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may safely  
graze**

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*War is the child of pride  
and pride the daughter of riches.*

*Jonathan Swift*

## Prolog

*J*ersey, 1943. The sea was stormy. The rain lashed against the superstructure of the small fishing boat. The windshield wiper tried in vain to fight the storm. On the boat, two men struggled to keep their footing to avoid falling into the boiling sea. Captain Jules Vernon held on convulsively to the helm, desperately trying to support his footing somewhere. He cursed God and the world and most of all himself. What had he gotten himself into again? This damned foreigner, who was now squatting between fishing tackle and ropes, dripping wet, fighting against the breakfast that threatened to come up from his stomach again, only to surrender to fate in the end. The captain no longer understood the world. What in the name of the devil was he doing here? Only very faintly, he could remember the previous evening.

He was sitting in the *Chez Delphin* pub with his friend Jaques in the port of St-Malo. After the third or fourth glass of cider, he had just sunk into a deep conversation with his table neighbor and was about to vehemently harp on about the government and the Boches, when he was plucked by his jacket. Jaques was standing in front of him, pointing his thumb to the backside. Jules pushed his cap to the back of his head, looked

questioningly at Jaques, got up from his chair and followed him into the back room. The door was open a crack. Behind the tall and strong Jaques, he caught a glimpse of the man sitting and waiting at the table. He tugged his friend by the sleeve, his own eyes trying to ask his: What does he want from me? Jaques shrugged, pushed open the door and shoved him inside. The captain took his cap off his head, introduced himself somewhat awkwardly, and fixed his eyes on his counterpart. He was feverishly thinking about what he had been saying politically and so on in the pub for the last hour, because the guy in front of him looked like one of the Gestapo. Damn drunkenness, every time there was trouble because of it, only because he never knew when to keep his mouth shut. The Frenchman resolved never to drink again if he could get through this in one piece one last time. The man at the table had not yet spoken a word when the captain rushed up to him and told him his misfortune. He hadn't meant it that way, and the whole thing was a mistake anyway, and he should forgive him again, and it was only the alcohol that was to blame.

Jules Vernon didn't know himself anymore. He was afraid of a man he had never seen before, he who always said that he feared no one and that he could take on anyone and so on. Vernon stood whimpering like a dog in front of the man, with fear sweat pouring out of every pore on his body. The man motioned him to sit down, whereupon the captain hesitantly took a seat, not feeling comfortable about the whole thing, preferring to go home, at least out of this room, away from this man with the suitcases and bags. Only now did Jules Vernon notice the luggage standing in the corner. One of the Gestapo with luggage, he thought, doesn't exist, but you never know and suddenly you're sitting in prison wondering why then. He'd better be careful and see what the guy wanted from him

first.

He put his hands on the table and looked briefly into the eyes of the other, noticing that this man must still be very young, for he had bright and clear eyes and the deep blue shone as if it had seen little adversity in its short life. The hands, which the stranger had stretched out on the table as if folded in prayer, slender and fine-limbed, had seemingly been spared hard labor.

"Monsieur," said the captain, crumpling his cap between his hands, "Monsieur, what do you wish of me?" just to say anything, for the constant staring was pressing on his nerves. The man in the trench coat cleared his throat and said:

"Am I speaking to Captain Jules Vernon?"

Vernon could only nod, his mouth dry, dry as dust. Despite his concerns, he tried to leave an indifferent impression, but he did not succeed. Vernon was shaking all over, and worse was to come when the stranger asked him the next question.

"Is your boat ready, can you take me across to Jersey?"

All the tension of the last hour collapsed, he had to get out into the fresh air, he felt sick. With a jerk, the captain got up from his chair and ran through the restaurant to the exit. He almost flew into the street. Leaning against the wall of the building, totally out of breath, he thought:

"This guy is crazy, it's impossible, not now and not at this time." The first raindrops fell on his head. Jules Vernon didn't notice any of this. An old, emaciated dog crossed the street, looked sadly over at him, trotted on, and looked for a dry place to sleep.

The storm had abated somewhat. The sky was dark gray, and the rain fell incessantly on the boat, which was trying to find its way through the rising sea. The captain cursed softly

to himself and was busy keeping himself and his boat on course. In a tangle of fishing nets and ropes, his passenger sat under a tarp, half-hidden from the rain. The damp cold crept into his clothes down to his skin; he tried as best he could to protect himself from it. His eyes tracked a drop of water that jumped off the tarp, met with several on the floor of the boat, and disappeared as a trickle under his luggage. April showed its unpleasant side.

Despite his initial euphoria, Simon wondered why he had left home a week ago to freeze to death or drown on an old barge, as the case may be. His life was proceeding in an orderly fashion until the time he read a letter from an English lawyer; thus began his odyssey.

