

THE BLOOD OF JUDAS



BY W SAUTTER

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By Walt Sautter

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Smashwords Edition

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Matthew 5:3-10 - The Beatitudes

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice,
for they shall have their fill”

Chapter 1

Encounter

Elda walked down the dimly lit, narrow street through the mist laden night air. She approached the several steps leading to a basement door and slowly descended them. The only lighting was emitted from a dull red bulb above the doorway. She knocked soundly and the door cracked open. A man peered through the scant aperture straining to identify the shape before him.

“Elda, it’s you” he exclaimed and widened the opening.

“Come on in Honey” he continued as she entered.

“Hello Fritz.

Much of a crowd tonight?” she asked.

“About the usual. Pretty slow, like it’s been. People are just too afraid to come. You know, there’re not fooling around any more. A lot of our regulars have been picked up and been charged with antigovernment activities” he replied.

“Antigovernment activities?” she repeated in an inquiring voice.

“Sure! You don’t think all the stuff that’s said here goes unnoticed, do you?” he answered abruptly.

“What about you?” he continued, “Aren’t you a little nervous?”

She paused.

“Sure, but I just can’t pretend that there’s nothing wrong with what’s going on. I guess coming here is my way of protesting. It’s all I can do. It’s pretty much all anybody can do.”

“I’m not sure how long we can continue. It’s just a matter of time before they come to shut us down or worse. Most of the other clubs are gone and some of their people are gone too.

We’ll keep open as long as we can and hope for the best but to be honest, I’m not sure there is a best.

Here, let me take your coat. I’ve got your table for you as usual.”

She removed her full length wrap revealing a tall, slim figure of curvaceous beauty and followed him.

He led her down a long hallway which opened into a large, open area. Clouds of bluish smoke hovered against the low ceiling. Three dozen or so small tables each bearing a lighted candle were scattered about the room, with a stage at the far end of the chamber.

Elda glanced about as Fritz ushered her to her table near the front, right corner of the stage. She estimated, fifty people at most, all engaged in conversations at whisper level. It seemed as if everyone was nervously attempting to avoid being overheard. Their unease was further evidenced by their constant glances about the room as they spoke.

“Are you expecting anyone else this evening?” asked Fritz.

“I don’t think so” she replied as she was seated.

“Adam, take Elda’s order please” he commanded the waiter.

“Absinthe, a double” she responded.

The waiter quickly arrived back at the table bearing a goblet containing several ounces of the dark, green liquid and placed it before her. After she had taken a few sips the red velvet stage curtains opened and the show began.

A trio, seated at the left side of stage began to play a slow, rhythmic, sensual song.

Several seconds later, entering from the right came a tall, slim blonde attired in a black sequined dress and donning a scarlet boa. She began to sing in a high, dulcet voice. She, an

obvious transvestite, moved slowly back and forth across the floor handling the microphone as if a phallus.

As her song ended, applause rose from the audience and the curtain closed only to reopen again moments later. At center stage stood a short, mustachioed, stocky man of apparent Jewish decent and he began his act.

“Hitler visits a lunatic asylum. The patients give the Hitler salute. As he passes down the line he comes across a man who isn’t saluting.

‘Why aren’t you saluting like the others?’ Hitler barks.

Mein Führer, I’m the nurse, comes the answer. ‘I’m not crazy!’ ”

Laughter erupted and he continued.

“Two men meet. ‘Nice to see you’re free again. How was the concentration camp?’

‘Great! Breakfast in bed, a choice of coffee or chocolate, and for lunch we got soup, meat and dessert. And we played games in the afternoon before getting coffee and cakes. Then a little snooze and we watched movies after dinner.’

The man was astonished: ‘That’s great! I recently spoke to Meyer, who was also locked up there. He told me a different story.’

The other man nods gravely and says: ‘Yes, well that’s why they’ve picked him up again.’ ”

“The German army Headquarters receives news that Mussolini’s Italy has joined the war. ‘We’ll have to put up ten divisions to counter him!’ says one general.

‘No, he’s on our side,’ says another.

‘Oh, in that case we’ll need twenty divisions.’ ”

Again, the crowd laughed.

“Two Jews are about to be shot. Suddenly the order comes to hang them instead. One says to the other ‘You see, good news, they’re running out of bullets.’ ”

The crowd once again laughed but this time in a very muffled tone.

The show continued and Elda continued to sip her drink.

Fritz approached her table.

“Elda, do you see the man sitting over there?” and he faintly nodded over his shoulder.

“The one wearing the dark jacket, smoking a cigarette, he said he would like to meet you. Shall I tell him to come to your table?” he asked.

Elda looked in the direction to which Fritz had nodded.

His table was about twenty feet away from her and she could see him clearly through the hazy atmosphere. He appeared to be in his mid thirties or so, with dark curly hair and a neatly trimmed mustache. He was well dressed and bore an elegant air. He looked straight at her with his eyes flashing and took a long drag on his cigarette as she glanced in his direction.

She paused and then spoke.

“Sure, Fritz – ask him to come over” she replied.

With that Fritz walked over to the man and whispered to him. He immediately reached into his pocket, withdrew some money, handed to Fritz and rose from his chair.

He was about six feet tall and slim and walked with a confident stride towards her.

“Good evening.

Thank you for allowing me to sit with you. My name is Anton Brusksa and you are Elda, Fritz has told me.”

Elda extended her hand to him.

“Bruska, that’s a Russian name?” she queried.

“Yes it is. I’m originally from Russia but I have been in Berlin for some time now” he replied.

“And you?” he continued, “I’m sure you are German, am I right?” he asked.

“Yes, I was born here. My father owns a small shop about ten blocks from here” she answered.

“And what brings you to the Katacombe?” he asked.

“I enjoy the shows. The entertainment and a few drinks and the real world disappears for a few hours.

You know, things are not the best here in Berlin and I’m not so sure that they will get any better, most likely it will get worse” she answered.

“I’m quite sure you’re right” he replied.

“Ever since the appointment of Heir Hilter as Chancellor and the Reichstag fire, it has not been good. You know the government has accused the Communists and has arrested four of them. President Von Hindenberg has given emergency powers to Heir Hilter and his powers are now complete. The Nazi Party now controls the parliament and they grant his every wish.

All the Communists have been rounded up. Who will be next after that, nobody knows but I'd bet the Jews are next. What do you think?" he continued.

"Yes – he has never attempted to disguise his for hatred of us" she answered in a somber voice.

"So you're Jewish?" he asked.

"Well, my mother was and according to the law, that means that I am too" she replied.

"Have you been threatened by the authorities?"

"No, but I know some who have. There is talk of a boycott of Jewish businesses to be instigated by Nazis next month. My father's store will certainly be effected" she said.

"I thought you said that your mother was Jewish. Is your father too?"

"No, but having a Jewish wife and a child by her surely puts him in the Nazi's crosshairs just as if he were a Jew himself."

There was a brief silence and then he spoke.

"This is an awful way to start a conversation with someone I've just met. Let's talk about something more pleasant. Tell me about yourself" he said attempting to brighten the mood.

"Well, you know my name is Elda, Elda Draken. I've lived here in Berlin all my life. I attended university and graduated five years ago. I studied art. It was one of the few programs that accepted women at university.

I now work at the museum but I am sure that my job there will not be much longer. The new government frowns on working women, especially Jewish working women. I'm quite positive that I will be fired soon to make way for a man and being considered Jewish makes it a certainty."

"What will you do then?"

"I'll work in my father's shop as long as it stays open" she answered.

"You said your mother was Jewish. What happened to her?" he inquired.

"She died in the influenza epidemic when I was a child."

"Yes I remember, the epidemic of 1918. People died by the thousands. Several of my friends died during the contagion" he replied.

She paused and looked at him quizzically.

"Your childhood friends?" she replied.

"Oh, yes, childhood friends" he repeated.

“So you are Russian?” she asked.

“Yes, my family home is in Moscow. My father lived there for generations.”

He stopped and then interjected.

“My father’s family that is.”

“And where do you live now?” she asked.

He again hesitated.

“My livelihood requires me to travel frequently. I rarely go back to Moscow but I guess you could call it my home” he answered.

“And what is your livelihood?” she continued.

“I am a businessman.”

“What kind of business?”

“I deal in wholesale meats” he answered in a rather unconvincing tone.

“And your family?” she questioned.

“My father and mother both died during the Revolution” he replied.

“And your brothers and sisters?”

“I have none. They too perished in the Revolution.”

“I guess I shouldn’t asked. I’m sure my questions opened old wounds.

I’m sorry” she replied and reached over and grasped his hand in sympathy.

Upon touching him, “Your hand is cold”, she said.

He looked into her eyes.

“Cold hands, warm heart they say” he replied.

She smiled and the conversation continued.

The curtain closed on the final act, applause rang from the crowd and the evening ended.

“May I escort you home?” he asked as they rose to leave.

“Yes, I would find that quite nice” she replied.

They left the Katakome together and he hailed a cab.

“May I see you again?” he asked as the driver pulled to the curb by her house.

She hesitated.

“Maybe we’ll meet at the club again. I certainly hope so. I go there quite frequently, most often two or three times weekly.”

“How about this Friday night? Will you be there then?” he replied.

She paused and then answered.

“Yes, Friday for sure.”

Chapter 2

Horror and Revelation

Elda arrived at the Katakome on Friday night as promised. She was seated at her usual table by Fritz. An hour passed and she fidgeted uneasily as she waited with no sign of Anton.

Then, she finally espied him, walking through the bluish, smoky haze, towards her.

“I’m sorry I’m a bit late but I had an urgent business meeting to attend to” he apologized.

“That’s alright. I’ve been enjoying the show” she replied pretending to be unconcerned by his lateness.

