Judas Women
Ten Case Studies of Female Denunciation in the Third Reich
by
Helga Schubert

Translated by
Linnea Damer
Class of 2010

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in German Studies

Middletown, Connecticut        April, 2010
Contents

Acknowledgements 3
Translator’s Note 4
Preface to the Paperback Edition 10
Informants and Traitors 15
Judas Women 20
Wanted: Goerdeler 42
The Fourth Child 53
A Conversation on the Train 69
The Unattainable Man 77
A Question with No Answer 88
Outside the Concert Hall 96
The “Confidential Informant” 103
The Fellow Soldier’s Wife 141
The Missing Grave 155
Illusion 164
Glossary 170
Bibliography 174
Acknowledgements

My thanks go out to Dr. Krishna Winston for her kindness, patience, and generosity. Without her encouragement, expertise, and advice, I would never have attempted this project, let alone completed it. I would also like to thank my parents and family for teaching me to love German and for their unwavering support. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and housemates for never failing to revive my enthusiasm, and constantly providing me with nutritional sustenance.
Translator’s Note

I first encountered Helga Schubert’s Judas Women in the course reader for a class that explored Berlin during and after the Second World War through the medium of literature. Coincidentally, this was shortly before I began to search for a book to translate for my honors project. I kept it in mind as I searched through bookstores in Berlin and asked friends, family, and professors if they could think of any interesting books of an appropriate length that were so new or obscure that they had not been translated into English. While I received many interesting suggestions, none of them captured my attention the way Judas Women had.

Schubert’s book, recounting ten instances of denunciation by women—ordinary, regular women—and her focus on the details of the day-to-day lives of these women and their victims offered a perspective on the events of WWII I had not seen before. The work includes references to certain important historical events, such as the attempted assassination of Hitler on July 20, 1944, but only to describe how ordinary citizens of Nazi Germany experienced them. The book avoids presenting history in the abbreviated form that students generally encounter in the classroom. It does not look at the experiences of societal elites or of the broad masses, but concentrates on individuals. I was drawn in by the stories and the minutiae of daily life that color them, and felt that of all the books I was considering, this one was the best candidate for this project.
Aspects of *Judas Women* are explained when one examines the life of its author. Born in Berlin in 1940, Helga Schubert fled the city with her mother during the Russian invasion but later returned, growing up in the Soviet sector of the city. She finished her *Abitur* in 1957, and graduated from Humboldt University with a *Diplom* in psychology in 1963. After graduating she worked as a clinical psychologist full-time for the next fourteen years. Her first published work, a series of stories titled *Lauter Leben* (“People’s Lives”), came out in 1975, after which she started writing more seriously, now working only part-time as a psychologist. In 1987 she gave up practicing to devote herself to writing. She has published many children’s stories and has written scripts for television, radio, and theater, winning several prizes, including the Heinrich Mann Prize and the Hans Fallada Prize.

*Judas Women*, researched and written before the fall of the Berlin Wall, was never published in the GDR. It was originally published in 1990 by the former East German Aufbau-Verlag in Berlin under the title *Judasfrauen: Geschichten nach Akten* (*Judas Women: Stories From Files*) and by Luchterhand in Frankfurt am Main with a different subtitle: *Zehn Fallgeschichten weiblicher Denunziation im “Dritten Reich”* (“Ten Case Studies of Female Denunciation in the ‘Third Reich’”). It appeared again in 1991 under the imprint of the Frankfurt am Main Büchergilde Gutenberg. The edition on which this translation is based was published by the Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag in 1992, followed by another printing in 1995. Since
its publication, *Judas Women* has been discussed and reviewed in several books and scholarly publications on the topics of feminism, fascism, literature, and history.¹

While *Judas Women* does provide convincing accounts of the lives of a handful of women in Nazi Germany, it includes four fictionalized narratives that make it problematic as a historical source. Schubert explains in her opening chapter, “Judas Women,” that the book is based on court files from both the Volksgerichtshof as well as the postwar courts. In the chapters that follow, she frequently alludes to this fact, reminding the reader of the research behind this work. However, the chapters “The Unattainable Man,” “The ‘Confidential Informant’,,” “The Fellow Soldier’s Wife,” and “The Missing Grave” are all written from the perspectives of individuals directly involved in the cases. In these chapters it is often impossible to tell which details were gleaned from files, diaries, or interviews, and which were invented and added by Schubert to lend color and depth to the story. The tone and style of these chapters suggest that Schubert used her knowledge and experience as a psychologist to make inferences about the personalities and thought processes of her subjects, but these inferences and the evidence supporting them are unexplained. Although these chapters add variety to the narratives of the book, they are also unsettling, blurring the lines between the facts of the past and Schubert’s interpretation of events, and lacking the authoritative, fact-based content that characterizes the rest of the work.

These chapters also provided a unique challenge to me as a translator due to the varied colloquial styles in which they were written. They include insults, jokes, puns, rhymes, song references, and slang that required research and a more creative approach to translation. The first-person narration added yet another layer of complication to the process of translating the German text in an appropriately informal tone. In these chapters the language not only had to be colloquial, but also had to reflect the identity and background of the narrators. They include a young woman guilty of denouncing several young men while working as an informant for the Gestapo, an older woman who had immigrated to Germany from Sweden and also became an informant, a middle-aged man denounced by acquaintances, and the daughter of a man betrayed by his wife and stepdaughter. This range of ages, genders, and the role played in the denunciation process required that I pay particular attention to mimicking the distinct voice that Helga Schubert had given each narrator.

The legal language in the book also stretched my abilities as a translator. Appeals and pleas filed by attorneys, as well as correspondence between attorneys and Nazi party authorities figure prominently in the chapters “Wanted: Goerdeler” and “The Fourth Child.” Faced with seemingly unending sentences composed in the most bureaucratic manner possible, I found my work slowed to a torturous crawl. In spite of this, from struggling through these sections, I have come to have a greater understanding of the Nazi and German legal systems.

The other great difficulty I encountered in this book was the legal and Nazi terminology that appears in every chapter. I chose to leave in the original German many of the titles and names of organizations that were either unique to the Nazi era
or no longer used afterwards and have provided a glossary that offers a rough English equivalent and an explanation of these terms. Some terms for which standard translations do exist have also been left in German and glossed in order to show readers how German was manipulated and changed by the Nazis for ideological and propaganda purposes. Any other German terms in the text are defined at the point at which they appear. Some of these words, such as the pronouns appearing in Schubert’s dissection of a Nazi execution form on pages twenty-nine and thirty, were not translated because they reflect a linguistic and grammatical nuance of German for which there is no English equivalent.

Although this book focuses on a single crime committed in various forms by women during the Second World War, the accounts show the crime in question, denunciation, occurring in highly diverse circumstances. The differences in the motives of the women who denounced others reveal an important lesson in the work. Some denounced out of fear, some out of a desire to do good, others did so out of spite, or for personal gain. The only connections between these cases are the nature of the crime committed and the legal framework that made denunciation possible. In some of the accounts the agents of this legal system attempted to obstruct the denunciation, in others they coerced the woman into denouncing. But, regardless of the intentions of the women and officials involved, the existence of the Nazi system is what ultimately made the denunciations recorded in this book not only possible, but also dangerous.

---

While this does not exonerate the subjects of her book, on page eleven, Schubert says of these women, “I have come to think that they, too, were victims of dictatorship. In a democratic state they could not have brought death to others.” This statement, written after the fall of the GDR, hints at Schubert’s own experience transitioning from living under a totalitarian regime to living in a democratic state.

On pages thirteen and fourteen of the preface, she observes, “During GDR times, when I read aloud from my unpublished manuscript, my friends and fellow citizens understood it as a parable for the present.” The similarities that Schubert notes between the two German dictatorships of the last century also apply to the present as well as many other places and times in the past. The period that comes to mind most readily is the Cultural Revolution in China, when the political climate and societal mores experienced constant turmoil for nearly ten years. Denunciation also played a key role in that period, but it went beyond the denunciation of strangers, colleagues, or neighbors. People were expected to denounce parents, grandparents, siblings, and even themselves for political deviation. But, just as the Nazi regime and its climate of terror came to an end, so did the Cultural Revolution.

The use of Judas Women as an educational text twenty years after it was first published is a testament to the power of the stories it tells. I have learned a great deal in the process of translating it and hope that like the original, this translation can serve as a record of the horrible power that a malignant state places in its citizens’ hands.

Linnea Damer
Middletown, Connecticut
April 12, 2010
This is a book about women who denounced others during the Nazi dictatorship.
None of these women is fictional. It is actually rather eerie to think that at least in theory they, the offenders of the dictatorship-before-last, could now be our neighbors. After all, a quarter of the German people went through not only two world wars, but also two dictatorships. Court records provided the sole source through which I learned about these women, the only exceptions being the two featured in the stories “Illusion” and “Outside the Concert Hall.” I found their informant reports or testimonies in files of the Hitler era Volksgerichtshof and I found their self-justifications and declarations of innocence in the files of the postwar trials that took place in the western occupation zones that would later become the Federal Republic of Germany. These files were published under the general editorship of Professor Rüter from the Van Hamel Institute of Criminal Law, University of Amsterdam, in the collection Justice and Nazi Atrocities. The author informed me that he was not granted access to records of comparable legal proceedings in the Soviet-occupied zone, the later GDR.

As I was doing the research for this book and also writing it (from 1985 to 1988), there was not one day on which I could escape the realization that since August 13, 1961 all of us had been walled and fenced in. Like millions of my fellow citizens, I had resigned myself to living out a sort of amputated life in the middle of

---

1 In the former GDR these files were stored under lock and key in the central party archives of the Institute for Marxism Leninism, part of the Central Committee of the German Socialist Unity Party.
Europe in the twentieth century. The prevailing atmosphere consisted of state-controlled propaganda; of stifled dissent; of pervasive collaboration and surveillance; of constant looking over one’s shoulder and chronic cognitive dissonance; of special privileges; of the precautionary alibis that inextricably tied victims and perpetrators to one another; of things unspoken and of compromise. In this context it comforted me to think that the Nazi period, too, had passed. I found it gratifying to describe how the informers later had to face democratic courts. To me it was important that they had had to answer for themselves at all, regardless of the severity of the penalty.

During GDR times, when I read aloud from my unpublished manuscript, my friends and fellow citizens understood it as a parable for the present: in May of 1945, the definition of criminal political actions changed overnight in Germany. Yesterday a denunciator had received an award and her victim had been executed; today she had to stand trial for crimes against humanity. Yesterday, the perpetrator had used the power of the state to solve her personal problems; today she was the accused. My listeners (and I myself) found this unforeseeable change in government fascinating: the historical facts offered proof of its possibility and strengthened our shared hope. They were astounded at the parallels they detected to their own totalitarian state, discussed the differences in the behavior of Party functionaries, judges, soldiers, and policemen. Since those who wielded power in the GDR justified their measures in the name of anti-fascism, comparing their dictatorship with the Nazi dictatorship was taboo. Shortly before the collapse of his party, a well-known SED writer called for the death sentence as a punishment for anyone making such a comparison. Even the term National Socialism was not to be used. Certain expressions common in the rest
of the world also became taboo: Germany, German unity, freedom of information and opinion, democracy, rule of law—all of them were assigned new meanings.

The more I observed and reflected, the more the contrast between victim and perpetrator in the SED dictatorship blurred. I came upon smart, compassionate, educated, warm-hearted people among those responsible. They all seemed to me like an enormous hoard of lab rats running in wheels. Who was actually to blame? Orwell, Huxley, Kafka had said everything that there was to say. And in the end, I think, everyone was relieved when the GDR collapsed, just as the serial killer of women is said to have done when he was arrested in the forest near Beelitz; his interrogators even described him as cooperative. The Stasi almost suffocated in the mass of totally trivial information about all of us. Their mandate included collecting not only information about possible enemies of the state, but also information about people who could be forced into gathering such information.

In this confusion of loyalties and morality, in this welter of disinformation and pathos, I saw no way out other than to observe precisely, to describe and not deviate from the facts. This way of writing resembles the cry of the child in the fairytale about the emperor’s new clothes: He’s not wearing anything at all!

Maybe this was the only possible posture for me as a writer. Today I would surely write a book about the past less indirectly, less as a veiled reproach.

In this book that you hold in your hands, I tried to write from various points of view about material that depressed and shocked me, putting it into literary form. Therefore you will find fictional monologues delivered by (real) perpetrators as well as the fictional monologue of a (real) victim, along with reports and material fused
into montages. The stories of the *Judas Women* did not appear while the GDR was intact, even though the East-Berlin Aufbau publishing house had had possession of the manuscript since 1988. Starting in March of 1990 several editions appeared in the FRG. But only after the first free elections, after the dissolution of the Stasi, after the first trials charging governmental crimes in the former GDR, after the *Volkskammer* passed a resolution to dissolve the GDR, and after the currency union, and a few weeks before the evaporation of the GDR, was the book published here as well.

In the meantime it was released in Japan and Italy, and the Dutch translation is in press. The reception by the public varies. In the West people saw it as a contribution to legal history; the women’s movement maintained that men were the actual perpetrators during this period. Lawyers’ groups invited me to galvanize debate over the question: What should we do with the GDR judges? Wouldn’t we have also conformed, too? What did we actually do with the Nazi judges? Not one had been convicted in a court of law (a fact that Professor Rüter also deplores). What should we do with the Stasi collaborators? The interest in my book’s content was stronger than the interest in its literary qualities. It is logical that DTV is publishing it in its non-fiction series.

But I had written it as a parable and prefaced the East German edition with the line from the Lord’s Prayer: “. . . and lead us not into temptation.”

It is not for me to judge the women described in this book. I have come to think that they, too, were victims of dictatorship. In a democratic state they could not have brought death to others. They could not withstand the temptation to commit betrayal. I had only to pick up their betrayal like a wilted leaf, and, as if under a
microscope, it revealed a structure that recurred again and again and again. But in each new betrayal I saw a variation that fascinated me, found people who did not support the betrayal, who even secretly tried to avert it. Sometimes I found that the betrayer was caught up in a tragic entanglement and felt sympathy for her. Every time I brooded over the situation as a riddle, experiencing relief only when I found the solution. The lives of these women and the deaths of their victims are inextricably intertwined with one another. I have changed the names of the women and of most of the victims to make them unrecognizable. Only three of the victims are called by their real names: the pianist Karlrobert Kreiten, the Catholic priest Max Josef Metzger, and the politician Karl Goerdeler; they stand for others who preserved their humanity or democratic skepticism in the midst of a dictatorship on German soil.

Berlin, Autumn 1991

Helga Schubert
Informants and Traitors

An informant is to a traitor as a murderer is to a manslayer. Like a murderer, the informant acts with intent: he wants to report on his neighbor. It is his duty, and that is why he observes him so attentively.

A traitor, on the other hand, tells an interested government official something that the traitor may have known for some time already. Up to this point he has kept it to himself, but now he sees an opportunity to take revenge or is forced to reveal what he knows.

Maybe he has obtained his dangerous knowledge by coincidence.

If I do not report this, the traitor may say to himself, I may be at risk as well.

Or he fears humiliation or physical pain; he could be beaten during an interrogation if he does not reveal what he knows.

I may return to the shadows, to peace and quiet, if I tell now, he says to himself, and reveals all.

Or he stands firm until threatened with torture.

Or he stands firm until they actually torture him. And then gives in.

Who casts the first stone?

The informant, by contrast, puts on an act. Otherwise no one would entrust him with anything. The informant must put on an act: pretend to have different opinions, laugh at a forbidden joke, tell one himself.

He must bait a trap.
But maybe the informant does not have opinions that differ from his victim’s? Maybe that is why he can be so convincing—like-minded and critical? Maybe that is why he laughs so appreciatively at the joke? But at the same time his observant eyes flicker:

Who told the joke?
Who did he hear the joke from?
Who is laughing at it?
Who is going to repeat it to whom?
Who else is supposed to have laughed at it?
Who told a similar joke when, where, and to whom?
The informant has to stay levelheaded, must not forget himself, and must not waver. He must not love his victims. Deep inside he must always be listening, listening. He must notice disdainful looks.

The informant must register the following:

Who isn’t saying anything?
Who doesn’t say anything at which point?
Who looks at another with a hint of a smile? At which juncture?
How does the other person respond?
Who else does he look at?
Who lowers his eyes?

Who might recognize the informant, catch him observing too closely? Who might become suspicious? Who might warn the others? Who might remember today’s
dangerous conversation later, remember those involved, and recall the informant, who was the first one, the only one, to be released from prison?

An informant must be watchful. His enemies ensure his employment. His enemies are his victims. And his enemies are those who will later find out that he was involved but not punished.

It is what comes later, it is what comes afterwards; that is the threat that the informant faces. He must arm himself against what may happen afterwards. He must avoid all evidence of guilt, must appear under a code name in the police files.

But what if his secret police handler remembers at a later date in court? Remembers him, the informant, perfectly? And offers up the whole story?

Because, there always is an afterwards: every era eventually comes to an end. And woe to its informants if they have not taken precautions. Because they must realize, usually from the fates of their own victims—evidence appears time and time again in the reports—that there is an afterwards. And it is only for exact reports, containing such evidence, that they receive any reward: money, or something more valuable than money, a passport, special treatment, the fulfillment of a wish, a villa, a car, an apartment, a lighter sentence, early release.

But why does the victim allow himself to be spied on by his informant? Why does he invite him into his apartment? Why does he visit him? Why does he entrust him with a dangerous secret?

What type of person is the victim? Trusting? An introvert? Someone who has been spared bad experiences? Someone weary of being mistrustful? Who yearns to trust someone at long last? Who is tired of always being watchful? (Speak softly,
please change the subject, be careful, how did you meet the person you brought along yesterday?)

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor, reads the eighth commandment.

But don’t informants and traitors tell the truth?

As it says in the Book of Proverbs, “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”

“The traitor reveals his neighbor’s secrets,” is what we find in the commentary written by a Pastor Albrecht from Recknitz on Luther’s Small Catechism. He had the book printed in Güstrow in 1894. Delilah betrayed her husband by informing the Philistines of where his strength came from. It goes without saying that Samson had wanted that kept private.

And Judas revealed to the high priests where they could capture Jesus. That he hanged himself when he saw his master crucified is something I first learned as a grown woman. I never thought of Judas in religion class, in church, at Easter time, in Confirmation class, at the sight of Jesus on the cross above the altar, or of a crucifix on a golden chain around a woman’s neck. Instead, I primarily felt pity for Jesus because his father had abandoned him. I always saw Judas as a minor character, and an interchangeable one at that. I thought, There’s always a traitor lurking in the wings. It would have come out sooner or later where Jesus was, especially since he did nothing to hide.

But that his father did not save him . . .
A sense of security does not last, can be taken away. I still think this way. One can be betrayed and abandoned from one day to the next.

But, asked the pastor almost a hundred years ago in his commentary (and this was fifty years before the *Volksgerichtshof* trials): “In what situation may and must I reveal what secrets I know about my neighbor, particularly if they entail evil?”

His response was printed in boldface, “When the authorities, or those who are my superiors, command it.”

“Yes, there are cases,” writes the pastor, “in which one must reveal one’s neighbor’s secrets without or before receiving orders from one’s superiors: for example, if you discover that your neighbor intends to do something evil, should you just calmly let it happen?

“No, I should earnestly and kindly dissuade him.

“What will you do if he does not allow himself to be dissuaded?

“Then I will report it to the authorities or his superiors.”

But there are, of course, situations in which you must report something. Suppose you recognize a person from a mug shot: he is sitting in your train compartment. And the police have published a request in the newspapers for the public’s assistance.

It would depend on why they are looking for him, if that were mentioned.

Could you think of a reason other than that society, including yourself, needed to be protected from him? What if you are simply told that it is in your most basic interest that he be captured?

Why? you ask. Why are you looking at me like that?
Betrayed by women.

Arrested by men, interrogated by men, judged by men, beheaded by men.

But betrayed by women.

A quiet betrayal.

A secret, clean betrayal. No blood on the delicate hands; the blood stained the guillotine.

Women who killed other people by betrayal. What kind of people were these women?

Do you even have the authority to write about such things? That’s something that should be written about by those who experienced it; those who were in concentration camps or emigrated.

You aren’t even the daughter of victims. You are not a child of Jewish parents and your mother was not a political prisoner.

Write about what you experienced: the flight from East Pomerania.

Write about the mothers who fled with you. On tractors, on trucks along the Baltic shores, headlights switched off, and the menacing rumble of Russian tanks up on the main road. You should compose a memorial for these women.
Yes, you’re right, I tell my mother. But I am also a German, and I am also a woman. What moved these women to betray others? They knew that the outcome would be deadly.

Isn’t it dangerous—you have to immerse yourself in their lives in order to be able to describe these women. In the end you may come to understand them better than you should. A decent human being has a natural threshold, a decent human being stops short of denouncing others.

Yes. But what’s the difference between the woman who steps over this threshold, and one who refuses to cross it? What would I do in their place?

Why do you speak only of women, anyway? As if there had not been men who did the same thing. Do you have something against your fellow women?

The idealization of women bothers me: we’re not as sensible, delicate, cooperative, motherly, sympathetic, creative, or authentic as we’re made out to be. We’re also cruel and dangerous in our own way. As soon as I see a person put on a pedestal, I want to knock it over.

I’m not the right person to ask, she says. I’m not a good living source for you because I’m a historian; I think historically and organize everything that I’ve experienced historically.

For example, I’m skeptical when people talk about their brave deeds: they don’t tell the whole truth, they exaggerate some things, don’t mention others, and that’s understandable. If I were you, I wouldn’t believe everything I hear.
Besides, you’re not asking the right people. You’re getting answers from people who are on the wrong side. They didn’t do a thing to stop Hitler, not these people.

You see, before the end of the war, I worked as a secretary for a man who was privy to the plans for the 20th of July plot. I first learned that he was implicated only after the war, and still ask myself now: Why didn’t he trust me? He could have let me in on the plan.

Go to the chair of our housing complex’s governing board: he can give you the names of the old anti-fascists who live around here. Then you don’t have to be so unsystematic and interrogate old ladies you meet in the elevator. Why don’t you write about the rubble women? There’s one who lives right here in our building.

Do you have to read that? Or are you reading it because you want to? the woman sitting next to me in the gynecologist’s waiting room asked after she noticed the title of the book I was reading: Women under the Swastika.

Both, I answered.

Do you want to go on reading, or do you mind chatting for a bit? she asked.

I put the book down on my lap and looked at her.

She was a co-author of the white papers on Globke and had inspected signatures of top Nazis, she told me; now she’s retired. Then she asked about my work.

I told her about my interest in women who engaged in political denunciation. She thought a minute: Some interesting old comrades live in my building. If you like,
I can arrange an interview with a woman who was imprisoned under Hitler for serving as the treasurer of a Communist organization and served a judge for many years after the war.

Under Stalin, too? I asked.

She had an uninterrupted career, she said.

And she was denounced? Or did she betray someone?

Neither. But she could help you understand that time period.

Once I found out that there were Volksgerichtshof files stored in GDR archives, too—everything in Germany was divided up after the last war—and once I knew where the archives in question were located, namely in Berlin-Mitte, I planned to go and read the death sentences for myself.

Police officers were posted at the entrance. How was I to get in?

It’s hopeless, another historian told me; she hadn’t been allowed in either. One needed a permit from “higher up.”

I submitted a written application and was given an appointment with a “higher up.”

Exactly half an hour before the appointed time I arrived at the “higher up’s” visitors’ waiting area. My name was checked and found on the list of registered visitors, I was given a pass, had to say how many bags I had with me, said that I had one, went with the bag and my pass around the corner of the massive-walled building, showed two officers my pass and my identification papers, showed my bag (into which I had stuffed my second, smaller bag upon being asked in the waiting area how
many bags I had so as not to have to walk around looking untidy and suspicious, loaded down with two bags), entered the marble entrance hall, got into the paternoster elevator on the right, rode past the carpeted hall that led to the highest of the “higher ups” and was guarded by an officer posted by the elevator, rode higher and higher, up to the floor with the room number indicated on my pass.

Inside the door the woman in charge was waiting for me. After greeting me she sat back down at her desk and directed me to the conference table at right angles to her desk. I sat down in one of the eight chairs and she asked why I was there.

I explained to her, orally this time: I wanted to read those Volksgerichtshof files in which a denunciation by a woman resulted in a death sentence. I was particularly interested in daily life under the dictatorship and the woman’s specific circumstances—I suspected helplessness—that might have driven her to commit such a crime. I had heard that permission to read these files required a referral, I told the woman in charge. And I had come to ask for this referral.

We appreciate the fact that you, as a writer, want to look into the fascist period in German history, she told me. Please focus particularly on the resistance efforts of Communist women. Our analyses have indicated that in comparison to their male comrades they have received little literary attention, and we must make an effort to do them justice.

I replied that what interested me was the temptation to betray others in a society where it was possible to resolve private conflicts by drawing on the powers of the state, so to speak.
What are you trying to do, reopening this closed chapter? she asked. She said
she supposed I intended to throw the petty bourgeoisie’s past in its face. That is not in
our interest, she said; they are our partners and allies.

She suggested that I concern myself instead with something more positive and
historically relevant. But she took some notes, and after a while I received written
permission to do my work in the archives, with a specified phone number that I
should call to arrange an appointment.

Over the phone I received an appointment for a “basic research sources consultation”
with a woman whose research area was “women and fascism.”

When I approached the entrance to the archives five minutes before my
appointment, the police officer looked for my name on the list of registered visitors,
had me show him my personal identification, and issued me a pass. Another officer,
who had watched this transaction from a distance of three meters, looked at my pass,
checked it against my identification, and let me in.

