

Thoughts are Free

A Novel

by

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Hamburg, early December 1942.

Paul is standing behind the window, looking down into the yard. It is snowing. Thick snowflakes are falling from the sky. It has been snowing since the early morning. Down in the yard, the white snow remains on the ground.

Paul can hear how his father steps into the kitchen. He turns around slowly and walks over to the stove to start the fire through the hole for the charcoal. Then he fills water in a kettle and sets it on the stove on the bluish flickering flames. He gets the dried vegetables and bread from the pantry. Father sets a beef bone next to the stove.

“Where is Mother?” Paul wants to know.

“She helps Katja Lipowetzky with Alina. The fever got higher again.”

Father starts to cook the vegetables and the bone, and after a few minutes the aroma of soup fills the kitchen.

“When will Mother be here?” Lured by the smell of the soup, Annemarie stands in the doorway, holding her rag doll in her hand.

“She helps Katja Lipowetzky with Alina”, Father repeats.

Annemarie does not reply anything, just sits down at the table and waits. Who knows when Mother will come home? If Alina is feeling worse again, that can take a long time.

Alina has been sick since last winter. She felt a little better during the summer months, but ever since it is winter again, she is doing worse every day. Alina is only twenty months old.

Paul remembers the day, when Alina was born very well. Back then, almost the entire neighbourhood visited the Lipowetzky's to take a look at the baby. Now, ever since Alina is feeling worse, his mother pays the Lipowetzky's upstairs plenty of visits. Axel says Alina will not survive this winter. Axel should know it. His uncle is a doctor. Paul hopes that he will be wrong this time. Until now, Alina is still alive.

“Hey Paul! Stop dreaming. Otherwise we will eat all your food.”

Father's voice interrupts Paul's thoughts. Quickly he sits down at the table, next to Annemarie, who looks at the quarter loaf of bread with hungry eyes. Father sets the soup down on the table. Then he gets Louise out of her crib and puts her on his lap. Paul hands out the soup and some bread.

Father spoon-feeds Louise. She is two years old already, but very skinny. The reason is that they do not have much money to spend. The majority of the money, Father is making at Blohm & Voss dockyards as a deckhand, goes towards the rent payment. They have to buy wood and charcoals for heating and groceries from the remaining money. They can only afford new clothes once a year, if at all. Therefore Paul is still wearing his coat he has had over the past three years, even though he outgrew it a long time ago.

Father often complains at home that the workers do not get paid well. He builds warships for the Führer and is working himself to death. The Führer only pays a pittance, barely enough to feed himself, but it is close to impossible to feed a family of five with such a small wage. The conditions are almost as bad as before the revolution twenty years ago, Father says. There were more groceries available back then, but they rarely have enough anyway, because money was so tight. Things would be different, if they had an actual victory back then, Father says.

The revolution shouldn't even be called that, because it only achieved a weak republic with the government changing constantly.

Father and his comrades had something different in mind in 1918, when they marched together with the other red jacks from Kiel to Berlin to down throw the Emperor of Germany. They wanted to found a socialistic state, a real People's Republic. Everyone would have had the same rights, there wouldn't have been any workers or employers, and everybody would have been equal.

Paul however cannot imagine how this would work. There always has to be somebody in a higher position, who's in charge and leads the others. Even the new state that was established after the down throw of the German Emperor and lasted for fourteen years had a man at its head.

At first, it was the rather cautious Reich President Friedrich Ebert, then his follower Paul von Hindenburg, an old general with a moustache like the emperor Wilhelm.

At the beginning, the principle of majority rule had worked more or less, Father had explained. But after the big economic collapse and an increasing election success for the brown shirts, almost every third Sunday became an election Sunday. Riots and presidential governments with so-called emergency decrees were the consequence. There was a constant change at the top: Reichskanzler (Imperial Chancellor) Brüning, then Reichskanzler von Papen and after that Reichskanzler Schleicher – one debilitated government after the other.

And on top of that, they had quarreling parties and a massive political shift to the right, towards the Nationalists and the Fascists, which Father fought till the end. He fought with posters and went to demonstrations; until he was arrested at the beginning of 1933. He came back after three days, deadly tired and with a broken left hand.

Ever since, Father is trying to keep quiet. Paul knows how hard that is for him. About a year after his first arrest, it almost happened again: back then, when the first residents of neighbouring houses disappeared, never to be seen again.