The evening wore on and as they spoke the warmth between them grew.

Then, abruptly the trio stopped playing at mid song. The house lights rose and three men emerged from the club entrance into the room.

Each wore the black uniform of the Schutzstaffel , complete with SS armbands and lightning bolts. The one with two stripes on his armband stepped forward and spoke in a loud commanding voice.

“As of this moment, this club is officially closed due to its antigovernment activities. Everyone will leave now and present identification at the door.”

With that, the two that accompanied him moved to the other exits and stood before them.

Everyone rose in stunned silence and began to file towards the main entrance in a trance-like state. Elda and Anton queued up with the rest. The line moved ever so slowly. When they finally arrived at the exit the reason for its slow movement became obvious.

At the doorway an SS officer sat behind a makeshift table, laboriously copying the details of each identification that was presented.

Elda handed over her papers..

“I’m sure that we will meet again, Fraulein Elda” said the man in a sarcastic, threatening voice as he handed her papers back to her.

She said nothing and left the building and waited outside for Anton to be processed.

“What now?” she asked as they started to walk.

“I don’t know but I’m sure that it won’t be good” he replied.

“What should we do?”

“I don’t think there’s anything we can do, except wait” said Anton.

“I’ll come and see you here tomorrow evening. Will your father mind?” he said as they approached her house.

“No, I’m sure he won’t. I’ll see you tomorrow then” and she nervously unlocked the door and went inside.

The very next evening Anton arrived at Elda’s house. He walked up the five, stone steps to the front door of the brownstone building and knocked.

No answer. He knocked again. No answer. He knocked again and this time the door moved slightly ajar. It was unlocked!

He cautiously pushed it open wider and peered inside.

Then he called “Elda, are you there?”

No answer.

“Elda, are you here?” he again called.

No answer.

He quickly scanned the adjacent buildings before entering. He could see two of the windows in the building across the street with the curtains cracked aside and eyes staring out at him. He stared back at each and the openings quickly closed in rapid succession.

He entered the house and walked down the long hall towards the doorway at the far end continually calling out but this time in a low voice. Still no response.

Everything was undisturbed but vacant. He left, perplexed but suspecting the worst.

He walked down the stairs to the sidewalk. An old man with a cane approached him as he stood pondering about what had just happened.

“Are you looking for Heir Dranken?” asked the old man.

“Yes and Elda” replied Anton.

“You won’t find them here. Not any more” came the reply.

“The SS came here early this morning and took both of them.”

“Took them where?” he exclaimed.

“I don’t know. A lot of people have been taken away lately and I don’t think anybody knows for sure where” the man answered.

“If I were you I wouldn’t be eager to find out where, because you’ll probably wind up in the same place and from what I’ve heard, it isn’t a good place” he continued.

“What have you heard?” Anton asked.

“I’m not going to say. If I do, I might be next”, came the reply.

Anton could feel the fear in the man’s voice but he had to know. He reached out with one hand, grabbed the old man by the front of his coat, lifted him from the ground and dragged him into the alley between the buildings.

“Tell me what you know” he commanded, his eyes flashing with a penetrating glow.

“All I know is that a friend of mine used to work for the railroad on the night crew. He retired a year or so ago but he always goes down to the yard every evening after supper to talk with his old pals. Now, he tells me, as of late, all the workers are herded out of the yard two or three times every night by the SS.

They bring in a whole bunch of people and load them onto the boxcars and lock the doors and the train leaves. Then they let the workers back in. I guess they don’t want anybody to see what they’re doing.

Where they go, he doesn’t know and neither do I. That’s all I know, honest mister.”

“If this is all done in secret how does your friend know all this?”

“One of the train engineers is a pal of his. They’ve got to keep the engineer otherwise there would be no one to drive the train” answered the man in a stammer.

“Well didn’t your engineer friend tell you where he took them?”

“No, he said two SS man rode in the cab with him and they made him stop the train in the woods a couple of hundred kilometers from here. They unloaded everybody there, men, women and children. He didn’t really know where it was. It was in the middle of nowhere.”

“When did he say they load these people onto the train?” Anton asked.

“Like I said two or three times a night” the man stammered.

Anton arrived at the railroad yard. He took up a hidden position, in the shadows, where he could keep a night vigil. He waited. Police vans pulled up periodically and discharged their passengers who were prodded through the doorway of the large station house by several SS troopers. After several dozen vans had been unloaded, those in the station house were marched to

the waiting box cars into which they were packed. Those who were too feeble or too young were lifted by the others and shoved into the car at the shouted commands of the guards. The door was slammed shut and locked.

Anton strained to see if Elda was anywhere amongst the herded masses. He scanned every face with an uncanny vision as they were clustered towards the waiting train.

The night wore on and two train loads had gone on their way. Vans continued to pull up and unload. A third train would be filled before dawn, of that he felt sure.

A whistle with its long, low tone, sounded in the distance and within minutes the final train arrived. The boxcar doors were flung open by the guards and its passengers began to file from the stationhouse.

Once again, Anton examined each face as it passed by his gaze.

There she was!

He quickly left his hiding place and stealthily approached to the doorway of the stationhouse. He paused behind the attending guard's back and waited.

A call came from the SS guard at the door of the boxcar to hold up the line for a moment. Anton then slipped by the distracted guard and into the line of frightened passengers.

After a moment's pause, the line again began to move with Anton in it. When he reached the open boxcar door, he like the others before him, was crammed through its entrance into a sea of humanity. All stood shoulder to shoulder with not so much as a hair's breath between them. Most all were crying, cursing or praying. Many of the old people and child were all but crushed by the compression.

He stood on tiptoe and peered over the throng, searching for Elda.

There she was in the far corner of the car. He immediately began to push and shove his way towards her. As he arrived at her side, the car box closed with a thunderous crash and everything became pitch black. For several seconds, no one in the human herd made a sound and then suddenly, the car lurched forward and the fateful journey began.

"Elda" he whispered in the darken, "It's me, Anton."

There was no immediate response. He knew it was she in spite of the darkness. He could see her clearly and she made no reply. She merely stood motionless and mute staring into the blackness.

"Elda" he again whispered a bit more loudly.

This time she turned towards the sound of his voice.

“Anton, it really is you” she replied in bewilderment.

“When I first heard your voice I thought it was an hallucination. How could it be you?”

“It is me” he replied, “It is me and I’ll be here for you come what may” and he reached out and held her against himself.

She pressed her head closely to his chest attempting to saturate herself with his comforting embrace. As she lay in his arms his apparent tranquility made her feel more secure than before. He held her tightly with a confident grasp. Not so much as the slightest quiver or any pounding of his heart divulged any fear to her.

The train continued throughout the rest of the night and into the dawn well passed the two hundred kilometer mark described by the old man. Tiny shafts of light streamed through the cracks in the walls providing a dim illumination. Hours passed on the seemingly unending journey. The foul odor of urine drifted through the air as people could no longer restrain themselves.

An old woman sandwiched next to Anton pressed against him as she collapsed but was unable to fall due to the wedge of the crowd.

The noisy banter of the passengers had long since subsided and an eerie silence prevailed only occasionally broken by moans and whimpers.

At long last the train came to a halt. The silence continued and even the sporadic outcries ceased. The only sounds heard by the passengers were the furious pounding of their own hearts as they waited.

Then, the sound of the car doors being unchained, one after another, filled the air.

Soon, Elda and Anton’s car door was flung open allowing a blinding light, reflected from the glistening snowfall, to enter.

“Out! Get out!” came the shouted command of the SS man as he pulled the weak through the doorway. Several landed prone on the concrete platform while some of the others stepped on them in their eagerness to exit the torment of the boxcar.

Elda and Anton moved with the thrust of the crowd into the line which was marched down an icy path leading towards a large array of buildings in the distance. Many of the marchers, having been wrested from their home in haste, wore no winter clothing. Elda was one of them, clad only in a light dress. She began to shiver violently in the cold, damp breeze that flowed over the frozen earth.

Anton removed his coat and placed it around her and her quivering lessened.

She reached over and grasped his arm to express her gratitude. He felt as cold as the snow itself.

“Let me tear out the lining and we can share it” she said pointing to the coat.

He looked at her and smiled.

“No need. I’m not the least bit cold. Just make sure that you are warm enough” he replied.

They continued on, she wrapped in the coat and he seemingly unfazed by the biting cold. After several hundred yards, the images of gray, tattered buildings encircled by a tall metal fence, came into clear view. Rows of windowless barracks ran side by side down the muddy road between them. The air was laden with the repulsive aroma of sewerage, smoke and stench, all in a vile mix. It filled the nostrils and sickened the stomach.

A mud splattered jeep roared down the road and stopped by the SS man leading the march. The passenger in the jeep shouted an order to him and the line was separated into men, women and children. Each was then hustled to a different set of barracks.

Anton gazed back over his shoulder, helplessly watching Elda and the other women being herded away as he and the men were spurred in the opposite direction.

He and thirty others entered the assigned quarters. It was a long, dark, hall-like building with no windows and but two dimly glowing light bulbs hanging from rafters. Strewn over the floor were squalid, canvas sacks stuffed with rags and hay. Foul odors oozed from every crack and crevice of every part of the room. The smells hung in the air, seemingly unmoved by the stiff drafts that raced through the dismal chamber.

“This is home sweet home” came the sarcastic shout of the trooper who had led them there.

“I’ll be back to give your instructions” and he slammed and chained the door behind him as he left.

Each man moved to claim one of the wretched cots and fell, exhausted onto its filthy surface. Anton walked to the rear corner and sat, propping himself against the wall.

An hour passed and rattling of the chain being loosened sounded through the door. It opened and a voice echoed.

“AufstehenBeeilen Sie Abschaum.