I found the scholar in her office. One wall had a window into the next room,
evidently a reading room. She wrote down my request and asked: Why on earth are
you working on such an unpleasant topic?

She had me sign a paper acknowledging that in these archives I was not
authorized to use the card catalogue and could read only the documents she gave me,
also that I would not publish any specifics without permission from the archives.

Then she gave me an appointment for my first reading day in the archives.
On that first reading day I showed my personal identification again at the entrance to the archives, received a pass because my name was on the list of expected readers, showed my pass to the police officer standing only a few meters away inside the building who checked everything again, and took the elevator to the floor with the indicated reading room.

I went in and registered with the archival assistant in charge of that reading room. He looked at the list of scheduled readers, found my name, and asked me to put my things in a locker in the hall.

I locked all of my things, with the exception of a ballpoint pen and paper, in a locker and went back into the reading room with the key to the locker, my paper, and my ballpoint pen. The supervisor gave me a second key with a numbered tag and guided me into the next room, where he showed me another locker with the same number as my key. He unlocked it and showed me the files I was permitted to read. There was a tracking slip in every file. He told me that every time I had looked at a file I had to sign and date the tracking slip.

I took all the files, locked the locker, and went with the two keys, my paper, and the ballpoint pen to a seat that I was allowed to pick out for myself. In the back wall of the small reading room was the large window with which I was already familiar. Behind it I saw the scholar working, and she saw me. From outside I heard the streetcars screeching and the birds on the roof chirping. For four decades there has been no war in Germany; wars like the one in these files don’t even exist anymore, I thought, and dove into a world of fear, betrayal, and merciless persecution.
There were many things I had not known about.

There were many things that I had heard described differently.

Now I know more than the people alive over half a century ago could have known, in 1933 or in 1940, the year of my birth, the second year of the Second World War, started by a leader and those he led, sustained by fathers, mothers, children, neighbors in streetcars, by the women who had received the Motherhood Cross\(^2\) and those who had conferred it. Sustained by the women assigned as public defenders for the female student sentenced to death for handing out a flier opposing the Führer, or to the female cinema employee sentenced to death for raising money for political prisoners, or the clerk sentenced to death because she and her husband had harbored and cared for the publisher of an illegal newspaper and had smuggled his stencils from Berlin to the Ruhr: sitting in the train next to you, next to me, the dangerous envelope tucked into a shopping bag. Not found, even when the newspaper was already in circulation, mailed to military postal addresses, read in the trenches, in the invaded countries by soldiers, husbands, and sons, then discovered by a member of an execution squad. He had stopped reading the disgraceful text directed against the Führer, \textit{Volk}, and fatherland, against the most sacred values. Such a thing had to be destroyed root and branch, the presiding judge of the \textit{Volksgerichtshof} agreed; he screamed at the accused, wanted to humiliate them, but could not because they had

\(^2\) This is the colloquial term for the Cross of Honor of the German Mother, an honor awarded to women from Aryan families for bearing large numbers of children. A mother could receive a bronze cross for having four children, a silver one for six, and a gold one for eight.—Trans.
not betrayed anyone, they had accepted the responsibility even though they were innocent. And the women who were guilty? Who had reported them? A female Judas?

The evacuee from Hamburg, the teacher’s wife, who denounced the woman who took her in. Or the farmer’s wife who betrayed the evacuee staying with her, a nurse from Berlin. I have read their names and, when the victims were Jewish, seen the victims’ three photographs in the clemency file. The clemency file is stapled to the front of the execution file.

In death sentence cases the execution is described on a pre-printed form. Always the same: only the day, time, and duration of the execution had to be filled in.

Date.

*Name of the condemned* (in cases dealing with women the “s” on the end of the masculine article des was changed into an “r” denoting feminine, in fountain pen, since officials did not use nib pens anymore, but did not have ballpoint pens yet).

*At . . . o’clock the execution officer opened the declaration from the Reichsminister for Justice informing the condemned* (the “m” at the end of the masculine article dem was changed to a feminine “r” as necessary) *that no recourse had been taken to the right to an appeal, and informing him (or “her” created by changing the masculine pronoun ihm to the feminine ihr)* *furthermore that the sentence would be carried out today at . . . o’clock.* (Those who had composed this
pre-printed form had surely passed the *Abitur*\(^3\). They could use the correct grammatical construction for an event in the future: would be carried out.) New paragraph.

*The* (for a woman, two letters had to be changed here to turn the masculine article *der* into a feminine *die*) *condemned remained calm and composed during the reading of the sentence.*

The execution report continued on the back of the pre-printed form (conserving materials was necessary during the war—not even one sheet of paper would be wasted on an enemy of the state):

*At . . . o’clock* (this was usually two hours later, but the exact time was noted to the minute: for example 15:08 o’clock) *the prisoner, with both hands tied behind his (or her) back, was presented by two prison officials.*

*The executioner* (the name was pre-printed here) *from Berlin was in position with his three assistants.* New paragraph.

*After the establishment of the identity of the person presented with the condemned* (here the feminine form was not substituted), *the presiding official instructed the executioner to carry out the execution.*

*The condemned, who was calm and composed, showing no signs of resistance, allowed himself to be laid on the bascule, whereupon the executioner performed the*  

---

\(^3\) These are the final exams taken by students in Germany during the last year of secondary school. Students holding the *Abitur* are entitled to apply to attend university and are seen as having reached a high level of academic achievement.— Trans.
beheading with the guillotine, and then announced that the sentence had been carried out.

From the presentation to the report of the completion, the execution lasted . . . seconds.

Two signatures.

Sometimes it took seven, sometimes eight seconds.

Who timed this? The executioner himself? He had so much work that he even received overtime pay, as was noted on one occasion in the files.

For example, September 6, 1944 was an exceptionally long workday because seven weeks earlier, on the 20th of July, the failed assassination attempt on Hitler had taken place. The conspirators had to be hanged or beheaded.

And each time one of those present had kept an eye on the second hand. In no file did I find a double-digit number recorded for the seconds.

On September 6, 1944 the accounting office of the Volksgerichtshof submitted a bill to the business office at the Reichsanwaltschaft of the Volksgerichtshof on behalf of the executioner:

In criminal case . . . the following costs for executions at Plötzensee were incurred:

10 hours overtime @ 1.24 Reich marks per hour = 12.40 Reich marks.

The judicial clerk who was present at the reading and execution of the sentence turned in four streetcar tickets for this particular day: two times to Plötzensee and back. There were four work hours between the announcement and
execution that he did not want to waste. So the accounting office of the
Volksgerichtshof had to reimburse him .80 Reich marks.

Why do I bring all of this up? These details are all recorded in German script
written on a typewriter, with the signature of a person who speaks German, just as I
do, who rides streetcars, gets out, shows a work badge (or maybe not? they know him
at the entrance to the execution site, after all), a person who goes in, sits down (or
remains standing?) and looks on as a person has his head cut off. He signs as a
witness, turns around, and, for the second time that day rides back from Plötzensee.

Because it is afternoon, maybe he goes straight home. There his wife is in the
kitchen, his son, who was in school that morning, might be at a Hitler Youth activity,
collecting bones or scrap paper, and the older son is perhaps a soldier, writing from
Russia from a military postal address.

No, by 1944 the son would not be writing from Russia anymore; by then the
army was already in retreat, but it wasn’t called that, rather the “straightening of the
front.”

The word “retreat” was not to be mentioned by the judicial clerk in this
connection. It was also better not to think it, otherwise he would end up like the
woman just now on the scaffold: she had wavered in her belief in victory, had said
something or written something in a letter, something that many in fact were thinking
but didn’t say or write; or she had known that someone was distributing a flier about
the hopeless war situation and had not reported him.

But he, the judicial clerk, had to fear for his life only during the bombing raids
on Berlin, because he, an indispensable official, did not have to go to the front. His
function was: to observe, not tell anyone anything, keep quiet. Because most of the executions were secret. Authorizations to be present were provided, but they were for those personally involved in the case and had to be destroyed by the recipient, the public defender, for example, if he did not plan to make use of them. They were sent in a double envelope: “Confidential” was stamped on the outer one, “Personal” on the inner.

When I, hollowed out by compassion, contempt, and horror, looked up from the files for the first time in hours and asked the supervisor where I could get a cup of coffee, I saw the archivist behind the glass pane stand up, too. I signed the tracking slips of the files I had read, put them back in the locker, returned the key to the supervisor, and went out into the hallway to the other lockers to get money out of my bag. She was already standing there waiting for me.

I saw you crying, she said. It’s important that you let your work arouse hatred. I often send my younger colleagues to the trials of war criminals who are still hiding among us. You must hate them, I tell them. If you like, I can get you permission to visit a penitentiary. Until recently one of them was living under an assumed name among us as a senior bookkeeper; now he is imprisoned for life. Would you like to speak with him?

But that man was sentenced for his participation in mass shootings, not for denunciations, I said.

In the coming days you will be given files that will show you how we have dealt with the Nazi criminals. You will read the court files of the SA thugs who
perpetrated the Köpenick Blood Week⁴ and stood trial here in the East. You will see that many of the known perpetrators in the western zones were not extradited to us, although we even knew their whereabouts and had shared this information in the extradition request.

The female denunciators are also known, I said; in the files, for example in the reports from home searches, police officers’ comments appear now and then, providing an important detail, deadly for the victim, the last link in the chain of proof. A woman gave the information. The police officer noted the woman’s name and address, but added that she did not want to be named at the trial because she is a relative of the victim, or his colleague or neighbor, and does not want to appear in a bad light in the future. I believe the files should be examined for such details as well. These women may still be alive. And they cannot be held to account because their misdeeds are still not known.

We don’t dig into the private lives of our citizens, she answered. And after a pause: We have tried thousands of Nazi perpetrators, female denunciators, too, and sentenced them to long prison terms. That’s why so many attempt to escape to the West.

Are there any data I could look at? Maybe in a book?

Yes, but you can take my word for it.

---

⁴ The Köpenick Blood Week was a weeklong action meant to stamp out political opposition. Starting on June 21, 1933, an SA unit in the Köpenick district of Berlin arrested, assaulted, beat, and murdered opponents of the Nazi regime, particularly targeting members of the Communist and Socialist parties.—Trans.
I believe you, but I am interested in details. Are there files here in the archives from postwar trials of female denunciators from the Nazi period?

Your research in these archives is restricted to the *Volksgerichtshof* files. You would have to file another application and have it approved. Maybe the state archives or the Attorney General’s office will grant you access to the files.

In the next few months I lived in two, then three different worlds: during the day in the archives—in the twelve years between 1933 and 1945 in Germany. Evenings, nights, and mornings at home in an apartment complex in Berlin-Mitte—in an everyday life with a newspaper and six television channels, but only two from the country that sometimes granted me permission to leave, for example, for a reading or a discussion on the other side of the border.

I received just such special permission while I held the permit to work in the archives. Which of these two rare permits carried more weight, was more irreplaceable? The one that gave me insight into another world in the present, or the one that allowed me to see another world in the past?

I did not have to choose between having my cake and eating it too; I tried to do both: on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I walked to the archives. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, however, I filled out a yellow form and a customs declaration in the morning, took the *S-Bahn* to the Friedrichstraße station, walked through the border-crossing booth in the *Glaspalast* as if it were perfectly normal, took the subway from the Friedrichstraße stop two stops farther to Hallesches Tor, changed to Line 1, and rode with residents of the Kreuzberg district, including a
lot of Turks and students, three stops to Kurfürstenstraße, got on a bus, and rode from there to the State Library. I walked past hundreds of bicycles, entered the building without having to show any identification, left my bag at the coat-check, went through a turnstile, passing exiting library visitors who showed the books they were borrowing or had brought with them, went up to the reading room and found the card catalogue, visited the stacks, and then settled at one of the several hundred work tables to read books that a zealous border guard would have certainly seized on my return trip, if I had taken them with me.

In this way on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I came to understand better what I read on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. And on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday I thought about the concrete examples that I had read about in Berlin-Mitte on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and understood better how to contextualize them.

For there is only one world.

One day in the archives I read the *Volksgerichtshof* file on the Jewish resistance group known as Baum. Inside was a small red poster announcing an execution in thick black letters. Names and ages. They were 21, 22 years old. I took the sheet out and laid it on the table. The archives clerk in charge of my reading room, his attention caught by the screaming red, came over and looked at the poster.

I saw this poster when I was a child, he said, astonished. One time I was sent to get beer for my father from a pub. This poster was hanging on the wall by the bar. I remember it as if it were yesterday. The names and the ages, all of them only about twenty.
What’s known about Freisler’s biography, when exactly did he die, I asked the clerk.

For that you’ll have to consult this book. He handed me *Who’s Who in Nazi Germany*, subtitled *A Biographical Lexicon. Supporters, Followers, Opponents in Politics, Business, the Military, Arts and Sciences*.

The book was originally published in London in 1982 under the title *Who’s Who in Nazi Germany*. In the introduction it says of Robert Wistrich, the author of the nearly four hundred short biographies found in the book, that for six years he was an editor of “The Wiener Library Bulletin,” published in London, and specialized in the history of Nazism, has authored a variety of academic works on the topic of fascism, and is now a professor and member of the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

My highlights from Freisler’s biography:

Born 1893 in Celle to an engineer of Moravian heritage, killed on February 3, 1945 in an Allied bombing raid.

Grew up in Aachen and Kassel, studied law in Jena.

Captured by Russian troops in 1915 during the First World War, spent many years imprisoned in Siberia, became fluent in Russian, rose—as it says in the lexicon—to be a Bolshevik commissar and committed Communist (it is said that Hitler never completely forgave him for this chapter of his past).

In 1920, when he was 27 years old, he left the Soviet Union, finished his legal studies in Jena, and earned his PhD by 1921, one year, that is, after his return from the Soviet Union, went first to Karlsbad and then Kassel to work as a lawyer.
In 1925 he became a member of the Nazi Party, in 1932 he was elected a representative in the Prussian Parliament, and in 1933 a member of the Reichstag.

From 1934 to 1942 he was an undersecretary of state, first in the Prussian Ministry of Justice, and, from 1935 on, in the Reichsjustizministerium. From 1942 on he was the chief justice of the Volksgerichtshof. He focused on cases of high and national treason,\(^5\) which included any type of opposition, writes Wistrich;

Freisler proved himself a true sadist in legal robes, heaping vulgar abuse on prisoners before sending them to execution and fully justifying his reputation as the German Vyshinsky. The exceptional brutality and sarcasm, the vile taunts which he inflicted . . . showed Freisler to be an able pupil of the Soviet techniques used in the late 1930s against the Old Bolsheviks.\(^6\)

While reading these lines I increasingly felt that I was doing and thinking something forbidden.

I thanked the supervising clerk and returned the book to him. He promptly put it back on the shelf behind his desk. Then I turned and glanced over at the archivist who, as always, was seated at her desk behind the glass pane. We met in the cafeteria.

Well, what did you read today? she asked.

I told her about Freisler’s biography; surely she was familiar with it?

---

\(^5\) There is a legal distinction between treason (\textit{Landesverrat}) and high treason (\textit{Hochverrat}) in German law. High treason is the crime of betraying one’s country or attempting to overthrow the government. Treason (\textit{Landesverrat}), or, more literally, betrayal of the country, is closer to the crime of espionage.—Trans.

\(^6\) This quotation from page 81 of \textit{Who’s Who in Nazi Germany} is incomplete. The original reads “The exceptional brutality and sarcasm, the vile taunts which he inflicted on the German generals, officers and other leaders implicated in the July plot of 1944, were actually recorded on a soundtrack as part of a film made of the first of the bomb-plot trials: they showed Freisler to be an able pupil of the Soviet techniques used in the late 1930s against the Old Bolsheviks.” It is likely that Schubert wanted to imply that Freisler abused all defendants who appeared before him in court, and not only those involved in the attempt to assassinate Hitler.—Trans.
Maybe this man’s fanaticism can be explained this way, I said: He had to prove, to himself and others, that he had nothing in common with his past self.

Ah, you see, she said sadly, The slanderous writings of bourgeois historians are so clever that even you are taken in.

But the biographies are based on documents and private files.

Anyone who wasn’t a Soviet citizen couldn’t possibly have become a Bolshevik commissar. Think about it. A biography of this sort is published only to damage us, she said energetically. So that people who want to inform themselves reach the same incorrect conclusions as you have just now. Namely: equating fascism and Stalinism.

No, I said, shocked, I hadn’t come to such a conclusion at all. The two men were guided by different ideologies, one by racism and one by . . .

One can’t compare the two at all. With that she stood up. You’re asking the wrong question.

She left. Shortly afterwards, my permission to read in the archives expired.

We did not drink coffee together again.

When my exit permit had only one day left before it, too, expired, I went on my very last day to a librarian who presided over a reading room in the West Berlin State Library and asked her to look in her card catalogue to see whether the holdings included any reports from trials in postwar Germany of female denunciators from the Nazi period. She reeled off the possible subject areas in the law section. I searched
and read and searched and read. I found the comparison I had already inquired about in the archives in a book by Rückerl, *Nazi Crimes on Trial*, Heidelberg 1984.

In the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany, the later GDR, a total of 7,210 Nazi perpetrators were sentenced up through 1949/50: 2,426 for denunciation, 3,115 for mass crimes, 901 as members of the Gestapo and the *Sicherheitsdienst*, 147 Nazi judges and state’s attorneys, 424 people in leading positions in war-related industries, 77 high-level officials, and 120 local Nazi officials.

In the American, English, and French occupation zones combined, later to become the Federal Republic of Germany, a total of 5,228 trials against Nazi perpetrators were held. Among them, however, up through 1950 only 100 were convicted of homicide.

At the end of this last day I spotted a 22-volume compilation of all the sentences West German courts had handed down in homicide cases after the war. The University of Amsterdam had assembled this massive work with the help of West German scholars. The index was still missing. The Dutch historians had established twelve different ways in which a person could be guilty of the death of another during the Hitler period. Denunciation was listed as number eleven.

I saw that I would need months to read these files, to understand, and organize everything from them in my head.

It was 8:30 in the evening and a recorded announcement urged all visitors to finish their work quickly, as the library would close promptly at 9 o’clock. I had just read the first of almost 700 sentences: that of a woman who, after the 20th of July 1944, betrayed Goerdeler, the mayor of Leipzig, whom she had greatly admired in her
youth, but who was now sought on an arrest warrant; she received a million Reich marks and a handshake from Hitler, and in 1946 was punished with six years in the penitentiary for a crime against humanity. The names of the defendant and witnesses were blacked out to protect their privacy.

The library will close in five minutes, said the recording.

This is like a nightmare, I thought. My time is up and I have to close a book that I can’t read because a wall was built between this library and my home, because Berlin and Germany were both divided, because Germany lost the Second World War, because Germany started the Second World War, because Germany practically eradicated the Jews, because Germany destroyed its democracy, because Germany was dissatisfied with the Treaty of Versailles, because Germany lost the First World War, because Germany started the First World War, because Germany wanted colonies, because the German empire had been established. For all of these reasons I could not go on reading the 22 volumes the next day.

You are being illogical: without those reasons these files would not exist.

Back at home, I wrote two letters. The first to the archivist in the archives and the second to the Writers’ Union. I asked the Writers’ Union to endorse a new time-limited visa for me so that I could keep reading in the West Berlin State Library. It was granted, and a couple of months later I could look up and read about the trials against female denunciators in the 22 volumes.

I asked the scholar from the archives to let me look at our court files from trials against female denunciators. Maybe my letter was too informal, I never got an
answer. This is why I know much more about the female denunciators in the part of the former Germany where I do not live than I know about the fate of those in the part where I do live. They are my fellow citizens. And if they haven’t died, they’re still living happily ever after.

That is absurd. Do you mean to say that the female denunciators are safe in this unambiguously anti-fascist part of the former Germany? You are completely forgetting or intentionally suppressing the decisive fact, namely that after the war all those who had crimes on their consciences relocated to the West. Those who stayed here were prepared to be reeducated.

Yes, always prepared.
Wanted: Goerdeler

Had the attempt on Hitler’s life that took place on the 20th of July 1944 succeeded, Dr. Karl Goerdeler would have become the Reich Chancellor. But the attempt failed.

Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, chief of the general staff to the commander of the reserve army, and his co-conspirators were either immediately shot, forced to commit suicide, or arrested and discharged from the Wehrmacht so that they could be tried before the Volksgerichtshof as members of a civilian resistance group and sentenced to death.

The search for Dr. Goerdeler was still underway. The Gestapo had recognized him as the man who would play the most important role in the civilian sector after the planned overthrow.

On August 1, 1944, twelve days after the assassination attempt, a wanted notice for Goerdeler appeared in all German newspapers. Eight days later, when Goerdeler had still not been found, the wanted notice was reprinted. One million Reich marks and a handshake from Adolf Hitler were the rewards advertised for information leading to his arrest.

This is how Helene became a millionaire at 44. And two years later, at 46, she was sentenced to 15 years in the penitentiary for a crime against humanity, reduced on appeal to six years, for the same act.

Karl Goerdeler was executed on February 2, 1945 at the age of 60, three months before the end of Hitler’s regime.
His father was a government councilor, leader of the regional administrative council, and a member of the Prussian House of Representatives. Helene’s father had worked for the railroad as a yardmaster.

For ten years after law school, from 1920 to 1930, Goerdeler was the deputy mayor of Königsberg, the city where Helene was born.

Helene went to elementary school first in Königsberg and later, after her parents moved, in nearby Rauschen. She stayed in school until 1918, when she was 16. After that she worked as a ticket clerk, a seamstress, and a maid. She continued to live with her parents in Rauschen. In 1920, when Goedeler took office and moved with his family to Rauschen near Helene’s house, he was 36 and she was 18. Sometimes Helene passed them on the street: Dr. Goerdeler, his wife and children. This is how she knew the deputy mayor by sight. And because he was always very friendly and returned her greeting, Helene remembered him well, even after she moved away from home in 1921, returning only for vacations.

When the wanted notice with his photograph appeared on the first and ninth of August, Helene was 42 and Goerdeler was 60. Twenty-one years had passed since their last chance encounter on the streets in Rauschen.

Would she recognize him?

Helene, childless and unmarried, was working at the time as a typist for a Luftwaffe payroll office. This payroll office was located in an inn near Rauschen.

During breakfast on August 12, which they ate in the main dining room at the inn, all the payroll office employees were reading the paper and talking, among other things, about Goerdeler and the wanted notice.
Helene, who took no interest in politics, and was not a member of the Nazi Party, knew that he had had something to do with the attempt on Hitler’s life two weeks earlier. She had already looked at the wanted notice very carefully when it was first published on August 1.

In the days that followed she collected newspaper clippings and, during the morning coffee break, asserted to her colleagues, with great conviction, that after seeing the newspaper photo she would have no difficulty recognizing Goerdeler, even though she had not seen him in twenty-one years. The others were dubious. Her superior said he considered such a thing unlikely. He who, as senior paymaster, ran the payroll office, also knew Dr. Goerdeler by sight because he had previously worked in Königsberg, but had also not run into him in over twenty years.

Goerdeler was the mayor of Leipzig for seven years, from 1930 to 1937. From 1931 to 1932, he was also the Reich Commissioner for price administration, after that economic advisor to the Reich government, and then, from 1934 on, again the Reich Commissioner for price administration. In 1935, because of Hitler’s rearmament program, he stepped down from this post.

In 1937 he left his post as mayor, too. He did so to register his protest against the removal of the bust of the Jewish composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy from its pedestal in front of Leipzig’s city hall.

Krupp made him an offer at that time to join his firm’s board of directors. But the Nazi Party blocked this move. Then Krupp financed a world tour for Goerdeler, who, on his return, would inform Krupp about the international political and economic situation. Goerdeler visited France, England, America, and the Middle
East, talked with important figures in business, politics, and military affairs, and composed a report after his return that was presented not only to his sponsor but also to Himmler, Göring and Hitler.

Supposedly Hitler laughed at Goerdeler’s conclusion that continuing the policy of bluffing and presenting the world with faits accomplis would inevitably lead to war. Hitler believed that the Western democracies neither had the will nor were in a position to enter into a war against Germany, so he could show them faits accomplis without any concern.

Within one year they were at war.

By 1944 Germany’s situation was so hopeless that influential people in business and the army, despite holding widely differing views, were united on one point: Hitler must die.

Goerdeler seemed to them the appropriate person to run a government after Hitler’s death that would unite the many disparate agendas.

Goerdeler held secret conversations, formed a shadow cabinet, and developed plans for a new constitution. After a successful military coup he was to be named simultaneously the head of government and head of state by the top commander of the military.

On August 12, 1944, when Helene came into the dining room for breakfast, twenty-three days had passed since the 20th of July. Twenty-three days of illegality for Goerdeler, twenty-three days of not being recognized, twenty-three days of not being betrayed lay behind him.
He was sitting on a sofa in a corner of the dining room and reading the paper when Helene walked in with her colleagues.

Helene thought she recognized him, but dismissed the thought, because she assumed he was in Leipzig. She thought it unlikely that Goerdeler would take refuge in East Prussia, of all places.

The stranger on the sofa seemed exhausted and put a hand over his eyes. When his gaze fell on Helene through his splayed fingers, it was clear to her: that’s him.

She got up, went into the office next to the dining room, asked for paper and pencil, and let the office clerk in on her observation.

On the paper she wrote: “Dr. Goerdeler is sitting on the sofa.”

The two women went back to the dining room together.

Helene returned to her place and the office clerk handed the note to the supervisor at the next table, who had also known Goerdeler in the past. The senior paymaster read the note, turned to look at the stranger, then turned to Helene, whose handwriting he had recognized, and shook his head.

