

The Good German Girl

I push my way through the city streets, slipping through the mass of people bustling this way and that, trying my hardest to go unnoticed in the chaos. Shouts echo through the alleyways, dogs barking, business owners yelling for customers, the homeless begging for food and money, parents shouting at children and children shouting at parents.

I, however, like the good German girl I am, say nothing.

My foot splashes in a puddle as I step wrong, dirty water from last night's storm splashing up and splattering on the hem of my skirt. I allow myself ten seconds to sigh and be angry at the street and its potholes, then step back onto the road and keep walking.

I can't be late, now can I?

My bulging purse bounces against my thigh in time with my brisk steps. Reaching an alleyway between two apartment buildings, I use the crowd to my advantage and slip inside, internally hoping that I'm not drawing attention.

The dark alley is much quieter in comparison to the street. I flick a blonde curl out of my eyes and lean against the brick wall in the shadows, breathing a sigh of relief to be out of sight. Then, remembering my assignment, I purse my lips and whistle in three short bursts, gaze flicking up to the fire escape.

Almost immediately after, I see a flash of dark hair, and a tall, skinny figure darts soundlessly down the metal stairs, landing across the alley from me in less than a minute.

"You're late." Andreas steps towards me, out of the shadows. His dark brown hair is disheveled, like always, and he's squinting a bit, like he does when he's being serious, or lecturing me just because he's older. Even so, his eighteen years to my sixteen mean nothing when it comes to quick thinking.

I shrug, looking straight at my friend. "You're early." I say plainly, secretly enjoying that I get to play him a bit. "It's not like you were going to leave at a certain time if I didn't arrive, is it?"

Andreas huffs, getting annoyed with me already. "Anneliese, you *know* how important this is, you can't just--"

Andreas starts to say something, but then stops abruptly, eyes going wide. He takes me by the arm and drags me to the edge of the alley, the one near the quieter street. I move to protest, to take my arm from him, but then he mutters three words in a soft whisper. "How's your family?"

Immediately, I realize that he's not just making conversation with me at all.

How's your family? is code for *There are soldiers coming, and fast.*

My head whips around, looking for the supposed SS on instinct, but Andreas turns my head to look at him and shakes his head, one finger to his lips.

I take a breath, trying to still my already racing heart and thoughts. "My brothers and sisters have been asking about you. They've asked if I can ask you to come to our house tomorrow. What time can you be over?"

This is all a lie. I have only two sisters, and they don't even know that Andreas exists, and they certainly don't want an older, unknown boy coming to our house. I've just asked him how many soldiers he thinks are coming.

He pretends to think, but is probably listening for footsteps. "You can expect me at around one." *One soldier.* I assure myself. *We can deal with that.* "I'll have to tell my mother, though."

Andreas lives alone, and both his parents have been dead for years. He's just told me that--

"Hey, you!" A barking voice echoes off the walls of the alleyway. "*Halt!*"

My blood goes cold.

Andreas releases me and we step a few feet apart from each other. From around the corner of the building, a blond-haired, blue-eyed SS officer marches toward us, his steps clipped and short, his uniform impeccable.

Surely a Nazi through and through.

The officer looks between Andreas and I. "What are you doing here?" He demands of us, gaze settling on me.

My heart thunders in my chest, but I nod at him politely and smile, reminding myself who this man is. "Good afternoon, sir. My friend and I haven't seen each other in a while. We were just catching up here to not get in the way of the people on the streets." *Like the good German girl I am*, I almost add, but then remember my place.

He studies me, maybe trying to decide if I'm telling the truth. "What's your name?"

Really, it's Anneliese, but I give him my nickname instead. "Liesl, sir."

"Papers." I sift through my purse and place my fake papers in his outstretched hand, the ones I use when I'm on assignments and get confronted like this. The ones that say Liesl Schmidt instead of Anneliese Klein.

The officer scans my papers, then looks at me, a hint of a smile dancing across his face. "Schmidt, eh?"

My heart skips, but I keep a plastered smile on my face. "That's right, sir."

He refolds my papers and hands them back to me. "That's my mother's maiden name. Nice to meet you, Liesl Schmidt."

"You as well, officer." I feel it's strange that this SS has taken a liking to me so quickly. That he's taken a liking to me at all, frankly.