(Get up! Hurry you scum!)”

Everyone rose, except two, near comatose old men, , who remained huddled in fetal positions. The others, including Anton, immediately arose and lined up in front of the barracks. Two of the troopers entered the building and unsuccessfully prodded the prone men, with their rifle barrels. Failing to be aroused, they were dragged from the building and thrown into the snow along side the entrance.

The others were marched off, single file towards the forest at the rear of the camp.

When they arrived at their destination, each was given a tool and the work began with several guards surrounding them, each brandishing a readied machine gun. The work of clearing the forest was backbreaking and unceasing. It continued until nightfall.

Twice during the day, one of the workers fell in exhaustion. Each time, the man was kicked and beaten. When one was finally unable to continue his work, he was dragged into the woods by two of the SS men and the sound of a gun shot resounded from direction in which he had been taken. Shortly after the shot was heard, the guards returned unaccompanied and resumed their sinister supervision.

As darkness spread over the area, the laborers were filed back to the barrack where several small loaves of stale, moldy bread and a large vat of cold liquid containing floating potato peels were waiting. Again, the door was chained as many fell with almost lifeless fatigue onto their filthy bedding. Most huddled around the repugnant meal voraciously dipping their bread scraps into the coarse soup as they ate.

Anton retired to his usual spot at the rear of the room against the far wall and sat. He made no effort to enter the congregation of the ravenous. He was hungry but his hunger was not for that bit of swill. He sat stone still, his thoughts of Elda racing through his mind. Even the tortures of the day’s experiences could not diminish his thoughts of her.

Within minutes of consuming the loathsome meal, the room fell silent. The only sound was that of the scurrying of rats, vainly seeking the tiniest discarded crumb of nourishment.

Anton gazed about the room through the blackness searching for those who appeared to be mortally weakened. He spied several teetering at the edge of death. He was sure that none would survive the next day’s toil.

He crawled on all fours over to the weakest, carefully pulled his head aside, sunk his teeth firmly into the man's neck and drained what little life he had left from him. Once satisfied he left the lifeless body and crawled back to the corner to resume his thoughts.

For a brief moment, a pang of remorse flashed within him. He instantaneously dismissed it. His act had not only satiated his hunger, it had saved the man from the horrors of the death that surely awaited him in the morning. In spite of its monstrosity, his act was above all, an act of kindness, not depravity, he thought. Throughout his macabre existence, he had always carefully selected those who would surely welcome death. He was sure to never extinguish any honest, vital being, no matter how overwhelming his urges might be. Anton felt himself to be as moral as one of his kind could be. He knew that his initiation into this ghastly reality had arisen from an unwitting act of benevolence and with that thought he found complete release from self-reproach.

As he sat, he felt waves of strength erupt within him. After a time, he stood and walked to the doorway and paused before it. He breathed deeply and stepped effortlessly through the chained door out into the night air. He stopped and drew the frigid atmosphere into to his nostrils seeking her scent. Once sensed, he turned and surged towards her building at the far end of the camp. He approached the building and once again stood silently before its chained entrance. As before he breathed deeply and stepped into the building.

The housing was similar to his in every respect, windowless, cold and squalid. The acrid odors of sweat, urine and excrement filled the air.

He saw her, there she was, curled tightly, lying on the floor at the back of the room. He approached, crawled next to her in the darkness, grasped her shoulder and gentled awakened her.

She opened her eyes and struggled to sit up, straining to see through the blackness.

"Edla, it is Anton" he whispered.

The sound of his voice sent an instantaneous rush of exhilaration through her.

"This must be a dream, a hallucination, a prelude to madness" she thought. She remained silent.

"Elda, it's Anton" again came from the darkness.

She reached feebly in the direction of the voice and touched him.

"Anton, it is you!" she then answered in an astonished tone.

"You are here! It is really you! How is this possible?"

“You are so weak, barely alive” he answered.

“I’ve had nothing to eat since we were arrested” came her reply with an intermittent, deep cough.

“You are ill?” he asked in a raised voice.

“Yes, I think you are right.”

“Speak softly so as not to awaken anyone or alert the guards” she whispered fearfully.

“Fear not.

In the hours of the night, only you can hear my voice. Only you can feel my presence. For others I appear as simply shadows of the dark unless I will to make myself known. All these powers flow freely as dusk arrives.

When the sun rises, my powers diminish and I am revealed as all other men. Until that time my appearance remains hidden at my command.”

Then he continued.

“Elda, I can save you but the decision will be yours. It will be one for which there will be no retreat. It will be a decision for all eternity. Regret will never be an option for you, only acceptance.”

Anton knew full well that he could easily force his will upon her and he knew he would if she were to refuse him. It would be his only choice. His love for her would never allow him to let her just die in this squalor and leave him forever. He also knew that forcing her against her will, could easily scar the timeless relationship with her that he sought.

“What decision?” she asked.

“Hold my hand” he replied.

She did.

“Touch my face.”

She placed her hand on his cheek.

“Press your ear to my chest.”

Again, she complied.

She drew away and spoke.

“Your hands are as cold as the snow as is your cheek and your heart is silent” she said with an air of bewilderment.

“Yes” he replied.

“How can this be?”

“I am one of those of whom you have heard much and know little. You like most, have refused to believe I am sure” he answered slowly.

“I am a phantasm perpetually existing on the precipice between life and death. I need no earthly nourishment, save one. I experience no torment, no illness, no barriers to my wanderings and no pain of death.

The only suffering that I endure is the thought of your loss and if you will come with me, that suffering will then also be relieved.

Let me share my gifts with you so we may leave this wretched place together.”

“I don’t understand Anton. I trust you but I don’t understand. How could this all happen?” came her uncertain reply.

There was a long pause and then he began.

“I am Russian, that you know. I was born into my first life, in Moscow in 1890. My father was a butcher with a small shop in the city until the great famine of 1892 caused him to close his business. There was no food to be sold and thousands died.

We too, were cast into poverty and after several years my mother and father both perished from malnutrition and disease. Their sacrifices allowed me to survive and after their deaths I was taken to an orphanage at the outskirts of the city. The headmaster was a sadistic priest who enjoyed the company of young boys and was particularly fond of me and so I survived too, while many others did not. It was a horrible existence but none the less an existence.

I lived there until I was fifteen. Then, I decided that I could no longer live in the abusive clutches of the headmaster. The famine had subsided and I felt that I could endure on my own.

How? I was unsure but I was sure that I had to free myself. I can still remember as if it were yesterday, I was packing the few possessions that I owned into a cloth sack when he entered.

‘Anton, where do you think you are going?’ he shouted sternly.

I didn’t reply.

‘I said where are you going?’ he again shouted and once again I didn’t reply.

'You're going nowhere' and with that he removed his gold watch from his pocket and placed it on the cot next to my sack.

'So you are stealing my watch and that is why you are leaving. Let me call Borya. I am sure that he can handle this' and he turned towards the doorway.

Borya was the headmaster's brutal taskmaster well known for his violence assaults on those committing even the slightest infractions. I knew of several that had returned from his punishment chamber in almost unrecognizable condition.

As he turned away from me I instinctively threw my arm around his throat and pulled him backwards towards the floor. His head struck with a solid thud and he went limp. He appeared lifeless. I pressed my ear against his chest and heard nothing.

I pulled the ragged sheet from the cot, wrapped his motionless body in it and slid him under an adjacent bed.

It was a cold spring day when I left. Life was hard on the streets of the city. Despite the hardship, I was forever free of the old man and his sordid ways and that solace sustained me. I took refuge in abandoned buildings, under bridges and in any shelter that could be found. Begging and stealing became a way of life, the only way of life available.

After several years of wandering, I was befriended by vagabond monk, Grigori, who invited me to stay with him in his shabby apartment. Recalling my experiences at the orphanage, I was immediately suspicious of his intentions but I soon discovered my fears to be unfounded. Although kindly towards me, I saw his ways as strange.

He almost never left the apartment in the daylight. When he did he returned quickly in a state of great weakness and fatigue. He frequently visited a Doctor Ivanovicha, who he said had been a protégé of the great neuroscientist Doctor Santiago Ramon y Cajal in Madrid but he never disclosed the nature of his illness to me.

I can't remember ever seeing him eat, yet he always appeared fully nourished and healthy in spite of his constant visits to the doctor. He had a loathing fear of physical contact and recoiled at the mere attempt at a handshake. His sleep was

silent and trance like and entered into most often during daylight hours. I never noticed any rise and fall of his chest as he slept only stillness.

Despite all of these oddities, he treated me well. He provided a warm place for me to stay and gave me money each day to buy food and my necessitates of life and asked for nothing but friendship in return.

One evening, an elated Grigori returned home claiming that his treatments by Doctor Ivanovicha had finally succeeded in alleviating some of the symptoms of his mysterious disease. He remained awake throughout the entire night eagerly awaiting the sunrise. As the light rays spread over the landscape, he tore open the door and stepped into their brilliance. He basked there for several moments, with eyes closed and arms outstretched.

Then, he turned and reentered the apartment bearing a broad grin the likes of which I had never seen of him before.

'It is done' he announced.

'My great friend Ivanovicha has, after centuries of darkness, brought me back into the light of the world. The gift I have promised him will surely be granted this very day' and with that he left the apartment without further explanation.

The very next day, Grigori again arose early and left the apartment.

Filled with curiosity, I too arose immediately after his departure and followed him down the winding streets and alleys. He arrived at a large house at the center of the city. The door was answered by a servant who admitted him without hesitation.

When he arrived home that evening his excitement was obvious.

'We will soon be packing our bags my young friend' he announced.

My immediate fear that we were being evicted, was allayed by the tone in his voice.

'Packing for where?' I asked anxiously.

