

INSIDE SATAN’S LAIR: THE UNLIKELY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DR. FELIX
KERSTEN AND DREADED REICHSFUHRER HEINRICH HIMMLER OF THE SS

A DocuNovel by Lauren Steinhauer

“I have more faith in Hitler than in anyone else.

He alone has kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people.”

—Elie Wiesel, *Night: NAZI Hunter*

Chapter 32

Wednesday, August 2, 1944, 11.00 hours.

The time had come for Kersten to move on mass releases of Jews, the emigration of thousands of them from Germany and Poland to Switzerland, Sweden and other countries supportive of the movement. Kersten contacted emissaries of the Swedish government, the International Red Cross and even the Jewish World Congress.

A former patient, Madame Immfeld from St. Gallen, Switzerland, met with Kersten at his farm, Hartzwalde.

“We want to wake the world up to the plight of these people,” said Madame Immfeld. We demand their release. I have a petition signed by heads of government, industrialists, international agencies for the release of 2,700 Jews from various locations throughout Germany and Poland. We are counting on your unique relationship with Himmler to accomplish all this.”

“It’s true that I have a very special influence on Himmler. He needs my medical attention, you see, and so I have been able to convince him to release some inmates. He is very unpredictable, though.”

“I think it’s time to pursue this.”

Irmgard approached with a setting of tea. She placed the silver display on the table and poured the amber liquid. "Sugar?" she asked.

"No, thank you," replied Madame Immfeld.

"Please," Kersten insisted, "please join us."

"I think not," Irmgard replied, "I will leave matters to the two of you." and left the room.

"Oh, yes, but it may be difficult," continued Kersten. "One day he'll be unwilling to discuss the release of even one inmate. And the next, he obliges me by either the release of inmates or postponing their demise till the end of the war, the war he still wants to believe that Germany will win. But I think, deep down inside him, he knows Germany is losing. And losing badly. I suspect he wants to rule a postwar Germany."

"Well, we are ready to facilitate the emigration," Madame Immfeld confided. "The International Red Cross has buses at the ready. Countries, like Switzerland and Sweden, are prepared to provide shelter till the end of the war after which the survivors may travel wherever they choose. We are all ready for this to happen."

"Of course what we demand is the release of all Jews. But, 2,700 Jews. That is a good beginning, Madame Immfeld," declared Kersten, chuckling. "This has been my dream for so long. I promise to do my best."

"I'm sure," said Madame Immfeld, tapping Kersten's knee twice. "Now," she continued, "what my supporters, the industrialists, Swiss statesmen and others, have said is that we need to present a solidly thought through program. What they propose is a program that insures the health and well-being of every intern of every concentration camp."

"I agree completely. I will be writing to Mr. Norbert Masur of the Jewish World Congress for more of his input."

"Well, enough said." Madame Immfeld reached down and brought into view a beige leather portfolio. Her hand slipped inside and withdrew an inch thick bundle of papers. "This should

help. It's a collection of ideas, pleas, prayers, commissions and directives collected by the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs. Good luck, Dr. Kersten."

He walked her to the door and waved her goodbye. Irmgard appeared. She approached Kersten, and they held hands.

"It look like we'll be releasing many Jews from their fate this time, Irmgard."

"It's a real challenge, isn't it, dear? What with Himmler being, well, Himmler."

"That's putting it mildly. Himmler: He is reasonable, rational, one moment and stubbornly unmovable the next. He has told me so many Jews are insignificant and then refuses to consider the release of even one Jew." Kersten raised a fist in the air. "I must be able to do this. I must."

"You will," said Irmgard, tightening her grip on his hand. "It's only the beginning. You'll see."

"Never!" boomed Himmler. "The Führer will never approve such a thing. Never."

"I ask you to meet with reasonable men who support the release, to consider the move."

"Who are these men?" asked Himmler.

"Mr. Norbert Masur of the Jewish World Congress, myself. Perhaps some diplomats, industrialists, heads of state."

"The Führer would have to approve such a move. I don't see it. As for me, yes, what is the fate of a few miserable Jews against the millions we have incarcerated in our camps? But I tell you one thing: there are many in my circle who want you imprisoned, punished, even executed. This move would only strengthen their resolve. I've protected you so far as well as I can. But with this demand, I don't know."

"I'm willing to take the risk, Reichsführer."

