

Prisoners

By Ava Harrison

Prologue

1918 Munich, Germany, 1st World War

Kurt Schmitt, a young German boy, sat on the summer grass pulling up blades dreamily, twisting them between his fingers. He lay outside a street of terraced houses that backed onto the river, one of which was his home. It was his last evening seeing his two best friends before they all left to go their separate ways. The two other boys stood around him, skimming stones across a lake, talking over what they were going to do in the future.

“My father wants me to join the army, to help finish this Great War,” said one boy.

“My family want me to be a Kohen,” said the other. Kurt did not care to enter priesthood or join the army, just as he did not care to join in the conversation. He just sat under the shadow of an oak tree, thinking. He had no idea what he wanted to be, though he didn’t care about that either. The sun was shining in a cloudless sky, giving the day a natural glow. He didn’t have to worry about anything. And that was enough comfort for Kurt.

“Kurt, come look at this!” shouted one of the boys.

Slowly, Kurt rose from the ground, taking a few blades of grass with him, and walked towards his two friends. The boy whom had shouted seemed to be holding a very sharp stone. It resembled something of a rather cheap dagger.

“Yeah Heinrich?” replied Kurt.

“Look how sharp this thing is!” said the other boy, who had just taken the stone out of Heinrich’s hand.

“Yes Sam, I can see that,” laughed Kurt.

The stone was indeed an obvious weapon. Kurt sighed sorrowfully and then sat down, the other two smiling at him with understanding. None of them wanted to leave each other. Then they both surveyed each other, and also took their seats. Sam handed the stone back to Heinrich who peered at it as if it were an old antique of great value.

“Can I skim it?” Sam asked.

“No,” replied Heinrich. “But we could do something else with it...”

“Go on,” said Kurt.

"I just thought that... no maybe it's silly," said Heinrich.

"Oh go on! We're listening now," said Sam, his unusually vibrant blue eyes glinting in the sun light.

"Fine! I thought we could make a blood pact. It's what best friends do – I read it in a book. Maybe it is a stupid idea! Just forget it -"

"And why is it a bad idea?" Sam interrupted.

"Look, we'd need to cut into each other's skin and -" said Heinrich.

"Oh come on it's just a bit of fun,' butted in Sam, 'and besides it will mean we're always together even when we're apart.'" He smiled sadly.

"Fine," said Heinrich, though his voice sounded far from disappointment.

"What do you think Kurt?" asked Sam.

Kurt was pleased to finally be addressed, considering they had not even asked his opinion on the matter throughout their whole conversation. He knew he had to leave soon and his mother would call him back for dinner. He didn't want to let his best friends go that quickly, but he at least wanted to leave with a part of them. Kurt knew this had to be done quickly, and properly.

"I'll do it if you do it," he said.

"Hand," said Heinrich to Kurt.

Kurt outstretched his arm towards Heinrich, bracing himself for expected pain. The stone was freezing cold, he could feel how sharp it was before it had even touched his skin. It was over in seconds. As he looked down at his hand, he realized it was shaking as blood trickled down onto the grass. Unsurprisingly, the pain was strong. Heinrich had cut deeply into his hand, which shocked Kurt a great deal.

"Ouch! Not so deep Heinrich!" Kurt cried.

"Sorry," he mumbled, his white hair swaying in the wind absently.

Heinrich then struck his hand with the stone as if it were ripping paper. Weirdly, he grinned at the pain as his usually stern face twisted into a smile. He leant over to cut Sam. Sam took a deep gasp for air at the mass of pain that had clearly just hit him.

"Ow! Why so deep?" he squealed angrily.

Again Heinrich mumbled his apology, though it sounded far from sincere. They agreed to recite a saying they had made when they were younger. Sam and Kurt put their bleeding hands together and said,

"Part yes we may, meeting many others. But it won't matter, for we are brothers. By blood, by heart, we shan't stand alone. For there's nothing between us, together, we're sewn."

No one spoke for a few seconds as their hands parted, and then Heinrich began to laugh but the others didn't.

Heinrich and Sam repeated the same process but before Kurt could make the pact with his other friend, he heard a distant call of,

“Kurt! Dinner! Now!”

“I better go,” said Kurt, as he got up from the ground.