He hesitated and then replied with a wide, tooth bearing smile,

'The Palace of the Tsar.

Did you hear me?

The Palace of the Tsar' he repeated.

I thought surely he had gone insane. Most likely the clandestine treatments that he had received from Doctor Ivanovicha had driven him mad. What other explanation could there be for his maniacal ranting?

'When will we go?' I replied disguising my thoughts of his apparent madness.

'Tomorrow!' he answered gleefully.

'And what will we do there?' I continued, curiously.

'You and I will save the young Prince and claim the great favor of the Tsar and the Tsarina' he replied with sudden solemnity.

All were aware of the Prince's malady. It burdened all of Russia. The slightest laceration or bruise yielded nearly unstoppable bleeding. The disease had driven the Tsarina to near hysteria. She had appealed far and wide seeking anyone who might cure his affliction. All had failed and the Prince continued to live at the edge, with the threat of death occurring from the slightest injury.

Grigori had been a great friend and benefactor and I hesitated to question the absurdity of his answer lest I offend him.

'And what part must I play in his cure?' I asked.

With that came a flood of astonishing answers, each one more unbelievable than the previous.

'I was summoned to Moscow by Anna Vyrubov as a great friend of the Tsarina' he began.

'All the men of medicine and healers have tried to save the young Prince from his tortures and none have succeeded. Fortune and power awaits those who succeed and you and I will.

I have already been rewarded greatly by the Tsar for the mere willingness of my efforts. He has allowed me to consult with his friend and physician, Doctor Ivanovicha, and paid him handsomely so that he might seek to remedy the unending plague which I have endured.'

'And what affliction might that be?' I replied.

'The weakness and certain demise impressed upon me by the rays of the rising sun' he answered.

'And Doctor Ivanovicha mended this infirmity?' I asked.

'With knowledge gained from his great mentor, Doctor Santiago Ramon y Cajal, he has succeeded in ameliorating the condition. Now only modest weakness prevails in the daylight hours, not the complete ebb of strength and approach of death that formerly persisted ' he hesitated.

'I am not as I appear to be.

Place your hand in mine" he commanded.

I reached and grasped him. I touched him for the first time.

'What do you feel?' he asked.

'Coldness!' I answered.

'The coldness of death?' he replied.

'Yes' I answered shocked by his question.

He opened his shirt and bade me place my palm on his chest.

'What do you feel?' he again asked.

'Nothing! Again coldness' I answered in an awestruck, trance-like voice.

'No beat of life?' he continued.

'None!' I replied.

'I am dead but I am not dead. I am alive but I am not alive, I exist. Thus I have been for many centuries and thus I will be for many more centuries. I am the second generation of the undead who have risen in glory with the sanction of the Divine.

I walk with the blood of Judas Iscariot in my veins. It was he that was given the true blood of the Divine in the cup from which he drank at the last repast while the others drank but wine.

It was the reward given by the Savior for his faithfulness, love and willing obedience. It was he Judas, who was asked by the Christ to deliver him to the Romans so he could become the sacrifice for all mankind. In doing, he selflessly surrendered his name to infamy for all eternity by carrying out the will of the Savior.

It was he, Judas who was my resurrector and granted me the gift of his resurrector, the first risen one.'

'But why you?' I asked.

'I had saved many during the Great Plaque by healing powers given to me by the Lord. How those were obtained and how they acted I know not, but act they did and I was able to spare many.

My reputation as a great healer spread and eventually reached the ears of the king. When his daughter took ill he summoned me to administer to her. My efforts failed and she died. I believe that king's soul was so stained by his sinister acts that my powers were made void.

I was about to be executed for my failure. As I was lying in my cell awaiting my certain end Judas appeared and saved me by granting me this life and these powers which I now possess.'

'And if he was granted eternal existence, where is he now?' I inquired incredulously.

'I continue by the life fluid of those who are living. My being is sustained not by consuming any of a fully vital nature but instead by those who seek relief of life's sufferings or those of evil purpose. I carry only mercy or revenge in my still heart when I seek nourishment.

He too, was of like kind. He sought only those of the nature which I have described. His searches for beings of this circumstance, often led him to the battle fields of old, where the dying wounded cried out for a hastened end. One such of these places was that of the conflict of Sultan Mehmed II and the Prince of Wallachia, Vlad Tepes on the battlefields of Romania. Upon his capture by the forces of the Prince just at the hour of sunrise, he was impaled by a wooden stake as were the others. Little did his capturers know that this would be the only means by which his essence would end. And so he did and he perished.'

He paused with eyes cast downward.

'This now is my cursed blessing' he continued.

'And what purpose will I serve?' I again asked, increasingly fearful as to what he might say.

'When first Anna Vyubovas summoned me I was unsure as to whether I might be able to serve the needs of the young Prince. I told her that to be sure I required a bandage from his wounds. Upon receiving it, its scent announced the rare

nature of his vital fluid. It was then for me to find someone of a similar nature. After a long, fruitless search I finally found someone of like nature.

It is you!

The character of your blood was fully described to me when we first met by the aroma of your very breath. It was you whom I sought and it is you whom I have found! We together will save the young man and we together will incur the eternal gratitude and reward of the Tsar.'

'And how will this be done?' I asked.

'Your blood and mine must intermingle that I might possess the necessity to administer to the boy. When that has been accomplished a slight infusion of our serum from my veins into his will diminish the ravages of his affliction until the next onslaught.

My prayers to Saint Judas, who has been already ascended to our divine resurrector, have been answered with these instructions. I am therefore assured that by this implementation, the child will be saved.'

And so it began. I willingly participated, unaware that Grigori had not told me completely of the consequences of my cooperation. Our first amalgamation occurred that evening.

The lamp light flickered casting eerie, elongated shadows against the walls of the room as he and I sat at the table with arms outstretched upon it. He held the knife to his wrist and with a rapid slice opened his vein. He showed no wince of pain or recoil. His heavy fluid oozed forth, flowing down over his palm.

Then he moved the knife to my arm. I instinctively felt the urge to draw back but instead held myself still. He sliced it and my blood pulsed forth. Immediately, he grasped my arm and pressed it tightly next to his. As the two liquids mixed his eyes rolled back and his head fell forward all the while keeping our arms in vise like contact. After several minutes, he regained consciousness and it was done.

The very next day, he and I moved into the palace. From that time on, he attended the boy regularly and achieved the greatest confidence and gratitude of the royal family. The child's health improved exceedingly.

As for me, my vigor began to change. I first noticed it shortly after my conjunction with Grigori. I began to feel lethargic during the daylight hours and overwhelmingly robust throughout the night. My appetite waned and my meals were sparse. Soon all desire for normal sustenance was lost.

My interest in the slightest sight of blood, whether human or animal, was peaked. I felt a compulsion to take daily trips to the local slaughter houses so as to observe the butchering of the animals. The sights, sounds and smells I found to become more and more delightful. I soon began a regular collection of the blood of the slain animals claiming that I was using it as garden fertilizer. In reality it had become my sole source of subsistence.

My unnatural urges continued to rise and I confronted Grigori. It was only then that I learned of my unalterable fate.

I too was, by my cooperation with him, was becoming such as he, existing on the precipice between life and death from that time forward. After time, my desire for human blood rose and my cravings could no longer be satisfied by that of animals.

It was then that he told to me the nature of the victims whom I should seek to satiate my thirst.

'Those suffering the torments of extremely poor health, longing for death are acceptable. Persons of a suicidal character who actually seek death will also be desired. The consumption of these shall be of a gentle, compassionate nature.

Also available to you are the malevolent evil doers, those who have proved their ways by malicious and diabolical acts. For them, the consumption shall be of the most violent and sadistic manner possible and the nourishment most invigorating.

This is the code by which you shall exist for all of eternity.

Under no conditions shall you stray from these commandments else you shall cease to exist. Damnation and its tortures will be yours to endure forever.'

Thus I was entered into the existence I now claim.

As the young Prince's condition bettered under Grigori's care, resentment and envy of those at the palace rose. Constant accusations of witchcraft, sorcery and nefarious activities of all sorts continually flowed from the lips of all.

The Tsar and Tsarina cared little about the suggested source of Grigori's palliatives. Only the extraordinary results were of their concern and they continued to lavish praise and benefits upon him.

As time went on and he proceeded to work his magic, resentment grew. Finally, it rose to a level at which the wishes of the royal family and the health of the prince were no longer considered and a small group of covetous schemers decided to act. That decision portended the demise of Grigori.

Late one evening, he was invited to meet with the conspirators under the guise of social congeniality. Little did he know the real intent was his murder. Unknowing of Grigori's true breed, the attempt was to poison him using wine adulterated with arsenic. To their surprise, the effort failed, in spite of his consumption of huge quantities of the lethal mixture.

Upon seeing his being unaffected, they resorted to shooting him. He fell into the snow at the doorway of the building as he attempted escape. Believing him to be dead they began dragging him towards the river for the final disposal.

Suddenly, he revived from the stunning impact of the bullets which had temporarily stilled him and began to struggle with his overwhelming strength. Again surprised, his assailants continued their vain attempts to subdue him. One grabbed an axe which they had brought to open a hole in the ice. Upon swinging it at him, the handle broke on impact. Its splintered end was then plunged into Grigori's chest thus impaling him. They had unwittingly and with great luck sealed his fate. His death was immediate and his body was cast into the icy waters of the Moskva River.

Without the healing acts of Grigori, the young boy again became ill. The royal family fell back into chaotic depression and I left the city. I traveled day and night. Luckily, I inherited from Grigori the tolerance of light he had acquired from Doctor Ivanovicha. The purpose of my travel was to find a nourishment of which I could readily partake.