I suspect that he holds a disdain for Andreas, however. The officer frowns as he looks over to him, simply holding out his hand rather than verbally asking for Andreas's papers. My friend's gaze never leaves the officer's as he takes his fake papers from his pocket, eyeing him with distrust.

The SS man scans Andreas's papers, looking between him and his identification, presumably looking for differences between him and his photograph. It's now that I realize that he probably likes me better than Andreas just because I fit the ridiculous Aryan ideals that the Nazis hold and he doesn't.

"Adrien Alarie," Andreas gives his code name unprompted. "From--"

"France, yes?" The officer interrupts.

Andreas bristles, not expecting this. "Yes, sir." Although it's true that Andreas may have French heritage and he speaks the language, he's lived in Germany his entire life.

"Hm." The officer studies him. "You speak German without an accent. How long have you been in the Fatherland?"

"I spoke German along with French when I was younger. I've lived here for five years."

My pulse races. I'm so scared something will happen, that this officer will do something rash, that he'll take Andreas (or I, I suppose) away just because he feels like it.

Similar things have happened before, after all.

But instead of all this, all he does is shove Andreas's papers back to his chest and turn briskly on his heel. As he's walking away, he glances back at us for a brief moment.

"Be careful, you two." He meets only my eyes, then leaves the alley for the street.

"Thank you, sir!" I am sure to call out, because one thing all Nazis have in common is that they like to think that what they're doing is noble.

Once I'm sure that the officer is far away on the street, I turn to Andreas, who's fiddling with his watch. "An odd man, don't you think?"

"Anneliese, look." He shoves his wrist in my face, the wrist with his watch on it. For a moment, I'm confused, but then I realize that it's fifteen minutes to three.

I was supposed to report at two thirty.

I take one look at Andreas, panic building. "It's okay, Liesl." He assures me swiftly. "Quick, quiet, and careful, remember?"

"Quick, quiet, careful . . . ," I murmur the three words that our movement leader always teaches new recruits.

He nods, then gives me a kiss on the cheek, which is Andreas for good luck. "See you soon, Anneliese. You'll be just fine, I know it."

With that, he stalks across the alleyway and turns onto the opposite street, as if he'd never seen me at all.

I dart to the street, once again finding myself weaving through the crowd, which seems much more busy this time. I mutter an apology as I bump into a pregnant girl not much older than myself, clinging to the arm of an older man. I'm becoming paranoid from my nerves, and I repeatedly brush the pockets of my coat and the bulk of my purse to make sure I have everything.

Finally, after what I think must be hours, the crowd starts to thin. Shouts of prices for food have become few and far between, and I've entered the part of the city that immediately feels darker when you look at it, the place where no one, *absolutely no one*, wants to be.

The ghetto.

I swear everything feels grayer here. The chain link fence is tall and cold, and all the buildings just look tired on the outside, though I know that on the inside, they're bursting at the seams. There are people outside, some walking, some lying on the ground, some sitting, begging for, well, *anything*, I suppose. I spot a girl, no older than six or seven, and though I'm far away, I can count her ribs through her thin dress. I see one man standing completely still, staring straight at a building beyond the fence, eyes unblinking and posture unchanging.

All of this, just because they're Jewish?

What has Germany become?

Reminding myself that I've done this a thousand times before, I set to work, hoping that the guard change is late, like we planned it to be. I walk along the fence, never looking into the ghetto, because that would be suspicious. I can see the loose wire, see where to drop my purse and empty my pockets--

"Halt!"

For the second time today, my blood freezes in my veins.

I feel someone turn me around sharply by my arm, and I find myself looking up into the cold eyes of a Nazi.

I don't scream. I don't move. I don't even blink. I'm paralyzed with fear, with the fact that I suddenly have no idea what I'm doing.

"What are you doing here, *fraulein*?" His eyes scan my body, and, to my horror, land on my purse.

He takes my clearly overstuffed purse, and before I can object or say anything, undoes the clasp. He peers inside for a moment before dumping out the contents onto the cobblestone. I bite my lip hard, and my hands curl into fists at my sides as everything spills out.

Bread. Cheese. A melted stick of butter. A jar of cream. Two plums. Four apples. Half a carrot. A small potato. A bottle of aspirin. And a wilted lily.

The symbol of our movement.

I'm shaking. With fear, guilt, rage, I'm not sure.

The officer looks at me, smiles a disgusting smile. "Not such a good German girl, are you?"

I shut my eyes.

I've been telling myself the opposite for years.