Maybe it would have been better, if the revolution had been successful after the first Great War and the Communists had come to power. Maybe they would have been able to prevent the little man with the funny moustache and the precisely parted hair.

At least he would not have shouted out his Anti Jew ideology as full-throated and they would have been spared his extreme gesturing. And Father's favourite author's books would not have ended up being burnt.

Or is it simply fate that Germany is ruled by the Führer's party for over eleven years now? Ruled by the Nazi party with the Swastika symbol and Adolf Hitler who brought them the second Great War.

Most people that Paul can see in the streets seem to believe that. They sing praises of the government top in Berlin. Even after the air strike's bombings that destroyed wide parts of the inner city around the river Alster, most of the people in the streets still have an unshakeable believe in the Thousand-Year-Reich and the best general of all times.

But Paul isn't so sure. Unlike the others, he does not believe everything the Führer tells. For instance, Paul could never understand why a German should be blond, tall and blue-eyed only.

Not, that he would have problems with that, as he is pretty tall himself and has bluish gray eyes and a head full of hazelnut coloured curls; quite contrary to some others, especially among the government leaders: There is fat and aged Reichsmarschall (Reich Marshal) Hermann Göring and, of course, small and limping Reichspropagandaminister (Reich Minister of Propaganda) Joseph Goebbels. And even the man who calls himself Germany's Führer (Leader) is of just average height and has neither blue eyes nor blond hair.

But why are they instigating such hatred against the Jews? They never did them anything. And what does the Führer have against people like Maria Goldberg for example, who met all requirements for the German ideal with her blonde curls and blue eyes? Or Katja and Peter Lipowetzky? What did they do?

Paul asked his father those questions numerous times. But Father does not know the answer. He often remembers the revolution, back then in 1918, when he was just twenty years old, full of ambitions and ready to change the world.

Back then, he was a very devoted member of Karl Liebknecht's and Rosa Luxemburg's Spartakus-group; an idealist. Then he became a moralist, like his favourite author Erich Kästner whose works are all blacklisted; all but *Emil*.

Just like Kästner his father is older, more settled and more thoughtful now.

During the past years he tried his best, to live a more secluded life. He called it an inner emigration. But sometimes he just can't control himself.

Even at forty-four years old Father still has the energy and sparkling eyes of a young sailor, whenever he talks in a low voice about a better Germany.

But even those break-outs became less, after many of his former comrades went to Fuhlsbüttel prison or were deported to one of the concentration camps with their infamous sections for political prisoners. None of them survived even a year in the camps.

Four years ago, when an enormous wave of arrests rolled through the Reich, Father got lucky and was spared. Most of his co-workers had to attend at least a police questioning at the Gestapo Headquarters on Neuer Wall.

That was when Father had to promise to Mother to be a lot more careful in the future: No more meetings, and no more communication with the former members of the Communist party.

Father agreed. Since the Communist party was prohibited, he only belongs to his own party anyway, he told Paul. And that from now on he would only fight on his own behalf. For the personal freedom of the individual, for peace, equality and for the abolishment of the anti-Semitic Nürnberger Gesetze (Nuremberg Laws), because every person is born equal and should be treated that way.

"Always remember, Paul", he had said. "Even the 'almighty' Führer is just a human being; and a giant liar as well. Forget all that rubbish about 'master race' and 'inferior race'. We all are human beings and have to treat each other respectfully, no matter where we are from or who our parents and grandparents are."

Back then Paul realised for the first time that what he learned at school is wrong: Arians, Racial disgrace, blood and soil. Ever since, whenever his teacher talked about the Nordic race and their advantage over the inferior races, he imagines a big pack of puppies, little dogs clumsily stumbling over their own paws. Some are black, some are white, others brown. Some are spotted. They all are dogs. They do not make a difference; they wag their tails for all and everyone.

Father was pleased and laughed, when Paul told him about that thought.

"You turned out all right, my boy", he had said.

But then he warned him, to keep this thought better to himself. Don't ever mention it to the teacher. And don't talk about it, when Herr Braun or the Blockwart (block warden) is anywhere near.

"You can think what you like", Father said seriously. "But these days, you have to be careful what to talk about in public."

Paul didn't understand that right away. Then his father reminded him of Herr and Frau Müller from across the street. They were former Communist party members, just like Father, and just opened their mouth in public one too many times. That was, when the Nazis raided the Jewish music store in May 1936. Herr Müller was

standing at the scene, shook his head and murmured: "It's a shame that those brown pigs won't get punished for that."