"A token release?" replied Himmler. "Token release," he laughed. "2,700 Jews. 2,700. I will have to consider this, Kersten. Seriously, although I have much on my mind."

Tuesday, November 14, 1944 12.05 hours.

One month and a day passed since Kersten approached Himmler with his proposal.

“It’s hopeless, my dear,” said Kersten to his wife. “I have failed.”

“No, don’t say that. You’ll see, Himmler will come through for us. He has too much to lose.”

Lunch was served. It was a quiet lunch, just the sound of fork to dish. Suddenly the phone rang. The servant walked the phone to the dining table.

“Quickly, quickly!” Kersten demanded. He swept up the receiver.

“Yes?”

It was Himmler’s adjutant.

“Himmler would like to meet with you today at 14.00 hours,” the voice said.

Kersten swallowed hard. “Yes, I’ll be there.”

“Very well, I’ll advise him. Good day. Heil Hitler.”

“Yes, Heil...” Kersten placed the receiver down. “Could it be? Could it?”

“It is, I know it,” Irmgard replied soothingly.

“I must get ready!”

Kersten changed clothes and readied himself for the appointment, maybe the most important appointment of his career.

He mounted the steps of headquarters swiftly and ascended to Himmler’s office. He knocked.

“Enter,” Himmler said.

“Reichsführer, it is good to see you.”

“Have a seat, Kersten,” Himmler offered stiffly with a wave of his hand.

“Do you need a treatment?”

“No, oddly enough. I have been well. Your last treatment has served me well. I’m grateful.”

Himmler arose and paced the floor.

“This is about your request. Or was it a demand?” Himmler’s voice rose to a high pitch.

“Nevertheless, you shall have your 2700 Jews, Kersten.”

A look of joy spread across Kersten’s face. “My undying gratitude, Reichsführer.”

“Of course,” Himmler announced, “there’s the matter of the head money.”

“Head money?”

“Of course,” said Himmler. “We may be a socialist country, but there is the strain of the capitalist in us all, is there not?”

“I don’t understand,” Kersten said, bewildered.

“50 Swiss francs for ‘ordinary’ Jews. 500 Swiss francs for important Jews.”

Kersten swept his hand across his forehead in disbelief.

“I don’t even know if we can meet that demand.” Kersten swallowed hard. “Have you not considered the immorality of such a demand?”

“Immorality? This is business, nothing more nor less. That is the offer, provided the Führer approves. Take it or leave it.”

“I suppose the Swiss would have to accede to your demand, if there were no other choice.”

“There is no other choice,” said Himmler bluntly. “The matter is settled, then. Go talk to your people. The money will be used to purchase trucks, tractors. In Switzerland. Do not be alarmed. The money will be put to good use.”

“Of that I’m sure,” Kersten said with a blunt touch of irony. “What about the meeting, Reichsführer? The one with Masur and others? There are critical proposals.”

“Very well,” Himmler dismissed Kersten abruptly, “that is all. I’ll consider it.”

“Yes,” Kersten replied. “Good day.” He turned round and exited the office.

In the days that followed, Kersten tried to find support within Himmler’s circle for dismissing the head count. He talked to Obergruppenführer Berger, whom Kersten sensed was sympathetic about his plan and how Himmler’s demand for money would be a severe hardship to those involved. Surprisingly, Berger agreed and volunteered to discuss the

situation with Himmler. But, no matter. Himmler stubbornly clung to his demand for Swiss francs. Nothing seemed to persuade him.

The end of the year, and nothing had happened. Kersten used the time to coordinate logistics with the International Red Cross and the Swiss bank. 500 francs were to be immediately deposited into Himmler's coffers. The calculation was made that at least 20,000 francs would be needed to free all 2700 of the Jews. In February, 1945, Ottowkar Von Nieren, a representative of the Bank of Scandinavia, introduced Kersten to Norbert Masur, leader of the Jewish World Congress, in Stockholm.

On a fateful day, Masur, suspicious of Kersten's motives, and Kersten met.

"Why are you doing this?" asked Masur bluntly, pushing a decanter of brandy in Kersten's direction.

"It is the right thing to do, is it not?" replied Kersten with a shrug.

"I understand you are an intimate of Himmler's, that you are his doctor, in fact," said Masur accusingly.

"It is true that I relieve some of his pains, he suffers gravely from stomach disorders. But it is not true that I am an 'intimate' of his. I minister to him for the sake of my family's safety.