Then Helene stepped over to him and whispered: I’m sure it’s him.

The senior paymaster whispered: Just a passing resemblance.

When she saw he was not going to act, Helene sat down at her place again.

When the colleague seated next to the supervisor, who had heard nothing of the discussion at his table, directed a clerk to call about a missing delivery, Dr. Goerdeler stood up, took his hat and coat, and left the dining room. Did he sense a threat?
After Goerdeler had left, a fevered debate broke out among those who had remained in the room—there were fifteen clerks from the payroll office present, after all. Helene insisted it had been Dr. Goerdeler. Everyone else argued that the facial features did not match the picture that had been published in the paper.

The supervisor said, if Helene was so sure, she should call the gendarme. She declined to do so.

Her colleagues fetched newspapers and looked at the mug shot.

Helene pressed her supervisor: Please don’t let him get away!

Five minutes had passed since Goerdeler had left the room.

The colleague seated next to the supervisor decided to go outside and look for the stranger. He did not see anyone on the street and headed back inside. Then he got his hat, military belt, and bicycle, and rode with Helene’s superior about 600 meters down the street, where they caught up with the man.

They asked to see his papers.

He was the wanted man.

They brought him to the mayor’s office. There the police came for him.

Helene saw him being shoved into the police car. At that she cried bitterly, as she later testified in court.

Did he see her, too? Did he notice her tears? Had he even recognized her when she entered the dining room? After all, to him she had been just a woman he passed on the street twenty years ago.

That same day, the two senior paymasters, Helene’s superior and his colleague, composed a written report to the airbase commander and had Helene sign
it. A few hours later the three were summoned to a hearing, where Helene successfully requested a correction in the written report: the two men had given themselves the chief credit for capturing Goerdeler.

As a result of her protest Helene received the full reward.

At the end of August 1944 she was introduced to Hitler at the Führer’s headquarters. He gave her a check for a million Reich marks.

She cashed the check at the Dresden Bank branch in Elbing, invested 800,000 marks in bonds, and put 50,000 marks into a savings account. To the city of Königsberg and the Red Cross she donated 50,000 marks each. She made 50,000 marks available to her brother-in-law, a locksmith. She withdrew 4,000 marks for herself and used the money mostly to buy presents. She deposited only 2,000 marks in her post office savings account, but never withdrew any of it.

When the Red Army marched into Elbing, where Helene had last resided, she fled to Berlin. She lived a secluded life there, earning her living as a seamstress and cleaning woman, and expected to be arrested.

In the months leading up to her arrest she continually reassured herself, as she testified in court: It will be all right! I work hard! I rent a room from a chimney sweep, that’s good luck! It will be all right!

She was arrested on January 16, 1946. The day she turned 44.

Helene had kept a diary and sewed it into the lining of her purse. It was found, but she had ripped out the pages about the visit to Hitler and destroyed them.

She made a full confession.
She did not hire a lawyer. No sentence, she said, could take away the guilt she felt.

Her sister asked Dr. Ronge, a lawyer, for his assistance. But Helene did not give him authority to act on her behalf.

Without knowing Helene’s wishes, the court appointed him as her public defender. It could not have guessed that Dr. Ronge had been a close friend of Karl Goerdeler.

Before the lawyer undertook the defense of the woman who had betrayed his friend, he asked himself, as he described in his article “Why I defended Helene S.” (he gave the full name), what Goerdeler, who believed almost fanatically in justice, would have said on this subject himself: “The opposite of tyranny is, and will always be, not just freedom, but the absolute rule of law.”

Perhaps Goerdeler actually would have said that.

Ronge ended his closing statement with questions: “Is it really so inadequate to conclude that the woman who provided the first impetus for the tragedy that befell Dr. Goerdeler was only a tiny cog in the massive machine of Hitler’s terror, that at least she personally is not devoid of human traits?

“And besides: Do we decontaminate the atmosphere that made all these things possible if we act on this case yet do not spiritually and intellectually overcome those who created this atmosphere in the first place?”

A tiny cog.

In connection with the July 20th attempt on Hitler’s life, seven thousand people were arrested and seven hundred implicated officers were sentenced to death.
and executed. The political prisoners executed just before the Red Army took Berlin are not included in this figure, according to a report published in 1947.

Two psychiatric experts, a female professor and a male professor, both characterized Helene in court as an immature, hysterical, emotionally unstable, untalented, unambitious, rigid person of low mental capacity. They testified that she had committed her crime not out of malice, vindictiveness, or greed, but out of egotism and self-righteousness.

But, said the court in its opinion, those should also be punished “for inhumane persecution, who, without ideologically adhering to a political system, undertake actions, in a time of political stress, out of unpolitical motives, that serve exclusively political ends.”

At her first trial, in November 1946, by which time she had already spent ten months in investigative custody, Helene was sentenced to fifteen years in the penitentiary and ten years of loss of civil rights as punishment for her crime against humanity. Her assets were confiscated and handed over to the Allied Control Council.

But she continued to stay in investigative detention because a new hearing was scheduled for May 1947 and another for November 1947 and yet another for June 1948; time and again her defender had managed to get the proceedings reopened. He exhausted all remedies in her defense.

In the end, on November 1, 1947, she was sentenced by a jury in the Berlin district court to six years in the penitentiary and six years of loss of civil rights. She received credit for time served, and had to return the bounty money and bear the costs of the trial.
Her superior and his colleague, the two senior paymasters, employed after the war as a bartender and a worker, were arraigned in March 1948 before the criminal division of the Lübeck regional court. They too were accused of crimes against humanity and were acquitted. The state’s attorney challenged the result.

In December 1949 the criminal division of the highest court in the British zone ordered a new trial. But in the meantime, the Federal Republic of Germany had been established and a new legal system adopted. The case against the two men was dropped because, as the regional court of Lübeck determined in August 1950, “in consideration of the conflicted position in which the defendants committed the crime of which they are accused, their guilt seems slight and therefore no penalty higher than six months in prison, a 5000-mark fine or both these penalties can be expected.”

Nonetheless, a month later the two men requested to be put on trial. When their defense attorney confirmed few months later that they really wanted a trial, their crime no longer existed:

“German jurisdiction over crimes against humanity,” wrote the Lübeck regional court on December 24, 1951, as a reason for withdrawing the charges against the two men, “up until now was based on KRG No. 10 Art. III paragraphs 1 c and 2 c in combination with ordinance No. 47 of the British military government. As of August 31, 1951 ordinance No. 234 of the British high commissioner invalidated

---

ordinance No. 47 of the British military government, effective September 1, 1951. The previous German jurisdiction over crimes against humanity is hereby from this time forward eliminated. The absence of jurisdiction makes a trial impossible, as stated in paragraph 206a StPO.

“The proceedings are therefore to be halted.”

A nice Christmas present.

It is noted in the case files that on August 14, 1944, two days after the arrest of her victim, Helene came down with brain fever. She had to stay in bed for a few days.

Was it anticipation that she would soon be touched by the most powerful man in the country, the Führer? On the right hand, the palm of her hand against his?

Maybe a picture of herself in the newspaper, with him?

Was it victory in the competition: “I am a better observer than the rest of you, I have a better memory than you, my superior? I am not an insignificant person and not stupid.”

Or was it power that made her sick, the power she had over the life of another person for once in her life? Over such an important man?

Had she tasted the blood that the mighty of this world drink every day?

---

8 StPO is an acronym for Strafprozessordnung, or code of criminal procedure, which states in paragraph 206a “(1) Should an impediment to proceedings arise after a trial has begun, the court may settle the case through arbitration outside of trial proceedings. (2) This arbitration may be immediately challenged on appeal.” See Bundesministerium der Justiz. "StPÖ—Einzelnorm." juris BMJ—Startseite. http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stpo/__206a.html (accessed April 2, 2010).— Trans.
A year after he came to power, Hitler had the *Volksgerichtshof* created, a political court that put opponents of National Socialism on trial for treason and high treason. Its presiding judge from 1942 on was Roland Freisler, JD, until a bombing attack on the courthouse in February 1945 took his life. During his term in office, 4,951 political dissidents were sentenced to death. Four thousand nine hundred and fifty-one people. One of them was Alois G., MD.

Alois G. was the eldest of six children born to a Bavarian farm family in 1890. After secondary school, medical school, and his doctorate, he settled down as a country doctor in Bavaria and lived with his wife and child in a small village in what was then called “the Gau of Bayreuth.”

Due to the air raids on Germany’s large cities that started in 1942, many women and children moved temporarily to the less threatened rural areas. Among them was thirty-three-year-old Else N. from Berlin with her three small children. She settled her family into a youth hostel near Dr. G.’s practice. Shortly afterwards, in July 1943, her husband, who worked in Berlin and occasionally visited her, came to the doctor and asked him to check on his wife every now and then, and to help her choose a midwife because she was due to bear her fourth child in October.

The doctor promised the man, who had come in a *Wehrmacht* uniform, that he would do so, and visited Frau N. twice. The first time at the end of July and the second time at the beginning of August 1943.
Less than three months later he was executed, on the basis of statements made by this woman, his patient.

After the first check-up, already on his way out, the doctor said to Else N. that she was brave to “go for another child now,” because if “things went badly”—he meant the war, not the birth—the aftermath would be hard on all of them.

His patient objected that she was convinced that victory was certain and the doctor suggested that especially since the developments in Italy, losing the war was not an impossibility. It would be particularly bad if “the Russians won.” That would mean the “physical death of the German people.” In comparison, being defeated by the English and Americans was the lesser evil.

When his patient countered in this first discussion that the English and Americans “were already devouring the country,” he replied that she was too heavily influenced by “skewed propaganda.”

The woman then asked in dismay what could happen to them in the absolutely worst case—no doubt she was thinking of her husband—and he responded: “Those in forward positions will of course be hit first—then there will be a massacre like the one at Katyn9.”

The downfall of Alois G. had begun with a misunderstanding. The husband of Else N. from Berlin had come to see the country doctor in a Wehrmacht uniform, but he was actually an Oberbannführer in the Hitlerjugend. Alois G. did not know this

9 The Katyn Massacre was perpetrated by Russian troops in 1940 during the Russian invasion of Poland. It resulted in the murder of nearly 22,000 Polish soldiers, intellectuals, and officials. The Nazi government announced in 1943 that they had found mass graves in the Katyn Forest.—Trans.
when he promised to make house calls. It was only during his visits that the doctor learned of the man’s rank.

In the hearing before Freisler’s Volksgerichtshof the doctor admitted to most of the statements. Freisler was convinced that the doctor had said even more, namely, everything that was in Frau N.’s report. But he relied only on the doctor’s confession in order, as he said during the sentencing, “not to subject the pregnant woman unnecessarily to the long journey to appear as a witness.” Freisler meant the long journey from Bavaria to Berlin.

The witness and the defendant never confronted each other during the trial. Only after the trial ended was a state’s attorney sent from Berlin to Bavaria to question the woman.

Throughout the trial the defendant denied a statement that the woman had reported to the Gestapo: that the political leadership to which her husband belonged would be killed in the case of a German defeat.

At the Gestapo office she said, verbatim, “In my consternation I commented that should that come to pass, everything would be burned immediately so that the activities of people in the movement could not be established in detail.” The doctor is supposed to have replied, “In that case the neighbors will see to things.” By that he meant, according to the witness Else N., that “everything would come to light in any case through the neighbors’ seeking to improve their own position.”

From this exchange she concluded, she explained to the Gestapo, that Dr. G. was listening to foreign radio broadcasts.
“What can you say about a swine like that?” she said to the BDM-\textit{Führerin} in nearby Regensburg, to whom she had described her first discussion with the doctor.

Then she wrote to her husband about it. He wrote back that she should remember to pay close attention during the doctor’s next visit, too, and to tell him again what was said so that he could pass it along to the right people.

The couple who ran the hostel where she was living, and whom she told about what she had heard, advised her not to report it. The doctor would surely deny everything. She defended her plans: here the issue was not “people improving their position” but “the cause.”

So, when the \textit{Hitlerjugend Bannführer} from the nearby town who was also a constable visited her, she told him about the situation, too. His opinion that this person needed to be “slapped on the wrist” was shared by a NSV nurse: it was high time that someone “put a stop to his game” since he had said similar things to a wounded soldier.

Else N. reported that during his first visit, she said to Dr. G.: “Doctor, this is all too much for me.” He responded: “Please do me a favor and don’t talk to anyone about our discussion.”

But she talked anyway.

On the basis of her report Dr. G. was questioned by the Gestapo post in Regensburg and, on orders from the \textit{Reichssicherheitshauptamt}, turned over to the \textit{Volksgerichtshof} on September 3, 1943, seven months after the battle of Stalingrad. One month earlier, Mussolini had fallen from power in Italy and a government without any fascist members had been formed. On the day that Dr. G. was transported
individually from Bavaria to Berlin, Germany’s former ally Italy signed an armistice with the Allies. Eisenhower announced the agreement five days later. Did this news reach Dr. G.?

On September 6, 1943 the *Gauleitung* of Bayreuth wrote to the *Volksgerichtshof* requesting that the trial against the doctor take place in the *Gau* itself since the *Gauleiter* was certain that it would have a galvanizing effect on the public.

This request had to be denied because the trial had already taken place on September 8th in Berlin, before the letters had arrived; Alois G. had been sentenced to death and transferred to Plötzensee.

During the trial the state’s attorney had in vain requested a postponement so that the witness Else N., who had not been summoned and therefore was not present, could be heard in court. Furthermore he had asked for a sentence of “only” ten years in the penitentiary and ten years of loss of civil rights for the defendant. Freisler denied these motions and instead imposed the death penalty.

Stapled into the file, directly after the death sentence, is an apologetic comment by the state’s attorney. It is typed, with handwritten corrections explaining why he asked for such a lenient sentence on September 8th: “In consideration of the serious implications of the statements made by Frau Else N. and reported in the pretrial hearing, the case was scheduled for expedited proceedings. But when this important material witness, contrary to my request, was not summoned to the trial or examined by a deputized judge, my representative in court, acting on my instructions, and taking the defendant’s plea in court as a basis, asked for a sentence of only (this
“only” is written in by hand) 10 years in the penitentiary and corresponding loss of civil rights. I do not fail to recognize that the behavior of the condemned, as a doctor addressing a soldier’s pregnant wife, was extremely objectionable. Furthermore, if” (here the phrase “Frau N.’s statements prove true and” is crossed out) “the continuing claims of Frau N., contested by the defendant, are accurate, the execution of the death sentence would by all means be appropriate. It seems to me, however, not” (written in: “completely”) “unquestionable that the form of the comments” (“made by the condemned” is crossed out) “as established in the verdict make execution of the death sentence necessary.” The letter continues in handwriting: “Although the statements made by the condemned indicate an abject lack of moral fiber, they do not dispel—specifically in the absence of other findings or evidence adverse to the condemned—the last shred of doubt as to whether he, in fact, if only to a limited degree, intended to harass the witness.”

Two days later, on September 10, 1943, Alois G.’s attorney, a lawyer from the upper-class southwest section of Berlin, handed in a petition for leniency to the Reichsministerium für Justiz—“rush, urgent,” was underlined in red on the front—accompanied by a certified copy of a police certificate of good conduct, issued originally by the appropriate Nazi Ortsgruppenleiter for Dr. G.’s exemption from military service. “Character references, from persons in his area of residence who have declared themselves willing to provide them, will be filed subsequently,” the lawyer announces in his brief. But first he wants to say something himself in defense of his client: His “client merely wanted to express his opinion on the possible consequences of a lost war. Such statements are, however, not calculated to have a
corrosive effect on the people’s fighting spirit, but on the contrary, to awaken in others the ultimate will to resist.” For this reason the daily press and in particular Reichminister Dr. Goebbels in his article in The Reich have also repeatedly referred to the “future that would befall Germany and every single German if Bolshevism were to gain influence over the political conditions inside Germany.” His client’s statements about events in Italy were “meant to be purely objective and were conclusions drawn from accounts in the press.”

The lawyer adds: “That these conclusions were accurate has unfortunately been proven by recent events. The observation that, in the case of a loss, Germany would fare better at the hands of the English and Americans than if the Soviets had the final say, is not apt to have a degrading effect on the fighting spirit, but rather expresses a purely subjective opinion about the possible consequences of an unfavorable outcome of the war. Katyn has also been discussed repeatedly in the daily papers and thoroughly disputed, and always in terms of putting everything into carrying the war to a victorious conclusion, rather than entertaining the idea of surrender, as is currently the case with Italy. In his entire attitude Dr G., a very quiet man, never politically active, who is himself a member of the Nazi Party, never intended to damage Germany or German battle readiness. He has also never, as forthcoming documentation will show, behaved in any subversive or even slightly negative manner in the large region where he works. Rather he has, in all relevant situations, given every evidence of being a good German.”

In closing, the defense attorney appeals to the ministry to spare his client, a conscientious, diligent, and beloved doctor to his many patients.
I do not know why—maybe the state’s attorney’s letter of excuse was actually not an excuse, but rather a motion to question Else N. after all, or maybe the defense attorney’s letter proved effective—in any case, the Reichsminister for Justice wrote to the Oberreichsanwalt at the Volksgerichtshof on September 17, 1943, requesting that the witness who had not been present for the main proceedings be “thoroughly questioned” immediately.

That same day, an express letter is sent to the appropriate district court in lower Bavaria, saying that the appointed Reichsanwalt Dr. R. will arrive in G. on September 28 at 1:37 PM; he will be recognizable by his yellow briefcase. He intends to question the witness starting at 3 PM in the small town of W., about 6 kilometers from the train station, and asks that she be informed. In addition, he will need a “proficient stenographer.” Maybe, he suggests, she could meet him at the train, and perhaps the court could provide a vehicle and driver for his use. In any case, he will require a place to stay for the night, since the earliest that he could return would be at four o’clock the following morning.

Also on that day, the Reichsanwalt writes to the Nazi Party Kreisleiter in Z., with whom he “would like to confer in person regarding the character of the condemned.” He makes an appointment for September 29, one day after the proposed deposition, and asks that confirmation be sent to an address in Nürnberg, where he will be conducting official business before meeting with the witness.

On September 23, the Reichsanwalt receives a curious answer from the Nazi Gauleitung: on September 28 the witness will no longer be available for a meeting in the area because she will have moved by then. The region lies a thousand meters
above sea level and, due to a large amount of snow, it is very difficult to reach, if not completely inaccessible, for most of winter.

“A family,” reads the letter from the Nazi Gauleitung written in September, “unused to such conditions, cannot therefore be expected to stay in such a location over the winter, and we have managed, at the request of Frau Else N.’s husband, Oberbannführer N., to find suitable accommodation for his family in (see above). The move will take place this week.”

It is recommended to the Reichsanwalt that he depart from Nürnberg at 6:05. This would put him in P. at 9:09. He could then catch a connection to Z. at 10:05 and be there by 11:47 AM. At 2:30 there would be someone available to speak with him at the Party’s Kreisleitung; the Ortsgruppenleiter would also be present then. One could drive to see Frau Else N. in his car. The Gauleiter does not wish to miss the opportunity to remind the Reichsanwalt “that the witness Frau Else N.’s pregnancy has reached a very advanced stage and she is expecting her fourth delivery in early October.” The letter-writer will inform the district court that the room reservation will be unnecessary.

But one day earlier, on September 27, the Reichsanwalt had received a letter from the district court informing him that everything had been arranged as he had asked: the woman had been notified and lodgings had been reserved.

This makes it possible for the Reichsanwalt to defy the Party’s wishes. He asks the Nürnberg-Fürth state’s attorney’s office for a stenographer and schedules September 28, 2 PM as the time for the deposition, which is an hour earlier than the
originally scheduled time. The Nazi Party is simply informed, and given no chance to respond.

The witness must appear at the appointment, accompanied by her husband, reported to be “traveling on official business.”

At the time of her act of betrayal, Else N. was 32 years old.

She had studied at a private high school for girls in Hamburg and until 1933, when she was 22, had worked as a nursery school teacher. Because she was a long-time member of the BDM, the Nazi-sponsored Bund Deutscher Mädel, and had been a member of the Nazi Party even before Hitler’s seizure of power, after the takeover, or transfer, of power she was placed with the DAF, the Deutsche Arbeitsfront. From there she entered the customs service and then in 1937 went into the human resources department of the Reichsjugendführung, where she met her husband, whom she married that same year.

At the deposition on September 28, the witness remembered everything to the letter. She repeated, without contradicting herself, all the statements she had made a month earlier to the Gestapo, for example, her comments, “America and England do not help us precisely because Jews are pulling the strings,” and, “The war is a Jewish operation against the German people,” and, “The Jew’s goal is to snatch mothers from their children,” and also Dr. G.’s response: “The Jews do nothing to hurt Germany”; he had claimed she was influenced by Nazi propaganda. She said he had advised her to see to it that her husband left his current post so he would not have to be among the first to pay the price.
Her statement ends with the words: “I judge the behavior of G.”—he was now only “G.” to her—“to be unbelievably seditious, which I consider even more dangerous in as much as he had the temerity to practice his scheming on me, the pregnant wife of a soldier.”

She never had to face him after she had betrayed him.

The Reichsärztekammer made two comments. The first time it attested to the fact that Dr. G. had been a member of the Nazi Party since 1936 or 1937 (member number 5220606) and until now had been judged to be “ideologically unobjectionable.” He had worked in his practice as a country doctor since 1932 (for eleven years). They asked for a copy of the sentence. This was provided. Thereupon the Reichsärztekammer expressed its sincere gratitude and informed the court that it did not intend to join the appeal for clemency.

The letterhead of the Reichsärztekammer indicates that it was a corporation governed by public law.

Five days before this letter was written, Italy had declared war on Germany.

On October 23, 1943 a professional colleague of Dr. G.’s, himself a Bavarian country doctor, wrote to the defense attorney in Berlin and included a character reference. In it, he emphasizes that in the many inquiries into this case he has never once heard the comment: He has it coming to him, a comment that can be heard “only too readily” in similar cases (this “only too readily” is marked with red and a question mark in the file, perhaps by someone processing the clemency plea?). In this case one observes, writes the professional colleague, “only regret for the unfortunate man, dismay at his inexplicable words, and general sympathy, also for his family. A stay of
execution would bring about a sense of relief and would carry a psychological significance whose effect could not be underestimated.”

An explanation is attached to the character reference: he himself was an old Party member, his first membership number being 19000, and his second being 101203. He had known Dr. G. since their first years together in high school. Dr. G. had always been a “quiet, unobtrusive man, inconspicuous,” “a brooder who always wanted to get to the bottom of things, always the best in the class. He never let himself be drawn into youthful excesses, hardly to an excusable boyish prank. He approached all questions of life and scholarship with a zeal that drove him to examine the smallest details, even a certain pedantry. He was a fanatic for the truth, but without the objectionable quality of a fanatic who attempts to persuade others to accept his opinion, using all the tools of eloquence or other methods of persuasion. On the contrary, he never showed the slightest aggression. A one-time student of theology who holds the methods of the clergy in contempt … He embraced the ideals of National Socialism somewhat more slowly than others.”

But he, the colleague, knew that he “follows the Führer and the Party in all respects. Weakened in body and soul by his difficult job, on call day and night in a challenging terrain, suffering from sleep deprivation: in this weakened state, he fell victim to an impulsive utterance. I, who know his personality well, can in no way imagine that he intended to do any harm to the German people with his statements.”

At the time his colleague wrote this letter, Dr. G. was already imprisoned in the Brandenburg penitentiary and had only eight days to live.
On the day before his execution, a conference of Allied foreign ministers in Moscow ended. At this conference the participants negotiated the continuation of the alliance until the defeat of Nazi Germany, the entrance of the Soviet Union into the war against Japan, the establishment of an international organization, and universal disarmament after the war. It was agreed that German war criminals should be put on trial and that democratic institutions should be established in Austria and Italy.

Why did Alois G. have to die because of a few utterances? Why was he careless in front of a stranger?

Had he felt superior to her in his white lab coat? Or inferior? A farmer’s son in the presence of the woman from the city? Or had he simply spoken his mind, as so often before? No one had reported him up to now or, when the Party inquired, offered themselves as witnesses against him. Everyone had known how he saw the situation, after all.

Why was this particular woman so dangerous? Did she want to destroy him because she feared that he was right? Because she dreaded the future and knew only one means against it: the whistle-blower had to be gone, dead, silenced; then everything he had said would not be true, then he would never have said it, then she would never have heard it? Then things could never come about as he had prophesied?

Did G. not sense the danger? By the time he was questioned by the Gestapo, it was already too late. He was probably too honest and too proud to deny everything, but he did try to give his statements a less dangerous interpretation.
That is what I read in the Gestapo interrogation report: “The accused meant his comment that Frau N. was brave to have a child in these times as an expression of admiration, not at all of the belief that the war was lost, but rather as a recognition that it had not yet been won. The accused explained his other comments with similar extenuations. He claimed he had not meant to say that only America and England could help us, but rather that America and England would be the lesser evil. The accused furthermore denied that he had said Frau N.’s husband should leave his post. He did not dispute, however, that he had told Frau N., referring to her husband, that people in that type of exposed position would be first in line in the case of a defeat. The accused had only the intention of undertaking a purely theoretical exploration of the consequences of a lost war, and did not have any ulterior motives when he made the statements in question—the accused is already known to the Nazi Party’s Ortsgruppenleitung of that area for having defeatist discussions in the course of practicing his profession. Until now, however (‘however’ is added in pencil), no substantive proof could be provided. Only in the case of Frau N. could evidence of his spreading seditious propaganda be provided.”

