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The Nazis always arrived on schedule.

Today would be no exception.

At four o'clock sharp, Zara St. James gripped the sides of her canteen, her dark eyes fixed on the Sentinel flying toward her. He soared across the cloud-ridden sky, zipping through the breeze with his arms locked in front of him, like a superhero from an old comic.

But there was nothing heroic about him.

As the Sentinel neared the fields, he dipped down so low that Zara could see the rifle looped over his shoulder and the fist-size swastika on his olive-green uniform. His golden hair flapped in the chilly April wind, cementing the look of the prized Aryan soldier: sturdy frame, snowy skin. Adolf Hitler's shining legacy.

"Not you again," Zara whispered. The corners of her mouth tightened with worry. Twice this week she had noticed him patrolling the farm, always around four o'clock. One visit was routine. Two, a bit alarming. A third could mean trouble. Possibly an interrogation.

Or worse.

Zara's worry sank deeper as the Sentinel headed straight for the farm. He skimmed over the Shenandoah hills, which were bursting with fresh spring leaves. Then his gaze swept over the St. James land, scanning the worn-looking house and the decades-old barn and finally settling on Zara, who stood at the edge of the rain-soaked fields.

He slowed to a stop. “*Heil Hitler!*” he shouted in crisp German, hovering thirty feet above her head.

Zara’s heartbeat clattered, but she stretched out her arm in the proper salute, just as her mother had taught her years ago. “*Heil Hitler,*” she replied. Her own German was passable due to the mandatory classes in primary school, but her accent had always been atrocious, which didn’t bother her in the least. On most days she rather enjoyed offending the Germans’ delicate ears — one of the few crimes they couldn’t beat her for — but now she made sure to enunciate each syllable. She didn’t want any trouble.

The Sentinel saluted in return. “*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer,*” he barked out. The Nazi motto. *One people, one Empire, one leader.*

Her breaths grew tight. At this distance, Zara could see the three lightning bolts printed on the side of his helmet, the symbol of the German Anomaly Division — the most elite, and most frightening, branch of the Nazi military. The division had been the brainchild of Führer Adolf Hitler’s, an entire regiment composed of genetically altered soldiers who could crush their enemies with their super-powered fists. And those fists had changed the world.

Zara’s gaze slunk toward the farmhouse, still unsure why the Sentinel had stopped by. *Please don’t be here for a search,* she thought desperately. She wished she could warn her uncle somehow — *Hide the radio,* she’d tell him — but then the Sentinel landed on the field, his boots flattening an onion sprout, blocking the house from her view.

“Your name, girl?” he demanded.

She forced herself to look up at him. “Zara St. James, *mein Herr.*”

“Age?”

“Sixteen.”

“And where are you *from?*”

Zara grimaced. She had heard that question enough times to know that he wasn't asking where she had been born, which was right here in the Shenandoah Valley. He wanted to know her *lineage*, where she had gotten her black hair and sable eyes in this rural mountain town.

"I'm English on my mother's side," Zara said slowly. Her chest squeezed at the mention of her mom, and she wondered where his questioning was leading. "And Japanese on my father's."

"The Empire of Japan, hmm?" His eyes skimmed over her sun-darkened skin, loitering over her sweaty, secondhand shirt and drifting toward her hips. His mouth curved into a smile.

A sour taste bloomed on Zara's tongue. She knew that smile and what it meant. Most Germans sniffed at her "half-breed" stock. She was an *Untermensch* — a subhuman — like the Polish and blacks and any mixed-race persons, only fit for factory and farm work. But not everyone scorned the color of her skin. There were a few townspeople — always men, it seemed — whose gazes lingered on the shape of her eyes and at the slight curve of her hungry waist. Like the Sentinel was doing now.

Zara's thoughts hit a tailspin. She could use her fists as a weapon, but that wouldn't be much against the Sentinel. Or she could scream, but there were acres between her and her uncle. Only the cows would hear her from here.

That left her with one last option, but Uncle Red's warning drilled through her head: *No one can know about what you can do*, he had told her countless times. *If the Nazis found out, they'd haul you off to one of their labs or a labor camp. Or a grave.*

The Sentinel stepped forward, that smile of his arching. Zara's fingers tightened around her canteen, ready to swing at his head, but

then he pulled out a stack of papers from his pocket instead. He tossed one in the dirt.

“An announcement from Fort Goering,” he said, referring to the Nazi citadel a few miles up the road, where thousands of soldiers were stationed. “Pick it up.”

Eyes wary, Zara retrieved the paper and ignored his grin at her obedience. The fort’s soldiers must have been ordered to distribute these flyers across the township; and unfortunately for Zara, the Sentinel had decided to hand-deliver hers. She scanned the paper’s contents:

**FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMAND
FORT GOERING, SHENANDOAH DIVISION
EASTERN AMERICAN TERRITORIES**

At 1700 hours EST, all residents of the Greenfield Township are required at the Courthouse Square. An announcement will be made shortly thereafter, broadcasted live from Berlin. Attendance is mandatory.

