

waits with a white handkerchief in his big sailor's hands, a barely perceptible shake showing in his wrists.

The Germans climb out of their vehicles, more than a dozen of them. Their boots gleam and their uniforms are tidy. Two carry carnations; one urges along a beagle on a rope. Several gaze openmouthed up at the facade of the château.

A short man in a field captain's uniform emerges from the backseat of the Mercedes and brushes something invisible from the sleeve of his coat. He exchanges a few words with a thin aide-de-camp, who translates to the mayor. The mayor nods. Then the short man disappears through the huge doors. Minutes later, the aide-de-camp flings open the shutters of an upstairs window and gazes a moment across the rooftops before unfurling a crimson flag over the brick and securing its eyelets to the sill.

## Jungmänner

It's a castle out of a storybook: eight or nine stone buildings sheltered below hills, rust-colored roofs, narrow windows, spires and turrets, weeds sprouting from between roof tiles. A pretty little river winds through athletics fields. Not in the clearest hour of Zollverein's clearest day has Werner breathed air so unadulterated by dust.

A one-armed bunk master sets forth rules in a belligerent torrent. "This is your parade uniform, this is your field uniform, this is your gym uniform. Suspenders crossed in the back, parallel in the front. Sleeves rolled to the elbow. Each boy is to carry a knife in a scabbard on the right side of the belt. Raise your right arm when you wish to be called upon. Always align in rows of ten. No books, no cigarettes, no food, no personal possessions, nothing in your locker but uniforms, boots, knife, polish. No talking after lights-out. Letters home will be posted on Wednesdays. You will strip away your weakness, your cowardice, your hesitation. You will become like a waterfall, a volley of bullets—you will all surge in the same direction at the same pace toward the same cause. You will forgo comforts; you will live by duty alone. You will eat country and breathe nation."

Do they understand?

The boys shout that they do. There are four hundred of them, plus thirty instructors and fifty more on the staff, NCOs and cooks, groomsmen and groundskeepers. Some cadets are as young as nine. The oldest are seventeen. Gothic faces, sharp noses, pointed chins. Blue eyes, all of them.

Werner sleeps in a tiny dormitory with seven other fourteen-year-olds. The bunk above belongs to Frederick: a reedy boy, thin as a blade of grass, skin as pale as cream. Frederick is new too. He's from Berlin.

His father is assistant to an ambassador. When Frederick speaks, his attention floats up, as though he's scanning the sky for something.

He and Werner eat their first meal in their starchy new uniforms at a long wooden table in the refectory. Some boys talk in whispers, some sit alone, some gulp food as if they have not eaten in days. Through three arched windows, dawn sends a sheaf of hallowed golden rays.

Frederick flutters his fingers and asks, "Do you like birds?"

"Sure."

"Do you know about hooded crows?"

Werner shakes his head.

"Hooded crows are smarter than most mammals. Even monkeys.

I've seen them put nuts they can't crack in the road and wait for cars to run over them to get at the kernel. Werner, you and I are going to be great friends, I'm sure of it."

A portrait of the führer glowers over every classroom. Learning happens on backless benches, at wooden tables grooved by the boredom of countless boys before them—squires, monks, conscripts, cadets. On Werner's first day, he walks past the half-open door of the technical sciences laboratory and glimpses a room as big as Zollverein's drugstore lined with brand-new sinks and glass-fronted cabinets inside which wait sparkling beakers and graduated cylinders and balances and burners. Frederick has to urge him along.

On their second day, a withered phrenologist gives a presentation to the entire student body. The lights in the refectory dim, a projector whirs, and a chart full of circles appears on the far wall. The old man stands beneath the projection screen and whisks the tip of a billiards cue through the grids. "White circles represent pure German blood. Circles with black indicate the proportion of foreign blood. Notice group two, number five." He raps the screen with his cue and it ripples. "Marriage between a pure German and one-quarter Jew is still permissible, you see?"

A half hour later, Werner and Frederick are reading Goethe in poetics. Then they're magnetizing needles in field exercises. The bunk master announces schedules of byzantine complication: Mondays are for

mechanics, state history, racial sciences. Tuesdays are for horsemanship, orienteering, military history. Everyone, even the nine-year-olds, will be taught to clean, break down, and fire a Mauser rifle.

Afternoons, they lash themselves into a snarl of cartridge belts and run. Run to the troughs; run to the flag; run up the hill. Run carrying each other on your backs, run carrying your rifle above your head. Run, crawl, swim. Then more running.

The star-flooded nights, the dew-soaked dawns, the hushed ambulatories, the enforced asceticism—never has Werner felt part of something so single-minded. Never has he felt such a hunger to belong. In the rows of dormitories are cadets who talk of alpine skiing, of duels, of jazz clubs and governesses and boar hunting; boys who employ curse words with virtuosic skill and boys who talk about cigarettes named for cinema stars; boys who speak of "telephoning the colonel" and boys who have baronesses for mothers. There are boys who have been admitted not because they are good at anything in particular but because their fathers work for ministries. And the way they talk: "One mustn't expect figs from thistles!" "I'd pollinate her in a blink, you shit!" "Bear up and funk it, boys!" There are cadets who do everything right—perfect posture, expert marksmanship, boots polished so perfectly that they reflect clouds. There are cadets who have skin like butter and irises like sapphires and ultra-fine networks of blue veins laced across the backs of their hands. For now, though, beneath the whip of the administration, they are all the same, all *Jungmänner*. They hustle through the gates together, gulp fried eggs in the refectory together, march across the quadrangle, perform roll call, salute the colors, shoot rifles, run, bathe, and suffer together. They are each a mound of clay, and the potter that is the portly, shiny-faced commandant is throwing four hundred identical pots.

*We are young, they sing, we are steadfast, we have never compromised, we have so many castles yet to storm.*

Werner sways between exhaustion, confusion, and exhilaration. That his life has been so wholly redirected astounds him. He keeps any doubts at bay by memorizing lyrics or the routes to classrooms,