Freisler, too, saw a danger in Alois G. He closed his justification for the verdict handed down by the Volksgerichtshof with the following words: “Any doctor who, when providing medical care to a soldier’s evacuated pregnant wife with three children, even though he, like G., is a Party member” (Freisler himself added, in parentheses, “now expelled”), “psychologically abuses this woman, commits a no less infamous attack on her than a criminal who rapes a woman during a blackout.” (Now I finally know why this sentence confused me: “this woman” is grammatically
unnecessary, even wrong, but it is more suited to act as a transition to rape than a reference to a woman who is also pregnant.) “Beyond the shaking of such a German woman’s belief in the final victory, his behavior has very dangerous broader implications. For, given the closeness of our National Socialist community life, every blow to any German’s belief in victory can easily have an impact on the steadfastness of our fellow Germans. By undermining our battle readiness” (“Section 5 KSSVO”\(^{10}\) is inserted in parentheses as the legal basis, a reference to the ordinance for a special wartime penal code), “G., who, as an educated man, had the obligation to be a particular support to the steadfastness of our home front, has disgraced himself forever. It is therefore, for the sake of our nation’s victory, imperative that he be punished with death.”

Alois G. was executed by guillotine in Brandenburg on November 1, 1943. He was notified two hours beforehand.

Not until I was writing this section did I notice that on the standard form a neat line, drawn with a ruler, crossed out the sentence “At … o’clock the condemned was informed of the rejection of his appeal for clemency and his impending execution”: unlike many others, Alois G. had not asked for clemency.

As is noted in the file, there is no objection to releasing his body for a simple burial. The illegible signature of a state police SS Obersturmbannführer, who was responsible for deciding on Frau G.’s petition to this effect, settles the matter.

\(^{10}\) Section 5 of the KSSVO (Kriegssonderstrafrechtsverordnung, in English, Wartime Special Criminal Ordinance) states that undermining military strength (Wehrkraftzersetzung) is punishable by death. See "§ 5 KSSVO Zersetzung der Wehrkraft." Lexexakt—Rechtslexikon. http://www.lexexakt.de/glossar/kssvo05.php (accessed April 2, 2010).—Trans.
From 1962 to 1986 sixteen people have read this file. My signature is the seventeenth.

He never saw the child he had felt in its mother’s body with his hands, and whose heartbeat he had been the first person to hear. She would have given birth to it in October. And they killed him in November.

It was surely still alive when he died.

This child knows his hands and his voice and heard everything from inside its mother’s womb.
Late on the evening of August 10, 1943, almost four years after the start of the Second World War, a German veteran—disabled in the First World War—and his wife were sitting in a crowded car on the rail line between Altenheim and Lahr. He was participating in a conversation that the woman sitting next to him, whom he had never laid eyes on until then, was having with a third person about the food situation.

During the conversation he made some negative comments about the Nazi regime, and the conditions in Germany, and also praised Stalin.

What did he say exactly?

Later on, no one could quite remember anymore, not even the master butcher who had sat across from him. It was certain that he had spoken negatively about the regime. And many had heard him, since the train had been completely full.

None of the witnesses, male or female, reported him, including the woman seated next to him, whom he had never seen before then. She was a forty-four-year-old woman from Ottweiler on the Saar, married to a businessman in Lahr, mother of an eighteen-year-old daughter and a fourteen-year-old son, politically unaffiliated, belonging to no organizations and not an activist. She did not report him, but she told the story to someone else on the street the next day.

She told it to the wife of the gardener who had at one time taken care of her yard. But when she did so, she knew that the fifty-three-year-old wife of the gardener, who had lived in Lahr since birth, was a Blockfrau for the Nazi Frauenschaft,

A Conversation on the Train
responsible for the residential block in which the businessman’s wife also lived. The
*Blockfrau* passed her yard almost daily and when she did, they often chatted.

They also chatted on the day after the conversation in the train: about the air
raids on Mannheim and what they meant for the immediate future. And since she had
informed the *Blockfrau*, as she later described it, “of delicate matters” many times
before, the businessman’s wife also told her about the man on the train. She did not
name the man—in fact she did not even know his name. Incidentally she had never
heard that the *Blockfrau* had passed on anything they had talked about.

Even a man with two insignia on his lapels—one from the Party (the Nazi
Party) and one from the *Sturmabteilung* (SA)—who had been standing near the door
of the car and participated in the discussion, did not denounce the disabled veteran.

Witnesses later described the man with the insignia as being between the ages
of 30 and 35. He had characterized the statements in question as Communist
propaganda; the other man should go to the front and let the bullets whistle around his
head, then he would learn to see things differently. The man with the insignia got off
in Lahr-Dinglingen without undertaking anything against the veteran, who stayed on
in the train, with the unknown woman seated next to him, until he suddenly jumped
off the train in Lahr while it was still moving.

The veteran was denounced at the *Kreisleitung* by the *Blockfrau*, who did not
know him and had not ridden in the train with him—the very day that she heard the
story from the businessman’s wife, or the day after. In addition to the businessman’s
wife, she named the master butcher as a witness. After the war, when she stood trial,
the businessman’s wife was not sure if she had named the master butcher as a further witness in her talk with the *Blockfrau*.

But how else could the *Kreisleitung* have known about the master butcher?

A few days later the businessman’s wife and the master butcher, independently of one another and without knowing about each other, were summoned to the *Kreisleitung* and questioned. The businessman’s wife initially made no allegations, explained truthfully that she had to depart on a trip, and was therefore dismissed.

But a few days later, a Gestapo agent came to her home and wanted her to tell him who had railed against the Third Reich on the train. This same agent had interrogated her husband on several occasions a year earlier because he had said some unflattering things about a *Kreisleiter*.

She was afraid of this agent. When she said that she did not know the man from the train, she was told to give details on his appearance. Immediately this first time, or during a later interrogation—she no longer recalled which five years later as a defendant on trial—the Gestapo agent showed her photographs of the veteran and asked her if this was the man. She affirmed that it was and also added some details after the Gestapo agent—as she testified in court after the war, leading to her acquittal—had threatened her with jail time in a sharp and ruthless tone in response to the excessively vague information. Besides, the man from the Gestapo said that the master butcher had already given an exact account of things.

After the war, as a defendant in court, the former *Blockfrau* testified in her defense that she had had strict instructions to report all negative political comments
immediately. She had seen it as her duty to report the subversive comments made on the train, but had done so only with great reluctance. If the businessman’s wife had not relayed the comments to her, she would have been unable to report the unknown man. She had not really wanted to harm him.

To be sure, she had certainly been afraid that considerable unpleasantness might result if she failed to make the report and it came out later that she had known about the incident: if, for example, the businessman’s wife had said something to another person and mentioned that she, the Blockfrau, was also in the know. Besides, she, the Blockfrau, had already told everything to her Frauenenschaftsleiterin before making her report. If she had not gone to the Kreisleiter the Frauenenschaftsleiterin would have gone instead.

She was also too conscientious, as well as too kind-hearted, to direct the businessman’s wife to make the report herself. And in any case, the businessman’s wife had spoken very indignantly to her, the Blockfrau, and expressed the opinion that the matter should be reported.

The postwar court did not accept the excuses put forward by the former Blockfrau. It was noted that she had been the confidante of the Frauenenschaftsleiterin and had strong support in Party circles, even to the point that the Kreisleiter had personally officiated at her daughter’s wedding. What sort of danger, asked the court, could have come from the businessman’s wife, who, like her husband, was not even a member of the Nazi Party, and, like him, had already come to fear the Gestapo?

The veteran was placed in so-called protective custody two weeks after the denunciation. Half a year later, he was sentenced by the provincial high court of
Stuttgart, convening in Offenburg, to two years in the penitentiary for preparing to commit high treason and undermining battle readiness.

The veteran’s daughter had a confrontation with the businessman’s wife in the courthouse before the trial, and again afterwards at the train station in Lahr. She accused her of denouncing her father.

In contrast to her daughter, the veteran’s wife had not heard the businessman’s wife testify against her husband in the Nazi court—this is what is recorded in the sentence handed down by the postwar court. Was she not present at the trial? Or were the witnesses questioned separately?

In order to serve his sentence, the veteran was brought to the Ensisheim penitentiary. After six months—a whole year had already passed since the conversation in the train—he was returned to the Berlin-Moabit prison because the Oberreichsanwalt in the office of the president of the special senate of the Volksgerichtshof had objected to what he considered an overly lenient sentence. But three months later, at the end of November 1944, the trial ordered by the special senate could not get underway because none of the witnesses had appeared, including the businessman’s wife. To get around having to testify at the trial, where she would again have been under oath and would have had to tell the truth, she had submitted a doctor’s certificate. She stated this as a defendant in court after the war.

Thus no harsher penalty could be given to the alleged underminer of battle readiness, also accused of preparing to commit high treason. In the interim they sent the fifty-eight-year-old to the concentration camp Dreibergen near Bützow in Mecklenburg.
He had to spend half a year there until the camp was liberated by Soviet troops in May of 1945. It was not until six months after that, in November of 1945, that he made it home, sick with tuberculosis, without hope of recovering. He died a month later. On December 15, 1945. He was sixty years old.

Three years later, the woman who had denounced him, who had known him neither by name nor by sight, and had merely heard on the street about his comments, was convicted of a crime against humanity by a jury at the provincial court in Offenburg and sentenced to four months in prison. By that time she was fifty-seven years old. Her codefendant, the businessman’s wife, now forty-nine year old, who had been a stranger to the victim, who had never belonged to the Nazi Party or any of its organizations, had never been involved with anything political and had no previous criminal record, was acquitted because she, as the court determined, had not meant to denounce the man. The sentence reads: She was just engaging in stupid gossip.

The “scene of the crime” was the rail line from Altenheim to Lahr. Altenheim is near Offenburg, and Lahr is in south German state of Baden-Württemberg.

On the day that would determine his early death, the disabled veteran celebrated his fifty-eighth birthday. Born in a village near Karlsruhe, he had trained as a mason. Shortly after his twenty-ninth birthday, he was drafted into the infantry to fight in World War I. After four years of war he returned with serious heart and lung problems and, at thirty-three, was declared 100% disabled due to damage sustained during military service. Nonetheless, he continued to work for another twenty years, until 1938, when he was fifty-three. When he could no longer manage to work, he and
his family had to live on his military and disability pension of 280 Reichs marks a month.

Before Hitler came to power, he was a member of the German Communist Party for a few years, and his first wife was a GCP delegate in the Baden state parliament.

His fellow passengers on August 10, 1943, none of whom were known to him, and who were later called as witnesses against him in court, reported that he had been somewhat under the influence of alcohol. It was, after all, his birthday.

Tipsy, he had been unable to keep his mouth shut in public. But why had he not been at home, hosting friends? Why was he in a railway car instead, making negative comments about the regime? In front of strangers? Had he celebrated his birthday somewhere else? In the town where he was born, farther north near Karlsruhe? Maybe his relatives had already discussed the political situation over coffee?

In 1943, the countries attacked by Germany struck back. The Red Army had taken back Stalingrad and Orel, and was advancing towards Germany with its tanks; British and American bombers destroyed German cities in the Ruhr district, and also Lübeck, Berlin, Cologne, and Hamburg. Dresden had not yet been destroyed. The Nazi regime began to evacuate from the larger cities any civilians who were not working.

During this war, without any prospect of peace, this German, not yet old, but with damage to his heart and lungs from the previous war, sat in a train on his
birthday, on his way home late at night, and wished for a different government for his country.

On one side of him sat a lively young woman, involved in a conversation, and on the other side sat his wife, who did not pay attention to the discussion in the train compartment and could not recall any details of it either at the trial in Offenburg against her husband before the war ended or at the postwar trial in Offenburg against the woman seated next to him on the train and the woman who denounced him.

Surely she had been well acquainted with her husband’s political opinions. Maybe the birthday party had made her sleepy. Maybe she underestimated the danger that he was getting himself into with his comments. In any case, she did not warn him or hush him up.

She left him alone, exposed to the woman who betrayed him.
The Unattainable Man

It is peacetime.

The war has been over for four years. And now I must spend six years in the penitentiary. I will grow old there. I will be 40 when I come out. Who will want to marry me then? Him?

I would take him in an instant.

But the things he said about me yesterday on the stand, he the witness, I the defendant. Not once did he look at me.

I thought, Keep on speaking, so that I can at least hear your voice, even if you won’t look at me. You don’t despise me, admit it, you hate me.

He hates me—and I can understand why.

I hated F., too. I hated him because he betrayed me. It could have meant my death, just as it could have meant his. So now we’re even.

F. forgot that we were even.

Yesterday, while I was listening to him in court and tried to catch his eye—I had to see if he still loved me, I hadn’t seen him in four years—I felt that he isn’t finished with me yet. I didn’t sense that he loved me, but I didn’t sense indifference, either. He still has something to settle with me. As I do with him.

And if he’s married when I get out of the penitentiary—this time he’ll get a divorce. He’ll get a divorce, and he’ll marry a woman fresh out of the penitentiary. I’ll tell him this in advance.
He’ll have to kill me to get rid of me.

But the times have changed. F. won’t have it as easy as I did back then. He would have to lay a hand on me, strangle me, strike me dead. He will avoid that at all costs.

And he’ll always have me close by. I’ll call him at night, rent a room in his neighborhood, ride on the same streetcar with him; we’ll have the same commute to work, because I’ll work in the same business as he does, no one can forbid me that; I’ll always pursue him. I’ll perch on his balcony at night, outside the open balcony doors, and when he mounts his wife, I’ll be there.

He won’t escape me when I’m released from the penitentiary in six years. Because I’ll never again be put behind bars. I’ll simply never do anything illegal. Or that will later suddenly be made illegal. I’ll have learned from my experiences: What I did, after all, was not illegal at the time, but a year later it was suddenly illegal—just because Germany had a different government.

First they paid me. They gave me 80 marks the first month, in the following months 60, for reporting to them on specific people, about their conversations and opinions. Did they themselves not know about these things? Maybe they just wanted to hear them again and again.

Then they left me in the lurch. When they noticed that their power was coming to an end, they began to prepare their escape, to cover their tracks, to burn their files. During the last three months they didn’t even give me any more money.

And once they, with their covered tracks, had come through with a clean slate and clean hands, there was a new government and I had to appear in court as a
defendant. Now I’m the wretched informant and they’re the honorable witnesses. They were only doing their duty as officials, but I offered myself up as an informant. They had simply not known how they could get rid of me. They had never given me an assignment, I had allegedly written denunciations of my own free will, after which they were obligated to arrest the poor people mentioned in them.

F. shouldn’t forget this: He started it, and all I did was take revenge.

F. is a smith working in a hammer mill and my father was a smith who made saw blades. We’re well matched. Didn’t I tell him at that time that my father preferred to stay home after work? He enjoyed his wife’s company.

F. would have enjoyed my company, too. But he never even tried it.

He’d gotten the wrong impression about me. Had thought me frivolous, seen me as superficial. But really it’s simply that I do what I want.

I don’t know much about art, but one time I recognized myself up on the stage. There, I thought, completely shocked, that’s me up there. They’re telling my story: Carmen.

Twice in my life my parents took me to the municipal theater: when I was a child to see Sleeping Beauty and after my confirmation to see Carmen.

Carmen or Sleeping Beauty. That is the question. To love or to be loved. Maybe they’re not mutually exclusive?

In any case I find it ridiculous to wait for a man to come and kiss you awake. I would rather pick someone out for myself and then leave him when I feel like it.

I picked F. out for myself, but I’ve never left him.

During our seventh year I’m being put behind bars—because of him.
It’s not his fault that he was married when I met him seven years ago, back in 1942. Not all the men one likes can be single. Even the fact that he was on his second marriage didn’t count against him. I understood that he couldn’t divorce his wife immediately to be with me, that he wanted to get to know me first. Even so, he was mine.

But when his second wife died, two years after our first time, I took it for granted that he would marry me.

He didn’t do so. It dawned on me: he never really saw me as his wife. And if she hadn’t died, he would never have left her. Not for me.

That was the end of my sweetness and patience. I wanted to punish him and planned the best way. I would take another man, not just anyone, but one I picked out myself. As a packer in the factory I saw them at work every day, the conscript workers. I had been mobilized to work, too, but these foreigners were essentially prisoners. You could see they were hungry, and we weren’t allowed to have contact of any kind with them, not to speak with them, or give them anything to eat. At night they all slept in the foreigners’ hostel in Remscheid. During the day I secretly gave them food and at night I sneaked in to visit the one I liked the most. Both of these activities were forbidden. That is why I told F. about them. It was supposed to be a wakeup call.

But he reported me and had the police pick me up one night when I was in the hostel.

That went too far, he’d chosen the wrong method; that was no way to treat me.
If he didn’t want to marry me, then what did he need me for? I could sleep with the foreigners; yes, the fact that it was forbidden and dangerous excited me. They were very tender and very hungry, these so-called sub-humans. And grateful for the bit of bread that I brought them.

F. knew, as did I, that some women had their hair shaved off in public after they were caught with foreign workers. They had to stand in the marketplace with a sign around their necks saying, “I am the biggest pig on these streets, I only let Poles between my sheets.” F. knew that these men could get hanged. He’d abandoned me and these men to chance. Out of pride, out of egotism? Yet he could have had me for himself, for life.

I can still remember every detail of that night in the foreigners’ hostel. That night determined my life, made me cold for many years to come. Who knows if I’ll ever rid myself of this frigidity. I was lying on the Pole’s bunk, he’d smuggled me in, we were trying to be quiet, but I forgot. Shortly before I came for the second time, the overhead light was switched on. German police officers dragged me out of his bed, and, naked as I was, led me away. And F. was standing at the exit and nodded: Yes, that’s her. I screamed: I’ll get you for this, you and your foreign radio broadcasts!

He looked at me in shock; he hadn’t seen that coming.

I knew that since he’d been bombed out he didn’t even have a radio anymore.

The prospect of revenge gave me strength during my interrogation at the Gestapo office. And I reported him that same night. By that time listening to enemy broadcasts was already punishable by death.
And then I asked the Gestapo officer who was interrogating me if it would be possible for me to work for him. I could tell him anything he wanted to know; about the workers in the factory, conversations in taverns, soldiers on leave, about specific people, he had only to tell me their names, he could rely on me, I would need only a little money. The important thing was that he let me go free.

He employed me as a Gestapo confidential informant. I didn’t need to work in the factory anymore. At the employment office I said that I’d been drafted into the Gestapo, but of course that wasn’t true. Being an informant is a voluntary occupation. Yesterday the state’s attorney even said: “Acting as a confidential informant requires a personal willingness and readiness to act as a prerequisite for achieving any success, even modest success, and therefore, by its very nature, cannot be imposed by force.”

He wanted to incriminate me by saying that. But he’s wrong about me. No one knows how deep my desire for freedom runs. I would do anything to keep myself free. And I have done everything.

I picked out four other young men to be my victims. Their fates were to serve as a warning to F.

I betrayed him that first night for something that couldn’t be fatal to him. I knew he didn’t have a radio anymore. So he couldn’t have heard any radio broadcasts (at least not in his own apartment—which is what I reported).

But only I knew this, the Gestapo didn’t. They could arrest and interrogate him for a night.
After the incident in the foreigners’ hostel we didn’t see each other anymore, and I waited day after day for them to arrest him. But he remained free through May and June. I saw him on the street. Had the Gestapo not believed me?

So I decided to make my first dangerous report. I remembered a young man who, in January of that same year, 1944, had been eating with a friend, a soldier on Christmas leave, at the table next to me in a restaurant. The soldier had brought a bottle of schnapps and they were drinking from it. I was chatting with a friend of mine, telling her that I liked the looks of the young man. I leaned back in my chair and said to him: “How about giving me a glass of that!” But he didn’t give me one.

Today I tell myself that he couldn’t have done so even if he’d wanted to because the bottle wasn’t his. But at that moment my pride was hurt and I said to my friend: “I’ll have him put away for that some time.”

At the end of June, almost half a year later, after I’d waited in vain for F. to be arrested, I went to the Gestapo and reported the young man for making seditious comments to a soldier in the restaurant.

They finally arrested F. on July 4th. Five days later, on July 9th, he still hadn’t been released. So the Gestapo had taken me seriously this time. That day a man invited me to go on an outing with him and a friend in his car. The friend didn’t pay any attention to me. Had the situation with F. taken so much out of me that I wasn’t attractive to men anymore? That what I expected to happen didn’t happen? Every man who met me tried to touch my knee or foot under the table to see how I’d react. This man didn’t do that and I became insecure and cranky.
We drove to an open-air restaurant, and while we were there we heard the daily military update over the loudspeaker. The man’s friend said: “They should turn off the radio, it’s all garbage.” He then told us that he’d said something similar in such and such restaurant four years ago.

The next day I reported to the Gestapo what he had said in my presence and also the story he’d told us about the earlier incident. Two days later the Gestapo picked up the young man who hadn’t given me schnapps. F. was still locked up.

On a Sunday morning, four days after the arrest of the young man who hadn’t given me any schnapps, I was outside a church, pacing back and forth, waiting for the people who had attended the service to come out. To one of them, a young man, I said, “Don’t you recognize me?”

He apologized, saying no.

Of course he had no way of recognizing me.

I said that I’d also been at the service and had recognized him.

He actually wanted to go home, because he was a soldier and on leave (the military had furloughed him to return home and work in his old factory, the German Stainless Steel Works), but he invited me to have a quick beer with him, probably because he was embarrassed about his memory lapse. He liked me, and he confided his political views to me: he was an “opponent of the National Socialist regime,” he was going to “take it down anyway he could,” he said he knew a Russian political
commissar, the V-rocket was basically “a bluff.” After saying all this he toasted the future regime. I reported him.

Four days later, on July 20, 1944, the attempt on Hitler’s life took place.

Two days after the attempt a young man, a reserve police officer, invited me to a private celebration in a master baker’s apartment. I thought he’d invited me because he was interested in me, but when I got to the party it became clear that he already had a girlfriend. I was intended for the other man, the master baker.

The reserve police officer had already had too much to drink when he said: “The Russians are right outside Berlin. The war will be over in a month.” I agreed with him.

The master baker started to worry that his neighbors might be listening and suggested that we go to a bar together, which we did. We got a table underneath a picture of Hitler, and the reserve police officer said: “Too bad that business didn’t work out, otherwise we would be rid of that dolt.”

When the bar closed we went back to the master baker’s apartment and partied there until early morning.

Later that same day I reported the reserve police officer to the Gestapo.

Ten days after that report, on August 2, 1944, the Gestapo first brought in the friend of the man who’d been so indifferent towards me when the three of us went for a drive.

F. was still in custody.

---

11 Commissar was the title given to Communist political officials assigned to the military to ensure that things were ideologically correct. Their rank was equal to that of unit commander.—Trans.
Later, on August 8, 1944, the Gestapo picked up the reserve police officer.

The soldier I’d met after church, the one on leave at the German Stainless Steel Works, who allegedly knew some Russian commissar, wasn’t arrested. Maybe they wanted to lure the Russian commissar into a trap?

In the meantime there were four men behind bars: the one who hadn’t given me any schnapps, the uninterested friend from the outing, the reserve police officer, who’d already had a girlfriend, and F.

They put him on trial first, on September 2, 1944, two months after his arrest. He’d spent that entire time in pretrial detention, he’d spent the whole lovely, warm summer of 1944 sitting in jail; that was his punishment.

His attorney called my credibility into question. I was the only witness, and I made it easy for him to disprove my statements and catch me in contradictions.

In order to make F. take me seriously and know that I didn’t really want to harm him, I said, in his presence, that after turning him in I’d reported four other men to the Gestapo, but for different and much worse offenses: for subversion, defeatism, undermining battle readiness, and public vilification of the leading men in government and the Party.

That was all true, in contrast to my charges against him.

And the Gestapo found that out. The trial was suspended due to my lack of credibility.

At the end of September they picked up the furloughed soldier working in the German Stainless Steel Works. Because he was a soldier, he was brought before the army high court and from there to the Volksgerichtshof. A trial didn’t take place there,
but when the war was over and he returned to Remscheid, he was so sick that within three weeks he had to go into the hospital, where he died. Prison had killed him.

At the beginning of December the reserve police officer was sentenced to death by the SS and police court in Düsseldorf. Through strange circumstances, the sentence wasn’t submitted to Himmler, who was responsible for authorizing it, and he survived. Every day till the end of the war, he expected to be executed.

The uninterested friend from the outing and the young man who hadn’t poured me any schnapps stayed in pretrial custody without ever being tried. But they both died on February 9, 1945 when a bomb fell on their prison. I think prisoners weren’t taken to shelters during air raids.

By this time F. was already free. At a second trial on December 21, 1944 he was acquitted, and two days later he was released to go home by the Gestapo.

I’d worried about him for almost half a year.

In the beginning, right after the war ended, I was afraid of his taking revenge, and of the dead being avenged. But after a year had passed and a second and a third, I felt more and more secure.

Now there’s been peace for four years.
A Question with No Answer

Shortly before the end of the Second World War, in February of 1945, a forty-three-year-old woman arranged with great determination to have her husband of sixteen years sentenced to death.

The witnesses at the postwar trial against the woman attested that the marriage between the two had been harmonious up to the beginning of the war, or, at least without any serious disputes. Had there been any, they would have been noticed in the small town.

In 1929 Hilde, twenty-seven years old at that time, married Michael. He was a cabinetmaker and a few years younger than she. How many years younger is not recorded in the sentence handed down after a jury trial held at the provincial court in Würzburg in 1953.

After nine years of school and up until her marriage, Hilde worked as a household helper and laundry woman or as a farm hand. Because her marriage to Michael remained childless, Hilde continued to work outside the home.