He was born Simon Benz in the outskirts of Zurich in 1915 and spent his childhood and school years there, growing up in an intact family and later moving to Zurich to begin his medical studies. His father, who died far too soon, left him a small fortune so that he could continue his studies. Then, when Hitler began his raids through Europe and Switzerland distributed its soldiers along the border, he enlisted in his company. At the border between Switzerland and Austria, every day he could watch as minor and major dramas played out before him, as foreigners, especially Jews, were picked up by German soldiers, shoved into a car, and then sent off to an uncertain future.

The days grew longer, the spring of 1943 announced itself and the old gray remnants of snow evaporated in the sun. Switzerland sank into lethargy, tired of the war turmoil around it. With thoughts of a two-week vacation from soldiering, he arrived at his mother's house with the letter from the lawyer. His mother did not understand the English language, had only read the return address, and was then very curious



to know what a lawyer from abroad had to write to her son. When he awkwardly tore open the envelope, pulled out the contents and held them up to the light, his mother could no longer control herself and urged her son to hurry. The letter did not contain good news. Who the heck is this guy the letter was talking about?

When he asked his mother about it, she replied that he was her late sister's husband and that he had moved abroad after her death. An uncle on his mother's side. He had had no idea of his existence, did not remember even when she held an old, yellowed photograph under his nose. The letter said that he had died and that he, Simon Benz, was listed as his heir in the will and whether he was accepting his inheritance and that his presence was required.

His mother advised him not to travel abroad in these times, she was a bit anxious by nature. But all the coaxing didn't help, he wanted to take up his inheritance. So, the suitcases were packed, good wishes were distributed and a little later he was on the train to the Swiss border.

When he arrived in Geneva, he asked the stationmaster how things were going, who gave him an answer that made him doubt for the first time whether his mother was not right after all when she spoke of the bad times, because he said:

"Not at all." Which was then true.

He looked for a hotel for the night and thought about the next day. Still, he could turn around and go back home. If he had known that evening what was in store for him, he would have walked home.

He was dreaming and had no idea where he was when there was a heavy knock on his room door.

"Mr. Benz. You wanted to be woken up..., it's seven o'clock," a woman's voice rang out from behind the door.

"Yes, thank you," he mumbled sleepily, got up and looked out the window, directly at the train station building. Now he knew again where he was and what he wanted here.

Shuffling, he went into the bathroom, washed, and slipped into his clothes, took his luggage and went down to the reception.

"When is the next train to France?" he asked the porter, who looked at him questioningly.

"Oh Monsieur, that's bad, there are no trains to France, and if there are, they vary a lot, maybe in an hour, maybe tonight, or not at all," he said, twisting his mouth into a wry grin.

Simon put his suitcases in a corner and sat down at the breakfast table. How did he get away from here? This question occupied him while he spread butter and jam on the bread. Just as he was about to take a hearty bite, the porter approached him.

"You were going to France, weren't you?" he asked. "Perhaps you can ride with the gentleman who is paying," he pointed his finger at a man standing at the front desk, stowing his wallet awkwardly in his coat pocket. Simon Benz jumped up from his chair so violently that he knocked over his coffee cup in the process and ran across the dining room toward the counter.

"You're going to France?" he asked the fat man.

"Who wants to know?" the fat man groaned between two puffs of smoke from his cigar.

"Excuse me, my name is Simon Benz and the doorman told me you were going to France... and I wanted to ask you if you might give me a ride?" he stammered. Something about the guy made him nervous.

"Do you have travel papers?" asked the cloud of smoke.

"Yes, of course!" He nodded his head.

The fat man packed his bags and headed for the exit, calling over his shoulder:

"I'll wait two minutes, then I'm gone!"

Simon Benz hastily paid his bill, took the luggage, and rushed out into the street, where the fat man was in the process of putting his suitcases in the car.

"Come on," he called, "put your luggage in here," pointing to the trunk of his car.

"Nice car, a Mercedes?" asked Simon to make conversation and put his suitcases with the others.

"Yes, yes," said the cigar, "get in now, I'm in a hurry," while he started the engine and closed the car door. Simon Benz hurried, he closed the trunk and sat next to him.

Only when they had crossed the border for a long time already did the fat man begin to speak; before that he had not spoken a word, only chewed on his cigar, and covered both of them in stinking clouds of smoke. Although they were hardly checked at the border, he behaved very nervously and pulled even harder on the cigar, then he rolled down the window and threw it out, only to light another one right after. Simon remained calm and just waited for the moment.

"Where do you want to go... I mean, where can I drop you off?" the fat man said breaking the silence.

Simon Benz swallowed his saliva first before answering.

"If you happen to be passing by Lyon, I'd be grateful if you could drop me off at the station there."

"To Lyon, then, I see. On business or pleasure?"

"Private," he said. He didn't want to reveal more; he didn't have too much confidence in him.

"Private means probably a hot little French girl..., right?" He said it like he was telling a particularly dirty joke. He started laughing stupidly, choked and almost drove into the ditch.