Unfortunately he didn't notice the three smirking Hitler boys behind him in the gateway. First they insulted him, calling him a Jew-friend and a traitor to the fatherland; then, protected from views, they beat him down and kicked him. The same evening they could hear Frau Müller's desperate screams, when she and her husband were pushed onto a truck. Paul never saw them again.

"They were brought to Dachau concentration camp", Hans Schönemann told him later. He lived in a little attic flat above the Müllers' apartment until 1938, when he was arrested himself.

In the spring of 1934, people already started to vanish from Paul's street. Goldbergs from No. 41 were picked up in April by numerous men in long coats. The Reichbergs, the Schönfeldts and the Giesemanns and many others followed.

When Paul asked his father, where they were taken, Father told him about the concentration camps the Nazis set up. Everybody the Nazis have a problem with is taken there.

Since the year before last, there is a camp named "Auschwitz".

This camp is located in occupied Poland and the reason why Father broke his promise and became active again. His conscience just doesn't allow him to sit around and do nothing, he told Paul. Not as long as "Auschwitz" exists.

Paul did not want to believe his father, when he told him that people in there, in particular Jews, are truly murdered. Is something like that really possible? That somebody just gives a cruel order to murder thousands of people, just because he doesn't like them?

The whole thing sounds outrageous, but it is the truth. Father knows one of the Jews that was in there and lucky enough to escape. Father and his friend Hein helped this young man to get away to America. For hours, Paul's parents and Hein were talking in the kitchen about that incredible cruelty, while he and Annemarie were sleeping. Father also told Paul about the selection process, the furnaces and giant mounds of laundry, jewelry and human hair that pile up in one of the extermination camp's big halls.

They had this talk two weeks ago. Back then, they took the Weiß family that was living underneath their apartment for many years. Paul remembers how Pauline Weiß and he always played together with Axel, Maria and Liza, when they were younger.

They got woken up early in the morning. They could hear loud voices and crying in the hallway.

After that, the Behm family moved into the Weiß's apartment. Behms are brown shirts, Father says. He is talking about the Nazis that used to wear brown shirts in the beginning of Hitler's reign. Nowadays you can't really tell who a Nazi is. Not all

of them are wearing a uniform or a Nazi Party Swastika badge in their coat's buttonhole.

"Come on, eat, Paul!" Father's voice interrupts Paul's thoughts.

The soup already turned cold. Annemarie fell asleep on the couch. Father sits at the table and flips through the weekly newspaper, *Die Woche* (The Week). Every now and then he makes some notes on the side of the newspaper.

Paul thinks about Alina. About Pauline and her parents, about Maria Goldberg; and about cute Liza Gieseemann, he once was in love with. Katja and Peter Lipowetzky are afraid as well that they could be picked up. They both have to wear the star.

Paul remembers his teacher Herr Wolf at school who told them about the bad Jews. Supposedly all Jews have a hooked nose and black, wirily hair paired with black, piercing eyes. Besides, they all are supposed to be pudgy and stealing whatever they can. But the Jews that Paul knows are completely different.

Liza Gieseemann had beautiful hazelnut brown curls, brown almond eyes and a cute snub nose. Furthermore she was very petite and the cutest and nicest girl, Paul had ever met. Maria Goldberg had blonde curls and blue eyes. She was slim-figured and a real good friend. She liked his friend Axel quite a bit.

Frau Lipowetzky is slim as well and has a pretty face, a straight nose, grayish blue eyes, brown hair; and besides that, she is the most honest woman Paul has ever known. Her husband is very thin and probably average height. His grey hair was brown, when he was young; his grey eyes are hidden behind thick glasses. He was a goldsmith before the Nazis closed down his shop. He is exceptionally honest and trustworthy.

But somebody like Herr Wolf doesn't care at all. Herr Wolf is a brown one as well. Many people are brown: the families Schulze and Möller from across the yard, Herr and Frau Behm and Herr Braun in Paul's house, just like most of the others from the surrounding houses, or Hamburg, or Germany.

Eventually there are some that do not believe the Nazi lies: The Sommer and the Schmidt family, Herr Holz and Father's friend Heinrich Schön.

"Red Hein" they call him; he lives somewhere hidden away. He is well known at the Gestapo, they have a big file about him. In there is documented that he was a jack on the same ship as Father. Luckily Hein was always able to escape and the Gestapo could never get a hold of him.

