mounted scope. They position themselves behind parked cars and the door ways around.

Multiple men in long coats get out of the car. Gestapo-Sonne is among them. He seems to have the supreme command. He disappears with three others and six SS-men in the surrounded house. Shortly after that three men and one woman are escorted out, their hands up.

“Go, go!” Gestapo-Sonne yells indignantly.

With grim faces the woman and two men step onto the truck bed. The third man is taking his time. When Sonne approaches him, he beats him right in the face, opens the driver-side door, jumps in and steps on the gas, the paralyzed driver in the passenger seat.

“Fire!” yells Gestapo-Sonne.

His brother fires immediately. The others from Troop 13 pull their triggers as well. With a horrifying scream the woman falls off the truck and doesn't move anymore. Glass shatters. More shots echo through the street and hit the walls of the surrounding houses.

Suddenly there's a loud bang. Herr Gröhn must have hit a tire. Because the truck starts to skid and crashes full throttle into the next wall. Instantly SS-men reach the scene. They pull out the driver – dead.

The arrested man is pulled out of the driver's seat. The men of Troop 13 violently take out their anger on him and his two comrades. The man who was driving is already bleeding from his forehead. Like beasts unleashed, Sonne's men beat them up.

The Sonne brothers stand next to each other, surrounded by the other Gestapo-men and watch calmly, how Troop 13 starts kicking the man that is already on the ground. The other two arrested men are crawling in pain.

“To hell with you!” one of them shouts.

Gestapo-Sonne and SS-Sonne pull out their guns both at the same time. The two shots fired sound like one. Hit, the man falls over, bathed in blood. Both bullets precisely hit him right next to each other in the heart.

“Stop!” bellows SS-Sonne to his Troop 13. “Prop them up!”

He points his weapon at the two bloody men that are still alive. Two SS-men each pull one of the arrested men up and drag them over to the wall of a house, like Sonne orders them. The Sonne brothers step in front of them.

“Heil Hitler!” shouts SS-Sonne and stretches his right arm out.

The Nazis are saluting.

“Hurry up!” SS-Sonne snaps at the two arrested men. “Salute. Now! Heil Hitler! Come on!”

The arrested men stay silent. Then both Sonne-brothers shoot each one in the left shoulder.

“Heil Hitler! Now!”

Slowly the men lift their arms and mumble the Nazi salute.

“Louder! I want to hear it!” snaps Gestapo-Sonne.

Both men scream infuriated and reluctantly “Heil Hitler!”

“Down with Moscow! Now!” SS-Sonne demands.

The men hesitate too long. So he shoots each one in their right shoulder.

“Down with Moscow! Now!” yells Gestapo-Sonne and shoots the man in front of him in both knees.

The man falls and kneels moaning in his own blood on the sidewalk.

“Down with Moscow!” he screams, his face in pain.

“Good!” SS-Sonne jeers and gives him the final blow.

The man falls over like a sack of flour and lays on the ground motionless. In the warm, bright light of the June sun a red pool starts to dry up on the pavement around him.

“And now, we’ll come to you”, Gestapo-Sonne smirks meanly.

The other arrested man shouts the demanded sentence immediately.

“That’s how it goes!” SS-Sonne jeers and shots him in the abdomen.

The man is screaming in pain. SS-Sonne shoots both his kneecaps. The man falls down, whimpering in pain.

SS-Sonne takes a brief look at his brother who stays silent. When he kicks the arrested man’s side with his boots, the man roars in agony. SS-Sonne laughs, pulls the man up so he has to sit on his broken knees and puts the pistol to his temple. The man still whimpers in pain.

“Go to hell, you red pig!” snarls SS-Sonne and pulls the trigger.

The Gestapo go back to their truck and drive away. The SS loads the corpses on the truck bed; meanwhile one of them replaces the tire that was shot with a new one. Then the black uniformed men drive away as well.

“Those damn pigs!” Axel growls.

Paul looks at Liza with a serious look on his face, puts his arms around her without saying a word and presses her tightly against him. It is so nice to be close to him. She closes her eyes and starts to cry.

“It’s over”, he whispers and calmingly pets her.

More tears come to her eyes. She clutches herself around him like she was drowning and cries heavily.

“What’s up?”

Liza flinches. It’s just Rebecca, touching her arm and giving her a worried look. Liza dumbly shakes her head and wipes her tears away.

“It’s all good”, she mumbles.

Rebecca peers at her.

“Really?”

Liza nods.

“Well, if you say so...”, Rebecca sighs and turns to her work again.

Liza tries to concentrate on work as well, but she has to think about the Sonne brothers over and over again. Those two chase her in all her nightmares. Every once in a while their faces turn into the ugly face of Scharführer Baldt.

She can't shake off the memories of the time before Neuengamme, the horrors that she had to witness. Usually the Sonne brothers were involved. She remembers how Paul and her once reflected, which one of the Nazis was the worst.

"I am not sure, but I don't think it's the Führer", he stated. "More those people like the Sonne brothers. On the other hand the Führer allows people like that. Hence he obviously is the worst. He gives his people the power to decide over life and death; completely at random. And he takes care, that they can get away with it. Nobody says anything against it. Behind the curtains they watch, but most people try to flee or look away, when the Sonne brothers show up."

"Finish!" troop corporal Baldt shouts through the room.

They get up. Liza heads to the canteen again to get dinner. Lutz is there already.

"Hello Liza!" he says with Paul's smile.

"Hello!" she smiles in return.

"It's a shame that we can't even talk a little bit in quiet" he tells her sadly.

She nods.

"Yes, unfortunately that's not really an option", she regrets.

He smiles.

"At least we will see each other every morning at the headcount", he smiles at her. "A smile from you and I'm feeling great all day."