And mine," Kersten explained. "After all, who disobeys Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS?"

"Very well," said Masur doubtfully, "do you have a plan?"

"Yes, before Himmler gets his 20,000 francs, We will propose our own demands."

Kersten went down the list of proposals deliberately, peering into Masur's visage looking for a receptive response. Masur, blinking occasionally, looked down at the desk.

"Quite a list," muttered Masur finally. He added some suggestions of his own, stressing that this and that point were critical. "What are our chances?"

"I think they are good," said Kersten. "I doubt Himmler would risk losing 20,000 francs, which, I'm sure, will wind up in his coffers. I doubt the money would go for armaments."

“Yes, I see. Too much time has already passed, Kersten. This must happen immediately.”

“I agree,” declared Kersten. “I’ll meet with Himmler right away and propose a meeting, again, although the timing must be right. If only he had one of his attacks. He can be quite reasonable while I am giving him one of my treatments. The players will be you, me, Schellenberg, I think, and Himmler’s adjutant. Perhaps an industrialist or two.”

“Very well, good luck!” wished Masur.

The men shook hands and parted, and Kersten vowed to himself that he would meet Himmler immediately and procure Kersten’s decisive intentions. But months passed and for one reason or another, no meeting came to fruition. More and more, it was clear that Germany was losing the war. The Soviets were moving relentlessly onward. The American forces were forging ahead. It was clear that they were to meet into a battered Berlin. Reports were making it clear that the concentration camps were houses of horror.

Chapter 33

Saturday, March 3, 1945, 09.30 hours.

Hartzwalde, Germany. A momentous occasion was about to occur. Irmgard set the table for five: Water glasses and a pitcher of water, balloon glasses and a decanter of brandy.

The first to arrive was Masur of the Jewish World Congress. Kersten opened the door to receive him, overly slender, bespectacled with round lenses, like Himmler’s. Kersten ushered him into the dining room and bade him sit down facing the front door. Masur clasped his hands on the table, his nervous fingers clutching and unclutching, his hands cold and clammy.

General Schellenberg and Rudolf Brandt, Himmler’s adjutant, appeared next. They, too, were ushered into the dining room with shaking of hands all around and were requested to sit down. They sat on either side of Masur so that he, the Jew, and Himmler, the Arian, would

face each other during the talks. Kersten took the remaining chair. Brandt drew forth a notebook from his briefcase and a pen from his coat pocket to record the event. The five were awkwardly quiet. Only a cough from Brandt broke the silence. Schellenberg cleared his throat. There was no room here for small talk.

Kersten suddenly spoke up. "Gentlemen, please. The brandy."

Schellenberg reached over, took the decanter by the neck and poured himself an inch of the amber liquid into his glass. He pushed the decanter toward the center of the table.

Himmler was late by half an hour. The group heard the throaty rumble of the Mercedes carrying him and the sharp rap on the door. Kersten moved to the door and invited Himmler in.

Brandt and Schellenberg rose as Himmler approached the table. They said, "Heil Hitler," in unison.

"Gentlemen," Himmler said, "guten morgen. In honor of our guest, we will dispense with the Fascist salute."

"My thanks," said Masur, curtly.

Himmler settled himself into his chair as the others seated themselves.

"Gentlemen," Kersten announced, "we are here to discuss important matters."

"Yes, we are here to discuss the Jewish question," Himmler said, "are we not?"

"I object to the phrase, 'Jewish question.'" Masur answered forcefully, "I know that it has been used to reflect the insidious treatment of my people."

"Come now, Herr Masur," Himmler replied, "if we are going to be so sensitive, we will get nothing done."

Masur rose. "Perhaps this is a bad idea."

"Now, now," proffered Kersten. "Mr. Masur, please sit down. We are here, all of us, to work through important matters."

An awkward pause. Then, reluctantly, Masur seated himself, again.

Schellenberg asked, "What is it you want to accomplish, Herr Masur?"

Masur cleared his throat. "The release of all Jews!"

"Quite a demand," replied Himmler. "Do you understand that the Führer would have to approve such a demand." He reached for the brandy. "It would never happen. Never."

"Perhaps," Kersten declared, "we can agree to agree, something that is possible. For example, I understand that Typhoid fever is raging in the concentration camps; it's raging in Bergen-Belsen, especially. These inmates need care and medicine. The International Red Cross is ready to employ such a measure."