Feeling a little disappointed that he didn't get to become blood brothers with Heinrich, he hid his hand up his sleeve and ran home, the words of their pact echoing in his head.

Chapter 1

1940 Auschwitz, Poland, 2nd World War

Kurt could feel the icy cold wind nipping his cheeks as he stood behind the gate, staring out towards a line of golden trees, his eyes stinging as white hair kept blowing into his pale face. It felt like torture to see what lay beyond the boundaries which he was bound to, the boundaries of hell. He watched as the leaves soared away from their owners, as the sky began to darken, as the sun set again. Every night he watched the day disappear, wishing it was all a dream.

Wishing to be a few feet further forward, just to be outside the gate. The gate that had the small hole by the entrance that led out to the wilderness beyond. The hole in the gate Kurt wished he could fit through, but it was more for rabbits. His hands were frozen to the gun he was holding, and his feet felt as if they weren't there at all. He was trapped behind walls destined to witness horrific murder. He had known that Auschwitz was not going to be pleasant, but if he had known of the blood curdling screams and of the mass of guilt that weighed him down everywhere he went... well... he couldn't say he would have rather died, but he would have taken torture or prison over gassing innocent people any day. It was impossible to believe World War 2 had begun, even after the first one, and that he, Kurt Schmitt, would have to serve as a German soldier in the middle of a Polish death camp.

Nothing in the world could have made Kurt's situation better. He missed his wife and children, the three people he loved most. He hated the fact he was being forced to kill innocent people purely because of their religion. He had never wanted to become a German soldier, but he was afraid of the nasty death Hitler would put upon unwilling traitors. He knew everything he was doing was wrong, but the matter of fixing it was way out of his reach. The only thing that gave him comfort, was a sharp stone that he had had for over 20 years.

His old best friend Heinrich was also occasionally visiting Auschwitz, though this wasn't always a comforting thought. Heinrich was a Nazi, and a Gestapo. He was also head of the SS. Considering the fact he was extremely close to Hitler himself, he most definitely agreed with the death camps. Kurt and Heinrich had managed to keep up over the years, though unfortunately, they had both lost contact with Sam. Even worse, Sam was a Jew. In itself, this was perfectly fine. In World War 2, you were probably going to end up dead. Kurt's hopes on Sam living were so low they almost didn't exist.

Although they had been parted for many years, Kurt still felt closer to Sam than he did to Heinrich. He didn't know whether this was because of the fact Heinrich had let the fame and power of what he had get to his head or that him and Sam were blood brothers,

something that he hadn't forgotten. Looking back on it, Heinrich had always been power hungry and slightly mad because of his fascination of pain. In a way, it didn't surprise Kurt that he had ended up like this. Still staring out to the doleful sunset, he heard a distant cry from behind him.

"Schmitt! In! Now!"

Kurt dragged his feet along the hard, mistreated ground, feeling utterly depressed. Even though soldier's bunkers were relatively comfortable, he couldn't keep the packed in prisoners off his mind. Again, a wave of guilt swept over him like a gasp of air. When he got to his bed, he didn't even take off his uniform before getting under the covers and attempting to get to sleep. His whole figure felt like a heavy weight. His soul ached along with his body. Even though his situation was mild torture, he knew he could do nothing about it. All he could do was sleep.

Kurt woke to a cold autumn day with a happy call of a robin bouncing around in his ears. How could the universe carry on when horror was happening all around it? Why was that robin happier than most of the human kind? These questions invaded Kurt's mind often. But he didn't have time to let thoughts dwell in his head at that moment, he had to be up and ready in 5 minutes. If not, he would be shot. Jumping out of bed, he remembered he had left his uniform on the previous night.

To be honest, this made Kurt take less time anyway, so it wasn't as if it was a bad thing. As he walked out of the door, he felt the blazing sun hit his face, blinding him for a split second. The new prisoners would be arriving shortly, meaning Kurt would have to be by the gate to see them in. Although he had time, Kurt didn't feel like having breakfast. He rarely ate anyway. He just stood by the same gate, waiting. Waiting as he always did.

Kurt constantly tried to block out thoughts about his family. He just had to keep convincing himself they were fine. It was highly unlikely they would be bombed anyway considering they lived in such a remote area. Instead, he took to filing through the happy memories he had with his wife and children.