A dozen questions ripped through Zara’s mind. Most announcements from Berlin – treaties signed, battles won – were aired on the evening news reports or printed in the state-run newspaper. Only a handful merited a live broadcast, let alone mandatory attendance.

Zara still remembered the first announcement she had attended, back when her mother was alive. All of Greenfield had met in the square to celebrate the birth of Johann Hitler, the son of the current Führer, Dieter Hitler. The entire Nazi Empire, from Berlin to Brussels, from the American coast to the North African shores, was forced to

salute the newest addition to the Hitler dynasty, the great-great-grandson of Adolf himself. Zara's mother had saluted dutifully, too, but a soldier struck her anyway for wearing muddy boots to such a sacred event. She had apologized immediately, but she never flinched from the hit. Years later, that memory still stuck with Zara: her mother standing tall, the bravest woman in all of Greenfield. The ache of missing her never went away.

Zara wondered what this new announcement would bring. Perhaps Dieter's wife had squeezed out another child? Or maybe the Führer had taken over the Italian Dakotas? The Italian economy had teetered on the brink of collapse since Prime Minister Benito Mussolini III came into power a decade ago. He may have sold the Dakotas, along with the Canadian lands, for a desperate price.

"Why are you still standing here, little *Mischling*?" the Sentinel said, cutting into her thoughts.

Zara tacked on a polite smile. "My apologies, *mein Herr*."

His jewel-blue eyes looked her up and down. "See to it that you aren't late. I'll be watching."

Her cheeks burned, but she dared not say a word. Instead, she quickly turned on her heel while the Sentinel launched into the clouds. Only then did Zara shudder.

"*Mischling*?" she muttered. It was a German term for *mixed-blood*, usually used like a slur, but the Sentinel hadn't made it sound that way. Her fingers had itched to slap him, but an *Untermensch* like her would get jailed for that. Or sent to the Front Royal labor camp thirty miles east.

With another shudder, Zara hurried to the house, abandoning the onions for tomorrow. She leapt over the infant rows of corn and ran past the faded barn that her great-great-grandparents had built before

the war. In the early '40s, the old United States had been a beacon of hope – of freedom so vast it could swallow you whole – but that America had long been destroyed, its cities flattened by the German Anomaly Division. After President Roosevelt was executed in early 1944, the Axis powers had cut the country like a giant birthday cake. The Nazis had claimed the fertile lands east of the Mississippi River while the Japanese took over the West, leaving the Italians with the Dakota plains, a consolation prize for their anemic role in the fighting. Decades had passed since then and the Germans still held a tight rein over the Territories, but Zara yearned for more than a life of hard labor and *Heil Hitlers*.

One day, she thought, clutching the paper in her hand. One day, her uncle would let her join the Revolutionary Alliance, an underground resistance group that had fought the Empire for decades. It was originally formed by the last remnants of the US military, who had escaped Washington, DC, after Roosevelt's execution. Back then, its members had numbered in the millions, many of them former soldiers, but with the US military long disbanded the Alliance now relied on civilian recruits, like Uncle Red. And hopefully Zara.

If only she could join the rebels, then she could help push the Nazis back to Germany or, even better, crush the regime altogether. Maybe then, finally, her mother's death would have justice.

As her lungs puffed, Zara burst through the kitchen door of the run-down farmhouse to find her uncle underneath the kitchen sink, a foot-long wrench in his hand. A water pipe had burst that morning (the second one that month), and he had stayed behind to fix it. Otherwise he would've been out in the fields as usual, planting eggplant and digging holes for the cabbage.

“What happened?” said Uncle Red. He set the wrench on the floor and pulled himself up. “Did the cow get sick again?”

Zara peered up into his bearded face. Her uncle wasn't very tall, but she stood a whole head shorter than him. “The cow's fine. Here, look at this.” She handed him the notice.

His green eyes, the same color as Zara's mother's, flared wide. “An *announcement*? Now?”

“Do you know what this is about?” Her voice dropped low out of habit. They never knew who could be watching them. “Maybe the Alliance sent you a message?”

“No, we haven't gotten a thing since last week.”

“This has to be serious if attendance is mandatory.”

Uncle Red ran a tense hand through his thinning auburn hair. As he neared forty, he seemed to be losing more of it each year. “I know. Remember to stick close to me. The square will be swarming with soldiers. You can't lose control, do you understand?”

Zara bristled. “I haven't had an episode in years.”

“It doesn't hurt to be cautious.”

“I'm always cautious.”

He looked doubtful, but said nothing more about it. “Grab the keys. We don't want to keep the Führer waiting.”