Axel's father, Bernhard Sommer, a friend of Father's as well, was a Socialist. He was not liked by the Führer and his men either. He was hit by a bullet at a meeting of the Social Democratic party that was brutally ended by the Nazi Storm Troops. He died the same day in the hospital, deadly wounded.

"Well, here I am."

Mother comes through the door.

“Good that you’re here, Grete”, Father says. “Here, you should read that.” He holds up the newspaper. Mother is reading and shaking her head at the same time.

“They are crazy. This time of the year in Russia...”, she murmurs and is talking about the “Operation Barbarossa”, the official Nazi name for the war against Russia. Thousands of German soldiers have frozen to death already. But the Führer won’t order the retreat. Instead he lets them continue to fight. More men are dying every day due to the arctic temperatures of Russia’s winter. That is why it was announced that they all have to collect winter clothes; so the soldiers won’t freeze to death.

Paul gets up to start the cast-iron stove again, so his mother’s soup can be heated up as well. But Mother pushes him back on his chair.

“Don’t worry. I’m not hungry anyway”, she states and gently strokes his hair.

Annemarie woke up. Mother sits down on the couch next to her.

“Did you feed Louise yet?” she wants to know from Father who just nods and goes back to reading his newspaper.

Annemarie snuggles up to her mother to sleep some more.

“Come on, Annemi”, Mother says, picks her up and carries her into the bedroom.

“All right, both girls are asleep”, she sighs when she comes back. “Well, and how about you?”

She stands next to Paul and looks at him.

“How is Alina?” Paul inquires. Father looks at Mother as well.

“Her temperature is very high”, Mother says quietly. “She probably won’t make it through the night.”

Both Paul and his father look concerned. Mother sits down at the table and takes some soup. Paul watches her for a little while, then gets up and gazes out the window again.

The snow remained on the ground. A white blanket of snow formed over the yard. It still keeps snowing. Paul can only imagine the white snowflakes in the dark. But he can see the ice crystals on the kitchen window just fine. They sparkle in the candle light. They are not allowed to turn on the electric light, in case of another air attack. When there is light, there are people.

A chair scratches over the floor. Father got up. He walks over to the kitchen sink and fills a cup with tap water.

He drinks three more cups, then sits back down at the table and continues reading his newspaper. Mother takes the kettle with the soup and puts it in the pantry. Then she starts to do the dishes.

Suddenly they all stop and listen. There are heavy footsteps in the stairway.

Mother turns off the tap and Father puts his newspaper to the side. Paul walks over to his mother and waits next to her. Mother grabs his hand and holds it tight. Father is already in the doorway, trying to hear, what is going on.

The footsteps stop in front of their door for a second, but then continue to go up. Upstairs somebody knocks at a door. Then Paul and his parents can hear Herr Lipowetzky's startled voice, but can't understand what he is saying.

"Oh no!" Mother whispers shocked. "Not Katja and Peter!"

They can hear Frau Lipowetzky's voice now, she is begging and pleading, but rough male voices cut her short.

Paul and his parents stand behind their door and listen. The footsteps seem to go downstairs again. This time they can hear another set of clicking footsteps and somebody scuffing his feet. The heels on Katja's shoes make the exact same clicking noise and Peter always scuffs his feet. All footsteps pass their door and continue downstairs. Father is ready to open up the door and run after them, but Mother holds him back.

"Don't, Max!" she begs. "Do you want them to take you as well?"

Father sighs and takes his hand off the door handle.

"You are right, Grete", he says quietly. "Sadly, we can't do anything for them anymore."

Mother takes Paul's hand and pulls him away from the door as well.

"You have to go to sleep now", she states.

A little reluctant at first to go to bed that early, Paul is taken to the bedroom and put to sleep. It is not that late yet, a little after 10 p.m. maybe. Yet he can sleep in tomorrow, because he doesn't have to go to school. The schools have been shut down due to the air attacks; besides, many teachers have been drafted for the war. Herr Wolf's brother, a teacher as well, died a lieutenant in Russia.

"Finally that dirty lot was taken", Paul can hear Herr Braun saying.

Paul sits on the carpet bar, his feet are dangling in the air and he tries to look as innocent as possible. He pretends he doesn't watch Herr Braun or Herr Behm, but he listens to every word they say.

"I don't understand, how they were allowed to live here for that long and soil that beautiful apartment", Frau Behm says.