"These rumors are unfounded," replied Himmler. "There is the occasional problem, and we take care of it."

"These reports," said Masur, "are well documented. There is widespread disease in the camps. My people are dying. They get no care. They just die. One less Jew to feed, eh."

Himmler swirled the brandy in the glass and sniffed the bouquet. "Very well," he relented.

"Send your Red Cross to the camps. They'll find out the truth."

"As the Allies approach, and they are approaching..." submitted Masur.

"We are winning the war, gentlemen," declared Himmler. "Our Führer will not let us down."

"As I was saying, when the Allies approach, I have heard more rumors that all inmates will be slaughtered by the camp guards on orders from Hitler. We demand that all executions, now and then, be stopped!"

"Yes," Himmler said, "trouble-makers are dealt with..."

"Killed, you mean!" declared Masur.

"Dealt with," replied Himmler. "We must enforce order. We deal with many inmates. Order must be enforced."

“Millions,” declared Masur. “Your ‘many inmates’ are millions. That is a well known fact, although the numbers do drop thanks to your showers and the ovens.”

“All lies!” Himmler pounded the table.

“I’m sorry,” replied Kersten, “this is well recorded, Herr Reichsführer. We need to deal with the truth if we are to accomplish anything today. There will be a reckoning at the end of the war. And your actions will determine your fate. This is a time to be magnanimous. No matter what has happened before, you will be judged by history with what you do from this day forward.”

“I want to do the right thing,” stated Himmler emphatically. “I have always fought for humane treatment of the inmates. I have always had their interests at heart. I will...give the order.”

“What we are asking for,” said Masur, “for the time being, is four-fold. Food and medical attention for those who need it. Again, the Red Cross is ready to accomplish this. We must stop the execution of all Jews. To secure the safety of Jews on the approach of Allies: We know that there is a black list. Health care for all inmates. And also, the safe transport of Jews to Sweden and Switzerland. The Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs has our support in this matter.”

Himmer drummed the table with his thin fingers. “You ask for a lot, Herr Masur. Frankly, I am astonished.”

“I am astonished at the treatment of the Jews,” reciprocated Masur, “ever since the Night of Broken Glass.”

“The chosen people:” retorted Himmler. “You have been scorned since the beginning of time. I wonder if you have ever read The Protocols of Zion, Masur.”

“That piece of trash has been discredited a long time ago.”

Kersten stepped in. “I think, gentlemen,” he cleared his throat, “it’s time for a short break.”

Himmler strode to a corner of the room, Brandt and Schellenberg trailing behind. Kersten and Masur remained seated.

“Remember,” Kersten said under his breath, “we must be willing to compromise, to give a little.”

“We have been compromising for generations.” Masur’s throat was dry. He poured water into his glass and drank.

A few minutes later, Kersten suggested, “Let us return to the table, gentlemen.”

The five men faced each other, again. The discussions went on for another hour and a half.

“Answer me this,” queried Himmler, “why should I accede to any of your demands?”

Masur spoke up. “It would go a long way towards establishing an alibi for you, yes, and even for Hitler, when the reckoning comes to pass. It might even secure better treatment for the German people after the war has ended. One point, though,” Masur strongly declared, “you must not release Jews to smuggle currency and other matters out of Germany.”

“Preposterous!” exclaimed Himmler. “You offend me, sir, although I know that I am Number One on the Allies’ list of war criminals.”

“And why not?” replied Masur. “You are head of the Gestapo, which is known throughout Europe as perpetrators of appalling cruelties.”

“Gentlemen,” Himmler said, “the press has convinced the world that I am barbarous and cruel, has built an entirely false character of me who in fact dislikes cruelty for its own sake.”

“You will be judged by the actions of your subordinates, Reichsführer,” pressed Masur. “I can recall proven instances of murder by the Gestapo. Just one, the murder of 2000 Jews in a certain hospital, comes to mind.”

“This,” replied Himmler, “is a false accusation.”

“I’m sorry to say this, Reichsführer Himmler,” said Schellenberg, “I know this to be true. I happened to witness it.”