Since there was no way to have a normal discussion with this fat jerk, Simon looked at the landscape passing by the car window. Spring had bathed nature in pastel colors. Just before Lyon, they came to a roadblock. Simon Benz only noticed when the car came to a halt with squealing tires. The fat man rolled down the window and hung his head out. Two soldiers, armed with rifles, were standing by the road and behind them a motorcycle with a sidecar, in which another soldier was pointing the machine gun mounted on it at them. The soldier closest to them came up to them, looked at them briefly and said:

"Your papers!" When the soldier saw the fat man's papers, he marveled briefly, saluted, and said, "Drive on!" The fat man put the papers away, started the engine, and drove the car back onto the road, his lips pressed together into a thin line. Simon looked at him from the side, it didn't make him any more sympathetic. With his stocky figure, he sat behind the wheel, his large head stuck on his shoulders without transition, for a neck was practically non-existent. The body was an accumulation, of just fat and body mass. They were approaching the city, now, and the traffic was getting heavier while the fat man was sweating even more than before. He stuck a new cigar in his face, held the match in one hand, the box in the other, and with his big belly he steered the car. He drove around a few blocks of houses, stopped the car brusquely and said:

"Lyon Central Station, all off!" With that, he pointed his sausage fingers to the opposite side of the street. Simon looked around and saw the entrance portal from the station.

"Goodbye, Mr. Benz..., take your luggage out of the trunk and close the lid."

"Goodbye and thank you very much for giving me a ride, Mr..., uh...?" Simon held out his hand to him, the thought

occurring to him that he didn't even know the fat man's name. The latter looked out the window of his car and said:

"Would you please hurry up, Mr. Benz, you know I'm in a hurry!" With that, he was dismissed.

Simon Benz got out, threw the door into the lock, went to the back of the trunk, quietly cursing, took out his suitcases, threw the lid shut and tapped it three times with the flat of his hand. The fat man understood his signal, put the car in first gear and sped off. Simon looked behind him and then saw something that made his blood run cold. The license plate number! Now everything fit together: the fat man's arrogant behavior, the soldier's salute at the checkpoint, his leather coat, which he didn't take off even in the heat, and the fact that he wouldn't tell him his name. Simon stood on the station square in the midday sun and froze. The car was from Berlin and the fat man was from the Gestapo.

He was still staring after the car, which had long since disappeared around the corner. He could not have known that he would meet the fat man again soon, all too soon, under different circumstances that did not bode well for Simon Benz.

In the meantime, it had stopped raining. The wave troughs kept their same rhythm, up and down, up and down. The clouds carried a lot of water, their dark gray color indicating that more rain would follow. Simon sat under the tarp, lost in thought, as a siren wailed, and a boat approached their boat. He crawled out from under the tarp and saw that they were a few miles from shore. The silhouette of Jersey could be seen clearly. The captain poked his head out of the wheelhouse, only to start swearing, "We're in for it now." They heard a loud-speaker blare.

"Stop the engines, we're coming alongside!"

The boat moved very fast towards them and only slowed its speed just before their boat. Then it lay alongside them. They were rocked by the waves caused by the big boat, could hardly keep on their feet, and had to watch helplessly as they were boarded. From the opposite side, a loudspeaker voice rang out.

"Throw over a rope!" The captain tried to comply with the request but had great difficulty in giving the rope the right direction, and so it plopped into the water twice before being attached to the railing of the neighboring boat. An officer of the German navy crossed over and came on board. He was talking to the captain while Simon could only understand snatches of words. He saw Jules Vernon waving his arms, then pointing his fingers at him as the officer was approaching him. The boat was still rocking, and the officer had to hook himself everywhere. He tapped his cap.

"Captain Lieutenant Harmusen..., your identification and travel permit!"

Simon took the papers from his coat pocket and handed them to him. Harmusen flipped through page after page, looked at him in between, checked everything, and kept the papers in his hand.

"Mr. Benz, what is the purpose of your trip to Jersey? I see you are from Switzerland..." He saw Simon's questioning eyes. "Well, this is a long and dangerous trip in wartime, so what's the occasion?"

"It's all in the travel permit," Simon defended himself. "There," he pointed to the paper, "that's where it says it!"

"But I want to hear it from you!"

"An inheritance..., my late uncle's notary wrote me that my presence was necessary there."

"Is this the only reason, or are there any others?"

"The only one!" he said. Simon didn't understand what he

meant by that, by the others. He wanted to answer if this one was not enough for him, but wisely held back.

The lieutenant captain put the captain's papers and Simon's in his own pocket, went to Jules Vernon, conferred with him, and climbed back over the railing onto his boat. Then the engines started, and the rope flew toward their boat. Vernon caught it, rolled it into a circle, went into his wheelhouse and started the engine. Simon went to him.

"What's the matter, why did he keep our papers?" he yelled over the noise of the engines.