Four years after their wedding, when Hitler ascended to power, they used their combined savings to buy a house near the village where Hilde had been born, and took in Hilde’s parents.

When Hilde was thirty-eight, Michael was drafted to fight in the Second World War. Between then and 1945 he returned home twice a year on leave.
First he served in the German occupation of Poland. While stationed there he wrote his sister, asking her to hire a Polish woman he had met to work in her home in Germany. Did he want to help this Polish woman? Did he want to protect her from being deported? Was he in love with her and hoping to keep her safe in his sister’s home? He did not mention anything to his wife. She, however, heard about the situation from his sister, as Hilde testified in her own defense in court after the war.

Once, while on leave, he asked his wife for clothing, and actually took one of her coats with him to Poland. Her coat for another woman. Maybe for the same Polish woman about whom he had written to his sister? What was Hilde supposed to think?

She asked him in a letter if he had a relationship with this Polish woman. But he did not answer her question. And she never repeated it.

Hilde continued to sleep with her husband every time he was home on leave. Up to the end.

But things changed radically in her life. Suddenly she started making a habit of accompanying a young widow to the train station and inviting soldiers who were passing through back to her house. She fed them, and she slept with them when she felt like it. Soldiers who were stationed nearby were also guests in her home and spent the night with her. She particularly liked one of them. She would have liked to marry him.

She told her sister-in-law that it would have been better if Michael had fallen in Stalingrad instead of his brother-in-law.

Because the town was small, soon everyone but Hilde’s husband knew what was going on. The Ortsgruppenleiter asked the Frauenschaftsleiterin to do
something to correct Hilde’s “licentious way of life.” The NSV, the Nationalsozialistische Volksfürsorge, threatened the young widow with whom Hilde always went to the train station, saying that her children would be taken away if she did not cease her association with Hilde. After that the young widow stopped accompanying Hilde. She testified to these events ten years later in court.

In October of 1944, when the war had already lasted four years and the attempt on Hitler’s life had failed three months earlier, Michael was able to return home to his wife. He had had enough of the war.

While in bed he said to her: “If the 20th of July had succeeded, the war would be over.” He also said, “When the Russians come, those bastards are going to get their throats cut” and “Goebbels is an idiot.” In letters he had already written similar things about the war and the country’s leaders. He once wrote: “If Hitler had croaked on July 20th, we’d be out of this mess.”

Hilde reported her husband’s oral and written statements to the SA Sturmführer responsible for the area. She also wanted to give him the letters to read, but he gave them back without looking at them and told her that these statements could cost her husband his life.

Hilde told the Sturmführer that a person who spread things like that about Hitler no longer belonged in society. The Sturmführer should pass on her report, she said. He, however, did not do so because he sensed that she was acting out of personal rather than political motives. He sent Hilde home.
She came back to see if she could persuade him to forward her report. He had his secretary say that he was not in. She complained about this to members of his family.

When she next encountered the Sturmführer, he warned her again. He did, however, describe the situation to the Ortsgruppenleiter, who likewise did not want to have anything to do with the report because of the woman’s bad reputation.

After a time, the Nazi Kreisleiter, who had been informed of the situation by an unknown party, inquired of the Ortsgruppenleiter as to why no written report on the incident had been filed. But because the Ortsgruppenleiter and the Sturmführer were both convinced that Hilde simply wanted to get rid of her husband, neither of them made this written report, as they both testified in court after the war.

Consequently, nothing happened to Michael. He was therefore able, in early February 1945, to return to his wife again on leave. His arrival took her by surprise, and although she was home, he was left waiting outside the locked door for some time.

She had been entertaining a soldier, whom she first tried to hide in her mother’s apartment on the second floor. It was in this way that Michael first learned of his wife’s infidelity.

It was winter. He was freezing as he stood outside. How many hours had he spent sitting on an unheated train on his way home?

The next day Hilde went to the apartment of a woman in the neighborhood who had taken her lover in, and stayed there for quite some time. When she finally returned home, Michael reproached her harshly, hit her with his military belt, and
threatened to first clear out the apartment and then shoot her and her mother before he left—this is what she testified in court. But there are no witnesses to corroborate this. And the postwar court did not believe her.

Hilde spent the following night at her neighbor’s house and returned home the next morning only to make breakfast for her husband, after which she went to the Sturmführer to tell him about the threats her husband had made. He referred her to the Ortsgruppenleiter or to the police if she thought she needed personal protection.

She next went to the Ortsgruppenleiter, who redirected her to the police or the Kreisleitung. Whether it was an intermediary or Hilde herself who described the situation to the Kreisleiter, who had already been waiting for four months for a written report, was something the postwar court could not establish. In any case, at noon on February 19, 1945, a local police officer arrested the cabinetmaker in accordance with a directive phoned in by the Kreisleiter.

The police officer notified Hilde of the arrest and asked her to bring her husband something to eat. She answered that she had nothing in the house. So the police officer had something brought from a restaurant.

The next day Michael was arraigned before the local military court and taken into custody.

Shortly afterwards the presiding judge of the local military court interviewed Hilde, warned her about the mortal danger to which she was exposing her husband by reporting him, and informed her of her right as a spouse to refuse to testify in court against her husband. He earnestly tried to dissuade Hilde from giving testimony in the impending court martial. But he did not succeed.
As the stenographer testified eight years later in court, he privately described Hilde as a “bitch.”

On February 17, 1945 the hearing took place before the court martial, presided over by the same military judge who had cautioned Hilde not to testify against her husband. Hilde was the only witness for the prosecution and the only witness to the crime. The court adjourned for deliberations and then announced that, due to a lack of evidence, it could not sentence the defendant, but would instead send him back to the front. Hilde was so indignant that she jumped up and swore to her statements against her husband.\footnote{In the German legal system witnesses are not always under oath when taking the stand. When a witness is not under oath, the court may judge for itself whether or not his testimony is true. It is likely that Hilde was not put under oath when she testified against her husband so that the court might choose to disregard her testimony as false.—Trans.} The military court now had no choice but to sentence him to death. As Michael’s relatives later testified, when Hilde heard the death sentence, she walked past them “sneering derisively.” At home she turned the radio up so loud that the neighbors complained.

She did not visit him and did not write him—the court cited this as incriminating evidence against her after the war—and she also rejected his relatives’ plea that she appeal for clemency. With the support of Party functionaries and the police, they themselves then asked that he be granted clemency.

The post commander of the local police filed a complaint about the sentence handed down by the military court, calling it a miscarriage of justice and appending reports of the witness’s very bad reputation and the very good reputation of the condemned soldier: He was described as “calm, hard-working, honest, truthful, and of
excellent character.” But Hilde went to see the *Ortsgruppenleiter* to inquire whether she would continue to receive her financial support after her husband was executed.

The death sentence was never carried out. Eight years later, the court was unable to determine whether Michael had been pardoned or whether the sentence had simply not been carried out so shortly before the end of the war.

Michael remained in custody until April of 1945, returned to his unit for the final days of the Second World War, and ended up in a prisoner-of-war camp, from which he returned two years later.

Three years after the end of the war, in June of 1948, Hilde, now forty-six, was charged in court for the first time for her denunciation. She was sentenced to two years in a work camp. She served fourteen months and then was taken back into investigative custody for one year and three months.

In 1949, after a twenty-year marriage, Hilde was divorced and declared the guilty party on the basis of her “extramarital relationships with strangers” and her denunciation of her husband.

In February of 1950 she was sentenced to serve fourteen years in the penitentiary for attempted murder and complicity in wrongful deprivation of personal liberty. Hilde appealed this sentence. And nine months later she was acquitted.

The state’s attorney’s office in turn filed an appeal. In the end the court sentenced Hilde to serve six years in the penitentiary. At the time she was fifty-one years old.
Her husband, who had been summoned before the court after the war—this time she was the defendant and he a witness—did not contribute to the prosecution. He refused to testify.

Just as he had not answered the question his wife had asked about the other woman.
Outside the Concert Hall

The pianist Karlrobert Kreiten was hanged on September 7, 1943 in the Berlin-Plötzensee execution facility at the age of twenty-seven.

In the night between September 7 and 8, 1943 the executioners killed one hundred and eighty-six people who had been sentenced to death. The prisoners were divided into groups of eight and killed so quickly that there was no time for them to write farewell letters, and the prison chaplain barely had time to offer words of comfort. By the end of the night the executioners were completely exhausted.

But because Karlrobert Kreiten took the initiative to address him, the chaplain paid particular attention to the young man. He noted down the “last greetings to his loved ones, parents, Grand’maman and sister, and administered the last rites, which aroused remorse and sorrow in him,” as he later wrote in a letter to those loved ones.

Karlrobert Kreiten had been sentenced to death by the *Volksgerichtshof* in Berlin only four days earlier, on September 3, 1943, for giving aid and comfort to the enemy and undermining battle readiness.

Neither his loved ones nor the lawyers knew about his impending court appearance. It was only thanks to an anonymous phone call to the Berlin apartment he shared with his sister, Rosemarie, that she learned of the death sentence and was then able to alert her parents in Düsseldorf. They immediately addressed a clemency request to Hitler, because they knew that as long as a clemency request had been received and not yet rejected, the execution had to be stayed.
As a Kafka novel, friends, parents, and sisters in Düsseldorf went to Berlin and all tramped from office to office with a clemency request from September 3rd until September 8th, one day after the execution; in Düsseldorf they went from the head of the *Gau* Cultural Department to the *Gaupropagandaleiter* and finally to the *Gauleiter*. All these officials put off accepting the petition, had many demands on their time, had meetings to attend, asked to have the facts of the case dictated to a secretary in the outer office, delayed forwarding the petition intended for Berlin by leaving it lying around for 24 hours in the telex room of the *Reichspropagandaamt* in Düsseldorf.

On September 8th, Kreiten’s mother and sister were allowed into the Reich Chancellery in Berlin, where their petition for clemency was accepted and they were promised that the Justice Ministry would be informed of the required temporary stay of execution.

In order to be sure that no more precious time elapsed, the mother and sister walked to the Justice Ministry themselves; all of these offices were located near one another. But the officials with whom they wanted to speak, with one exception, all pretended to be out of the office. Only the last one, whom they did get to see, a state’s attorney in the Justice Ministry, told them what he was not supposed to reveal: Karlrobert Kreiten had been dead since the previous day.

An example was to be made of a young artist as a warning to others.

One week later, the following appeared in the newspapers and was pasted on the kiosks in Berlin:
“On September 7, 1943 the 27-year-old pianist Karlrobert Kreiten from Düsseldorf was executed. The Volksgerichtshof sentenced him to death for lending aid and comfort to the enemy and undermining battle readiness. Kreiten attempted to influence a good German woman’s trusting and loyal attitude through the most objectionable rabble-rousing, slander, and exaggeration, in the process manifests views that made him an outcast from the German national community.”

Who was the German woman with the trusting and loyal attitude?

An old school friend of his mother’s.

Her name was Ellen X.; she had studied voice with his mother at the conservatory in Saarbrücken and now lived in Berlin. She had offered Karlrobert Kreiten the use of the music room in her apartment because she knew, perhaps even from his mother, that he was preparing for his next concert on March 23, 1943 in the Berlin Beethoven Hall, but at the same time was moving from one part of Berlin to another with his sister and grandmother, and thus had nowhere to practice.

He knew that the audience had high expectations of him, since he was regarded as the most talented German pianist of his generation.

The young man was accustomed to enjoying the good will and support of others. Born in 1916 in Bonn to a concert pianist, university teacher, and composer who would later be active in Düsseldorf, and a concert singer, he had grown up in a very affectionate and artistic environment. His grandmother, born in Spain to French parents, highly educated and interested in many subjects, and widowed young, loved her grandson more than anything in the world, supervised his piano and violin lessons before he started school, taught him French, the multiplication tables, and the German
ABCs. Later, when he was already a famous pianist and living in Berlin, she took care of the household for him and his sister, an actress, as well as attending to his professional correspondence.

Karlrobert Kreiten had already become a sensation at eleven when he played Mozart’s Piano Concerto in A major in the Düsseldorf Concert Hall’s Imperial Theater for a radio broadcast. At thirteen he attended the conservatory in Cologne, at sixteen he competed in and won a competition in Vienna in which one thousand pianists participated, and that same year he won the Mendelssohn Grand Prize in Berlin and studied under Hermann Abendroth. After studying in Vienna for two years, he finished his training with Claudio Arrau.

The woman who taught him in Vienna, Hedwig Rosenthal-Kanner, was offered a position in the USA in the late thirties and advised him to move there as well. But he did not listen to his well-intentioned teacher; he wanted to become better, even more famous, in Europe before he dared make the jump to another continent.

Next, acting on advice from Furtwängler, he moved to Berlin with his sister. Their grandmother followed and served as Kreiten’s “finance minister,” as his father later wrote in his book Those Whom the Gods Love . . ., an account of his dead son’s life. Now, in March of 1943, the joint move into a larger apartment was about to take place.

The quiet music room in the home of his mother’s friend was surely an oasis in the midst of the chaos of wrapping and packing. (And again, it was a motherly woman interested in the arts who extended herself for Karlrobert Kreiten.)
At Ellen X.’s home, in preparation for his concert he practiced sonatas by
Scarlatti and Mozart, six études by Chopin (from Opus 10, numbers 12, 8, and 2;
from Opus 25, numbers 7, 6, and 10), Liszt’s Spanish Rhapsody, and Beethoven’s
Sonata in F minor op. 57, the Appassionata. During breaks in his practicing he
conversed with Ellen X. (Did she make him a cup of tea?)

He had not known that she was an ardent National Socialist and gave in to the
temptation to talk with her about the nature of National Socialism, as he saw it, and
about Hitler and how the war was progressing.

He said, among other things: that Hitler was sick; to think that the German
people were now at the mercy of a lunatic like that! In two to three months revolution
would break out, and then Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, and Frick would all be shortened
by a head. The war was practically lost, which would result in the downfall of
Germany and its entire culture.

Did he sense any danger, or did he take it for granted that he could speak so
openly with a family acquaintance?

Ellen X. was appalled and told a neighbor in her building about his shocking
statements. This woman, the wife of a Ministerialrat Y., whose first name was
Annemarie, was also a devout National Socialist, and a training supervisor. In her
fanatical devotion to the Party, Annemarie Y. even had her own sister kept under
surveillance.

Annemarie Y. was incensed by what she had heard and discussed the situation
with a third woman, Tiny Z., who worked with her in the Frauenchaft and was
familiar with the Kreiten family because she, too, came from Düsseldorf.
These two women, as Ellen X. later testified, put a gun to her head: the report was turned in to the Reichsmusikkammer by all three of them in the middle of March 1943, one week before the planned concert.

But nothing happened. The Reichsmusikkammer had not forwarded the denunciation to other authorities.

Karlrobert Kreiten continued to practice day after day, oblivious to the danger.

The concert took place on March 23, 1943. The pianist was enthusiastically acclaimed by the audience. But strangely, only one newspaper reported the story the next day. Except for a private concert at the home of a painter in Berlin a few days later, it was the last time Kreiten performed for an audience.

The women waited in vain for his arrest.

At the end of April 1943, six weeks after making their report, they read in the paper that Karlrobert Kreiten was engaged to perform at a concert in Florence on May 2, 1943. They lost their patience. It became clear to them that the Reichsmusikkammer had deliberately misplaced their report. They delivered a second report. This one, based on evidence from Ellen X. and written by Annemarie Y., was handed in by Tiny Z. at her former workplace, the Propagandaministerium, and from there went to the Gestapo.

During this time Karlrobert Kreiten visited his parents in Düsseldorf, went on a trip to the Siebengebirge with a woman friend, and waited for his Italian visa.

It did not come.
He did not become suspicious; other Germans were allowed to leave the country only under exceptional circumstances. And the young men his age were all away in the war.

Before he received the invitation to Florence he had planned to tour domestically in May of 1943, starting with a concert in Heidelberg. So instead of traveling to Florence he made his way to Heidelberg. But when the audience arrived at the University Great Hall on May 3rd for the long since sold-out concert, there was a small note posted on the door: “Kreiten concert cancelled.”

The Gestapo had arrested him at 8 o’clock that morning in his hotel in Heidelberg.

Two weeks later he was brought to the Gestapo prison in Berlin and confronted with the woman who had betrayed him. What must the woman have felt when she looked into the hungry and bruised face of her friend’s son?

He had faith in a good outcome, practiced his sonatas every day on a table top, was put in the court’s pretrial prison, took heart again, practiced, went hungry, wrote letters, looked forward to his vacation with his girlfriend, was allowed to see his family when they visited him, gave his grandmother advice about what to eat for breakfast: she should eat oatmeal to strengthen herself.

On September 3, 1943, he was sentenced to death.
The “Confidential Informant”

Introduction

A jury trial took place at the Kassel district court from October 19 to November 16, 1954 in which Dagmar I., fifty-eight years old at the time, born in Sweden, a housewife and widow, was charged as an accessory to murder.

This trial had been preceded immediately after the end of the war by a police interrogation in Sweden in which Dagmar I. was accused of espionage and denunciation; she pled not guilty, then suffered a nervous breakdown and was brought to the psychiatric hospital in Stockholm by her mother. In 1946 she was expelled from Sweden and banned from reentering the country. Dagmar I. was then taken from the hospital in Stockholm and immediately turned over to the military government in the British occupation zone of Germany, which recommitted her to a psychiatric hospital; after that she was taken into police custody. That same year (1946) she was named a chief culprit and sentenced to ten years in a work camp. After three years she was released as part of a general amnesty, but the state’s attorney filed an objection to her release. She was then placed in pretrial custody and spent several months under psychiatric observation in various university hospitals. This was followed by acquittal, another objection by the state’s attorney’s office to her acquittal, and a decision by the Federal Supreme Court that she should stand trial again. In 1954 the prosecution charged Dagmar I. with serving as an agent provocateur for the Gestapo in the period from 1941 to 1945, that is to say from the time she was forty-five until she was forty-nine, and with causing in this capacity the arrest of sixteen people, five men and eleven women from her inner circle. Three of the men were sentenced to death: the seventy-four-year-old retired Protestant minister Dr. Alfred K. and his friend, the painter Heinrich W., for listening to and discussing so-called enemy broadcasts, and the fifty-six-year-old Catholic priest Dr. Max Josef Metzger, founder of the Una Sancta movement, who, in early 1943, had authored a manifesto calling for a new Germany, which he addressed to highly placed English clergymen and the British government. Father Metzger was executed on April 17, 1944.
The court in 1954 accused the defendant Dagmar I. of luring the priest into a trap by offering to be his confidante and to smuggle the manifesto to Sweden, where she would deliver it to the Swedish archbishop. She had put a typewriter specially rigged by the Gestapo at his disposal.

Whereas Dr. K., the initiator of and leading figure in a discussion group and a former teacher of Rudolf Hess, was granted a reduced sentence on February 13, 1943 of eight years in the penitentiary, his friend, the painter Heinrich W., was executed on February 20, 1943.

In this connection, in 1954 the court accused the defendant of carrying out orders from the Gestapo to gain access to Dr. K.’s clandestine discussion group, participating in said group a total of five times between New Year’s Eve of 1941 and February 6, 1942, and on February 6, 1942 causing the group to be arrested on the basis of her reports.

The court heard the case for one month in 1954 with only short interruptions. It had the defendant undergo a psychiatric examination, studied twenty supplementary files, heard from the five surviving victims, the friends and family of those who had died, seventy witnesses for the prosecution and defense, expert witnesses, and the defendant, who contradicted and contradicted herself and denied and denied everything to the very end, even when the chief witness for the prosecution took the stand. This witness was the Gestapo official who had been her handler, had passed her orders on to her, received her reports, and carried out the arrests and house searches of those she had denounced; he knew her code name and could explain all the contradictions in the case.

She continued to deny everything and never made a confession.

Dagmar I. was sentenced to serve one year and three months in the penitentiary for acting as an accessory to severe deprivation of liberty in the case of Dr. Metzger. Eight months of pretrial custody were counted towards her penitentiary sentence. She spent a total five months of her life in the penitentiary.

She had been allowed to deny her guilt and had not, unlike her victims, been tortured until she confessed.

As I write this, she, now ninety-three, may be sitting on a park bench. She has been free for thirty-four years.
You, my judge, are handsome, brown-eyed, childlike. You probably want to be just. You are polite, almost tender, my dear judge. You resemble one of the eleven considered my victims, you resemble Brother Paulus, who was beheaded. He trusted me so much. I was his only confidante. Maybe you have sympathy for me? I could be your mother. Yes, I will utter this sentence at some point—when you have me stand and ask me about one of these witness statements that you would like to use to convict me. I will stand up, look straight at you, and say softly, so softly that you will have to ask me to speak louder so that I can be heard in the whole courtroom, I will have a chance say it twice: *I could be your honor’s mother!*

(You just said that to your mother—is that any way to speak to your mother—you should be ashamed of yourself, speaking to your mother that way—after all I’ve done for you, sacrificed for you, suffered—you were an accident—you interrupted my professional career, no, broke it off—the difficult pregnancy, the long labor—if you hadn’t come along I wouldn’t have stayed with your father—if you hadn’t come along I could have married again—but a widow with a child, when there were so few men and so many unattached women after the war? Because of you I’ve had to give up everything—a new family, travel, plenty of money—I couldn’t discover my talents—I couldn’t pursue my interests—I had to spend all that money on you—have you any idea how much financial sacrifice a child requires? You’re ungrateful, you speak to your mother like this, you’ll be sorry some day.)

*I could be your mother, your honor.*
My daughter left me, went away. She went just about as far as a person can go to get away. She married herself away to America.

I visited my own mother at home in Sweden twice a year, but my daughter doesn’t even come to my trial. All she can do is loathe me now, she wrote in a letter after the war. Then she never wrote again. Since then I am dead to her.

My own mother is also dead, my lovely mother in Sweden. She disinherited me in favor of my daughter, allegedly so that the family inheritance wouldn’t go to Germany. She didn’t want me to have it.

She put me in the madhouse, after the war in Stockholm, in the madhouse. Supposedly to protect me from being taken to court. But I wasn’t crazy, I felt they were after me only because everyone claimed to know so much about me. They had thrown a net of assumptions and reproaches over me.

She also sent my father to the madhouse. He wasn’t kept there long, either. He was allowed to return home to her, while Sweden, my homeland, handed me over to Germany. I never got to return to her again. I never got to see her again.

They’ve both been dead for a long time now.

My husband is dead, I know this for certain. He died while fleeing to Hamburg from Bergen-Belsen, just two weeks before the end of the war. He was with me for almost the entire war. It was shortly before the end that they called him up, the early retiree, along with the last contingents—the elderly, the retirees, the cripples, and the children. He wasn’t fit to be a real soldier, not with his neck wound from the First World War. They had him work in a concentration camp, censoring mail, if that can be called real work. He certainly had practice reviewing writing: until his
retirement it was the essays written by his students, and afterwards, during the war, my notes. At any rate he corrected the German in my reports for three years.

He never achieved anything in life. He was a loser up to the end: he died of typhus while fleeing. Not from a wound like the other soldiers, the real ones. Nonetheless I received a war widow’s pension. A fine warrior.

You, too, your honor, ask me about my marriage.

How many times I’ve had to answer questions about my husband. As if he were to blame. No one forced me to stay with him, including him. He wanted to live with me and I with him, though both of us for different reasons.

When I met this man during my first trip to Germany, he seemed to me like a snail in its shell, all alone, without any feelers reaching out. You could say he made use of my feelers; they were enough for both of us. And I, I used his shell. It was only later that it got too confining for me.

At twenty-six it was high time I got married. Who was supposed to support me if not a husband? My parents?

I would have had to work, but as what? My father hadn’t allowed me to train in the profession I wanted: as a nurse’s aide. My father didn’t allow me to work outside the home.

After my wedding I lived on my husband’s teaching salary and then his civil servant’s pension, and now on my pension as a war widow. Yes, he’s provided for me since I joined myself in marriage to him. Not counting the three years in the work camp, I’ve never worked outside the home, let alone earned a living.
It’s hard for me to picture my husband’s face now, but I have some photographs of him that I keep. A stern, reserved man looks out of the pictures at me.

I can’t remember ever taunting him for his one-sidedness; I was and still am convinced that a person can’t ever radically change his basic attitude towards life and towards people. He was dependable, and I didn’t ask any more than that of him.

He taught his subjects, religion, German and history, to his students without humor or sympathy. So neither his students nor his colleagues and superiors could stand him.

In the first years of our marriage he was transferred every year. So we had to pack up everything at the end of every school year and move to another apartment in another town with our small child: from Stettin to Anklam, from Anklam to Wittenberg, from Wittenberg to Halberstadt. That was the first place where we were allowed to stay longer; it ended up being eleven years.

Right at the beginning of the new regime he joined the Sturmabteilung and I joined the Frauenschaft. But that didn’t help him; just one year later one of the positions at his school had to be cut, and his was selected. Finally they forced him into early retirement: at forty. And that, I have to say, hit me hard. It was indescribably embarrassing to me. What was I supposed to say to people when they asked what we were living on? Was I supposed to end up in a provincial backwater at the side of an embittered, hardened, failure of a man?

I had a nervous breakdown and spent a couple of months in a sanatorium in the Harz Mountains, actually just to be able to think things over in peace. While there I recognized that at thirty-nine my life was not over; rather it was just beginning. First
of all, we had a regular income in the form of his retirement pension, which meant
that he no longer had to go to the job he loathed every day and be humiliated by the
others’ dislike. Second, we could move to a place where we really wanted to live,
where no one knew us, where I could maybe go to the movies or the theater for the
first time in my life. I was old enough to go to a café alone or with acquaintances,
people I would maybe meet in our new home, without causing gossip, old enough to
go on another trip, perhaps, besides the regular one to Sweden twice a year.