Suddenly, he heard the creaking of the gates as they opened ominously behind him. He hated that sound as much as if he were a prisoner himself. Every time he heard it, it meant that more pure, innocent people were going to die, even if they didn't know it yet. Kurt tried as hard as he could to not look at them, feeling awfully guilty whenever he caught their gaze, but he couldn't resist whipping his head around when he heard a voice whisper,

"Don't worry darling, Daddy's got you. Every things going to be fine. Remember, by blood, by heart, we shan't stand alone, for there's nothing between us and together we're sewn,"

Kurt hadn't heard that phrase out loud for 22 years.

His jaw dropping, he had turned to look at his oldest friend. Sam, older but easily recognisable, was clinging on to his wife and daughter looking utterly terrified as a Nazi screamed,

"Quiet, you scum! Unless you want to be shot!"

Kurt couldn't believe it, it was Sam.

Now with a beard and with bloodshot eyes, but it was Sam! Kurt refrained from shouting and or staring at his best friend, he just stood trying to not look suspicious in anyway at all. Kurt knew he needed to do something, but what? All this time he had just been saying to himself there was nothing he could do, but what if there was? All Kurt knew is that he needed to get Sam out of there: it was their blood pact. After all, it wasn't made for nothing.

The gates shut with a loud crash leaving Kurt slightly deafened, but a lot happier as he watched the new arrivals march of into the distance. Kurt didn't know why he felt so happy at first, though it didn't take him long to figure it out.

It felt as if he finally had a purpose at the death camp, to save his best friend. And now Sam could live, and his family, if he got them out of there. And others, once he figured out a way. And he was going to find one, if it was the last thing he did, he was going to find one.

Chapter 2

Kurt barely slept that night. He couldn't keep Sam off his mind. But when he did rarely drift off, his dreams gave him no comfort. The one where he watched Sam beg on his knees to a Nazi that he wasn't a Jew and that he wanted to join the soldiers was by far the most disturbing; because of the fact he was shot seconds later. But what made Kurt the most depressed was that Sam didn't know he was there. Though this didn't stop Kurt from thinking up ways of getting Sam out, even though he hadn't had any success so far. It was not like putting Sam in the back of a supply truck as a disguise was going to last for long, because as soon as the driver opened it up, BANG, over. This was another one of Kurt's nightly dreams.

One day after lunch, Kurt decided to patrol the ghettos where the Jews were '*kept*', hoping to find out what number Sam was. Though it wasn't proving easy. There were just so many- this fact made Kurt thoroughly depressed- that he couldn't locate him. The stench in each one seemed to get worse and worse for every door he opened.

'How can these people live like this?' he thought. Although, he considered himself lucky that the original guard had left moments after Kurt arrived, stating briefly that he was going to lunch, and leaving him in charge.

Kurt managed to talk to some of the Jews while he was there. Though this made his weight of guilt even heavier, the least he could do is keep them company. Number 53,897 was also named Kurt and they both had a long talk over family life, which ended up leaving the poor man in tears. And number 21,945 claimed he also knew a man called Sam Goldring and that he could help Kurt find him.

Though it didn't sound like he was talking about the same person because he said Sam was 'the cutest little baby he'd ever seen' and this man looked even younger than the Sam Kurt knew.

Losing hope, Kurt trudged to the last ghetto crossing his fingers in his pocket that Sam hadn't *had his shower* already. Feeling utterly helpless, Kurt swung open the door to find another room full of walking skeletons, pretty much assuming that Sam was gone. He mainly looked at his feet, not barring to make eye contact with any of them. Just as Kurt closed the door behind him, he heard a woman call,

"Sam, have you seen Nora?"

Kurt spun around to see a sallow faced woman peering at the back of a man's head.

"Yes darling, she's here," replied the man, turning to face her.

Kurt stifled a surprised gasp with great difficulty, but his smile couldn't be held back. He tugged on the door handle, but it had locked itself when he had shut it. Reaching into his pocket, Kurt swore loudly as he realised he lost his key. *I must have dropped it in a ghetto*, he thought angrily. He rattled the bars as he shouted,

"Sam?"

The man turned around and said,

"How do you know my... wait, KURT? What are you doing here?"

"Why I'm here doesn't matter, because I don't want to be here. The question is how we get you out of here," Kurt replied, attempting to open the door again.