"What do you think, you can see why!" he nagged back. "They've got us by the short hairs. Now, it's going to be tough on both of us. The lieutenant told me to stay in his wake, he was taking us to port, he said there were too many floating mines in these waters. Ha, the mine is on land and not out here." At this, the captain stared somberly forward at the stern of the Coast Guard vessel, on which a Marine was holding a heavy machine gun aimed at his bow. The captain felt sick to his stomach and cursed at the Boches, at the foreigner, but most of all at himself. The Jersey harbor entrance was coming closer and closer to them. They were sailing toward an uncertain future. We won't see home again so soon, he thought to himself. He could not have known how right he was.

Sultry air prevailed in Lyon; the sun was hidden behind thin clouds. Rain will come soon, thought Simon Benz. He was still standing in the same place where the fat man had dropped him off. When he turned around and looked for his suitcases, they were gone. He looked into two beady eyes peering out from under a peaked cap.

"Can we, monsieur?" the suitcase carrier asked, wiping the sweat from his face. Simon looked at him questioningly.

"I've already loaded up the luggage," he pointed to the handcart standing next to him. Since Simon knew French and English in addition to German, he was about to explain to him that he would rather carry the suitcases himself, but then saw the carrier's fear of losing business standing in his face and changed his mind.

"Go ahead to the ticket counter, please," he said to the man with the suitcases and walked behind him. When they arrived at the station concourse, a crowd of people hung outside the ticket counter, thus they had to wait in line. The baggage porter said he'd go see what was going on up front and ducked into the crowd. Simon leaned against the handcart, protectively holding his hand over his luggage. The crowd moved only very sluggishly from the spot as Simon pushed the cart ahead of him. Suddenly he heard loud voices at the entrance, boots stomping and isolated shouts. The crowd began to move. They dispersed uncontrollably and everyone sought their salvation in one of the corners. Simon watched the hustle and bustle with curious eyes. Finally, the soldiers positioned themselves in front of every entrance and exit, hence any escape was impossible.

"Control!" someone shouted, and "IDs at the ready!" Two men in black leather coats were checking people in the hall. The porter came back and stood next to his cart. Simon held the papers in his hand and waited until the time came for him to be checked. Four people in front of him "leather coats" pulled an old man out of line and clubbed him, shouting:

"You Jew pig, we'll show you..., move!"

Then he received a few more kicks and another blow to the head. The old man sank to his knees, blood ran from the corner of his mouth, dripped onto his pants, and left an ugly stain there. Simon took off his coat, put it on the cart and was about



to lunge at the two men in leather coats, but the porter of the suitcase held him back.

"Oh, oh, monsieur, you really don't want to make yourself unhappy, too. This happens once or twice every day," he pulled him by the sleeve. Simon saw the soldiers beating the old man through a corridor of people. This must have been what it was like when Jesus was on his way to Golgotha on the cross, the thought occurred to him. He tore himself away and walked toward the counter, which now stood abandoned. Outside on the tracks, shrill whistling locomotives rolled toward the exit under tremendous blasts of steam.

"When is the next train to St-Malo?" he asked at the counter.

"Tonight, but it's already full! Oh, no, wait! You're in luck, Monsieur, a seat has just become available!" He pointed with his head to the exit, where the soldiers dragged the old man to the exit. Simon would have liked to punch the ticket clerk right then, because this seat had too high a price to make a stupid joke about it.

He reluctantly accepted the ticket, paid, and went to the baggage room. There he left his suitcases for a few hours. As he rushed toward the exit, he felt as if he were being followed. He looked around and saw the baggage porter behind him. Simon had forgotten to pay him.

On the street, he oriented himself by his nose; he was hungry and looking for a bistro. Simon walked along the rows of houses with his eyes open and saw, not far away, a restaurant. Through the windows he noticed a free table. When he pushed the door open, the smell of cooked meat wafted towards him. He chose the table by the window, so he could watch the restaurant and the street at the same time. The host came to the table and looked at him questioningly.

"Do you have a card, uh... menu?"

"No menu, Monsieur, there is only one dish, with soup!" He wiped the table with the cloth.

"All right, I will have that then," Simon said.

The host moved away and said to the two guys leaning against the bar:

"A menu the fine gentleman wants!" At that, they looked over and laughed.

Simon ignored them and looked out the window at the hustle and bustle on the street. Across the street, a black Citroën came to a stop; the door opened, and a woman got out, crossed the street, and came into the bar. She looked around briefly and came straight toward him.

"May I sit down?" Simon Benz looked around the bistro in irritation. There were enough free tables, why come to him of all people? He didn't say it, of course, but replied instead:

"Of course, please take a seat!" He politely got up from his chair and offered her a seat. She looked very good with her long black hair and blue eyes. Hastily she took off her raincoat and laid it over the back of the chair. Simon waited until everything was in place and looked at her questioningly.

"Please excuse my intrusion, Mr. Benz," she began, "but it leaves..."

"How do you know my name?" he interrupted her.