We didn’t have to leave any friends behind—we didn’t have any. Maybe, I
thought then, it will be possible for me to find a circle of friends for the first time in
my life, because I would know we could stay here, in this town; we surely wouldn’t
be transferred again, not from here.

While I was still in the sanatorium, my husband got an offer to expand the
archives of a Christian student organization he had belonged to earlier, and for whose
magazine he had written articles all through his career up to that point. These archives
were located in an elegant villa in a beautiful old Hessian city. And the offer, in
addition to good compensation, supplementing his pension, included the opportunity
to live on one floor of the villa free of cost. I immediately saw this as the change of
fortune I had been longing for, persuaded my husband to accept, and he complied.
We moved again: our last move together.

I hadn’t been mistaken. As a result of my husband’s new job, we finally
belonged to the respectable citizenry of a town. But when we called on people to
introduce ourselves, I already sensed that my husband was going to continue his old
way of life: shunning other people, having contact only with me and our daughter.
But my old life was over.

I noticed that four men met for a sundowner every Wednesday in the villa where we lived; like my husband, they were former members of the Christian student organization. I learned that their families also got together once a month.

I suggested to the men that from now on, as the wife of the archivist, I could organize their meetings as well as their family get-togethers, and my husband, who didn’t want to insult me in front of others, reluctantly agreed. This was how I was able to turn our house into a small social center, admittedly only for these four, who, furthermore, were all theologians.

Unfortunately I had no access to other families in the first few years. The military, artistic, and academic circles of the town remained closed to me, although there was a professor who was actually married to a Swedish woman. I knew this from the file on expatriate Swedes, whose maintenance I offered to take over immediately after our move, and which was gladly handed over to me.

Who enjoys paperwork? Still, it was no comparison to the dreary life of the first fourteen years of marriage: our income was twice as much as before, so I could often travel to Sweden by plane instead of only by train, as I had been doing up to that point, and our housing situation had never been so comfortable.

Then I, like my husband, became I member of the Party in power. Because I was in tune with the new era, I also wanted really to be a part of things.

Even from today’s perspective, that can’t be illegal.
Unfortunately I could no longer take my trips to Sweden when the Second World War started four years later. From the beginning of the war on, you needed a stamp from the Gestapo in your passport in order to leave Germany. What reason should they have for granting me a special permission like that? Had I not married a German, I wouldn’t have been trapped within Germany’s borders; I would have been able to travel freely around the world. Instead I had to live in a country at war and endure all of the hardships of a wartime economy.

The four men continued to meet at our home. Three clergymen and a scholar.

One of the clergymen later hanged himself in the basement of the Gestapo, one day before an arrest warrant was issued for his friends. Who knows what details he had betrayed? Perhaps his conscience was bothering him?

The second clergyman, who had asserted that no one would find anything if his house were searched, really did have to be let go by the Gestapo after they searched his house, and found nothing; he didn’t confess to anything. But he had grown suspicious—because that statement was cited as grounds for searching his house. He knew he had said this only once, only at our home, and only in the presence of the three other theologians, myself, and my husband. Only one of the five of us, his five closest acquaintances, could have denounced him.

I owed it to the third clergyman that I was granted permission to travel to Sweden seven months after the start of the war. Shortly thereafter he went back to America, where he had already lived previously.

The scholar among the four was rumored to have a circle of invited guests that met at his home every Friday. For years I wasn’t included, even though he frequented
our house every Wednesday. He probably thought himself too good for us, with his ladies and the painter. He and his entire little Friday group were arrested by the Gestapo in my presence one day. I had finally been invited to the last five gatherings. He invited me for the first time on New Year’s Eve in 1941; I had waited six years.

He was sentenced to death.

But he was lucky: after he had spent five months in strict isolation waiting for his execution, with only a thin mattress on the floor, bound hand and foot, hungry, starved down to 128 pounds despite being nearly six feet tall, covered with festering sores and freezing, his sentence was reduced to eight years in the penitentiary because five universities and several high-ranking people interceded for him. He served only three years because the war ended and he was freed by the advancing American troops.

But he died nine months later, at seventy-eight, from a heart attack while he was traveling. So in the end it really was a death sentence.

Of the eight ladies in the scholar’s circle, two are dead. Of the other six I believed only one when she said she hadn’t been involved with him. Except for her and me, the other women all ended up in the penitentiary or in concentration camps.

One, the wife of the painter, was a Jew from Vienna, and was gassed in a camp; a second, the wife of a paraplegic professor, died of cancer a week after being released from prison early for Christmas.

All of them had to atone. For their haughtiness.
All of them confessed to something, though not what they had been accused of—gathering to listen and discuss the London news broadcast—even if it was just tuning in a music program from Radio Beromünster, because that, too, was forbidden.

What did they expect, your honor, for confessing to something forbidden? That they would be rewarded? You don’t tell the truth if you know you’ll be punished for it.

All of them confessed to something, I was the only one who didn’t. That’s why I was never punished. I’ve said this again and again. That’s why I wasn’t punished, your honor, that’s what I say again today.

After the war the courts kept sending me to insane asylums for so-called evaluation. Time and time again the doctors sent me back to the court. They were all baffled. Because I told them that I’m not guilty.

Your witnesses seem to know so many things, your honor, remember so much. Years have passed, merciful years that let people forget. That woman’s ashes have already turned to earth. And grass has grown over the graves of the two men. Were their heads put back on in the coffins?

Where else should a head be put other than in its proper place? Beheaded and replaced.

Were the executed men lying in their coffins with their eyes open? Or did they close the eyes in the chopped-off head before putting it in the coffin? And who did that? A doctor? Did the death have to be officially pronounced? Was there a protocol for such things? Was it the executioner’s prerogative? The right to the last night that he was unwilling to give up? Or were the assistants allowed, or ordered, to do it?
It’s all in the past.

He who murders has power. He who has power is allowed to judge. But I haven’t done anything bad. I was powerless. Death is inevitable, death is inextricable from murder, your honor. Why else would someone go to the effort to commit murder? And it does take effort.

A murder requires intention and preparation, this is what you learned and had to repeat for your exam. And a base motive: greed for money, power, or sex. The base motive is the most important of the trinity. A touch of fanaticism—it doesn’t have to be thought through at all—in a person’s worldview, politics, or religion excuses the murder. The murderer is no longer a murderer: an extenuating circumstance exists.

But I don’t need an extenuating circumstance; I am not a murderer.

I’m supposed to think about what I felt while wanting someone to be gone, and you, your honor, want a confession? Everything is in the files.

Born in Sweden, the child of Swedish parents, living with these parents until age twenty-six, sheltered, an only child, raised to be genteel in a small town.

You too, your honor, cannot believe this.

My father, first a farmer, later the director of a company, raised me with the help of my mother to be Christian, allowed me to continue attending the school near our home until two years before the university-qualifying exams. Instead of a profession, he had me learn what every genteel young lady, in his opinion, should know: how to run a household, paint porcelain, and speak foreign languages.

I always lived with my parents in that town, as you, your honor, will no doubt say in a minute; I can’t have helped learning about freedom of opinion and the press,
along with respect for the democratic rights of the individual, as they are fostered in Sweden. There, you just said it.

At twenty-six I traveled to Stettin, which still belonged to Germany at the time, met a secondary-school teacher, became engaged to him, and married him in October of that same year. My daughter was born the next year, also an only child, like me.

Do you know, your honor, what it's like to be excluded? It’s far worse than loneliness. To be excluded by those you want to belong to. You walk down a dark, cold street past illuminated windows through which you can see lively, laughing men and women inside. I am sure that you, your honor, are one of the people who sit inside, in the warmth, and not one of those who stand outside in the cold.

Sweden doesn’t want me anymore. They expelled me from my homeland because I allegedly was a spy. I’ve been interrogated for years, suspected, accused, classified, sent to work camps, evaluated in locked psychiatric wards. Time and again, they had to unlock doors for me, let me out. You, too, will have to let me go free, your honor. Within a year I will cross your path as a respectable woman on the street, your honor, while you’re out for a walk with your wife.

I will stay in this town. I know everyone so well. I have nothing to reproach myself for.

I won’t forget one word that was said against me. And my revenge will be very painful.

You’re handsome, your honor, but you know too little about life. You think in clichés.
You’re thinking in terms of exonerating circumstances: coddled but confined in your parents’ home, then an orderly but boring marriage. But I’ve never been bored in my life. I was breathless, like a gambler. My life tasted good to me. My ears brought me joy; how I liked to hear voices whispering. How I like the sound of my broken German with its Swedish accent. How I love to look at my face in the mirror: it’s always unfamiliar to me. I can never remember the eyes. They look at me. Who do they belong to? When I close them and run my tongue over my warm lips, then I know: I’m inside myself. And when I open my eyes and look into the eyes of other people, into yours, too, your honor, then I feel our mutual understanding:

Yes, you are beautiful.

Yes, I am beautiful.

I spy with my little eye something that is red.

When you played this game, your honor, did you always stick to whatever you picked first? For example, the spine of a book?

If the red spine of the book was guessed too quickly, didn’t you secretly, out of fear that the game would be over too soon, switch to the geranium blossom, to the lampshade, to your neighbor’s lips, to the hostess’s shoes? As a child, I was already glad that no one could guess my thoughts. I sensed: Thoughts are free, the imagination is free, wishes are free.

I still remember how I had to laugh in literature class when we read Don Carlos: Grant us freedom of thought, Sire. Under dictatorships the audience sometimes breaks into spontaneous applause after that sentence: Grant us freedom of
thought, Sire. I could laugh myself silly at such sentimentality. I can’t ask for something I already have: Grant me my nose, Sire. Spontaneous applause. Now the poet has really thumbed his nose at those in power. He’s saying something we’re all thinking. Yes, we want freedom of thought. At the very least, freedom of thought. But you have it, everyone has it, you dimwits, ugh. The proof?

Supposing, for example, I imagine right now, your honor, that the door to the courtroom opens; the police come in, walk up to you, lead you away, everyone in the courtroom is silent, either distressed or frightened, no one protects you, the police lock you into a paddy wagon, take you to an interrogation room, and hand you over to the Gestapo. You can’t see the interrogator because he shines a spotlight on you, and now you have to stand there for the next few hours while the interrogator reads out loud to you what you said to a very small circle of friends.

How can the interrogator know all this? Who could have told him all this, word for word? It’s all true. Who else was in that room? It’s impossible that he would know all this without someone’s having betrayed you. Someone must have betrayed you, one of the men you trusted. Or was it one of the women?

Now the interrogator says that he knows everything; denying it will only cost you sleeping time. Everyone else has already confessed, that is to say, they haven’t actually confessed, says the interrogator, rather the others put the blame for everything on you. You’re the ringleader, you, your honor, talked the others into it, led the innocents astray, but now your friends are finally done with trashing the ruling system, the system to which they owe so much, no, owe everything, your friends are so relieved, says the interrogator, that they can finally be honest again, your friends
don’t want to have anything more to do with you, your honor, and they call for the harshest punishment for you, the interrogator says, oh, if only you could be rendered harmless, say your friends. Once and for all.

It’s not preparation for—no, says the interrogator, it is treason, high treason. For something like that, the only possible sentence is death, the interrogator is sure of that. Unless you stop denying everything, give up your defiant, obstinate denials. The interrogator doesn’t want to offend you, but denial in this situation is really stupid.

Confidentially, the interrogator can’t imagine that things are the way your friends say they are, your honor. They must have contributed something to the discussions. Although they deny it. And what if your friends hadn’t laughed so hard, yes, would you, your honor, have said such subversive things in the first place, expressed such negative opinions? And if your friends hadn’t provided so much material from actual situations? For example, your friend the teacher, about the students’ jokes: God rest A (a dead friend of the man on top), God rest B (another dead friend of the man on top), God rest C (the man on top, himself). He’s already put A to rest, he’s already put B to rest. May God rest all three of them.

Naturally, these are children’s jokes and they’re told about anyone in power. You asked your friend, the teacher, to tell you his students’ jokes. But he reported that you told him these jokes and egged him on to tell more in front of the others, some of whom are also teachers. He also said that you find the regime stupid, one official dumber than the next, conceited, power-hungry, mindless: one has golden faucets, another has his own island, a third has a pink hunting outfit. You allegedly told the anecdote about how the one with the pink hunting outfit wanted a trophy over his
cabinet, the head of an elk, and therefore the only tame elk in the entire country was presented to him and his shotgun, but someone else shot it, so the head wound could be in the right spot, inconspicuous when the head was stuffed. We don’t believe you said that, as I already mentioned, the interrogator says to calm you, your honor, while he forces you to undress and squat down, pulling your shackled hands over your knees, then putting a stick between your elbows and the backs of your knees, and knocking you over. Yes, there you lie, helpless as a beetle on its back, crying for democracy and human rights, and get your first kick in the face from your friendly interrogator, who doesn’t care for hysteria, not for hysteria and not for lying and not for false camaraderie and certainly not for martyrdom. Because there’s nothing here to suffer with dignity, there’s a signature to sign beneath a confession so he can finally call it a day. You’re making him late to his wife’s birthday party, merely because you with your misplaced sense of solidarity want to protect all your so-called friends. No one has any solidarity with you. He, your interrogator, wouldn’t describe them as friends—they haven’t come through in your time of need.

And you do find yourself in a time of need, your honor, because the death sentence is looming, and after the events of the last few months there is no clemency to be expected. The person who would have to grant you clemency would, after all, be the same person you’ve insulted, if what your friends have reported is true.

Now, says the interrogator—already showing impatience—now let’s resolve the question of guilt once and for all: Who said what, when, where, and in whose presence to whom? And what did the other person answer?
It can’t be, the interrogator screams at you, that everyone is nothing but a sick, gutless liar, so worried about saving his pathetic skin that he craps in his pants.

What’s dribbling out of your mouth?

Don’t get the floor dirty. Lick it clean.

What thin blood you have, says the interrogator, and smears your blood around; that’s a sight I’ve seen only when my father, who was a butcher, slaughtered pigs. I will repeat this again, slowly and clearly for a dimwit like you: All of your so-called friends are already at home in bed with their wives or whomever, because they signed their reports, and, if necessary, confessions, and could be released to go home. We could release you, too, not immediately to your home, but at least to your quiet cell in solitary, says the interrogator as he stubs out his cigarette on your neck, your honor.

Because the wound needs to be dressed; hygiene is a big thing in the 20th century, especially in Europe, isn’t it?

The only thing missing is the signature: first and last name. The confession is already lying there, neatly typed.

We need it. Otherwise what else would the judge have to work with? Our state observes the rule of law. Without a confession, there can be no fair sentence.

No signature, then. You will sign, just wait.

I can already see you whimpering on the wet cellar floor with no blanket.

But it’s your own fault: why did you trust people? Not just one, no, several. And now you don't know who betrayed you. Or do you think there was a listening
device? The interrogator was too well informed about the discussions of the last weeks. But he also presented you with visual details.

Bugged and betrayed? Or only betrayed? Or betrayed by several people?

No one, your honor, not even you, no one can see these thoughts in my head. Thoughts are free, your honor, what we think, who can guess? They fly by like a shadow in the night: noiseless, no one can know them, and so on.\textsuperscript{13}

Your face is unscathed. Soon you will call a recess for lunch and, accompanied by your clerk, maybe only by your attractive female clerk, go to the cafeteria for lunch as a free man, while the marshal takes me to the food bucket waiting in the holding cell.

That is the best proof.

I spy with my little eye something red, and it is blood.

I’m not to blame for the scholar’s death. No, there’s nothing to confess.

He was an unusually sexy man, smart, educated, worldly. The exact opposite of my husband. He was twenty-eight years older than I and lived alone, though only in his apartment; he had many women—as I soon found out.

I looked forward to those Wednesday evenings when, out of habit or old loyalty, he came to our house for a sundowner with the other three men, former Christian students, now grown old. I would try to catch his attention, but never succeeded.

\textsuperscript{13} This is a modified quotation from the song “\textit{Die Gedanken sind frei}” (thoughts are free) whose precise origin is unknown. The song was first published in the early 1800s in Switzerland.—Trans.
He had studied philosophy and theology and had been a pastor and the director of the German School in Alexandria before the First World War. In that position he had spent eight years teaching the man who would later become the second most powerful in Germany, Hess. After the First World War he retired from the ministry. It was his voluntary decision to retire, not imposed on him as it had been my husband after his professional failure. Despite being retired, he went on to study geography, archeology, and Egyptology, received his doctorate, wrote scholarly essays, and gave many talks about Egypt and the Near East. I admired him.

Only in the beginning did he welcome the new Reich, and he soon distanced himself ironically from the system, gathering—especially after Hess’s flight to England during the war—like-minded people in his apartment to listen to English radio broadcasts and then discuss what they had heard.

He disguised the Friday night meetings as an intimate party. He invited: the painter, who tuned the radio to the right station; he was married to the Jewish woman and involved on the side with a nurse, of all people; these three constituted the regulars. Others who came, albeit not regularly, were: a young woman studying medicine, whose mother had earlier been close to the educated man; a teacher; and a woman who managed a branch of a dairy company. The guests were thus predominantly women, and young, attractive women at that.

I felt neglected and excluded, slighted at being left out, and I was curious—I, too, wanted to belong.

I asked myself, Why doesn’t he invite me? Is it that he has something against me for being uneducated, for having no profession? Is it that he doesn’t trust me
because I’m a Party member, and he sees himself as an opponent? Is it indifference towards my husband and me? Do we not even cross his mind when he plans his Friday parties?

Or is it maybe—and this would have been the worst—his lack of interest in me as a woman? Am I too old for him? Too unattractive?

But in those days you couldn’t assert yourself in such a situation.

I invited him for lunch several times when I’d received some Swedish treat in a package from my mother. But except for bringing a bouquet of flowers he never reciprocated.

Things continued that way for several years.

What about me bothers you so much that you don’t want me? I thought very intensely as he sat across from me eating truffles. But he leaned back and admired the moldings in our dining room.

If he didn’t appreciate to me as a woman or as a cook, then at least my political reliability should impress him, I decided. I told him how very disappointed I was, politically: by the system and the Party, by the youth organization to which my daughter belonged; that this disappointment led me to listen to Swedish radio broadcasts on a daily basis so I would be better informed than I could be by the German state broadcasts, which I didn’t trust anymore.

I told him that now that I had permission to travel back to Sweden, despite the war, I could take letters with me, avoiding the postal censorship.

At that point he finally invited me.
Too late, because I could attend only five times: from my first invitation to the New Year’s Eve Friday evening party in 1941 until his arrest on February 6, 1942, only five weeks went by. In the four years until his death, I didn’t see him again.

How old you’ve gotten, you, the witness who came here specially from America, the third man from the sundowners circle.

You, too, avert your eyes from me, just like the other survivors. But I didn’t do anything to you, quite the contrary: I selflessly helped you by carrying your mail.

In exchange you also selflessly helped me get regular permission to travel to Sweden. Without you I would have had to live in this war-torn Germany without visiting the peaceful oasis of Sweden twice a year, and without me, you wouldn’t have known how your wife and children in Germany were faring, and they would never have heard from you.

You will soon have to admit this here, in court. Although you’d emigrated to America quite early, and soon after that became a naturalized citizen, you will testify, that you’d returned to Germany with your wife and two children shortly after the beginning of the Third Reich, while your eldest daughter stayed in America.

After the war started, you were pining for your daughter and America, but your wife preferred to stay in Germany with the two smaller children.

How to get mail out in wartime? you wondered to yourself at home.

Your wife had the idea, you say, to ask me, because I was the only person among your acquaintances who could possibly leave and visit a neutral country
during the war; I could put the letters in the mail in Sweden and receive the answers at a Swedish address.

But I didn’t have permission to leave the country.

You decided on your own, you testify, to ask an officer with military intelligence, with whom you were friends, how I could get special permission to leave the country.

He promised, you attest, to arrange for me to meet a detective from the Gestapo if he found me trustworthy.

You introduced me to him.

He found me to be trustworthy.

Then you and your son accompanied him and me to an office of the Gestapo.

You and your son waited outside while the intelligence officer brought me to the office of the detective who was in charge of the post, but the officer came out alone.

I allegedly negotiated alone with the post director. That was seven months after the war had started.

When I came back outside and saw you, you remember, I had the exit visa in my passport. It was granted to me without objection, for the entire war.

How else could I have delivered your mail?

I had also, you say, dependably picked up all your mail and told you that before leaving Germany I would present the outgoing mail to an intelligence officer in Berlin and, upon reentering the country, would present the incoming mail to an
intelligence officer in Frankfurt/Main. I had not told you the names of these officers.

You don’t know anything further and you now swear to that, on your honor.

Never, pastor, would you have sworn a false oath.

Löser.

Löser won’t say anything.

He would be incriminating himself.

A former senior detective of the Gestapo keeps silent.

Where did you dig him up, your honor? In the penitentiary? I haven’t seen him in years.

We couldn’t let on that we knew each other, couldn’t recognize each other, after the war.

Today, too, I don’t know him, I’ve never seen him, I’ve never stroked his warm blond hair, his thighs against mine.

I will stay as silent as the grave about us.

What does he say he was?

An opponent of the regime even before the war?

Löser, the Gestapo officer—an opponent?

That’s what he told the Americans, in any case.

Turned himself in? With a detailed written report?

Clever. The only way to save himself, since his name could be found in the personnel files of the Gestapo. It’s on promotion lists, salary records, receipts. He couldn’t deny any of this.
He made his choice, I would have done the same; as in Cinderella: the good
go in the big pot, the bad go in the bird’s crop, the bad go in the crop of the new state,
the good into the pot of oblivion.

Your honor, you must praise him: everything factually described down to the
smallest detail.

He helped reveal the brutal methods used by the Gestapo? A star witness?

But he didn’t mention me. Right? That would have been the lowest form of
betrayal.

It would be sheer slander.

He doesn’t do it. He doesn’t betray me.

He’s the only person in whom I confided completely. Otherwise I always had
reservations: my mother was too beautiful. She was too preoccupied with herself. My
father was too apathetic, he didn’t think I was capable of anything. My husband was
too much of a loner, too fearful, he was too afraid of other people.

Oh, I trusted you because you were strong, you could support me, knew the
evil within me. We both knew it. We didn’t need to disguise ourselves when we were
alone together.

There, he’s said it, calmly: I know her.

Löser says he knows me.

He’d kept a record of our meetings, including our minutes of love, hours of
love, it was never days of love. He’d kept it at home, for years, for his own
exculpation, he says, because he knew that I would be convicted again, had to be,
with everything I had on my conscience.
He will testify to what he knows, to clarify things.

He pulls out the notebook.

He says I craved validation, was scheming, an adventurer.

It was not to be denied that I had above-average intelligence. But I was cold-hearted, delivering one after another to the knife—not to his knife; he had only been taking orders; what could he have done in the face of my eagerness to destroy others, other than do his duty, but as slowly as possible: it had filled him with horror. That I, as the insignificant wife of a teacher new to the area—and he, after all, had been only a minor official—had destroyed many decent, long-established families, put the husbands behind bars or under the guillotine with my filthy denunciations. He would have preferred to let my reports disappear, but soon I stopped dealing with the lower level to which his office belonged, and instead dealt only directly with Berlin.

Because I didn’t request payment for my services, the Gestapo practically had to force the money for my additional expenses on me. Sometimes he just gave me some necessary foreign currency for Sweden.

He’d understood the situation this way: that I had no interest in money, but that permission to travel to Sweden was so important to me that in order to avoid losing this opportunity I wanted to prove myself useful to the Gestapo, and wrote report after report, sometimes about people whom the Gestapo had not even noticed.

For example, he testified, I had reported on a woman who worked as a teacher and had been a friend of the Swedish archbishop’s family for years. She had translated a book by him from Swedish into German, of which I was really envious. My report had dealt primarily with her forbidden reading material (I had lent her the
books and told him where to look for them when searching the house) and her
listening to the news in secret. The information was so incriminating that he had no
choice but to forward the report to his superior, who was also known to me because
of his use of torture, and who, as expected, had immediately issued an order for the
teacher’s arrest.

He testified also that this teacher had never come to the Friday parties, due to
her dislike of the scholar, not even after my express invitation to the last five
gatherings. This was unlike the pastor from our sundowners, for example, who later
hanged himself in custody.

After the first time she was taken into custody by the Gestapo, the teacher had
to be released due to a lack of evidence. She had become suspicious of me and denied
everything when she sensed that they had no proof against her and she was accused
only of things that I knew about. She was not charged with very serious offenses,
such as caring for a Jewish family living in hiding, which she was doing but had
never confided to anyone. It was because of this that she suspected she was the victim
of a single denunciation.

The same day she was released, she warned all of my acquaintances about
me—but by that time there weren’t many of them. When I got wind of this, I wrote
her a threatening letter, saying I would report everything I knew about her to the
Gestapo if she didn’t take back what she had said. She then hired a lawyer to refute
my threat as blackmail and to challenge me to bring an action against her for slander.
I didn’t do this; instead I filed complaint about her with the Gestapo. Together with
incriminating reports by two of the teacher’s female colleagues, this was sufficient
grounds for a second arrest, which put her in prison. On the day of her release, I arranged for her to be brought immediately to the Ravensbrück concentration camp by the Gestapo. She will testify against me, says Löser, because she survived.

One of his colleagues had told this teacher, even though it was of course forbidden, that I had been the author of the reports. He said he had picked up all my reports from my home upon receiving a phone call from me, initially typed in duplicate, later in triplicate, because the authorities in Berlin also wanted a carbon. And why should he copy everything again himself when all I would have to do was put one extra carbon in the machine to fulfill the demands from Berlin.