"Correct", her husband agrees, "the Führer said years ago that something has to be done about that dirty Jewish lot."

"So those parasites won't steal our work places!" Herr Braun rants.

Herr Braun is unemployed. He thinks the reason for him not having a job is that the Jews already took all jobs; even though that's not true. Paul learned from his

father that Herr Braun was simply fired, because he was so damn lazy. But usually everybody finds faults in everyone but themselves, Father said. Consequential somebody had to take the blame for everything. They were looking for a scape-goat.

Paul wanted to know from his father, why the Führer and his Reich Minister of Propaganda chose the Jews to go after, out of all people? Is the weird Nazi's Raci-ology the reason for all this? It states that Jews are inferior to the Arian Master Race.

That's all rubbish, Father said, a pseudo-scientifically justification for the exclusion of one part of the population. The bad part about it is that the majority of all Reich citizens believe that explanation without ever questioning it, so there are not many people pro-Jewish.

Jews have been an expelled and hunted group of people for centuries and have always been outsiders in society. That's probably why they were picked by the Nazis and the Führer to blame them for everything. Even Emperor Wilhelm back then didn't really mean well. He just didn't hate them as much as the Führer does. Paul cannot understand at all what the Führer has against people like the Lipowetzky's, the Goldbergs or the Giesemanns. They are just normal people, human beings like him and Axel. Just like the Führer is. He is just a human being as well. He has red blood running through his veins like everybody else has.

"Still his people and the Führer think they are something better", Father says.

Paul can't really comprehend all that. He hopes though that he will one day. "Earlier today they picked up the old Silberstein woman", Herr Behm continues. Frau Silberstein, the old lady from No. 38? Paul has a hard time believing it.

"She deserved it, that old witch", Frau Behm rants.

Just last week Frau Silberstein took the last badge of dried vegetables at the store, right when Frau Behm wanted to get it. After that, Frau Behm told everyone, that Frau Silberstein is a witch.

Father just silently shook his head, when Paul told him about that. If he could imagine Frau Silberstein flying on a broom for Walpurgis Night, Father had asked him then. Paul couldn't imagine. He still couldn't, when Frau Behm told Frau Schulze she had seen Frau Silberstein cooking devilish potions in her kitchen.

Frau Silberstein knows about herbal remedies and has "healing hands". She has helped Katja Lipowetzky to deliver Alina. Paul has to think about Frau Silberstein's wrinkly face with those shiny, quick eyes, and about her silver hair. Back then, when there still was candy to be bought at the shops, she always gave him and the other children something sweet. That nice old lady was picked up? Paul doesn't want to know, where she is taken and what they will do to her.

"The Führer is right", Herr Behm carries on. "Those Jews are damaging the German nation's reputation."

“Yes, indeed”, nods Herr Braun. “That is why it’s so important to get rid of all public enemies.”

“I agree with you”, Herr Behm replies. “Heil Hitler!”

“Heil Hitler!” Herr Braun salutes and disappears in the stairway.

Herr and Frau Behm walk across the yard and through the adjacent house into the parallel street. They probably are going to Frau Steiner’s little shop, but she doesn’t have anything to sell anymore. She didn’t get any deliveries since last week. Mother was very upset, when she came from the store with nothing but some dried vegetables. There is nothing else to get.

Axel enters the yard. When he sees Paul sitting on the bar, he waves his hand. Paul waves back and jumps down. Axel is his best friend.

“Hey, Paul!” Axel shouts now. “We were supposed to go looking for wood, remember?”

That is true, Paul remembers now. They need wood for heating. Furthermore they don’t know how long the charcoals will last; and when they are out, they will have to use the wood stove in the living room for cooking. So they need wood for that, too. The friends take a saw and sacks and head out.

Axel is in a good mood and talks the entire time. Paul walks silently next to his friend and keeps thinking. He won’t understand what Herr Braun has said earlier. Why is Frau Silberstein damaging the reputation of the German nation?

Or the Lipowetzky’s? Or Liza Giesemann?

And why does Herr Braun call them ‘public enemies’? Those people don’t do anything to the nation or the Führer. More dangerous for the Führer are the people that tell the truth: Resistance groups, Red Hein, Father. He flinches a little scared. If anybody had heard, what he just thought!

“Hey Paul! Are you dreaming?”

Axel nudges him.

“Well? What?”

Paul slowly finds back to his senses. Kind of scary, what he just thought about...

“I just said that we could go to the zoo”, Axel repeats.