"Oh, that wasn't hard to figure out, you have these cute little notes all over your luggage."

That was his mother; she had a habit of putting addresses on all his luggage. He had told her several times not to do it, but she always did it anyway.

"You are Simon Benz from Switzerland, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am, but what does that have to do with you?" he wanted to know.

"You can do me a favor and take this letter with you to St-

Malo, you are going to St-Malo, aren't you?"

"And for what reason should I do that?" he asked a counter question. "After all, I don't know you."

She was about to answer when the innkeeper came over with the food.

"Want something to drink?" he asked sullenly, setting the table.

"A bottle of red and two glasses." The host trotted back to the counter and fetched the wine.

"Thank you, Mr. Benz, I hope I'm not disturbing your meal, by the way my name is Yvette Vernon," the black-haired woman said. Simon looked at the food. It didn't look very inviting. There was something indefinable floating in the soup and on the other plate was meat surrounded by some brown sauce and with cabbage on top.

"So, what about the letter?" he asked across the table, just to take his mind off the food.

"Oh yes, the letter," she grimaced her pretty face as she looked down at the plate. "Could you take it with you, it's for my father."

"Why not send it by mail?" The wine came. The host filled both glasses.

"It takes way too long, it's urgent, and it gets censored too, sometimes." Simon took a spoonful of the soup, it tasted sour. He poked at the meat and set both aside.

"Do you have any idea what this might be?" He looked at her questioningly. She nodded and grinned.

"Brains from some animal, I don't know which though." When she saw his face grimace, she burst out laughing. Simon thought of the brains of the Jew who had been beaten up in the train station, that probably looked the same, with one exception, the brown gravy was real blood in that case.

"I can invite you for lunch at my house, I don't have much to eat, but it will be enough for us. And, in return you deliver the letter to my father. Come on, my house is just around the corner!" She still held the letter in her hands and beamed all over her face at her good idea.

"This is blackmail!" he said to her, laughing. The host came to clear the dishes from the table. When he saw the full plates, he became even more unfriendly.

"Monsieur, you haven't eaten anything, this is not good, this is a specialty of mine!" His eyes sparkled. Simon thought to himself: then I don't want to see the other food but just replied to him:

"I'm sorry, I can't have this. I'm not used to such specialties, but I'll pay for it anyway." With that, the innkeeper was satisfied and trotted off. When they had finished the wine, he paid and helped her into her coat. They left the bistro and stood in the rain.

Entering the harbor was no more difficult than anywhere else, so what was the guy moaning about in the first place? Vernon hadn't seen a single mine; it was all lies. They were going to collect him, that's all what they wanted. The boat docked at the north pier. Vernon placed his boat awkwardly next to it. When the mooring maneuver was finished, Simon looked around in all directions. So, this was St. Helier on the island of Jersey. He didn't know where to look first, at the mountain in front of him with Fort Regent, or along the lovely rows of houses. Although everything was still foreign and unknown, Simon felt a deep affection within him that captured him in one fell swoop.

However, something irritated him and disturbed his view. The whole pier was full of soldiers, German soldiers.

Vernon climbed the ladder in front of him. Simon wanted to take his luggage, but the lieutenant told him to leave it in the boat and come up himself first. He did as he was told and stood next to Captain Vernon on the pier.

"So, gentlemen! You will separate now, Herr Benz will go with me and the captain to the customs barracks ahead," Captain Lieutenant Harmusen pointed to a shed very close to them. "Private Neske will accompany you, so you don't get any foolish ideas," he continued. Vernon's rifle barrel was pressed into his own back, and he started walking toward the barracks. Simon wanted to thank him and say goodbye, but they didn't give him time.

"Get in, Mr. Benz," the lieutenant at sea said and pushed Simon into a bucket truck. They drove along the quay, past Vernon as their eyes met for a tiny moment. Simon had seen the captain's sad eyes for the last time, but he knew nothing of that at the time.

"Where are you taking me?" he wanted to know, but he got no answer; everyone was looking straight ahead, like wax figures. Suddenly the bucket truck came to a stop with screeching tires in front of a large building. The door was pulled open, and he was told to get out. He looked up the wall of the house at a board with the inscription *Hotel Pomme d'Or* and below it *Headquarters of the German Navy*. Simon began to lose hope of a nice stay in Jersey, because no rooms had seemingly been rented in this kind of hotel for a long time.

When they stepped out of the restaurant, it began to rain. A thunderstorm broke out over their heads. The sultry air escaped, and wetness spread. Simon Benz turned up his coat collar and looked around. They were still standing under the canopy of the bistro, neither of them wanting to take the first step.

"Where is your car?" he asked.

"That isn't my car, it's my brother's, he just drove me here to make it go faster..., so let's go!" Then she ran off. Simon looked after her, then he ran too. Two minutes later, he had caught up with Yvette Vernon. They were both soaking wet.

"Why are we running like this?" he asked between breaths.