To continuously seek the ill or the evil to satisfy my needs required great effort. Every day necessitated a frenzied search. Being new to this way of existence and without the counsel of Grigori, made the task next to impossible. Grigori, over the centuries had developed his senses so that he could immediately identify those

whom he might consume. I knew I must find a way to survive until I, too, could perfect my skills.

And so it was that I decided to travel to Prussia where the Great War had just begun. I was there to search for those mortally wounded souls strewn about the battle field just as Judas had done in Romania.

I portrayed myself as a medic and combed the battle field each evening. Upon finding those whom I sought, I consumed them thereby easing their passing and filling my vital need.

When the war ended, my abilities had been honed to a keen edge and my lust for the blood of vengeance rather than the blood of mercy, grew within me. I came to Germany knowing that my search for malevolent victims would easily be accomplished. The rise of the National Socialist Party would provide me with a lengthy menu. So it was that I arrived in Berlin and began my indulgence.

Several vain attempts at devouring SS thugs failed. It was as if each was enveloped in an invisible, protective shield sheltered from my advances. Each time I was thwarted and each time I was made to seek out nourishment amongst the weak and suffering. After about the fourth such incident, I began to recall the lessons of Grigori. He had told me of one great obstacle that could be encountered when preying on the purveyors of evil and their confederates.

The power to repel my quest for vengeance is granted to the one who touches the Spear of Destiny, that instrument which pierced the side of the Christ as he died on the cross. The power it bestows upon its possessor is superior.

If held over ones heart at the midnight hour and the sacred words of protection are recited threefold, it ensures safety and victory for he who then harbors it and for all those who perform this same rite in his presence. The true Spear was obtained by the Fuhrer from the Imperial Treasury at Vienna by surreptitious means and replaced with a forgery before he rose to power. The secrecy of its theft prevented the Austrians from realizing his bellicose intent. Had they discovered its loss, they surely would have been alarmed and prepared for attack. Without knowledge of its disappearance, they remained ill prepared and easy prey.

It is now in the custody of the Fuhrer and it endows him with authority over me and all others who oppose him.”

He paused and continued.

“Elda, let me save you from the certain death that awaits. Join with me in the gift of eternal life and the search for the way to destroy this evil that has enveloped the land.

All I need is your consent to make it so” he whispered as he gently brushed her hair from her forehead.

She hesitated and then replied.

“I trust you Anton and I believe your words, but you are giving me a choice between the certainty of death and the certainty of a gray, eternal life, living in the shadows and darkness. I am not sure if an existence filled with encounters of those racked with terminal torments and those of abhorrent evil is a price worth paying for eluding mortal death. I must be sure of my choice before I allow this to happen.”

He held silent and then spoke again.

“I will return tomorrow night” and with that disappeared into the darkness.

Anton returned night after night as he had promised each time finding her in a more weakened state. Life was slowing within her as the days moved on. He, by contrast, remained vital and strong owing to his continual nourishment taken from the many surrounding him who were lying at death’s edge.

On the fifth night he arrived to find a squalid, slumped mass, a gaunt shell of Elda barely clinging to life. Her once beautiful form had withered into a skin clad skeleton and her well quaffed locks had been reduced to a snarled, tangled mat. She drew in slow, labored breaths as she lay motionless and mute on the cold, dirt floor of the barrack.

Panic filled him as he whispered.

“Elda, Elda speak to me!”

Her reply was silence.

“Elda” he repeated once again more loudly.

Again, no response, only a guttural whimper.

Although, she had never agreed, she too had never fully rejected his offers, he thought to himself as he knelt beside her near lifeless form. Should he surrender her to eternal death and

lose her forever or give her eternal life and risk her scorn for his act? He was torn by inner turmoil. He clasped both hands over his face and closed his eyes. Minutes passed.

Then, he opened his eyes and slid his hands slowly down his cheeks.

Her loss would surely lead to his own demise, of that he was certain. The unending remorse that would consume him would be impossible to bear. The thought of letting her slide into the abyss of death when he possessed the power to save her would haunt him for eternity, of that he was doubtless.

Her breathing was becoming shallower and her unintelligible utterances less frequent as he anguished by her side. If he were to save her, it must be soon before the finality of death took hold. The compulsion to act grew within him and soon overwhelmed him. He moved in a trance like state guided by swelling emotion.

He reached down, lifted her wrist and punctured it with a quick thrust of the small knife he had bought with him. He could see her blood glistening in the dim light as it slowly pulsed from the incision. Then, in like manner, he plunged the knife into his own flesh and pressed his open wound tightly against hers.

He felt his life force flowing into her and a rush of warm passion rippled over him as the fluids mingled. Within moments, Elda began to stir, her breathing became less labored and her mumbled groans became more coherent. Then, her eyes flickered open and her lips began to move. A faint smile spread over her face as she looked up at Anton sitting beside her.

“Am I alive?” she whispered and again closed her eyes.

He paused and then answered.

“You are more alive than you have ever been.”

She reopened her eyes and spoke.

“You mean” she began and stopped.

“Yes” he interrupted.

“I had no choice. The only other choice I had was to lose you forever and that was a choice I couldn’t bear to accept. You must understand that to lose you would be to lose myself”, he continued apologetically.

A brief silence prevailed.

“I understand” she answered.

“I too, feared your loss but I couldn’t find the courage to join you. This way of life that is now ours is an anathema to my religion but your assurances as to its purpose makes me confident that the path is just” she continued and then paused.

An improved glow of vitality continued to ebb over her as looked up at him.

“Thank you Anton for saving me” she said meekly.

Anton reached into his pocket and took out a small, cloth bag. He used the knife to scrap soil loose from the hardened dirt floor and placed several handfuls in the bag. He pulled the drawstring of the bag tightly closed and handed it to Elda.

“Guard this carefully” he instructed her.

“This is the soil of your grave, the place in which you have died and been reborn. It is your protection when you rest. Without its presence your very soul is in peril as you sleep.”

She sat up, took the bag from him and secured it in the waistband of her dress.

“What has happened to my father? Is he still alive?” she asked.

“I don’t know. We were separated when we left the train” he answered.

“We must find him” she continued in a frenzied voice.

“We will. We will” he consoled her.

“First, you must gain the strength to escape this wretched place with me and for that you must eat.”

“What do you mean?” she asked knowing full well the answer she was about to hear.

“You know the nature of our existence from my own stories that I have told you. We must find someone here that will welcome your embrace” he answered.

She paused, attempting to allow the full reality of her new being to enter her consciousness. After a moment or two and with a long, hard swallow, she replied in a weak voice.

“I have worked next to Stella since I arrived. She is steadily weakened and continually mumbles prayers asking for her own death. Today, I had to help her back here. She stumbled and fell several times and each time I struggled to bring her back to her feet. When we arrived she was too weakened to even eat the scant morsels we were given. I am sure she might welcome me as the answer to her prayer.”

“Where does she lie?” he asked.

She pointed towards the front of the room and together they moved in that direction.

With that, he helped her to her feet, grasped her hand tightly, and together they walked towards Stella. He turned and spoke to her.

“Act now as your new nature requires” he commanded.

With that, she knelt down beside Stella’s skeleton-like frame, gently moved her head aside and exposed her thin, ashen throat. She hesitated momentarily and then the instincts of her newly acquired being consumed her and she began to draw nourishment from Stella’s near lifeless form. As she consumed the salty fluid she could feel a rush of strength and well being flow into to her. It filled her every artery and vein. It poured over her every nerve and muscle imparting a euphoria and potency which she had never known.

She arose and stood erect, her once gaunt figure replaced by one of fullness and vitality.

Anton reached out and grasped her by her waist and pulled her close and kissed her blood covered lips in a long passionate embrace. As they held tightly in each other’s arms, they were filled with the knowledge that they were now bound for all eternity .

“More about your new life I shall reveal to you later but for now we must leave” said Anton.

“Follow me” he commanded and he stepped with ease through the barrack’s wall, just as night breeze might rush through an open window. She hesitated.

“This gift is that of the Archangel Raphael. We can move as he, passing through the walls, as he did when he spoke with Enoch.”

Then she felt his gentle tug and then she too stepped forward and passed with equal ease behind him.

“It is now we will search for your father.”

“Where?” she replied.

“You said that you haven’t seen him since we arrived?”

“I think the camp commandant will know” answered Anton confidently.

“I am sure he would, but how will you get him to tell us?”

“I think we can. Come with me” he replied assuredly.

With that they started walking towards the headquarters at the far side of the camp. As they walked, a small contingent of three guards loomed in the distance, coming in the opposite direction.

Elda upon seeing them immediately rushed into the shadows of a small alleyway separating the barracks. Anton stopped and awaited the approaching guards. One carried a large flashlight whose light he continually swept back and forth over the rutted street. Anton stood stone still at the edge of the muddy roadway awaiting their arrival.

The oscillating beam cast over him time and time again as they neared. Elda continued to cower in the darkness and stared with alarm as they came closer and closer to the motionless Anton. Each time the light struck him it failed to reflect but rather appeared to pass straight through him lighting the objects behind him.

When the guards came to about ten feet before him, they stopped abruptly. Elda crouched, frozen with fear as she watched.

One of the guards reached into his pocket and pulled out a pack of matches and lit the cigarettes of the other two. Then, they continued their march passed Anton without any acknowledgement of his presence.

He turned in Elda's direction and called her forward. She timidly emerged from her hiding place.

"As I told you before, to be seen or unseen as you wish is within your power. You can appear as a mere shadow of the night to those whom your presence is to be obscured. All that is required is your desire to make it so. Remember however, these powers are only a blessing of the night.

At sunrise, we are afflicted with all the vulnerabilities of mortals. It is the price paid for our freedom during the hours of dawn to dusk.