Chapter 3

Sam had a plan and Kurt knew it. There wasn't much time, it had to happen that night. At 10:00pm, Kurt was on duty to take the Jews from ghetto 231 (Sam's ghetto) to 'have a shower'. As he walked to the ghetto, Kurt felt an urge to run as fast as he could, to try get rid of the anxiety and or exhilaration that had been stacking up inside of him all day. Opening the door with his new key, Sam was standing there saying with a nervous smile,

"Ready?"

"Ready," Kurt replied.

The moon was glinting blankly in the sky as Kurt and the prisoners patrolled across the camp towards the gate. Kurt was sure that he was leading at least 10 people towards freedom, giving him a ray of happiness inside of him, something he hadn't felt for months.

Although it wasn't a large number, if he took anymore he was sure to be caught. Sam, who was on Kurt's right, kept turning his head frantically backwards and forwards, keeping a lookout for any other guards, panic etched on his stony face. No one had the courage to talk. No one had the courage to make a noise at all.

They were close to the exit. All the guards were looking around suspiciously, waiting for something to happen. And it did. As planned. All of a sudden, a prisoner let out a fake yelp of pain to grab the attention of all the guards, and all of the guards immediately ran to the prisoner.

Snatching her up as if she were food rations, they took her away to the ghettos and Kurt heard a defining bang and a real scream of mirth, leaving him sad at the poor woman's sacrifice.

She gave herself for others, he thought, *for others*.

Then, Sam and Kurt took off towards the exit, everyone else following. The hole below the gate was so small, Kurt knew that he would never be able to fit. Although the prisoners most certainly would considering how thin they were after months of hard work and starvation. One by one, Kurt and Sam ushered the prisoners through the hole, which led out to the icy landscape. Some prisoners were carrying food, others tools, others water, Kurt had stolen all this from the soldiers cabins. This was to keep them alive long enough for them to be safe.

Almost everyone had gone through when Kurt heard someone say his name very loudly from behind his back. For the first time, the sound of his name sent chills down his spine. Kurt slowly turned around to see another soldier called Gareth Goodwin staring at him, looking utterly bewildered.

“What are you doing” Goodwin said, looking Kurt up and down, trying to figure out what was going on.

“Oh nothing Goodwin,” replied Kurt, in the calmest manner he could pursue, “just taking this lot out for a late night stroll in the cold, fighting in the ghettos you see.”

“Oh, why didn’t you just shoot them?” Goodwin asked as if this was just a throw away question.

“Uuuuhhhh, slow torture is more painful, wouldn’t you say?” said Kurt, disgusted at his own words. The soldier shrugged, clearly unconcerned, and said, “Well get them back to the ghettos and I don’t want to see them out with them again,” and walked of as if nothing had happened.

Kurt’s mouth went dry. It was obvious that Goodwin had been suspicious, but he wasn’t in charge. Kurt’s mouth almost opened to fight back when he remembered that he wasn’t armed, unlike Goodwin. It seemed stupid to Kurt that he didn’t think of combat in any way. It also seemed stupid to try and lead people out of Auschwitz WITH GUARDS AROUND!

He should have just gotten Sam and his family out alone. The main point of the heist was to get Sam to safety, and Sam was still there!

Chapter 4

Kurt couldn’t bare it. He had tried so many times to get Sam out, and failed. It upset him that he got other people out but not Sam, why did his friend have to be so noble? They didn’t buy the soldier dress up trick, which led to Kurt making up a story about him having no idea and saying he would shoot Sam himself, which he didn’t do. He tried the gate escape again, and got caught. But he used the same excuse he used on Goodwin. The only upside of these failed attempts is that he knew what worked and what didn’t, but what did work?

Why can’t I get him out, Kurt thought. Though that wasn’t the only thing on Kurt’s mind, it was the first time that Heinrich was visiting the camp and Kurt needed to talk to him. It was the first time he was going to see his friend after 22 years, after all.

Over the few months Kurt had known Sam in the camp, their bond had grown a lot stronger, as if they had never been apart all those years. But to Kurt, this was just another reason to get Sam out. They talked as often as they could, normally through bars, about

family and other subjects to take their minds of reality. It turns out, that Sam's daughter and wife were two of the few prisoners to escape. Though unfortunately, Kurt hadn't had the chance to speak to Sam for weeks because the other militaries were becoming more and more suspicious of him every time he came back from talking to him. Though Kurt was sure they had no idea what he was doing for if they did he knew that living would not be an option.