"I'm afraid of thunderstorms," she yelled back, and turned down a side street, under an arcade. There she stopped to catch her breath. Simon leaned against a pillar and breathed in and out hastily.

"Is it much farther?" he gasped. She shook her wet head and pointed to a front door. Then she opened and beckoned him to enter. A narrow staircase led steeply up to the apartment door, which she unlocked and locked again behind him. He looked at her with a smile when he noticed this.

"You're mighty scared of thunderstorms," he grinned. Then, Simon looked down at himself, he was completely soaked. A puddle was forming where he stood, and water sloshed from his shoes with every step.

"There's a bathroom in the back, get undressed..., I'll bring you a bathrobe from my brother," she spoke and disappeared behind a door. He tiptoed down the hallway to leave less water stains. When he stepped into the bathroom and looked in the mirror, he couldn't help smiling. Blond hair slapped to his face, coat buttoned wrong in his haste, he looked like a wet otter. Simon undressed and hung his wet clothes to dry on a line that hung across the bathtub. There was a knock at the door, and a hand reached in with a large towel and a bathrobe.

"When you're done, come into the kitchen and we'll have dinner!" she called as she left. He dried his hair as best he could, slipped into the robe, and put his feet into the slippers that stood outside the door. When he got to the kitchen, Yvette

was fiddling with pans and dishes. She had wrapped her wet hair in a towel and was also wearing a bathrobe.

"Do you like an omelet with lots of herbs and mushrooms?" she asked, cracking eggs into a bowl.

Simon sat in his chair at the kitchen table and watched her cook. She really looks lovely in her bathrobe and headscarf, he thought to himself and then the fat man with his obscene remark came to his mind and all the magic was gone.

"Do you want to set the table?" she snapped him out of his thoughts. "The dishes are up there." She pointed to a hanging cupboard. Simon got up and picked up the plates, setting them on the table and taking knives and forks from the drawer.

"One question has been bothering me all along," he bit into a large piece of omelet and chewed on it. "How did you just come up with me, I mean, someone must have tipped you off or something...?"

"That was my uncle..., he works at the train station as a porter, you know him, he carried your bags." She poured him some more wine. He thanked her for the food and was about to ask her something else when the phone rang.

Yvette went into the hallway and picked up the receiver. Simon got up and stood in front of the rain-soaked window, watching the drops run down from above. As he did so, he noticed a black Citroën parked in front of a phone booth, the man, presumably the driver, gesticulating wildly to someone with the door open. From the hallway, he heard Yvette talking on the phone.

"No, not now..., I have a visitor..., " then louder, "I told you, not now!" Then she threw the phone on the fork. The driver down the street did the same. The man came out of the phone booth and looked up, saw Simon standing at the window, looked again, got into his car, and drove away. Yvette came

back.

"Where were we?" She smiled tensely.

"Trouble?" asked Simon a counter question. She took the scarf off her head and shook her hair.

"No, it's just..., heck, I just didn't want to be disturbed..., I want to talk to you..., and..." At that, she came very close to him and looked into his eyes. Simon felt a tingling under his skin.

"And..., what else did you want?" He wrapped his arms around her.

"Come," Yvette said, pulling him by the hand out of the kitchen, down the hall and into the room next door. Simon thought no more about trains, no more about war, Jews, and soldiers; he let time stand still for a few hours.

A few lights were burning when Simon Benz arrived at the Gare de Parrache. The station made a deserted impression on him. However, this changed abruptly when he stepped through the door into the hall. A hustle and bustle of people crowded onto the platform to board the train cars that stood diagonally back on the track. Simon picked up his suitcases and got in line at the control gate. A man in a station uniform was checking his ticket, watched by two sinister figures in leather coats.

Simon climbed into the train and looked for the compartment number on his ticket. The carriage was a mess of people and luggage, so it took him some time to fight his way into the compartment. He stowed the suitcases above his head in the rack and sat down at the seat by the compartment door. With a jolt, the train started up, then slowly made its way over bumpy switches out of the Lyon station. Simon lit a cigarette and thought of Yvette. She didn't want to accompany him to



the station; she hated goodbyes, she had said, after ironing the suit and packing some sandwiches for the trip. On the return trip in a week, he should visit her again, he had to promise her into the hand before he said goodbye to Yvette with kisses. With his eyes closed, he tried to recall her soft, warm body, which he halfway succeeded in doing, then he fell asleep.

Simon awoke in the middle of the night. It was pitch dark and the train was at a standstill. He opened the compartment door and stepped into the aisle, where several people were standing by open carriage windows and talking quietly. Through the window, he heard an airplane from afar, heading toward them and then veering off again. Simon leaned out the window and sucked the fresh night air deep into his lungs. Beneath the window, a train conductor walked with a dimly lit trac sparkler, tapping the iron wheels with a heavy hammer. There was nothing to be seen far and wide, only the horizon was getting a little brighter at the upper edge. A new day was beginning.