It is important to be most careful during these times since injury and even death are possible. True and complete healings are possible only after darkness falls. At that time even the most severe of injuries can be remedied, even from the edge of death, so long as one's body has not been destroyed.

They continued the march towards the camp headquarters with Anton leading the way. They soon approached the commandant's barracks. Two SS men stood stoically before its entrance. Upon seeing them, Elda instinctively slowed her pace and stopped.

Anton turned towards her.

"Fear not, I have clouded their minds and they cannot see us" he encouraged.

She then timidly began to move slowly forward but still cautiously lagging behind him. Once reaching the entrance of the building they entered freely, without the slightest acknowledgement of their presence by the guards. At the far end of the long hallway was the commandant's office, its door open wide revealing a huge, stocky man seated behind a large desk. A lamp glowed brightly behind him as he poured over the papers before him.

They entered the room unobserved and stood before the desk. Anton closed his eyes and furled his forehead as he concentrated. After a second or two, the commandant looked up with a start.

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" he announced with startled voice.

"Beeile dich!

(Guards! Guards!)" he yelled.

Elda glanced down the hallway to see the two guards that had been at the front door, racing towards the office.

Anton stood motionless, unconcerned about the approaching guards. Elda closed her eyes and forced herself to remain still as he did.

They rushed through the doorway with guns drawn.

"Shoot them! Shoot them both!" shouted the commandant as he pointed at Anton and Elda.

Both men froze in astonishment and looked perplexedly in the direction to which he pointed.

"Why do you hesitate? I said shoot them! Both of them!" he repeated angrily.

They remained in their frozen pose and stared at each other in bewilderment. Then, one spoke in an unsure tone.

"Who should we shoot, Heir Commandant?"

"Those two, you fools!" he exclaimed and again motioned towards Anton and Elda.

The continued to hesitate and then again spoke.

"We see none, Heir Commandant."

"See none? Are you blind?" he screamed.

Hearing intensity of his command, they blindly shot several volleys in the direction to which he had pointed. Several bullets struck both Anton and Elda but neither responded. The

punctures made by the penetrating projectiles closed within seconds leaving no evidence of their entry and they both continued to stand silently before the Commandant.

Upon seeing the ineffectiveness of the firing, he ordered the guards from the room and sank back into his chair in disbelief. He looked up at them and spoke.

“Am I mad?” he asked himself meekly.

“Who are you and what are you and what do you want of me?” he continued in a low, stuttering voice.

“Who and what we are is of no concern to you. What we want is the fate of Fredrick Draken. He was brought here to your camp several days ago from Berlin” replied Anton.

“Thousands have been brought here. How could I know about one individual?” he answered.

“You have records, records of everyone and their every move. Find that of Fredrick Draken” Aton commanded as he motioned towards the several large file cabinets at far end of the room.

“I have no such records” replied the Commandant.

A raging scowl crept over Anton’s face. He stepped towards him, grasping him by his hair pulling his head backward with a sharp thrust and with his other hand held his chin with a crushing grip. He bent over, inches from his face, with eyes gleaming and repeated his command.

“Find me those records, now!” he yelled and with that he lifted the Commandant from his chair and threw him headlong towards the file cabinets.

The commandant slowly rose to his knees from the spot where he had landed and timidly opened one of the cabinet drawers. After several minutes of shuffling through the papers he withdrew several sheets of paper and began to peruse them.

“You’ve found it!” announced Anton.

“Give it to me!”

“I haven’t located his name yet” replied the Commandant.

“That’s a lie. You are looking at his name right now. I can see it in your mind” Anton answered sternly and ripped the paper from his trembling hand and read it silently to himself.

"Fredrick Draken nach Auschwitz geschickt auf Antrag des Doctor Hirt" it read.

"What does it say?" asked Elda eagerly.

“It says your father was taken to Auschwitz the day after we arrived here” answered Anton.

“Auschwitz! Why?”

“It says he was sent at the request of a doctor at Auschwitz, a Doctor Augusta Hirt.”

Anton looked up at the Commandant.

“Why does a doctor at Auschwitz want him?” he asked.

The Commandant swallowed hard and replied.

“I don’t know. Every once in a while he sends for a specific person to be sent to him. I think it is because they have some special characteristics that suit his experimentation.

That’s all I know. I am required to conform to his requests by orders from Berlin.”

Elda turned to Anton.

“That true?” she asked.

“Yes, he tells what is in his mind” Anton replied.

“When we arrived here I noticed that not all of the box cars were emptied. Many left still filled with passengers. Where were they taken?”

“To other camps. Each of the cars is marked as to which camp they are to go” replied the Commandant.

“Do any go to Auschwitz?”

“Yes” he answered.

His questions answered, Anton closed his eyes. A statue like expression covered his face. He stood frozen; not a muscle moved.

Elda watched as the Commandant rose and slowly walked to his desk. He opened the desk drawer and withdrew a Luger. He then raised it to his head in a robotic motion.

Then he spoke.

“I was only following orders” he exclaimed.

There was a brief silence.

“So am I” replied Anton and with that the silence was broken by the report of the gun shot that ripped through his temple. The gun flew from his hand as he slumped to the floor.

Anton immediately stepped to him, pulled back his head and sank his teeth into the neck of the lifeless body. After he had filled himself he arose and looked at Elda.

“Mother always told me it is a sin to waste good food” he spoke with a sly grin as he reached for the Commandant’s towel which was lying on a washstand in the corner of the room. He wiped the blood from his mouth and chin and then extended his hand to her.

“We must go to Auschwitz and find your father.”

“How shall we go?” Elda asked.

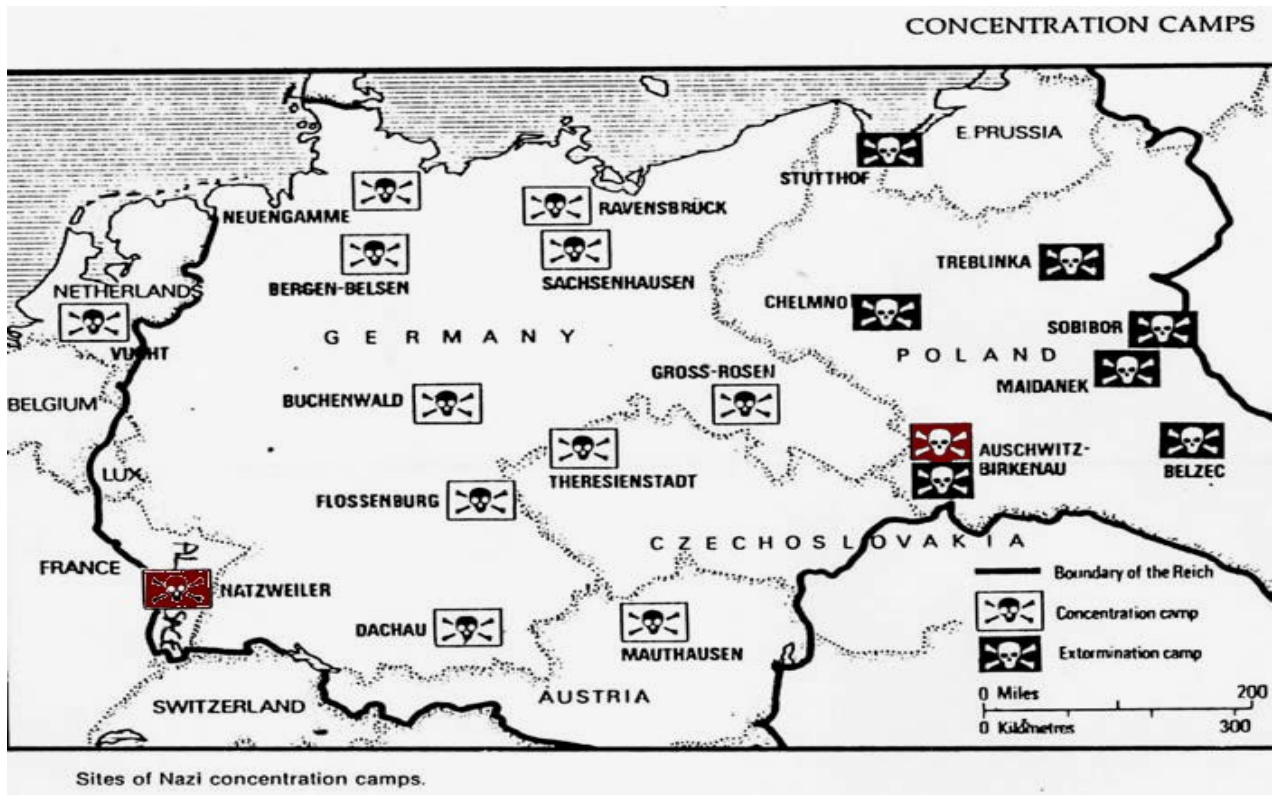
“Aboard the train” he replied.

“We must leave now for the station before the sun rises. Once the light of day arrives all our powers are forsaken. We can no longer hide from the sight of others, we can no longer traverse physical boundaries at will or see the thoughts of others and worse of all we become subject to death itself. If we sustain mortal injury and can survive until sundown, we will then be healed as the sun sets. If survival until that time is not possible then a final death is our fate. We will cease to exist and our bodies will return to the elements. This is the risk we must endure so as to be able to walk in the light as other mortals do.

When night falls our powers are again restored and we walk again with the gifts of the Christ, given to us through Saint Judas.

Let us go now and hide near the train station until darkness and then we will enter the car marked Auschwitz and seek your father.”

With that they passed out of the office in the same manner as which they had entered, leaving the Commandant’s corpse to be found by the guards as the apparent suicide of a mad man.