However, Heinrich was coming to assess the camps progress in the elimination of the captives (which Kurt thought was stupid because Auschwitz was one of the largest death camps there were and it would naturally get 'high marks') and that meant that Kurt could tell Heinrich about Sam and see if he knew a way to get him out of there. Even though Kurt was very doubtful with Heinrich, he was his last hope and at this point his blood brother came before anyone.

As usual, Kurt stood next to the currently opening gate, watching Heinrich's carriage roll into the camp. Heinrich stepped out of the vehicle and did up the buckles on his jacket, scanning the area with his piercing grey eyes. A sudden feeling came over Kurt as Heinrich smirked unpleasantly at the General. It was like the feeling you get when you watch four people bully one. It was repulsion, anger, and many other emotions put into one feeling that burned Kurt's throat and boiled his gut. But Kurt pushed it away and ignored it, remembering that Heinrich could help. Then, completely unexpectedly, Heinrich walked straight up to Kurt, grabbed his wrist and dragged him over to the head.

"Who is this man?" he asked the General.

"Kurt Schmitt, sir," replied the General timidly.

"Ah ha, now, do you have an empty building I could borrow?"

A puzzled look spread over the General's face.

"Yes, and why would you be needing it?"

"Don't ask questions, just take me and Schmitt there please,"

The General nodded his head, and began walking towards the empty storage cupboard, Heinrich following with Kurt.

Chapter 5

The cupboard became even more cramped as the General shut the door on the two men.

"Well well well, we meet again. How long has it been?" sneered Heinrich.

"22 years... I think," Kurt replied.

"Mmmmm, that long? Well," He chuckled,

"Feels longer,"

Repressing his angry thoughts once again, Kurt went straight to the conversation he had been waiting for.

"Heinrich, Sam's here. We need to get him out. They'll kill him soon."

Heinrich gave a small chuckle again, though Kurt didn't see the funny side of this fact.

"I knew you hadn't changed" Heinrich mumbled.

"What do you mean?"

"So gullible, Schmitt, so easy to fool. Kind hearts are easily manipulated, didn't you know?"

Confused, Kurt frowned slightly at Heinrich's gloating face.

"Once my advisers gave me a list of new recruits for Auschwitz, and I saw your name, I thought you changed. Oh how foolish I was to think that. And when I saw the list of new prisoners, all of my hope died. You would never let your blood brother die, Kurt, I'm not stupid. I have been working up excuses to come here for months, of course my dear friend Adolf was confused of my desire to go at first, but trusted me to well to deny my request of checking the place over. You haven't changed Schmitt, you are a traitor, and punishment for you will not go unnoticed," Heinrich's sneer crept back onto his face, leaving Kurt in shock.

"But Sam," Kurt spluttered.

"He can't be helped, not now. Not even people as powerful as me can raise the dead,"

It took Kurt a few moment for these words to sink in. Sam. Dead. Gone. Forever. Kurt was frozen in grief and shock, before screaming,

"I THOUGHT WE WERE FRIENDS!"

"You thought wrong then" Heinrich laughed.

Without thinking, Kurt launched himself on Heinrich, disarmed him of his gun and held it to his head. Betrayal boiled in his blood and overtook his mind. Revenge was all that was left. To kill him.

Startled by Kurt's sudden move, Heinrich blurted out, "Going to kill me Schmitt, GOING TO KILL ME!" he was hysterical. Then Kurt lowered the gun. What was he doing?

"No, I'm not. Because I'm not a killer, Heinrich. That, I believe, is your job!"

Suddenly, Heinrich grabbed the gun out of Kurt's hands, pushed him to the ground, and pointed it at his chest.

"You are weak Schmitt, WEAK! You couldn't kill if you tried!"

Kurt knew it was over. But he didn't care.

“No, you’re weak. I’m not afraid to die, Heinrich, because you will lose this war. The weak are the ones who kill, the ones afraid of death! That is why you will lose, Heinrich. The better man always wins, not the one who kills him!” That was enough. A worried yet angry face was looking at Kurt’s, which was calm and ready.

“Goodbye, Heinrich. And may the better man win.”