The emergency lights in the car began to flicker, the train started moving again and slowly picked up speed. Simon went back into the compartment, grabbed a loaf of bread topped with cheese from the paper and ate with gusto even the crumbs that occasionally landed on his pants. As he ate, he looked at the old woman across from him, who was slouched in her seat with her mouth slightly open, snoring loudly.

Although he had no idea where he was at this moment, Simon knew that the trip couldn't last much longer: The taste of salt water, fish and seaweed stung his nose. He was glad that this train did not go via Paris, but via Nantes and Rennes, so he could avoid the annoying change of trains and reach his destination faster, or so he hoped.

The old woman awoke with a grunt, stretched extensively,

and began to search in her bag. She then revealed a cheese, the scent of which filled the entire compartment in an instant.

"Would you like some?" With a wave of her hand, she held the stinky cheese under Simon's nose. He firmly declined. His neighbor stuck a cigar in his face, wrenched open the window, and a gush of fresh sea air poured over their heads. Outside it was already quite bright, he could see the landscape shining in the rising morning sun. Simon fumbled in his clothing pockets for cigarettes and found the letter from Yvette's father. He took it out, weighed it examiningly in his hands, held it against the light, and saw that it was not sealed. As he pulled out the stationery, a small slip of paper fell to the floor with the message *In love, Yvette*. Simon read the letter but did not understand its contents. It was all written in unrhymed verses that made no sense.

He put the letter back in the envelope, stowed the paper in his pocket, and thought no more about it.

It was early morning when the train pulled into St-Malo. Since the station was near the sea, Simon took his luggage under his arm and made his way to the harbor. The boats bobbed lazily along as he walked along the pier, looking for information. At last Simon met a fisherman hanging his nets out to dry. He casually tried to strike up a conversation, asking in between for Captain Vernon. The old man became suspicious and asked for the reason for his inquiry. Simon told him about the letter, about Yvette, his daughter, and slowly the fisherman thawed, gained confidence in the stranger, and showed him the way to a restaurant called *Chez Delphin*. He assured him that he would find him there for sure.

With his suitcases under his arm and rather exhausted, he arrived at the restaurant, which was hopelessly overcrowded at this hour. Simon looked around for the landlord and found

him standing behind the counter by the tap. After explaining his concerns to the innkeeper, he came out from his overheated booth and directed him to the back room. Simon didn't know what to make of this, but somehow, he felt he was being hidden from something.

When he first saw Yvette's father being pushed through the door and then standing in front of him full of fear, he could hardly believe that this was supposed to be the fearless man Yvette had told him about. This shivering heap could never be the captain. His first question was thus to his name. He did not know what reaction he would trigger with it.

After some time, the captain returned, a bottle with yellowish contents tucked under his arm and two glasses in his hand.

"I had no way of knowing you were sent by my daughter!" he puffed, setting the bottle and glasses on the table, and pouring. "Old Popaul just told me, and..." He saw Simon's questioning face. "Well, the old fisherman you asked about me..., Santé!" He smiled mischievously. Simon nodded, also raised his glass and toasted him.

"But I still can't take you to the Channel Islands, too dangerous, troubled times, you understand. The islands have been turned into a fortress by the Germans, no getting in or out without their permission. Sorry, monsieur!"

With eyes as big as soup plates, he looked at him. Simon took his time answering, took a sip of cider, pulled the letter from his pocket, and laid it on the table in front of him.

"I have a message from your daughter, perhaps you should read the letter first?"

Hesitantly, the captain took the paper in his hand, read it, looked up briefly in between, folded the letter and put it in his jacket pocket with trembling fingers.

"How do you know my daughter?" he asked gruffly.

"I met her in Lyon and fell in love with her...! That's a code...?" He pointed to the jacket pocket. "Isn't it?"

"Did you with her...?" Vernon didn't pronounce the word.

"What a question! You haven't given me an answer yet..., that's a code! Are you with a resistance movement, like the Résistance?"

The captain did not answer, but merely nodded.

"Yvette too?" Another nod of the head. Simon realized many things. The black car, the strange phone call, the letter taking too long in the mail, the pickup line at the bistro, and so on. He was a bit disappointed; he had believed that because of him Yvette had gotten involved with him, meanwhile he was nothing more than a private mailman.

"So, when will your boat be ready to leave?" he asked harshly. He was annoyed at being used. "One hand washes the other," he added.

"I'll drop you off at a quiet corner tomorrow morning and you can sleep at my place tonight. Deal!" He held out his hand to him. Simon grasped it and said:

"That's a word."

Thereupon they toasted each other, drank a few more bottles of cider, and then trotted off to the captain's cabin. There he slept peacefully on a canapé until a rough hand shook him and the captain signaled for him to get up. Simon slapped cold water on his face in the small kitchen, put on his clothes and went back to the pub with Vernon to get his luggage. Then he chewed a slice of stale bread and washed it all down with translucent coffee. When they got to the harbor, the wind was driving the rain ahead of them. The boat rocked like a buoy on the water and Jules Vernon had his hands full trying to get out of the harbor at all.