“There’s probably just some wood lying around waiting for us. And if not” he points at the saw, “we just cut the trees.”

Axel expects some applause or at least some appreciation for his great idea. But Paul’s thoughts have already wandered off. He still thinks about the conversation he overheard.

Father is right, the Behms and Herr Braun always cheer so much for the Führer and tell exactly the same rubbish. Paul remembers the summer well, when the Führer visited Hamburg and held a speech on the city hall’s balcony.

Father and Paul stood all the way in the back close to St. Peter's church and could only make out a tiny brown haired man on the balcony, gesturing like a maniac while he was talking.

The excited crowd cheered, jumped around and applauded. Just in the back, where they were standing, people didn't cheer. Those were all comrades and friends of Father's: Communists and some Socialists.

The man on the balcony could be heard from the very last row. He shouted so everybody could hear him. Paul can remember the people in front of him that were all ears and hypnotised by everything that man said. He talked about German pride, German unity and the upcoming victory of the German troops. Back home Paul learned from his father that the Führer wasn't even a German, he was born in Austria.

At school, Herr Wolf told them about the 'German Ideal' and the 'Race Theory' that puts the Arians on top; and the Jews rank at the bottom as they are the inferior race. A real German has to be tall, blonde and blue eyed. Moreover, a real German has to be slim, athletic, brave, earnest and faithfully. Back then Paul already doubted that this is really true. At last there are many honest people that have dark hair. They may not be athletic, but earnest and good.

He also believes that others could be just like this – the English, the French, the Russians, the Polish or the Jewish. Are you really able to use the hair- or eye colour of an individual as an indicator for personal qualities?

Paul knows many people that are blonde as well as blue-eyed and they are bad, mean and cowards. A good example would be boys like Gunnar Berger, he knows from school. They are swollen with pride, when they wear the black uniform of the Hitler Youth (HJ).

He knows the opposite, too. Father neither has blonde hair nor blue eyes. But you can always rely on him. In addition, he is righteous and truth-loving.

Maybe hazel brown curls are an advantage, when it comes to athleticism. At least, if someone has long legs and is skillful like Paul. Back then, he always was the best in class, when it came to running, jumping or tossing. Better than Axel or Kalle that are both blonde and blue-eyed. He can't really tell, if he is particularly brave. But he is earnest and honest, something not many can say about themselves.

At least, he is more brave and honest than, for example, Herr Braun and Herr Wolf. They just parrot the Führer and don't have their own opinion anymore. If they had one and would stick to it like Father, they could be considered brave.

"Here, bag this."

Axel hands Paul some branches. They are in the zoo. The trees already lost all their leaves. And many didn't just lose their leaves; most of them are cut down. Paul takes the pieces of wood Axel hands him and packs them in their bags.

Suddenly Axel jumps down from the tree, grabs his bag and starts to run. Paul looks around. Damned, a zoo guard! He grabs his bag and follows Axel.

The guard shouts something after them, but Paul only thinks about escaping. And Axel seems to think the same. They both run down the street until they think the guard won't catch up anymore. After this, they lean against a wall to catch their breaths.

Paul feels side stitches. He was breathing too much cold winter air in a short amount of time. Axel appears to have the same problem. He is panting and holds his left side.

Suddenly they are both startled.

"Those were shots!" Axel whispers.

Paul nods. They shoulder their bags and carefully sneak up to the next street corner. When they take a peak around, they back off quickly: SS-men have closed off the path between a house entrance and a truck.

People with their hands up step out of the house; they are all wearing the star. They are followed by three men in long, dark coats. A man dressed the same way waits next to a car.

"Jews!" Axel whispers.

He noticed as well, when they picked up the Lipowetzky's last night. Alina had already died, when the SS-men rumbled up the steps.

The men, women and children vanish in the truck that drives off instantly. The Gestapo struck again. The street is empty and deserted, except for the SS-men.

Behind the uniformed men, Paul and Axel can clearly see three dark bodies in the white snow. Some SS-men take the corpses to an open truck that is parked across the street and drives off right away as soon as the men are done loading.

The remaining SS-men split. One part walks off in the same direction as the trucks drove, but the other part is walking directly in Paul's and Axel's direction.

Nervously they look at each other. Then they quickly retrieve into the next house entrance. When Paul takes another careful peek, he can see the SS-men walking down the street. They got lucky, Axel and him. As fast as possible they try to make it home.

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