In general I had increasingly received my assignments from Berlin; his role was simply to pass orders on to me. My reports and the orders given to me were both to be treated as “classified information” and as “secret Reich business.”

In the beginning I sometimes forgot to sign my reports—with a code name of course—in which case he had to return them to me.

The reports, he says, described the discussions at the Friday parties, the scholar’s discussion circle, with such precision that he initially thought this might be a case for the vice squad rather than for the Gestapo.

But I had produced actionable information on enemies of the state, he says, elicited through leading questions or interesting suggestions, for example that everyone should read aloud to the whole group any letters they had written or received regarding political matters, so as to give everyone the courage to resist the regime in their minds. Another suggestion was that everyone should report on unfortunate conditions in the Reich—in the military, in the labor service, in the food
supply, in the availability of information. Thus, the early move against the group was worthwhile.

And he testifies that I had always provoked others, as a proper agent provocateur must do, so they took me for a bitter opponent of the state and confided in me that they secretly listened to foreign radio broadcasts and read banned books at home, as I told them I did.

Outside of the country clergymen in high positions were equally convinced after my visits that they were meeting with someone who opposed the state out of Christian conviction.

That is why, he says, I was able to establish a valuable connection to the Swedish archbishop, to whom I was supposed to deliver a memorandum written by the German Catholic Brother Paulus about a democratic Germany to be established after the collapse of the dictatorship. On instructions from the Gestapo, I had urgently advised Brother Paulus not to use his own typewriter to write the memorandum, lest it be traced to him if, contrary to expectations, it was found on me or maybe even at his home. I, however, had delivered the memorandum not to the Swedish archbishop but to the Gestapo.

In the fifth year of the war, with tangible evidence of his crime, Brother Paulus was sentenced to death by the Volksgerichtshof, and executed soon thereafter. His arrest, incidentally, took place in my presence, just after he had given me the dangerous document in my hotel in Berlin as planned. The Gestapo storming the room found it in my handbag.
No doubt Brother Paulus blamed himself to the day of his execution for putting me in danger and dooming me, a volunteer courier, to die.

He immediately made a complete confession, without being tortured. Such an idealist, such a dreamer, such a fanatic for the truth!

Löser testifies that the Friday party group had been found guilty to a man and to a woman on the basis of my detailed reports. Complete surprise at the arrest played an important part in their convictions. Because they could not believe they had a traitor in their midst, they assumed there must have been a listening device, and concluded that denying the charges would be pointless.

But of course that would have been the only sensible thing to do. The state’s attorney, says Löser, was able to read my reports in court, because, as previously mentioned, confidential informants of the Gestapo are usually protected. A judge can use mutual incriminations and a person’s own confession only if they are signed with a real name. So the Gestapo had to supply such documents to the court.

Because I was such an adept stool pigeon, he says, the Gestapo hadn’t wanted to lose me. That's why, on instructions from the Gestapo, I had to allow myself to be briefly imprisoned for show, until my victims lost sight of me. As cover for my release, the wife of a professor was officially released one hour before me so she could look after her children, aged seventeen and eighteen. After that I could also be released for childcare reasons; my daughter was eighteen at the time. The others didn’t become suspicious until they were already caught.
My code name with the Gestapo—and for my safety, others were allowed to speak of me only by that name—was my childhood nickname in Sweden. He states this nickname, our secret, for the record: Babsy.

My file, like those of all confidential informants for the Gestapo, was labeled only with a number. He states the number.

He looks in his notebook: On such and such date at such and such time a colleague, who will testify later, on orders from high places in Berlin, met me in a downtown café to give me a bouquet of flowers with a note thanking me for my valuable services.

He himself had seen me for the first time on such and such date in October during the third year of the war. His superior at the time, So-and-so, who has meanwhile been executed, had introduced us and told him that, without further ado, I had responded favorably to the inquiry, recommended by the Reichssicherheitshauptamt on the basis of my unusually good contacts in the Protestant and Catholic churches, as well as my many trips to Sweden, as to whether I would be willing to work with the Gestapo.

He, Löser, had been appointed my contact by his superior, which is why he had kept in touch with me for years. I had always been friendly to him and on one occasion even brought him coffee from Sweden for his sick wife.

He had found it noteworthy that I had always pushed for arrests and interrogations of members of the Friday party group gathered around the scholar instead of continuing to submit detailed reports that could have led to the arrest of an even larger circle of people with subversive attitudes.
The Gestapo—he had been present—had moved in on the Friday party group on February 6, 1942, not without making me responsible for ensuring that all the participants were present that day.

After the arrest the scholar and the painter had incriminated each other during their interrogations, so thoroughly that both of them could be sentenced to death by the *Volksgerichtshof*.

Unlike the scholar, the painter was not granted a reprieve, despite the fact that many people advocated for him. The Jew to whom he was married was protected only as long as he was alive. After his execution she was transferred from the penitentiary to the Auschwitz concentration camp, from which she didn’t return. First gassed, then cremated.

How should I have known that they did such things there?

The pastor from the Wednesday sundowner gathering at the archives, who hanged himself in the custody of the Gestapo after being interrogated, really did commit suicide, Löser affirms credibly.

As he affirms everything credibly.

Because you, your honor, can only believe him—you can’t defend him. He would incriminate himself too much.

Whom does he serve? Always those who have the power to judge?

Your honor, you want a confession. I want to speak.

I could be your mother, so you can believe me: I don’t know him. I have never seen this man before. This woman, who says she met me at the Friday evening parties hosted by the scholar whom I so greatly respected: I’ve never seen her before.
This man I don’t know is saying such despicable things about me that I can only suppose he wants to wash himself clean of his responsibility as a former ranking employee of the Gestapo and distract attention from his own crimes.

He resembles a man who worked for German military intelligence and visited me at home, asking about my impressions of the Friday evening parties held by the scholar.

He wanted to interview the other participants, too.

No, I didn’t ask them if he’d come to see them, too.

At that time my husband was working in postal censorship in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. So he would have had absolutely no time to edit the German in my reports.

I must admit that my husband wanted me to attend the Friday evening parties hosted by the scholar because there were such indecent goings-on there that he wanted to gather evidence against them that would make it possible to expel them from the Christian student group for moral turpitude.

I resisted. But he forced me to go and to report back to him.

I also kept a diary and signed every page with the nickname my father and mother had used in my childhood, which matches the name given by this Herr Löser. I gave these records to my husband, who lent them to a friend.

There’s one point about which your star witness, Herr Löser, is correct: at the time it was rumored that I had an intimate relationship with this friend of my husband’s, a professor.
You will understand, your honor, that out of shame and a sense of discretion I would never allow anything to be said publicly about this relationship. Maybe my husband’s friend’s house was searched and that’s how the notes came into the possession of the Gestapo.

Why the others got the death penalty and I wasn’t sentenced for the same offense is something that I can’t explain.

Why I, as a confidante of the Catholic brother’s and voluntary courier for his memorandum—I was named in the verdict, after all—was not also sentenced, was a riddle to me.

Yes, I am named in the verdict as his chosen courier: my German last name is also a German female given name. My presumptive given name is followed by the word “of [from]” and then the town from which I was supposed to take the memorandum to Sweden. In this context my name sounds like the name of a noblewoman. It’s a coincidence, not a disguise. Why would the court have wanted to protect me?

If your family name, for example, is Heinrich, and you were supposed to bring a letter from Eberswalde to France, the verdict would read: The letter was to be brought by the former German citizen Heinrich from Eberswalde to France.\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\) In German the preposition *von* means both “from” as well as “of.” It appears in the names of German noble families, connecting the given name and a place name (usually the area controlled by the family). In this context the narrator’s last name was omitted in the file, and her first name was followed by *von* and the name of the town where she lived to indicate which Dagmar the file referred to without completely revealing her identity. This name-von-place structure could create the impression that the person in question was of noble lineage.—Trans.
Now I understand why no one in Germany recognized me until the survivors were released from the penitentiary or concentration camp.

No, I didn’t have to appear before a court in the Third Reich, either as a defendant or as a witness. Not on account of the Friday evening parties, not on account of the teacher with contacts in Sweden, and not on account of the Catholic brother.

No, of course I didn’t report my daughter’s teacher, or the shoemaker, or the man who used to be an SS member and engaged to my daughter, when they told me in confidence that they listened to English radio broadcasts and thought that the war could no longer be won.

They hadn’t done anything to me.

I didn’t report anyone, I’m telling you. I only offered witness statements like the others.

Why Sweden deported me and won’t let me back into the country? I can only speculate that there must have been some misunderstanding. It’s based on an interview I gave a reporter after the war. He exaggerated the story I’d told him and published it under the title “I Played Hostess to Hitler.”

Hitler and his staff once stopped by the villa housing the archives, where we lived. I supposedly told this reporter that I choked down some broth in the presence of the Führer, that the officer’s valet washed his hands in champagne, and that Hitler had several cases of wine and soap sent to me as a thank-you.

Now, I didn’t tell him this: the reporter misrepresented my words.
He also incorrectly understood that my husband was the commander of the Bergen-Belsen camp. That was only a rumor in our city. Showing off and self-importance are both foreign to me.

No, this article was not cited as the reason for my extradition in 1946. But I can’t think of any other reason they could have had for extraditing me.

It’s proven, and if you believe Herr Löser otherwise, you can also believe his testimony in this respect, that the participants in the Friday evening circle all incriminated one another. Even if I had written a report, nothing would have happened to them if they had denied everything. And if the exit visa in my passport really had been a reward for my services as an informant, I would have continued to be granted exit visas because the Gestapo would have always hoped that they could convict yet another suspect.

The best example is the pastor from our sundowner group, who had to be released after he was interrogated and his house searched. One Wednesday over tea, he’d said that the Gestapo would not find anything at his place. No, he didn’t participate in the discussion group at the scholar’s home.

I have no idea why his house was searched in the first place. I would suppose someone reported him for making that statement.

I have no idea how these two women who are here today as witnesses, and whom I’ve never laid eyes on before, hit on the idea that I explicitly urged them not to go to the movies on February 6, 1942 as they had planned, but instead to come to the Friday party with me.
Yes, at the time I’d already attended four gatherings on the invitation of the scholar, and I knew that only he issued the invitations, never one of his guests. Why should I have invited anyone? It wouldn’t have made sense; so I didn’t do it.

And it’s also not true that I warned this woman, who, like me, came from Sweden, that she should under no circumstances go into town the next day because something dreadful would happen. I don’t recall having asked her if she knew anything about the sinister powers and what it felt like to be arrested and driven off in a car.

Like me, she was never sentenced, not even arrested, and she can be happy about that, as I am.

I didn’t admit anything to the Gestapo.

That’s why no one could do anything to me.

That her husband, the professor, noted my strange warning in his diary the day before February 6, that is to say, on February 5, and is now producing it here, I can explain only by saying that anything can be forged, including diaries.

Why I ranted about conditions in Germany during my visits to Sweden during World War II, and mentioned torture committed by the Gestapo, but said nothing about either the execution of the Catholic brother whose closest confidante I had been, or the memorandum he’d composed, the contents of which I knew precisely and which I’d encouraged him to write—I was the only eyewitness—is easy to explain, your honor: Wasn’t the Gestapo ubiquitous? Even in a neutral foreign country? Aren’t there traitors everywhere?

Your honor, I would like to confess.
I’m not guilty. I was only a stone. Only the first stone in a rockslide. I’m an offender only in my thoughts. I’m supposed to have hurt others only with letters, with written words? Why do they all always have to mock me so, why do they consider themselves better, smarter, more noble? Nobody forced them to say these things. First do forbidden things in secret and then not admit to them. Should I not have been allowed to travel to my homeland when I had the opportunity to do so? Maybe the others didn’t suffer from this painful longing to sit, dressed in silk, in the cushioned first-class compartment of an express train, waved to by an officer on the platform, shot fleeting glances by the serious person seated across from you, riding through the ever flatter landscape of Northern Germany, gazing at the Baltic Sea from the ferry, leaving behind the militarized Germany and arriving in Stockholm, met by a gentle, clever man from the church or a childhood friend, surrounded by peaceable people on the street, freed of fear of bombs or hunger or death. Was I supposed to deny myself all this simply because I refused, in response to some polite inquiries made by my host country about a few arrogant complainers, to share a few harmless and truthful pieces of information?

All this effort, all these witnesses.

You want to prosecute me for complicity in murder.

You will never be able to sentence me for this. Because I didn’t contribute to murder. Not even all of those I wanted dead have died. You, too, live on, my little brother, my beheaded one. You wait in vain for my confession.
The Fellow Soldier’s Wife

As the wife of a fellow soldier (since I, like her husband, was a former active-duty officer), she simply wanted to warn me—even though we had never met. That was the first sentence that came out of her mouth. In the summer of 1943.

She had rung the bell at my apartment door. And I had opened the door because I was alone in the apartment: my wife was in jail and the woman who sublet from me was out shopping. She stood outside, a very elegant stranger in her early forties, and spoke this odd sentence:

Please excuse the intrusion; you don’t know me, but as the wife of a fellow soldier—my husband was an active-duty officer, like you—I would like to warn you against being politically careless. You are in danger: the woman you sublet to wears her heart on her sleeve and tells other people everything you say against the political leadership.

I invited her inside. But she declined, thanking me, saying that she had to go to work.

You work? I asked her, surprised.

Yes, as a volunteer at the air-raid protection service and at the ration office. The woman in charge there is your—she hesitated—is an acquaintance of yours?

I nodded and thought, Yes, she is our good, loyal friend. She has remained our friend all these years, even though my wife is now stuck in Fuhlsbüttel. Many people have distanced themselves, but not her.
But I did not just think this; instead I once again promptly said what I thought. Said it quietly to the woman who was still standing at the door to the apartment, her right glove in her left hand, a glove made of fine leather. Her lips were rouged and the smell of her perfume hung in the air.

And the woman to whom you sublet is a friend of mine, she said with a smile. I gather you’re very bitter since your wife went to prison. My friend reports in detail what you say about the political leadership. And I, for example, know everything you have said, even though I don’t know you, Herr von . . .—she mispronounced my last name. Isn’t that dangerous? What if the wrong people come to hear these things!

I thought about my wife. Just a week earlier I had again received her dirty laundry from the jail to wash. With blood splatters. They have tortured her, I thought, and they don’t even want to hide it, just threaten me: You can end up this way, too, before you know it.

But I did not want to be afraid. In my own apartment? In my own apartment I could say what I wanted, after all. It wasn’t public. Out on the street and at work I kept silent.

But my wife had also only spoken out at home, only here in the apartment, after that that terrible air raid. But it was different for her: She is Jewish. Only because she is married to me, an Aryan, and only because I refused to divorce her, even though she is Jewish, was she allowed to stay at home. I was reluctant to let my wife leave the apartment anymore and, in addition to working, took care of the shopping and all official errands so that she could not be insulted on the street. I wanted to protect her.
But I didn’t succeed.

We brought it on ourselves when we took in sub-tenants after the first air raids on Hamburg: a young couple, not yet married. They had been bombed out. When I first saw them standing at the door, I was terrified: the young man in an SA uniform, high-ranking, an SA-"Führer. My next thought was: The main thing is, he’s not with the SS. And my wife is protected by her marriage to me, after all.

It happened in the kitchen after the next air raid. (Why did my wife even leave our room when the sub-tenants were in the hall?) My wife had looked out the kitchen window after the air raid, seen the burning ruins of houses and the people running every which way in the streets, and without thinking said—in our own kitchen, within our own four walls, but in front of the people we had taken in—what she had already said to me often and what I had also said to her, what many people quietly said to one another: the person we had to thank for all this would be called upon on to answer for it some day. The usual—not even a joke or a reference to so-called enemy radio broadcasts.

The SA-"Führer immediately reported her.

She was taken away while I watched. I have not seen her since. Only her bloody laundry.

The couple didn’t stay with me very long. When I ran into them in the hallway—though I tried to avoid such encounters—I even greeted them. I wished him a good day. I greeted the man who had denounced my wife.

Shortly before they moved away they took in her mother—the mother of the young woman, his future mother-in-law, if they did end up getting married.
Does one marry someone who has denounced another person? Maybe the young woman was of the same mind as her boyfriend? I never talked politics with her.

The mother stayed on with me after the young couple moved away. She was the sub-tenant against whom I was now being warned: She wears her heart on her sleeve, said the woman standing at my door.

And she claimed to be this woman’s friend?

I had never before given any thought to the relationships between people. My wife had done that for me. She understands people better than I do—or thinks she does. She did make a mistake that one time at the kitchen window, since she must have heard the young man’s footsteps in the hall. He had been able to hear her. Or had she thought we were alone in the apartment? Or was she so absorbed in what was happening on the street? At first she spoke very quietly to herself, so that only I could hear: Soon all of this will be over, not just the war.

Maybe she didn’t hear the sub-tenant’s step because she was already imagining an end to the injustice, picturing a normal life, for herself too, a Jewish woman. That she would never again have to accept the distinction: Jewish – Aryan. Because earlier we had naturally never thought about her being Jewish. After I met her I wanted to have her as my wife; I wanted to have her by my side for an entire lifetime. I loved her for who she was.

The friend of this woman at the door could betray me?

And why was this woman warning me? Why as the wife of a fellow soldier?
Even a warning was dangerous. This woman was putting herself in my hands. She had to trust me. But she didn’t know me. Did she think I was an opponent of the state because I stood by my Jewish wife?

She had to trust me because of the stories told by her friend, my sub-tenant. So was the sub-tenant on my side? Otherwise she would have reported me already.

But maybe she did not report me even though she held other opinions? Her future son-in-law was, after all, a high-ranking SA officer. But this woman, the wife of a German officer, apparently shared my views. That is why she warned me not to be indiscreet.

But why warn me about the woman with whom she was friends? She could simply have asked her not to gossip so much.

But why should she put herself in danger in the first place?

I was truly confused by this woman at the door, who did not leave even though she had to get to work, who did not come in even though she seemed to have time, who warned me about a woman with whom she was friends.

Would I warn a stranger about one of my friends? I asked myself.

Her friend didn’t know about this visit and the warning, she said. She, the wife of a fellow soldier, didn’t officially know me yet, she said. And if I were introduced to her during a visit she would soon be due to pay her friend, my sub-tenant, I should act as though I were seeing her for the first time.

I promised to pretend. And promised to be careful about what I said. And promised not to say anything to either my sub-tenant or anyone else about the warning.
Why? This was no play, was it? But whether I wanted to or not, I no longer felt at ease. I avoided my sub-tenant, no longer spoke to her, and after a few weeks she moved to Kiel.

In the meantime the fellow soldier’s wife—I call her that, even though I never met the soldier whose wife she was—in the meantime the soldier’s wife and I saw one another often: when she visited my sub-tenant, when I called on our friend, the woman in charge of the ration office, when we ran into one another on the street. She was always friendly, greeting me and chatting with me.

When my sub-tenant, her friend, moved away, she rang my bell the very next day.

This time she accepted my invitation and came inside. I made tea for us.

For the first time we had a real talk. She was truly a very intelligent and well-educated woman.

She could understand how I must feel, she said. As the husband of an imprisoned Jew I belonged to a minority among the German people. She also belonged to a minority. Only it was not as apparent as with my wife and her Star of David: she was a lesbian.

She told me she had been living with a woman for four years. These days it was not so out of the ordinary when two women shared an apartment, but she was afraid she would be forced to take in people who had been bombed out, because inevitably they would notice something.
And the fear of discovery was warranted. Shortly after her girlfriend had moved in with her, which must have been in 1940, she had been warned by a police official that raids on the lesbian bars in St. Pauli were imminent.

The two of them, she and her lover, had not frequented those bars in any case, but she had passed the warning on to a clerk in a nearby bakery who she knew was a lesbian and liked to go to these bars in the evening. Because the clerk did not listen to her, she had been caught up in a raid and sent to a concentration camp for nine months without a court hearing, even though until then only men, not women, had been punished for homosexuality. After the clerk had been released from her nine months in the concentration camp, she had taken her in for the next three weeks to give her a chance to recuperate.

Why is she confiding all this to me, I thought?

I asked her about her husband, since she had introduced herself as the wife of a fellow soldier when she first came to my door. Was she a widow? She had never spoken of him except for that first time.

No, she was divorced, since 1926, seventeen years ago, and since then had lived off the small alimony he paid her. She had married him at eighteen after graduating from a girls’ high school and business school in March of 1914; the German Reich was still at peace for another half year. At that time he was already on active duty. About my age, so twenty years older than she.

She must have been very pretty, I thought.

During the First World War she had cared for the wounded. After the war she had taken acting classes and worked as an actress. Eventually she had become
addicted to morphine and had been sent to a rehabilitation facility. Then he had divorced her. As an officer, I could not have afforded to have a wife like that either, I thought; she would not have been the right person for me.

At the time of the divorce she was twenty-seven years old. With no children. She had not remarried, even for appearance’s sake, and she had never worked as an actress again. She was always at home, living with girlfriends, receiving financial help from her family now and then.

I did not dare ask her why she had introduced herself to me as the wife of a fellow soldier if she had already been divorced for seventeen years. Nor did I dare ask whether she had ever been intimate with her husband at all, whether she had started to hate her husband or other men, whether she had been disgusted by him or whether he had left her indifferent.

Maybe she’s bisexual and that’s why she is sitting with me in this darkened room, I thought.

I did not want to offend her or put us in an embarrassing situation, because, after all, I was alone in the apartment with her, an attractive and exciting woman. Maybe she simply wanted to try out her erotic appeal on a man after she had told him the truth? Maybe she wanted to unburden herself and was hoping for understanding from me because my wife had been cast out and I was suffering because of it?

It has gotten dark, hasn’t it, she asked abruptly, stood up, and positioned herself next to my chair. This week she said, I helped a veterinarian’s wife escape. She is Jewish and told me she was about to be deported. I provided her with false papers from the ration office, keeping the papers of a woman who had been
evacuated. With the false papers I bought her a ticket to Konstanz so she could leave the country. I am friends with a woman who works for the Sicherheitsdienst, she continued. This woman was assigned there five years ago and serves as the receptionist for the head of the Hamburg bureau. She has written reports on the general mood and the military situation; she knows everything, including about the Gestapo, and wants to get away from there. She is the daughter of one of my childhood friends, so I have known her since she was little. Nine years ago she stole my lover away, and now they are living together.

"Stole away? I asked. Can a lover be stolen away?"

"Our lover, said my visitor, has only felt the two of us, never seen us, because she is blind. And my childhood friend’s daughter can thus disguise her love better. She can pose as the blind woman’s caretaker."

"I can’t disguise my own situation, says my visitor, my partner is healthy. Her sister knows about us, and I don’t know who else. I didn’t come today to warn you, but instead to ask you for help, for a married couple. Four years ago I met the young woman, and two years later the young man. I found that the two suited one another and introduced them. They married that same year, 1941. He is divorced, has a grown son from his first marriage, is an interior designer, and manages several cinemas. He recently rescued a Jewish man who was about to be sent to the ghetto—he secretly brought him to the Romanian border. So he is a brave man. They are happy, as happy as one can be in a war like this. I like both of them very much, we’re on a first-name basis, and they call me “mother” out of gratitude. Now they are looking for a room to rent, and I was wondering if you could perhaps take the two of them in? Since"
yesterday you have a room free here, don’t you? The young woman can help you with cooking and washing. Wouldn’t that be nice?

Finally some comfort again, I thought; it would be nice not have to mistrust anyone at home at least.

I agreed, and things turned out as I had hoped. I gave the young woman my ration cards and they invited me to join them at meals. When my wife’s dirty, bloody laundry arrived from the prison, the young woman washed it and comforted me.

A year went by. It was strange that the young woman no longer visited the woman who had played matchmaker for her and her husband, the woman she had called “mother,” even though she lived in the same neighborhood, and her husband still kept up contact.

In July the attempt on Hitler’s life failed, but it showed that in the military, too, there was open resistance to the system. This war cannot last much longer. That is my firm conviction.

In August the bank branch where I worked sent me to the central branch in Berlin for a few days of training for a higher position. On the morning of the day when I was to travel to Berlin, I heard the young woman bustling about in the kitchen. And when I went into the kitchen it smelled pleasantly of freshly cooked jam. The jars were cooling on the kitchen table. The sun was shining through the sparkling windows. The young woman, wearing my wife’s apron—I had given her permission to wear it—was standing, lit from behind and humming a song. I stopped in the kitchen doorway. She had heard me coming, turned around and pointed proudly to her work: That’s for you, too, she said in a friendly voice.
If I had not said the following, but only thought it, she would not have lost her composure. But instead of taking pleasure in her hopeful attitude, in her providing for the future, I said: There’s no point making preserves; the Russians will be here soon. Then things will be horrible. I will be all right because I am known as an opponent of the Nazi system. I will try to advocate for you, too. But I don’t know whether I will be able to help you.

The young woman, so happy just a moment ago, became frantic, rushed past me to her room and cried so loudly that I could hear her through the closed door.

I didn’t dare follow her into her room. She was alone there, and what could I do to calm her? I had only spoken my mind. I had even promised my help.

Shortly afterwards her husband returned. He could not calm her, either; he had to go back to his office. And I had to be on time for my express train to Berlin.

When I returned from Berlin last night, our doorbell rang. Two Gestapo officials were standing outside.

The young man, my sub-tenant, came out of his room and looked at the men with a shocked expression. He was certainly terrified: had they found out that he had saved the Jewish man from the ghetto? Did they know that I had been speaking negatively about the regime for some time now without being reported by him or his wife?

The Gestapo officials asked my name. I told them.

