

PART I – THE BODY

Day 1 – Monday 2nd July 1934, Midday

Karl stood in the doorway to the parlour and wondered if he could slip back out again unnoticed. He was used to seeing his father drink generously alongside his friends, most of whom either drank more or held it worse; he'd never seen the drink get the better of him before.

Robert Wiek raised his head and made an effort to focus his eyes. "Karl," he began – "Can I get you something?"

"No. Come here. Come here and stand in front of me. Here, where I can see you."

Karl took a few steps forward. And another few – until he was close enough to smell the alcohol strong on his father's breath. The eyes were quite steady, now. Too steady. Karl's stomach gave a quick start – like a hand clenching in his gut. His father wasn't normally the sort of man to make you afraid: he was tough; he expected his children to be successful, disciplined and resourceful. But so long as you were all that, which had never been hard for Karl, he was fair, generous, sometimes even playful.

There was nothing playful about him now. Nothing generous about the way he fixed his gaze on his eldest son. "Salute."

Karl whipped himself upright, clicked his heels and shot out his arm. "Heil Hitler!" And he stayed that way – erect, arm outstretched – while his father, with a huge effort, pulled himself up to standing.

"You are going to make me a promise."

Karl's eyes continued looking straight ahead.

"Promise me you will never join the SS."

Karl hesitated. He knew there'd been a lot of bad blood recently between the members of the SA who'd gone over to join the younger, more glamorous, more rigorous SS, and those who'd been left behind or stayed out of choice, loyal to their old comrades. Rumours had it that the leaders knew there wasn't room enough for the both of them and there was a nasty struggle for supremacy in the offing. While the SA held the old guard – people like von Epp and Ernst Röhm who could command the respect of the entire nation for their courage in the Great War – the SS had the wits, the youth and the energy, and were gliding effortlessly into the driving seat. Robert Wiek himself, with his infallible nose for the way the wind was blowing, had been conflicted for a while about whether to join the SS. In the end, his friendships had won out and he'd stuck with the SA. But it was a lot to ask his son: to give up any chance of backing the winning horse.

"Promise me you will not join the SS."

Karl went on standing, holding himself to attention. A muscle in his arm tried to twitch; he willed it to stop. His father was very drunk – it was a struggle for him to remain on his feet. Nonetheless, Karl knew this demand came from a place in him that knew exactly what he was asking. Deputy Gauleiter Robert Wiek would remember clearly the next day and the day after that, and probably every day until his dying day. He'd remember what Karl's response had been – exactly how long he had hesitated. Five seconds? Seven seconds...

"Promise!"

It was a command. An order.

"I promise."

His father nodded, then slumped back down into the chair.

"They've shot Captain Röhm."