“Herr Reichsführer,” commented Kersten, “I have been treating you for many years now. I am sure everyone here knows this. The somatic effects I have been able to subdue with my special form of massage. But the effects persist. The cause is two-fold. One is somatic. But the greater of these is psychological. The weight of wrong doing has oppressed you. You know, I’m sure, that you have committed many wrongs to a helpless group of society. This plagues you. And it expresses itself in the form of your ailments. They would disappear, I’m sure, once you acknowledge your misdeeds and turn things around. Accede to Masur’s requests and they would go a long way to health. You must also consider your role in history, the consequences when you are interrogated by the Allies at the end of the war.”

“So,” retorted Himmler, “you think the Allies have won. I do not. We are the master race. The Führer has wonder weapons. I shall go down in history, along with my Führer, as the protector of the human race and the fulfillment of the master race. But we are also magnanimous. It is one of the unique Aryan traits.” He drew the decanter to him and poured brandy in his glass. “We will accede to your requests, Masur, if only to attest to our generous spirit. As for my place in history,” he sipped the brandy, “I shall go down along with my Führer as the greatest statesmen the world has ever seen. Just one provision: The Allies must cease bombings for at least a fortnight.”

Kersten spoke up. “The Allies would never support such a demand.”

Masur added, “As proof of your sincerity, then, free 20,000 Jews to Switzerland.”

Kersten reached into his portfolio and withdrew the manila folder full of documents from Madame Immfeld. He tossed it in Himmler’s direction.

“These pages document demands, prayers, resolutions of many humanitarians, Herr Reichsführer. Perhaps they will make you feel better about your decision.”

He shoved the folder back to Kersten.

“I need no folder to submit to your requests,” stated Himmler. “What I will need is a letter from the Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada and certain press cuttings to support my requests from the Führer. But do not worry. When I make a decision, it is set in stone. I shall free all of your Jews, I will get the Führer’s approval on one condition. You are to supply the transportation, the white Red Cross buses.”

“That can be arranged,” declared Masur. “I can also arm you with a copy of a letter from the Orthodox Rabbis of the United States of America and Canada, which is very much to our purpose.”

Himmler also asked him to procure certain press cuttings denouncing Germany’s treatment of the Jews and to forward these to him.

“Very well, gentlemen,” Kersten said, breathing a sigh of relief. “I think we have accomplished something monumental today. Thanks to all, Mr. Masur, Herr General Schellenberg, Herr Brandt and Reichsführer Himmler.” Kersten added, “You will send me a written confirmation, no?”

“Yes,” Himmler replied. “Expect a note from Brandt within a day or two.”

Kersten’s guests, aside from Masur, left. Kersten and Masur shook hands warmly. “Now,” Kersten said, “it is a waiting game. We will see if Himmler keeps his word. We will see if he can convince Hitler to acquiesce to our demands.”

Masur added, “I shall give the British Legation in Stockholm an account of our negotiations with Himmler.”

“Very well, do that,” Kersten said. “Have a safe journey.”

“Thank you,” replied Masur, “and goodbye.”

Soon, Kersten and Irmgard returned to Stockholm. Months passed. He put through a phone call to Himmler.

“We are wondering why there has been no action on our requests,” said Kersten.

“It takes time, my Buddha,” said Himmler. “The logistics, you know. Patience, patience, Kersten. We are winning the war. That is why I have considered your demands. Anyway, I have always had a merciful attitude toward the Jews.”

Kersten did his best to hide his surprise at Himmler’s statements, despite his lifelong rants against the Jews.

“For years,” Himmler continued, “I have pursued a policy toward tolerance, despite the pursuit of a policy inflicted by our Führer. In 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939 and 1940, I proposed a policy of tolerance and humanity.”

“We welcome your influence regarding these matters,” Kersten said, trying not to laugh at Himmler’s preposterous statements. “As you know, the majority of inmates in the camps are Jews, many of them outside of Germany. In Hungary alone, there are 35,000 Jews interned. Reichsführer, free them!,” declared Kersten with passion. “The list I submitted to you includes the names of 2,700 Jewish men, women and children in some of the other camps. Free them!”

“I see that you are very eloquent about the matter, as it should be. Leave it to me, all will be well.”

Suddenly, Kersten received letters from Himmler and Brandt stating that all the points brought up in the previous meeting had been met. Kersten wrote a letter to His Excellency, Mr. Christian Guenther, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, reporting the successes stating that 1000 Jewish women were released from Ravensbrueck, alone, and were transported to Sweden. 50 Norwegian Jews, 50 Dutch Jews, 50 Dutch women, one Frenchman, three Frenchwomen, many Swedes, 13 Swedes from Norwegian camps were released. All in all, ten thousand Jews were freed from Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald. Kersten himself had witnessed one of the releases.

