

**MITTE DISTRICT, EAST BERLIN****CHAPTER ONE**

It was April 12, 1961, almost noon, and Manfred Amsel was a deeply worried man. He paced back and forth, back and forth, across the worn linoleum of the waiting room. His wife, Rose, was in labor a full two weeks early. Prayer after silent prayer went up as naturally as breathing. He ran his hands yet again through his hair, fumbled for yet another cigarette almost as an afterthought, every fiber of his being willing his wife and child to be all right somewhere behind closed doors.

After what seemed an eternity, the doctor appeared, tired but smiling. “They’re both just fine”, Dr. Strauss said, laying a kind hand on Manfred’s shoulder. “You’ll be able to see them within the hour. I shall want to keep them for a few days, just to be sure. After that, you can take your little family home.” And the doctor walked away to a well-earned cup of coffee and a cigarette of his own. Through his tears of joy, Manfred managed to light his cigarette, albeit with a shaky hand. He walked out into the sunshine, smiling and crying, a proud new papa. Life was complete.

Manfred had been the cause for his father’s same happy tears in 1920 in Berlin. His father, a mathematical genius, had sobbed with joy at his son’s arrival on that cold winter day. An only child, Manfred’s parents doted on him constantly, took him everywhere, and exposed him as much as possible to the arts. He was reading newspapers aloud to his father over breakfast by the time he was four, and by the age of nine firmly announced his intention to be a professor

of world literature at Berlin University. Hitler's ascension to power, first as Chancellor in 1933, then as President in 1934, put an end to that plan.

Manfred's parents, outspoken intellectuals who did not agree with or wish to conform to Nazi ideals, were worried both for themselves and for their only son. Mother, perfectly balanced between sentiment and practicality, wanted to pack up the entire house but realized it was not possible. Some cherished things would have to stay behind. She woefully confined her efforts to clothes, family pictures, and a few mementos that could be easily fit into the suitcases. Taking a last look at what amounted to years of memories, she whispered a prayer of protection for her family and for the house as they locked the front door, possibly never to return. In this manner in mid-1934 the Amsels left their beloved homeland and their small but cozy home, heading first for Amsterdam.

For all the stress of the preparation to leave, the trip itself was uneventful, a welcome surprise. They traveled to and through Amsterdam with no trouble at all and booked passage on a steamer to England. Safely out of harm's way, or so they thought, they continued much as they had been – mother as a housewife and highly talented painter, father as a mathematics professor. Manfred continued to receive outstanding marks in school, despite the move, and was accepted into the University of Oxford on scholarship in 1937. Manfred used the time and opportunity well and attained a master's in world literature in 1941 at the age of 21. He also proved proficient in language, adding fluent English, French, and Russian to his native German. These would later prove to be more valuable than the degree.

In addition to his academic prowess, however, Manfred also possessed a kind and gentle heart and an unwavering sense of right and wrong. It angered him to the core to hear reports of

what Hitler's Germany was up to, and he grieved heavily for his homeland, in the arms of a madman, ripped asunder. He vowed privately to someday return to Berlin and do whatever he could to help restore Germany to a peaceful and harmonious nation. And after his parents were killed in the Luftwaffe bombing blitz of London in September 1940, he had also vowed to do whatever it took to wipe the filth of Nazism off the face of the earth forever. This line of thinking led him quite naturally into the British intelligence community, who put him to good use as he could fluently speak, read, and write four languages, including that of the enemy. He individually pursued a doctorate in world literature when he was not busy providing translation services for the Allied effort.

This entrance into the war effort also landed him what would become a lifelong friend. He met Max Jones quite by accident one day in February 1945 as he was heading to a routine briefing with his superior, Michael Smythe. The subject matter, as usual, was to discuss the results of his day's translation of intercepted German messages. When he arrived at Michael's office, he found one of the guest chairs already occupied. The stranger that rose from it and extended his hand in greeting turned out to be a young American Army intelligence officer who was assigned to a joint task force composed of Brits and Americans. Brown-haired, suntanned, with an easy grin and piercing green eyes, Max Jones had a laid-back Texas personality that Manfred immediately took to.

Michael explained that the task force needed not only a top-notch translator, but someone who would be willing to return to Berlin 'once this bloody war ends' and be the eyes-and-ears on the ground there, as it were. They informed Manfred that the inter-Allied European Advisory Committee had decided in 1944 that once Germany was defeated, it was to be divided into four zones of control – Soviet, French, Britain, and American. Max went on to say that if certain

things went the way the Allies hoped, Berlin would fall before the year's end – but there was a bit of concern that if the Soviets arrived in Berlin first, they might make life a bit difficult for the other Allied powers.

So, the task force needed someone, a native German with impeccable credentials, someone who could set up shop in the Soviet zone without attracting attention. This individual would be depended upon to pass information from the Soviet zone to the American and British zones if needed. Max and Michael believed Manfred was ideal because he also spoke French, English, and Russian. Would he do it?

Without hesitation, Manfred agreed. With one condition. “I have no training whatsoever, gentlemen. If you will remedy that so I can properly defend myself if necessary, you have a deal.” Manfred stated solemnly.

Max grinned and replied, “Absolutely, Professor. I'll have you shooting through the ace of spades at fifty paces!”