Chapter 3

Pursuit

They hid the entire next day in the cool dark shadows of an adjacent pine grove watching train after train, arrive and leave. Each time prisoners were hustled from the same five cars marked “Sachsenhausen” while the rest were left unemptied and sent off to their other dreadful destinations. Each car was marked designation, Dachau, Buchenwald, Treblinka and finally Auschwitz.

At last the sun began to set and Anton and Elda could hear the sounds of another approaching train. They moved stealthily from the shadows towards the station just as the locomotive pulled in and the final rays of the sun disappeared behind the horizon.

The doors of the cars marked “Sachsenhausen” were flung open and the wretched cargo was pulled from it. The sounds of the guard’s shouts, the incessant barking of their dogs and the

cries of the people filled the air as they were pushed and shoved down the narrow path towards the camp.

Anton and Elda made their way to one of the cars marked “Auschwitz” and entered through the padlocked door. Once in inside, they merged with the pitiful crowd of prisoners.

Soon, the train lurched forward and their journey to find Elda’s father began. They rode for hours, stopping several times. Each time the mournful cries of the discharged passengers along with the screams of the guards rang loudly.

As the hours passed, Anton began to peer out of the small cracks in the wall of the car. He was searching for any sign of the morning light and hoping to see none. So far, none appeared.

Finally, the train again came to a stop and this time the door of their car slid open with the resounding crash of metal on metal as it slammed against the stop. Immediately, everyone was pulled, pushed and prodded by the guards from the sordid freight car.

Anton and Elda remained at the back of the car as the rest exited. Within minutes, it was emptied, the door was slammed shut and relocked. As they stood alone in the empty vehicle they could hear the receding sounds of the crowd leaving the station.

They then moved through the door and onto the platform. Two guards stalwartly remained at the far ends of the depot. Anton and Elda moved quickly towards a thicket adjacent to left end of the station so as to obtain hiding just as the sun’s rays began to leak over the horizon. As they walked passed the guard, suddenly his dog began to howl and lunge in their direction.

“Was ist los?” commanded the guard as he pulled the dog backward. The dog continued to bark and strain in their direction.

Elda stopped in mid step as a bolt of fear shot through her. Anton too, stopped in mid step and turned to the animal, glaring straight into the beast’s eyes. Within seconds barking ceased and the dog seated himself quietly as the guard’s feet.

The guard looked down and announced in a disgusted tone “Albern animal” and then continued his stoic stance.

Anton and Elda turned and walked to the sheltering thicket just as the sun’s light began to reflect from the tops of the snow covered trees.

“We will wait here until darkness again prevails and then seek your father” said Anton.

“And how shall we know where to find him?” replied Elda.

“We will ask, just as we asked the Commandant at Sachsenhausen” answered Anton assuredly.

With that, they huddled together in waiting. As the day came to an end and the sun’s rays disappeared over the horizon, they emerged from hiding and moved towards the lone guard at the near end of the station platform. As they approached, he raised his rifle towards them and shouted sternly.

“Stop! Wer sind Sie?”

They both stopped and Anton replied.

“It is no concern to you who we are. Where is the Commandant’s barrack?”

The guard raised the rifle even higher to his shoulder and began his reply.

“Heben sie ihre hande und”, he suddenly stopped his speech in mid sentence and lowered the rifle. Edla looked at Anton. His eyes were closed and his face bore a familiar pose, like that which it had shown in the Commandant’s office at Sachsenhausen.

The guard then again began to speak, this time in a calm, robotic tone.

“He is at the far end of the path. It is the building with the Swastika over its door.”

Anton and Elda left the guard in his entrancement and moved unheeded passed the other guard at far end of the platform. They began the walk down the path leading from the station.

Once at the barrack, they passed the guards as they had done before and stood before the Commandant’s door.

This time he felt no need to further demonstrate his supernatural skills. By now, Elda was becoming well aware of the powers that Aton and she too possessed.

He again summoned his deep concentrated thoughts. Inside, the Commandant sitting behind his desk, looked up with the uneasy feeling of a presence about him. His eyes scanned the room but saw no one. Then, he pulled himself erect in his chair and stared straight ahead as if deep in thought.

The door of the office opened and Anton and Edla entered. Without a word, he rose and walked to the cabinets behind his desk, opened the drawer and rifled through the files. After several minutes, he pulled a paper from the drawer and handed it to Anton. He then turned silently and returned to his seat behind the desk.

Anton read through the long list of names on the paper and finally found it.

“Fredrick Draken sent to Natzweiler- Struthof by order of Doctor August Hirt.”

Anton looked up and spoke.

“I thought Hirt was here at Auschwitz?”

“He is now at Natzweiler- Struthof and he sends for what he calls ‘interesting and demonstrative anatomical specimens’ for scientific investigation and experimentation” came the monotone reply from the Commandant.

Anton looked at Elda without a word and she replied to his thought question.

“My father has two different color eyes. It’s called heterochromia iridium and is very rare in humans but common in many animals. That probably sparked Hirt’s interest in my father.”

Anton pointed to the Commandant and looked at Elda.

“Are you hungry?” he asked.

“Not now” she replied.

They turned and left as unnoticed as they had entered. They walked back to the depot through the cold night air hoping to find a train to Natzweiler- Struthof before daybreak. As they approached the station the first few snow flakes of a winter storm began to fall. Then, getting closer, they could see a train pulling up to the platform. The boxcar doors were flung open and the sorrowful cargo was again herded from it.

Anton and Elda hurried towards the car marked “Natzweiler- Struthof” and upon arriving there, slid through the locked door to join the woeful occupants of the freight car. After the shouts of the guards, the barking of the dogs and cries of the evacuated passengers faded into the distance, the train moved forward, down the icy rails, towards its next destination.

Elda’s heart sank as she peered through a crack in the wall of the car and saw the crowd being marched down the path towards the camp through the ever increasing snowfall. The tragic sight dimmed as the train accelerated and soon all that was visible was a flurry of white.

She and Anton settled in a corner of the car, prepared for the long trip to Natzweiler- Struthof. An hour passed and then another. They felt the continuous shifting, left and right as the train made its winding way through the mountain passages.

Elda continued to stare out through the crack with a vacant gaze.

“What are the real chances of finding her father?” she thought.

“And if they do find him, then what?

In what condition might he be?

Will he be starved, maimed or even dead?
If they find him alive, how could they free him?
Must he be made to be like them in order to be saved?
And would he agree to become of such an existence?"
All these questions raced through her mind.

Suddenly, her thoughts were interrupted by a deafening screech of steel on steel filled the air. The shifting of the car intensified into a rocking and then into a violent quake. The entire car pitched sideways throwing all the passengers against the wall. As the mass of bodies struck the wall, the car seemed to be suspended, motionless in space for a brief moment. Then, a sudden feeling of weightlessness as the car left the tracks and began its fall to the valley below.

To Elda time was suspended. Everyone and everything tumbled about the car in slow motion as they accelerated downward. Then a resounding crack of impact and the car was thrust sideways for a moment. Sunlight streamed into the still falling container as the roof the car was ripped free by its collision with the rock wall of the cliff. The descent continued in free fall.

Seconds later, a final impact with the base of the cliff resounded with a thundering burst. The cars still coupled, rolled one after the other, in a long mangled chain, over and over again, before coming to rest. The sound of some still spinning freight car wheels and the moans of several passengers filled the air. Within minutes these all faded into a deafening silence.

Elda awakened. She could feel a throbbing pain in her right arm and a numbness in her hand. She looked about the mangled remnants of the car lying on its side. No motion, no sound, not a stirring of any sort could be seen, only ripped flesh and distorted steel. She pulled herself out through the hole which had been gashed in the roof and into the cloud dimmed sunlight and stood erect. Far above, she could see two cars still clinging precariously to the side crag, held there by entanglement with the twisted rails which held them. Then, listening carefully, she could hear the faint, distant screams of poor souls which they housed.

Roused from her stupor by the horror of the scene, she soon regained her full consciousness.

Then, suddenly, "Anton! Where is Anton?"

The alarming thought flashed frightfully through her mind.

The pain of her injuries vanished as she frantically squeezed herself back into the wreckage. The clouds began to part and more light flooded the opening. She crawled over the

strewn bodies, eagerly searching for him. Finally, she found him slumped under two others. Using all her strength she pulled the two lifeless forms from him and began to drag him towards the opening.

“How could this be?” she thought.

“With all his power that she had witnessed, how could this be?

How could he be dead and she still be alive?”

Then, she remembered his repeated words with startling recall.

“When the sun rises all our powers of the darkness are relinquished and we are as all other mortals be. We become subject to the same pains and sufferings and even death. If one can remain vital until the dusk, no matter how grave his injuries be, he will become fully vigorous and completely restored in every manner.”

She bent over his near apparently lifeless body and placed her ear upon his chest hoping to hear even the slightest sign of life. Did she really hear a feeble beat of his daylight existence or was it wishful imagination?

She pressed even harder against his chest and listened even more intently, anxious to confirm a trace of hope.

Yes, weak but present, she could perceive the faint rhythmic pulse of his mortal being.

“He is alive! But for how long?” she thought apprehensively.

She again peered out through the open roof. Nothing but a sea of white stretched across the valley floor. Not a sign of life prevailed. She leaned back against the edge of the opening with Anton in her arms. Tears slowly streamed as she sat, trancelike, anticipating the fate awaiting both Anton and herself.

Hours passed. She held a tight grip on Anton wrist, feeling his vapid pulse becoming weaker and weaker. By now, the sun was high in the sky. She knew full well that sunset was hours ahead and the likelihood of his survival was diminishing with every passing second.

Then, within minutes, the moment of dread arrived and the tepid throb in his wrist became more weak and intermittent. Elda, with a sob, bowed her head in despair and pressed her cheek against his ashen forehead.