Thursday, April 19, 1945, 10.30 hours.

Chapter 34

Felix Kersten pulled binoculars from their case and pressed them to his eyes. He viewed a long procession of red and white omnibuses, more than a hundred, a cloud of dust trailing behind, pulling up to the concentration camp. They were under the command of Colonel Gottfried Björk. They were accompanied by the vice president of the Swedish Red Cross, an important social figure, Count Folke Bernadotte. Later, he was to attempt to usurp Kersten's contributions to the release of internees.

He stepped out of the front-most bus and stepped up to the gated, wired entrance. He waved a document before a guard's face and produced identification, which the guard dutifully inspected. The guard cranked a telephone to life and uttered something. Fifteen minutes passed. Then, an SS officer appeared and double-checked the paper work and identification. He barked something and several guards went running toward the barracks.

Kersten pointed the binoculars beyond the wired gates of Dachau. From the crude wooden structures, figures slowly emerged, some dressed in striped garments and others skeletal and naked. Guards pushed the sorry figures, men, women and children, forward with the butts of their machine guns. Most were grimly thin. Guards moved to the gates and pushed them open. Other guards forced the figures into a single file so that they could be counted as they left the camp. Red Cross staff helped the figures aboard the buses and draped the naked with brown blankets. Two hours later, the gates were closed. The caravan of buses began to pull out, headed for freedom in Sweden and Switzerland. Kersten slipped his binoculars back in their case and dabbed the corners of his eyes with a handkerchief. Not enough, he whispered to himself. Not enough.

Chapter 35

April, 1945.

Allied forces begin taking large numbers of Axis prisoners. 1,500,000 prisoners were taken on the Western Front. Over 800,000 German soldiers had surrendered on the Eastern Front. The European war was coming to a swift close. Hitler and many of his cohorts slid down into the führerbunker where he and his wife of one day would commit suicide.

It was April 2 in the morning. The Russians were bombarding Berlin. Himmler had called on Kersten for the last time. Facing great, personal danger, Kersten moved up the steps of SS Headquarters and entered the pockmarked building to find empty hallways. No guards.

Documents haphazardly strewn across the floors, bespeaking a hasty retreat. He ascended the stairs to the second floor and moved to Himmler's door, which was partially open. Kersten knocked anyway. He heard Himmler say, "Come in," and Kersten entered the chamber.

Himmler was standing before a full-length mirror. He was dressed in the uniform of a private. He was fitting himself with a patch over his left eye and had shaved his moustache.

"Well," Himmler said, "what do you think?"

"I don't believe my eyes," remarked Kersten. "What does it mean?"

"It means," answered Himmler, "I shall not be found out as SS by the enemy."

"What of the SS tattoo under your arm?"

"They won't bother about that, I assure you, my Buddha. I'm a private, for Christ's sake!"

Kersten paced the floor. "We've been through a lot," he said, strangely wistful.

"Yes, I have counted on you quite a bit and you have come through. I only wish you had joined the SS. What an officer you would have made, topnotch."

"I think not," said Kersten. "I had to draw a line somewhere."

"Well, I am proud of my SS ring, my SS knife, my SS calling. We were and still are the master race. Think of what we accomplished in a few short years. Think of what we could have accomplished if we hadn't been betrayed."

“You have always treated me well, Reichsführer. And you tossed a blind eye to my Irmgard. I do thank you for that.”

“It was nothing,” uttered Himmler. “You were my conscience, Kersten,” he said, packing a duffle bag, then slinging it over his shoulder. “Goodbye,” he uttered, offering his hand.

Kersten shook the outstretched hand and said, “Good luck!”

“To us both,” declared Himmler. “You are going to face some tough times, you realize that, don’t you? There will be some among your people who question your relationship with me. Don’t be surprised. Well, farewell, my magic Buddha.” He raced out the room and down the steps. Kersten could hear the heavy front door open and close.

Kersten looked round him, then exited the building and into his car. He drove back to Hartzwalde, collected his family and headed for the airport. Kersten could hear mortars exploding behind him. They managed to arrive at the airport without incident and boarded the plane. Destination: Stockholm.