And so, Manfred went through an abbreviated version of combat training and ‘spy school’ condensed into one program. Although not detailed enough to render him a walking lethal weapon – Manfred was willing but there was not enough time - the training did involve firearms and self-defense, in addition to comprehensive instruction in sending and receiving coded messages, dead drops, and other crucial data he would be much more likely to use. Manfred once again proved a top student, including attaining marksman status on the pistol range. The Professor was now loaded for bear should the worst occur.

Manfred Amsel began the journey home to Berlin in early 1946, both as a professor and, if all went well, as an inside source within the Soviet sector for the British and Americans. He stopped in the American sector of Berlin to touch base with Max Jones for last minute instructions, and to set up some basic drop schedules for routine messages. A radio transmitter and a weapon would be passed to him when it could safely be done, a piece at a time if necessary.

Upon his return to the Mitte district of the Soviet sector, he found his family's little home on Wilhelm-Pieck largely unscathed, a sentiment that could not be echoed through much of the rest of Berlin. Fate seemed to have held the house of his childhood ready for his homecoming. There was one patch of roof that needed mending and the garden beds along the front were horrendously overgrown. The entire house smelled of dust and age and was badly in need of a thorough cleaning and paint, but overall, he counted himself lucky. So many other buildings were at least partially destroyed. Four lots down, two other houses had been literally blown away – a blackened crater and debris the only evidence they had existed.

He found the interior only in minor disarray; it evidently had been used to billet soldiers at some point before the Soviets housed their forces in larger accommodations. Crude bunk beds had been installed in the tiny loft bedroom where he used to sleep. He guessed the time and trouble to retrieve them was not worth the effort because they were still in place. In the living area and bedroom downstairs, some of the family furniture had been stacked against one wall to enable still more bunk beds to be put into service, judging from the marks on the floor. The rest of the furniture, he assumed, must now grace some Soviet officer's quarters.

Quietly settling in, he did his best to keep out of the way but to listen and observe as much as he could. No one in the Soviet sector knew he could speak, read, and write Russian. As a result, he could be sitting in the café, reading his paper, pretending not to notice as two young occupying soldiers at the next table talked in their native tongue. Manfred understood every word they said, although he gave no sign. This eavesdropping while pretending not to turned out to be extremely useful. On June 18, 1948, he communicated to his friends in the American sector using a dead drop. He relayed information he had heard about a blockade intended to cut off West Berlin's inbound supply routes. The only thing Manfred did not overhear was when it would start, but from the conversation he felt it was likely imminent. What later became known as the "Berlin Blockade" began on June 24th.

He found that Humboldt University had reopened its doors, went and spoke to the chancellors, and was immediately taken on as one of its professors. The lifetime goal of teaching in Berlin had been achieved, although not in way Manfred had dreamt it. In 1947, the University began to experience inner turmoil. The division ensued due to roughly half of the faculty and students being resistant to the Communist tone the University was espousing. Consequently, Freie Universität of Berlin was founded in December 1948 in the American Zone. This would give Manfred the excuse he needed to be able to travel much more freely, but it had to look like it was beneficial to Communism or it would not be allowed.

As he had been teaching there for about two years, he felt bold enough to approach Humboldt's chancellors and humbly ask permission to teach both there and at the new University in the West. He needed to convince them that cooperation between the two universities could not only enhance Communist teachings in the East but persuade some individuals to return from the

West. “One cannot proclaim Communist superiority without first drawing examples from the decadent West,” he exclaimed. And to his surprise, his bosses, and their Soviet handlers, agreed.

Permission was granted.

He uttered those words at great personal cost. Manfred fervently embraced the idea of democracy with all his heart. But for his personal safety, to maintain the ability to teach young minds in East Germany about other points of view, and to be able to continue to pass information westward, he had to pretend to cling to Communist beliefs. His parents did not raise a fool. So Manfred also became an ‘intellectual’ spy within academia. But his public stance enabled him to travel more freely among the Zones, and more importantly, generate and maintain valuable contacts in the American and British sections of the city.

Thanks to new Freie Universität credentials, the Soviet border guards no longer looked at him so closely – he became a regular fixture to and from through both Checkpoint Charlie at the American border and at Tiergarten, the beginning of the British zone. Every third or fourth trip he carried back into Soviet territory one piece of what would become his wireless radio transmitter. By the end of 1949 he had a fully functional independent means of contact, to be used for emergencies only. By the end of 1950 he also was in possession of a Walther .380 and one hundred rounds, also for emergencies only.

1952 saw the Soviets border off their entire section of Germany from the West, with the exception of the Soviet zone of Berlin. The Soviets thought they had caught the West unaware with this move. The Americans and Brits had in fact known about it roughly a week before it happened – thanks to Manfred, and two unwitting accomplices in the form of lower-level Russian soldiers complaining about their weekend passes being cancelled.

In early June 1954, on a brilliantly sunny afternoon, Manfred crossed into the American zone and was making his way toward Freie Universität to introduce his junior-level students to the works of Tolstoy. As he walked along, he was looking down at his notes for the day's lecture. Preoccupied, he walked straight into the person that would complete his world. Rose Meyer was an ethereal beauty, a petite brunette twenty-four-year old, with cornflower blue eyes that captured his heart the moment he looked into them. It was, literally, love at first sight. In that moment, he knew she was his future. He met and was immediately approved of by her parents, courted her passionately, and proposed on their seventh date. With an angelic smile, she accepted.