Come with us!


It’s not your place to be asking questions!
The young husband, my sub-tenant, had to watch helplessly. They announced that they would return to question him and his wife about me. Will he remember my request to take my file case if something should happen to me?

Now they have both of us, my wife and me.

We are in their power.

Epilogue

What had happened? The couple who had met through the intervention of the “soldier’s wife” and also owed their room in the old officer’s apartment to her attentiveness, soon no longer shared their affection for her. The wife pulled away and barely saw her anymore, even though they lived very close by. The husband, in the meantime, often visited her on his way to or from work. At her home, he met the daughter of her childhood friend, the young woman who worked at the Sicherheitsdienst as a receptionist. The three had many conversations and discussed the old officer’s dinnertime comments. They were concerned they might all end up in a concentration camp on account of him and his talk because they were privy to his statements.

So the woman who worked at the Sicherheitsdienst but wanted to quit because she thought that too many unqualified people there exercised enormous power over others, knew the old officer only through what the others had said.

As a defendant after the war, the “fellow soldier’s wife” gave the following account in court:

The husband, after being unable to comfort his young wife, had come to her, incensed, planning to call on their mutual acquaintance, the receptionist at the Sicherheitsdienst, at her apartment to report what his landlord had said. With this intention, he soon left.

Shortly afterwards the mutual acquaintance had happened to stop by her home, and she had told her of the man’s intention. Then she had left the visitor alone in her apartment and went out to walk the dog. She had conversed at length first with the building superintendent and then with her
lover’s sister, who had dropped in to look at a letter. Thus the Sicherheitsdienst receptionist had phoned in the charges against the old officer in her absence, without her knowledge and without her approval.

The superintendent, very old by that time, remembered the conversation he had had on the street with the “fellow soldier’s wife” in almost word-for-word agreement with her testimony. It had allegedly taken place at exactly the same time as the report to the Gestapo was being made from her phone.

The testimony of her lover’s sister underwent an odd change. In 1948 she initially testified three times—to the criminal police in Hamburg, under oath in a deposition to the “fellow soldier’s wife’s” defense attorney, and to a state’s attorney—that she had been present and heard the report as it was given to the Gestapo: in the apartment and in the presence of the “fellow soldier’s wife.”

But two years later, in front of a jury, she recanted this statement. Allegedly she only now remembered correctly that the defendant had been standing outside on the street with her dog and the superintendent the entire time and had explained to her where in the apartment she could find the letter she was looking for. While searching for the letter, she had become an involuntary witness to the denunciation. She had told the two still standing on the street about the telephone call that had just been made from the apartment. The defendant had reacted with horror. The court, however, believed the witness’s earlier testimony instead, and did not put her under oath.

The court initially sentenced the husband to prison, but then acquitted him on appeal due to a lack of evidence.

Two days after his landlord’s arrest, the husband had brought the officer’s document case to the “fellow soldier’s wife.” That was when, he said five years later in court, he first learned, to his dismay, of the denunciation.

On the morning after the arrest the two Gestapo officials had returned, as announced, and had asked him whether his landlord had organized meetings and whether he supported the state.
He truthfully responded in the negative to the first question and answered the second by saying that you could really not expect that of a man whose wife was in prison. The Gestapo officials gave him a warning for that answer.

It could not be proved that he had really wanted to file charges against his landlord; the blind woman, the receptionist’s partner, convincingly testified in court that neither on that day nor on the following day had he come to their shared apartment looking for her girlfriend. She told the truth, even though a lie would have exonerated her girlfriend. She told the truth.

The girlfriend, too, told the truth, from the beginning: When the “fellow soldier’s wife,” who had always been an authority figure to her, had told her about what the old officer had said on that August day in 1944, and requested that she report it to the Gestapo, she had done so.

The Gestapo did not put the Hamburg bank employee and former active-duty officer on trial, but instead sent him to the Neuengamme concentration camp. He died there in the spring of 1945. Allegedly of a cold. That is what it says on the death certificate.

His wife was sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp after his death because she was now no longer protected by a so-called privileged mixed marriage. She died there.

The war ended a few weeks after her death.
The Missing Grave

I am his daughter, his only child. And he lies buried somewhere nearby.

I don’t know where.

At the time it rained and rained, one day and one night and a second day and a second night and a third day. It rained that first day, the day when a frightened Viktoria told us that my father had suddenly appeared outside our house, threatening to buy himself a pistol and shoot us in revenge for the penitentiary. Then he disappeared again, she knew where to. It rained that entire first day, the day when Viktoria reported the threat to the policeman, who was afraid of my father—as was the mayor and the local farmers’ representative—twelve days before the end of the war, when the French were already nearby. And it rained that entire first night during which we were in fear of my father, alone in our house without men. Viktoria’s sons were all off in the war. She, her daughter, and I were alone. We kept listening for footsteps, but it stayed quiet.

It rained that second day, the day when the two strange men asked us to put them up for the night. They were from the Gestapo; they showed us their badges at the door, but they had merely been drafted to guard prisoners—the older one with a glass eye since the previous year and the younger one with a stiff knee since a month earlier. They said they had let their last prisoners go at Lake Konstanz and were now fleeing east to escape the French. But they didn’t have permission to flee. They were supposed to report to local authorities from time to time and ask for instructions; and
there was a local SS office in the next village. When they had asked for lodgings for the night—only lodgings, they had brought food with them—no one had any room for them, and they were told to make their own arrangements. So they went to a farmer who allowed them to sleep in his barn on the night of April 26, 1945. Who would want to have the secret police on his farm so shortly before the end of the war (but no one was allowed to say “end”)? But who dared refuse to provide the two of them with a place to sleep for the night as long as the war was still on?

It rained endlessly on the second day when we told the two men about our fears. When they promised us their help if we wanted it. When Viktoria promised the two soldiers beds for the night in our house and said to them: Better one dead than three. This second night, when Viktoria betrayed my father’s whereabouts to the two men. Because I refused, she had her own daughter take the men there. They found, seized, and searched him, led him away, shot him, and buried him that same night.

And it rained that entire third day, the day after, when I began searching. The earth was soft from the rain. Where was I supposed to find any trace of him? In the forest?

Where do you bury a man whom you have just shot without a verdict, secretly, during the night, while rain pours down?

In the ditch along the road?

There, out in the open, someone might happen to see you, become a witness to your crime. A dog might smell the body; dig it up. Those driving by, the refugees fleeing in groups, might see the dead body in the disturbed earth and ask: Why isn’t he buried in a graveyard?
Where did you hide my father? In a field? He would be found during the next harvest.

For forty-four summers and forty-four winters my father has been lying in the earth, unprotected.

On the day following the night of his death I went into our forest, his forest, my forest. He could be nowhere else. A forest can hide any secret. Only in the forest does a murderer have leisure, the leisure to kill and the leisure to make things disappear and the leisure to disappear.

The rain washed away my tracks in the forest, too—not just the murderers’ and my father’s tracks—while I searched for him. Rivulets flowed along the sides of the wood road; where did they intermingle with his blood?

Two shots in the night. One to kill him. The second, when he was already dead, to make sure he was dead.

The men couldn’t have gone very far into the woods with him. They hadn’t taken long to come back, returning that same night.

We waited up for the two of them. We: Viktoria, her daughter, and me. We three women sat awake in the darkened house, waiting.

I call Agathe “her daughter,” not “my sister,” because the two of us have different fathers.

Agathe is the master butcher’s daughter. During what Viktoria always described as her first, short, but happy marriage to him, she had had three children, two sons and Agathe.
I am the plumber’s daughter. Viktoria married my father after the First World War when she had been widowed for three years and had managed by herself with three small children, a thirty-two-year-old butcher’s widow who had learned butchering from her first husband and could do farmhouse slaughtering by herself. After the wedding, she gave him a child of his own, a daughter: me.

The others were only his stepchildren, two stepsons and a stepdaughter. I was his only real child. The only one from his twenty-four-year marriage to Viktoria.

When the two men returned, we were still sitting exactly as they had left us. At the same places, at the same table, silent out of fear and apprehension. Only Agathe had been gone for forty-five minutes. She had shown the two men where my father lived, not where he was hiding, no, where he was living temporarily since being released from the penitentiary.

I would never have stooped to betray him that night.

After their return, the two men were as silent as we were. They were exhausted.

They laid on the kitchen table everything my father had had with him: his wedding ring—but hadn’t he been divorced from Viktoria for two years?—a pocket watch and chain, his change purse and his wallet.

There was no pistol.

And after the three of us, Viktoria, her daughter, and I, had looked at these last four possessions of my father’s, one of the two men, the older one with the glass eye, said: So, he won’t be showing up anymore.

He meant my father.
He said it with such finality, not triumphantly, deadly serious.

Then I knew: my father is dead.

I looked at the hands of the two men. They were not dirty, there was no blood staining their hands or their uniforms. After reporting the completion of their mission to the appropriate authorities, they had surely been allowed to wash up.

The men stayed in our house for a few more days. Agathe was already thirty at the time and had an illegitimate child that was six months old. She took the younger soldier into her bed. After she had shown the two men where my father was staying she had quickly run home through the night, through darkness and rain—and then she had waited for one of the murderers.

She slept with him that very night.

I heard the two of them during the night, how they cried out with passion without any consideration for me. I was twenty-five, the same age as he.

The next morning I saw the two of them kissing and heard them using the informal du, and I heard him tell Agathe that he would come back to her if his fiancée in Stuttgart was no longer alive.

He never came back, even though my mother gave him something as a farewell gift: a bicycle.

Six months later, after the war had ended, Agathe was arrested by the French and spent nine months in investigative custody.

But she refused to speak.

By that time the young man was already working as a cook for the Americans.
She maintained her silence and even had a letter smuggled out to him: He didn’t need to worry, nothing would happen to him.

I was also interrogated by French officers and told them everything about Viktoria and her daughter, everything I knew about the two of them and my father, because they were fighting with me over the inheritance.

Why should I have spared them?

Viktoria was not even arrested by the French. She had always stayed out of things, sent us instead.

Her daughter kept silent about my father’s murder and had to be freed.

The young man with the stiff knee married two weeks after her release: not Agathe, but his fiancée. All her silence, all her steadfastness, was for nothing.

But almost nine years later they had to stand trial after all: the older man with the glass eye, the younger one with the stiff leg, Viktoria and her daughter, now married to a man who had the same given name and profession as my father. He had been able to take over my dead father’s business.

Agathe denied everything, including her fling with the young man with the stiff leg.

He, too, denied everything. He had known nothing ahead of time, he had spent the afternoon at my mother’s house in bed with a fever, had heard nothing about a execution order, had only gone along; his comrade with the glass eye had shot the shackled man in the woods, him himself had fired a shot into my father’s dead body so as to not appear a coward in front of his comrade. A love affair with Agathe was
out of the question; she had never sent him a reassuring message from the internment camp.

My testimony contradicted all this.

Viktoria testified that the two soldiers had arrived at her home late at night already intending to pick up her ex-husband and take him away. She had told them only where her husband’s hideout was and had also asked her daughter to show the soldiers the way there, but thought he would just be sent to the workhouse. She had not equated “taking away” with “killing.”

The older man with the glass eye testified that he and his comrade had arrested my father on orders from the local office, taken him back there, and received orders to execute him. If he had not done this he would have been shot himself.

But he had been ordered to do this by a man who was not his commanding officer, said the judge after the war.

He would have had me shot, said the man with the glass eye in his own defense.

Viktoria and her daughter were acquitted due to a lack of evidence.

The two men were both imprisoned for second-degree murder, not for long, but they had to pay.

All of them were defendants, only I was a witness.

No one asked why my father was so furious at us on April 26, 1945 that he threatened us with death. He wanted revenge for the penitentiary. And Viktoria, her daughter, and I had put him there.
A week before Christmas in 1941 we reported him for listening to enemy broadcasts.

I wanted him to be taken away, so we could have a peaceful Christmas. He had gotten drunk again and had yelled and smashed things.

I listened to those same broadcasts, and he knew this. He was far too decent to betray me during his interrogation. I was his only child, his daughter.

He also surely knew that Viktoria was behind the report—but she hadn’t signed it, Agathe had. Agathe signed.

He could have been sentenced to death; that was how great a danger we had put him in. He got two and half years in the penitentiary. We put him there. I hadn’t seen him since.

He escaped from the penitentiary but they caught him again. Afterwards, as he stood in front of our house and threatened that he would take revenge, he was speaking only to Viktoria. He knew that a word from her, the butcher, would have been enough to save him in court.

Only she had anything to fear from him, not us, her tools.

Viktoria was the only one who witnessed the threats he made in front of our house. Maybe he hadn’t even threatened us, and she only told the soldiers he had done so to have them kill him. Then she would finally be free of the man who had been loyal to her for twenty-six years, who had married her as a widow with three children, who had fed her, and who drank and hit her and insulted people when he drank, until she fled the house at night, taking us with her, dressed only in a nightgown.
But why did she stay with him? Why did she pay for his lawyers? Why did she spend years paying his fines for disorderly conduct? Why did she divorce him only when he was already in the penitentiary? Did she still love him? Did Viktoria love my father?

When she was with him I sometimes saw my mother so happy, only with him, he was so easygoing, so genuine. He struck out only when he was drunk. And wasn’t he right? We really had betrayed him.

Twice.

On the day he died we betrayed him for the second time.

This time I could have saved him, warned him about his impending death. Warned him against the men who were his murderers, who walked slowly in the rain, sent by my mother and led by her daughter.

He could have fled, the war was over ten days later.

I owe my life to him.

And he owes his death to me.
Illusion

Every person has one story to tell. To his children, to his grandchildren. When they are old enough really to understand it. Or to complete strangers, too—so long as they listen. Every person has his most important story. That makes him different from others, that justifies him, excuses him, explains him.

The old woman had started to write down her story twenty years earlier. She was already sixty-three then. And she was still writing. First she sent me her story, now she was standing there in person. Her white hair tied in a knot at her neck, her eyes were a whitish blue, leather sneakers, men’s pants, a baggy sweater under her parka. She stood in the doorway to our apartment and said to her young companion: You can pick me up at four. We will need five hours for our discussion. He left.

You have a nice view up here.

My grandmother would be ninety-seven now, fifteen years older than you, I replied. She was a teacher, too. Would you like tea or coffee?

An herbal tea would be nice.

I read your drafts with great interest, I said.

She was still looking out the window, over the rooftops of the courts and ministries and the church in ruins.

I will soon be able to give you an edited version of the second chapter, she said, there are still typographical errors in it. I didn’t study writing, after all. As a scientist I am accustomed to keep to the facts and to present them cleanly. I never
aspired, she said, to develop a style. Though LTI\textsuperscript{15} is among the books that I most often give people as a present. Actually, everything started with the chapter about the camp. I have added the other chapters over the last twenty years, about the time before the camp and the time afterwards. But I see the camp chapter as my legacy, said the old woman.

She had been at Buchenwald recently and had wanted to give the archives her chapter on the time she had spent there. But they hadn’t known what to do with it. The documents in the archives stopped at 1945. She could understand that.

But she had been a prisoner there until 1950.

Were you really arrested for bestowing Motherhood Crosses when Hitler was in power? I asked.

No. I still had the hope that my memoirs would be published. That’s why I did not give the real reason in the story as it is written. Among other things, my job was to assess whether a woman was worthy to receive the Motherhood Cross or not, but that wasn’t the reason I was detained in the camp.

She explained the difference between the Secret State Police, the Gestapo—she stressed the first syllable—and the Sicherheitsdienst, the SD. She had done work for the latter and understood its nuances. After the war, another employee had claimed during interrogation by a Soviet officer that he knew she was working for them, too. He thought she had already escaped and was safe in the West. Otherwise,

\textsuperscript{15} LTI or Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notizbuch eines Philologen, (Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist’s Notebook) was written as a diary by Victor Klemperer during the Nazi rise to power in the 1930s. It is a firsthand account of how the Nazis altered German for propaganda and political purposes, as well as how these alterations came to be commonly used by the general German populace.—Trans.
the older woman thought, he would not have said anything. She ran into him later in
the camp. And he was really very shocked to see her. He had not meant to denounce
her.

I suddenly saw my visitor through the eyes of a judge after the war. Or of a
Soviet officer who is to interrogate her. Or through the eyes of a Jewish woman. And
during a discussion, I thought, She might suspect that I was Jewish or disagreed with
the sanctioned opinion. Or she had been eavesdropping when I listened to English
broadcasts. Then she would be in my power—or I in hers.

You keep asking questions, she noted, admonished me; this isn’t a real
conversation anymore.

It was true. I had been seeing myself as her enemy or her victim.

I was just thinking, I apologized, that I am now older than you were when the
war ended, that nothing is as set in stone for me as everything was for you at that
time. I find it so difficult to put myself in the situation you were in back then. Take
the race question. I cannot understand how I could be worth more if I belonged to the
so-called Aryan race. How relieved I was at fifteen, and actually still am today, that I
could not be considered for a bit part as a BDM girl. I had of course not tried out for
it, either. At the school attached to the DEFA\footnote{The \textit{Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft} (German Film Corporation) was a film
production company in the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany. It was founded in an
effort by the Russian authorities in Germany to produce films that would undo over a
decade of Nazi indoctrination.—Trans.} we were all herded into the
auditorium one day; the assistant director of the Thälmann movie worked his way
through the rows of students, looking everyone in the face. He took my friend who was sitting next to me. But to me he said, smiling: No, not you, you aren’t Aryan.

The old woman gave me a searching look—a chill ran through me—and said: Although, of course, that is not true. You are a typical Nordic person, precisely because of your individualism, and—I would count this as well—also because of your intellectual veneer. This sort of thing is most pronounced, almost an obsession in America. I am not at all in favor of this “American way of life.”

I answered: If I could write a story about you, I would title it “Enthusiasm.” Enthusiasm as an emotion I fundamentally don’t understand.

But enthusiasm would be incorrect, said the old woman. Illusions would be the right word.

And then she told me about her current life in a one-room apartment in a building with many units equipped for the elderly. She told me she does not let a cleaning woman into her apartment, even though she could afford one with her educator’s pension of one thousand marks. A cleaning woman would mix up her notes and the books organized in piles on the floor around the table in the middle of the room. Unlike the other women in the building, who sometimes met in the hallway to trade needlework and knitting patterns, she simply had no time for a cleaning woman. She had to write and see to it that someone could make use of her camp chapter.

They had not been reeducated in the camp, just kept out of circulation, so to speak.
You’re sitting here in place of all the others, the Soviet camp commander had said to the prisoners; we can’t punish everyone.

She had not felt guilty. That was why she had not fled the advancing Soviet troops, but instead had kept working, at the time as a doctor’s aide. After being released from the camp, she had been offered a very good job as a biologist during a visit to her parents in the West. She did have her doctorate after all, and was a specialist in microbiology. Hence her interest in genetics and race, and the lectures she had given. She had recently reread her articles that had been printed in the Nazi teachers, journal and remembered those lectures. She had not taken the job in the West, but had preferred to return here. A life under capitalism wasn’t for her. There it was dog-eat-dog.

Thirty-five years have passed since her release. And she was forty-three when she first came to the camp.

So much lay behind her: her childhood as the daughter of a civil servant in Berlin, living in an apartment overlooking the street, the First World War under the Kaiser, life in the Youth Movement, her abortion in the twenties—the child would have had a Jewish father. A member of the Nazi Party since 3-3-33 (to her disappointment her membership number was already over a million), deputy to the Nazi Party Kreisleiter, then director of a teacher-training institute. Then fleeing from the Soviet army and later returning to their occupation zone because, as stated, she did not feel guilty. Her detention in the camp. Her love affair with a woman. After 1950, her unsuccessful applications to be allowed to work as a teacher again. She has
come to terms with all of this, only not with the fact that no one knows or wants to
know or should know about the camp.

Does she want, I wondered, to claim elite status again because she paid the
price for others?

She hadn’t had a typical Nazi fate, she said, because she had really been a
believer. That’s why she had reported those who merely took advantage of their
power. Like the school principal who had favored his daughter and harassed unbiased
teachers, or the Nazi Kreisleiter because he was corrupt. A bad Nazi, she had thought
at the time.

Maybe a good one, in Hitler’s sense, the Soviet officer had countered during
an interrogation.

Whom else did you report? I asked uneasily.

Other than that her duties for the Sicherheitsdienst had been only to report on
the general mood, on reactions to a movie or to the quality of Hitler photos in the
paper, for example. She had not hurt anyone, she said firmly. She had said yes to the
recruiter from the Sicherheitsdienst only because she wanted to keep the National
Socialist ideal pure. She had been put in the camp for that.

Her one story.

Maybe she has to keep telling it until a younger woman can forgive her, a
younger woman who was not alive in those days. A woman like me.
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bannführer</td>
<td>banner leader: a high administrative rank given to adults working for the <em>Hitler Jugend</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDM-Führerin</td>
<td>BDM-Leader (female).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blockfrau</td>
<td>lit. “block woman,” low administrative rank in the <em>Frauenschaft</em>, responsible for one neighborhood or block.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM)</td>
<td>League of German Girls, a subdivision of the <em>Hitler Jugend</em> for girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF)</td>
<td>German Labor Front, a trade union established by the Nazi government in 1933.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frauenschaft</td>
<td>Women’s League, a centralized Nazi organization that replaced many local Nazi women’s groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frauenschaftsleiterin</td>
<td><em>Frauenschaft</em> director (female).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gau</td>
<td>originally a medieval term meaning “region” brought back into general use by the Nazi Party as they sought to extend their control over all of Germany by dividing it up into regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauleiter</td>
<td>Nazi Party official in charge of a <em>Gau</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauleitung</td>
<td>regional office of the Nazi Party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaupropagandaleiter</td>
<td>director of propaganda at the regional level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaspalast</td>
<td>building near the Friedrichstrasse train station housing the border crossing between East and West Berlin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitlerjugend</td>
<td>Hitler Youth; initially a Nazi organization for boys that later included the BDM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kreisleiter</td>
<td>Nazi Party leader on the county level, subordinate to <em>Gauleiter</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kreisleitung</td>
<td>county-level office of the Nazi Party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerialrat</td>
<td>ministry official.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Volksfürsorge (NSV)</td>
<td>National Socialist People’s Welfare: a social welfare organization primarily focusing on helping children and pregnant women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberbannführer</td>
<td>senior banner leader: <em>Hitler Jugend</em> officer superior to a <em>Bannführer</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberreichsanwalt</td>
<td>chief state prosecutor for the <em>Volksgerichtshof</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obersturmbannführer</td>
<td>senior assault unit leader, SA and SS rank roughly equivalent to lieutenant colonel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortsgruppenleiter</td>
<td>local group leader of the Nazi Party, functional on the city and town level, subordinate to <em>Kreisleiter</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propagandaministerium</td>
<td><em>Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda</em>, in English “National Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda,” organization responsible for culture and propaganda in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsanwalt</td>
<td>senior state prosecutor for the <em>Volksgerichtshof</em>, similar to a senior state’s attorney or public prosecutor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsanwaltschaft</td>
<td>National Prosecutor’s Office, the prosecuting body of the <em>Volksgerichtshof</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsärztekammer</td>
<td>National Physicians’ Chamber, a Nazi organization replacing earlier German physicians’ organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsjugendführung</td>
<td>National Youth Leadership, Nazi organization in charge of the <em>Hitlerjugend</em> and BDM, established with the goal of inculcating children with Nazi ideology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsjustizministerium</td>
<td>see <em>Reichsministerium für Justiz</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsministerium für Justiz</td>
<td>National Ministry for Justice, a ministry created during the Weimar Republic, later used by the Nazis to centralize control of the justice system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsminister</td>
<td>national minister, historical term used in the Nazi regime to refer to members of the national governing body chosen by Hitler.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichsmusikkammer</td>
<td>National Music Chamber, Nazi organization established to promote the composition and spread of music in line with Nazi ideology as well as suppress music that clashed with Party values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichspropagandaamt</td>
<td>National Propaganda Office, Nazi organization providing support to the <em>Propagandamministerium</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reichssicherheitshauptamt</td>
<td>National Main Security Office, organization under the authority of the SS, created in 1939 as a combination of the SD, Gestapo, and criminal police to eradicate “enemy groups” such as Jews, Communists, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-Bahn</td>
<td><em>Stadtschnellbahn</em>, urban rapid railway, a public light rail system in Berlin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA-Führer</td>
<td>SA-Leader, rank used in the 1920s in the SA, later renamed <em>Sturmführer</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

172
| Schutzstaffel (SS) | literally, Protection Squadron, a paramilitary organization and elite guard responsible for many of the war crimes committed by the Nazis during WWII. |
| Sicherheitsdienst (SD) | Security Service, founded to gather intelligence about possible enemies of Hitler and the Nazi regime, first overseen by the SS, later by the Reichssicherheitshauptamt. |
| Sozialistischer Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) | dominant political party in East Germany created by merging the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the German Communist Party. |
| Sturmabteilung (SA) | Stormtrooper Division, term used in WWI for German shock troops, adopted by the Nazis, refers to the paramilitary organization that supported Hitler during his rise to power and is known for perpetrating large-scale violent attacks on members of other political groups and Jews. |
| Sturmführer | assault leader: SA rank equivalent to second lieutenant. |
| Volk | German term for “people” or “folk” that took on political and racial connotations in Nazi propaganda. |
| Volksgerichtshof | lit. “People’s Court,” created by Hitler in 1934 to try people for political “crimes” outside of the normal judicial system. |
| Volkskammer | “People’s Chamber:” the East German parliament. |
| Wehrmacht | lit. “Defense Force;” term adopted by the Nazis to refer to the German armed forces as a whole. |
Bibliography