It was then, that she noticed the light streaming into the car began to pale. She lifted her head and again peered out of the opening. The brightness of the glistening snow was fading. A

shadow, dark as night, crept towards her. It moved closer and closer and soon enveloped the entire valley.

It became night when it should be day. The sun was replaced by the moon. Forlorn howls echoed across the snowscape as distant wolves prepared for their nightly hunt.

Elda's writhing pain in her arm ebbed and the numbness she had felt dissipated.

She felt a tight grip on her hand and looked down. Anton's eyes slowly opened. Now she could feel no pulse but his grip grew even stronger. His lips began to move and spoke.

"What has happened?" he asked.

Elda replied in a stunned voice.

"There was a terrible train wreck. The car left the tracks and we plunged into this valley."

"How come I know nothing of this?" he queried.

She hesitated.

"It happened just at sunrise. Everyone was killed except me" she answered.

"If the sun had risen then how is it then that I am not one of the dead?" he asked.

"You were at the edge of existence."

"You remained barely alive until just a few moments ago. Now night has miraculously fallen during the day and you have survived" she answered as she hugged and embraced him.

"Night fallen during the day?" he repeated quizzically.

"Yes, but moments ago it was daylight and now it is night!" she replied.

Anton peered out through the torn roof opening. He could see the faint halo of light surrounding a huge dark disk in the sky. Then he knew. He arose and stumbled out into the cool, still air. He raised his hands skyward, fell to his knees and cried loudly.

"Oh Lord Christ and Saint Judas, by this miracle, you have preserved me. I give you my thanks for allowing me to remain faithful to my perpetual tasks. I shall continue in your name, mercifully relieving the agony of virtuous souls and casting your vengeance on those of malevolent heart."

He held motionless as his words filled the dark landscape, echoing and reechoing from the canyon walls.

He then reentered the car and spoke in an urgent voice.

"Elda, this gift of darkness is only brief. We must gain all the strength that we can, now while it is still with us."

He looked about the car and swept his outstretched hand, with a pointed finger, over the maimed bodies lying everywhere.

“None will survive. For those not already perished, their certain fate is death. Let us search amongst those here for the warmth of life that may still be present in some and feed ourselves while it is still possible.”

They moved throughout the car, from body to body, seeking and consuming that which was needed. With each swallow of the precious fluid, Elda became more vital and her senses more acute. Anton, too strengthened as he took in long drafts of the blood from one and then the next until his thirst was sated.

With their stamina rekindled, they set out on a path through the valley, paralleling the train track on the cliff above. As they plodded through barren, snow covered terrain, an eerie light began to filter from the sky. Edla looked skyward to see a crescent sliver of sun. As they walked the crescent became larger and larger until at last the sun’s full radiance again streamed over the land.

It was then that she realized the true significance of Anton’s relationship with almighty powers. His existence had been spared by authority of nature itself, an eclipse had saved him. As the light poured over them, their supernatural powers began to decay into those of mere mortals and the view before them continued bleak and endless.

Where would this wandering take them? Neither knew, however each was sure that staying at the scene of the disaster would likely result in their demise. The SS would surely arrive once the accident was discovered. If they arrived at night Elda and Anton could overcome them and take their vehicles. However, if it took several days, how could they survive that long? All the occupants would be long since dead and useless for the nourishment they required.

If the SS arrived in the daylight Elda and Anton would be defenseless and surely be executed. Taking the chance that the SS would come soon and at night was one they were not willing to take and so on they marched ever forward, fatigued by the cold, cruel journey.

Every step was more exhausting then the one before it. The sun began its descent and dusk was shading the land. The howling of the wolves reverberated from the cliff walls with greater frequency and their cries less distant.

Elda saw it, a slithering shadow faintly visible in the distance. Then another darted even closer, followed by a third. Finally, a fourth appeared within a hundred meters and stopped. Its lurking, gray outline against the dimly light snow made its nature obvious.

With a long, forlorn cry the other three joined it and in unison began to approach the two weary travelers. Two moved straight ahead while the other two moved one left and one right, surrounding their intended prey.

Anton and Elda stopped and stood stone still. Anton looked upwards hoping to see the setting sun disappear against the horizon. Its rays were failing but not entirely extinguished. It would be several minutes before day would completely slip into night.

“Don’t move and don’t back up no matter what” whispered Anton.

There they stood frozen as the wolves stealthily crept towards them and sky light dulled. They continued their approach with each slow, deliberate, crouched step. Elda reached out and tightly grasped Anton’s hand. That slightest of motion invoked a low, frightening snarl and the pack paused momentarily, then they again resumed their menacing advance. When within feet, they stopped once more, appearing as motionless statues in the faint moonlight creeping over the terrain.

Suddenly, the lead wolf let out a sharp, reverberating howl and leapt forward at Anton. Without a flinch, Anton reached out and gripped the beast by the throat in mid air. With his other hand he ripped its head to the side. The animal instantaneously fell dead before him.

He then turned to face one of the other two. It immediately cowered at his gaze, turned and ran off into the darkness followed by the other.

Anton turned to Elda.

“We should make use of this nourishment. Although animal fluids lack the potency of the human it must suffice for we can’t be sure when we will have another opportunity to feed ourselves.”

With that, they consumed all that they could from the lifeless creature and continued their desolate journey. They plodded through the knee deep snow for several more hours. Suddenly, Anton spied a dim speck of light in the distant. It grew brighter as they approached and the faint smell of wood smoke filtered through the air. A small house with a flickering light streaming through the window, came into view. Behind it, stood the outline of a barn and several out

buildings. Upon seeing it, Anton and Elda increased their pace. They had no way of telling what to expect, but whatever it was, it had to be better than this frigid desolation.

Arriving several hundred yards from the house, their attention was suddenly drawn to another light in distance. The light came ever closer and they could see that it was not one light but two. The noise of racing motors could now be heard echoing over the landscape.

Anton and Elda moved a bit closer and did not approach the house but instead remained in the shadows of several pine trees adjacent to the building.

The distant lights came ever closer. Then, looming from the hazy darkness came the outline of a motorcycle with a sidecar. As it came into sharper focus Anton could see that it was being ridden by two SS troopers. The vehicle stopped abruptly in front of the farmhouse door and both men got out. They walked to the door and soundly rapped their gun butts against it.

“Offnen Sie im Namen des Fuhrers” they shouted as they continued to pound the door.

The windows of upstairs rooms became illuminated and several seconds later the door opened revealing an elderly man in night clothes. Both SS men pushed their way passed him and entered the building.

Anton and Elda moved closer, up to the wall of the house and listened intently. They could hear the interrogation of the old man.

“Have any strangers been by this way?”

“No!” came the frightened reply.

“There has been a train derailment about five kilometers up the valley and we are seeking passengers who may have escaped. They are all considered to be prisoners of the Reich and harboring any will be a capital offense. You do understand that?” stated the trooper in a stern voice.

“Let me ask you again. Have you seen any strangers in the area?” he continued.

“No” replied the old man in a quivering voice.

“Search the house” the first trooper commanded as he motioned to the other one.

“No, you’ll frighten my wife and she has a serious heart condition” protested the old man as he stepped forward.

“Pay him no mind” shouted the trooper and he pushed the old man to the floor with the butt of his rifle.

The second proceeded to do as he was ordered.

Anton and Elda could hear the banging of doors and cries of the old man's wife from upstairs as the search was carried out. After several minutes the second trooper returned.

"What did you find?" he was asked.

"Nichts!" came the answer.

"Go to the barn and search there."

Upon hearing the command Anton motioned to Edla and pointed towards the barn. Elda saw the trooper trudging through the snow to the door of the building and entering. She immediately raced to the barn and stood beside the open door. She could see the reflected beam of his flashlight scanning the building's interior. Then, the ray of light shone out through the open doorway and she heard the footsteps behind it.

The trooper appeared in the opening, turned and reached to close the door. Elda could feel herself fill with anxiety. She wasn't sure if it was from her eagerness or from her fear of what she was about to do. A feeling of strength swelled within her and she lunged towards her victim and gripped him tightly from behind. She had one hand around his throat with which she squeezed with all her might making him incapable of the slightest utterance. With her other hand she ripped his head to one side and sunk her teeth deep into his neck penetrating the carotid.

She felt it, the warm pulsating surge. The powerful fluid filled her mouth as she swallowed again and again until his body fell limp in her grasp. A feeling of strength and well being overwhelmed her as she dropped his lifeless form to the ground.

"Anton was right" she thought.

"The more sinister the victim, the greater the power his blood bestows" he had told her.

The blood of those crying for death to come was sustaining but this was more than just nourishment. It yielded intensity and imparted vitality beyond description. Feelings of ecstasy and vigor pulsed through her as she walked back to the house.

"Where is Herman?" the trooper asked himself aloud.

A prolonged silence and again he spoke, this time to the old man in a threatening voice.

"You and I are going out to find Herman" and he grabbed the old man by the back of his nightshirt and pushed him out the door. He marched him bare foot, through the knee deep snow towards the barn.

Upon seeing this, Anton raced to them and clenched the trooper from behind catapulting him backwards to the ground. His rifle fell aimlessly as Anton pierced his throat with a savage fury. Within seconds he lay cold and still in blood stained snow.

Anton arose, sated and wiping away the bright red drippings with the back of his hand. The old man stood paralyzed, unable to fully comprehend the event he had just witnessed.

“Go back to your home and forget what you have seen. Be thankful for your rescue and fear not” spoke Anton.

The old man marched back to the house in a hurried, trance like state. Anton and Elda proceeded to drag both the lifeless body to the far side of the lot and deposited them in an adjacent hedgerow where the wolves were sure to dispose of them. They then went back to the house and claimed the abandoned motorcycle for their own.