She has to restrain laughter. How nice of him. Almost just like Paul.

"You said that lovely", she smiles.

"I mean it like that", he assures.

"Exactly like that?"

"Exactly like that!"

He looks at her seriously.

"I kind of like you quite a bit."

She smiles.

"I like you, too."

She almost said: Because you look so much alike my boyfriend Paul. But that would not be very tactful and way too complicated to explain. And actually it's not really important anymore. Who knows if she will ever see Paul again? But Lutz is here, here and now...

"Don't sleep!" somebody behind them hisses.

Rushed they pick up the food for their barracks and walk off.

"Good-bye", Liza smiles.

Lutz grins.

"Tonight I will only dream of you", he promises.

She smiles and nods, quickly she walks over to No. 7. After dinner they are not allowed outside. Whoever takes care of the food that day has to get back in the barracks as soon as they returned the dirty dishes.

Liza slips under the thin woolen blanket. Rebecca takes a little more time.

“Did you meet him again?” she wants to know and lies down with her.

Liza nods.

“Nice”, Rebecca smiles. “Hey, what’s that?”

She feels around and pulls out Nathalie.

“Oh, here”, she says and hands Liza the old rag doll.

Rebecca stretches out on the pallet. She is taller than Liza, but also one year older. Liza snuggles with her friend to utilize the body heat. It gets really cold at night in the barrack.

“Tell me”, Rebecca starts whispering after a while. “Why do you still have a doll at the age of fifteen?”

Liza holds Nathalie close.

“I got her from my grandmother”, she says in a low voice close to Rebecca’s ear.

Rebecca only replies “Hmm”.

“Do you remember the election days almost ten years ago? When the Nazis got surprisingly high results?”

Rebecca again just mumbles “hmm”.

“My grandparents lived close to us in a little house on a garden plot”, Liza whispers. “My grandfather put all his heart in the little garden. It was so beautiful, especially in spring when all flowers started growing, and in the summer, when all flowers were in bloom, it was like paradise on earth.”

Liza sighs deeply and sees all the beautiful flowers before her. And in the middle is the grandfather in his green gardening apron. The grandmother is sitting at the coffee table in her white dress and is all smiles.

“And?” Rebecca pokes her gently.

Liza flinches. All of a sudden she sees the fire again, the grandparents lying in their own blood.

“During the election days”, she starts quietly, “some SA-men came.”

She wipes away tears.

“I just crawled in my hideout through the hedgerow of roses and played with Nathalie. Grandmother gave her to me the day before.”

She squeezes Nathalie tight. The memories are like ice cold hands that grab her heart.

“A cup of tea, my dear?”

Nathalie nods and graciously sits down on a mossy tree stump.

“With milk and sugar, my dear?”

“Yes, please, I’d love that”, Nathalie smiles.



"A piece of cake, my dear?"

"Yes, please."

"With whipped cream?"

"No, no. Thanks. I have to watch my figure."

"But not you! My dear!"

"You're cake is delicious, madam."

"Oh, many thanks, my dear."

"This hat suits you really well."

"Many thanks, madam. I bought it in the city. At..."

*"Clear the streets for the brown battalions..."*

"What do you want?"

Grandfather's footsteps on the gravel. Heavy boots kicking in the garden gate.

"Out of the way, Jew!"

"Pardon me!"

"Shut up, Jew!"

"How dare you smear paint on our house?"

"On your knees, Jew!"

"Herr Sturmführer, I beg you!"

"Sturmbannführer! There is nothing to beg about."

"But..."

"No if, and, or buts. Go to hell, Jew!"

A shot.

"What have you done? Isaac, can you hear me?"

"Shut up, woman!"

"You shot him. Oh, Isaac!"

"Will you be quiet now, woman?"

A cry of pain.

"Oh, shut up!"

A second shot. Silence.

"Hurry up!"

"Aaand – fireworks!"

"Burns well!"

"Carry them inside!"

"But everything is burning in there!"

"Go! Or do I have to get angry first?"

"No, no, of course not, Herr Sturmbannführer. At your command, Herr Sturmbannführer!"

A pause. And then after a while:

"Very good! And – line up! Right, two, three, four...!"

*"The flag on high! The ranks tightly closed! The SA march with quiet, steady step ..."*

Silence.

Smoke.

"Grandmother? Grandfather?"

Silence.

Flames blazing sky high.

Black smoke, that burns in the eyes.

On the gravel walk – blood.

In the open door of the little house: two bodies – covered in blood.

"Grandmother? Grandfather?"

Silence.

Tears.

"Oh my god!" Rebecca mumbles and grabs Liza's hand. "I am so very sorry for you, Liza. I feel for you."

Liza has to swallow hard and wipes away more tears. Rebecca puts her arms around her and cradles her like a little child.

"And all the while you were hiding behind that hedge!" Rebecca's voice gets teary too. Liza nods.

"I sat there, like paralyzed. When they were gone, I took Nathalie and crawled through the hedge. The entire little house was in flames. They were lying in the doorway. Grandmother's white dress was dirty and bloody..."

More tears run down Liza's face.

"Keep crying, that helps", Rebecca moans quietly and carefully strokes Liza's brown, curly hair. Then she cradles her gently while reciting the ancient, consoling words: *"Hear, O Israel! The Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One. You shall love the Lord..."*

*"... with all your Heart and with all your Soul and with all your Might"* Liza finishes and snuggles closer to Rebecca, who murmurs a few more words: *"So God speaks: I will comfort you...!"*

Liza takes a deep breath and feels, how those words actually comfort her. The horrible memories start to fade. Rebecca is right, the ancient words do help. Liza holds her friend's hand and feels how her rushed heartbeat calms down. Snuggled up against each other, they fall asleep.

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LOST YOUTH – Novel series about the time of National Socialism

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