## Chapter One

The *Pomme d'Or Hotel* was chosen by the German Navy as their headquarters on the island. The hotel retained its character, only its guests were inevitably exchanged for soldiers and the entrance was given other attributes. Captain Harmusen announced himself and his catch at the reception. The soldier behind the counter neatly wrote everything in a book, which the lieutenant dictated to him. Next, one would go up the stairs and be met by another soldier who had swapped his rifle for a pencil. The same game as downstairs at the reception began with entry of name, time, and reason for presence. The spit came out from behind his table and disappeared through one of the many doors, reappearing after some time. He conferred briefly with the lieutenant, then both returned to the room. Simon was placed in front of the door with the number ten and was told to wait here. He sat down on the bench that was in front of it and searched the walls with his eyes for distractions. The only things he found were stands and flags with swastikas as a motif. Somewhere a door was torn open, he heard scraps of words and laughter, then the door slammed shut again. The spit stepped out of the door, checked him out of the corner of his eye, but pretended that Simon was not there. The latter was about to make himself comfortable when the door with the number ten opened again and the lieutenant invited him to enter. Simon was amazed at the luxurious furnishings of the room. Behind an antique desk sat a tinsel-adorned, uniformed older man who fixed Simon through nickel-bespectacled eyes. An outstretched hand gestured for him to sit down. He pulled up a Chippendale chair and sat down in front of the desk. Simon saw the uniformed man

searching through a folder but apparently not finding what he wanted, because he moved his graying head back and forth, clicking his tongue.

"I don't know whether to think you are particularly brave or exceedingly stupid to arrive here on the island without permission from the military authorities. You are here illegally, Mr. Benz! By the way, you can throw that piece of paper into the nearest rubbish bin!" He pointed to the request issued by the German consulate.

"It won't be recognized here," he continued, taking off his nickel glasses to clean them.

"What do we do with him now?" This was like a cry for help to the lieutenant captain. He moved his chair to the side, crossed his legs, looked at both of them for a second, then addressed the following words to Simon.

"You are in an unpleasant situation, Mr. Benz. You are traveling to a country occupied by the German Armed Forces without valid entry papers, this can end badly for you, in that we will put you on the next supply ship and transfer you back to the border. Until the arrival of the ship you will wait in prison, which, by the way, can take several days. Not a pleasant prospect, Mr. Benz, you can take my word for that."

Simon felt as if someone had hit him on the head. He was numb. Completely overwhelmed. He had to digest the words before he could answer. Everything had started so well and then this conclusion. He couldn't go home with this result, it would break his mother's heart, he was convinced of that. He had to defend himself, but how? Simon desperately tried to find a way out of this awful situation. He felt like a drowning man, and there was no one to throw him a life belt.

Jules Vernon was in a similarly precarious position when

SS-Colonel Müller put him through the wringer in the customs house down at the harbor. Fat and puffed up, he sat astride the desk and tormented Vernon for an hour, asking question after question, taking pleasure in answering them himself by allowing only his answer to be valid. When the letter was also found during the body search, Müller behaved like a Roman emperor. He shouted with his subordinates that he could be heard for miles around. The code was deciphered in a matter of minutes and the howls of triumph swelled immeasurably. Captain Vernon realized that only a miracle could save him, but miracles were scarce at these times. He sat transfixed on a chair in front of his tormentor. The latter, sure of his victory, had lit a cigar and exhaled the smoke with relish. As he did so, he looked at Vernon with a sardonic grin.

"Your time is up, Monsieur Vernon..., as a resistance fighter, a father, and as a human being. We will put you on trial and then shoot you according to martial law. You can only change your situation by telling us what we want to hear..., names, places, people..., think about it, it's your only chance!"

Then he stood up, buttoned his uniform jacket, and called for a soldier. Jules Vernon noticed the SS runes on the lapels, with that his courage left him - he knew he was done for. The soldier arrived, saluted, and was instructed to take the prisoner to detention.

"Take him to HQ to Schumacher. He's waiting for customers!"

SS-Colonel Egon Müller doubled over with laughter. Handcuffed, the captain was led out of the wooden barrack and loaded into a car that drove off across the pier toward St-Helier, engine roaring.

Field commander Colonel Leo Schumacher was at the German Armed Forces headquarters, the Metropol Hotel. He marched up to his command center with his arms folded behind his back and was in a bad mood. He spent half the night rolling from side to side. Nightmares interrupted his sleep. He had probably eaten too much and too spicy again last night, which triggered nightmares of the worst kind. The problem with the text for the eulogy at the funeral of First Lieutenant Zepernick was also still unsolved; after all, he wanted to cut a good figure at the eulogy when General Stülpnagel attended the ceremony. This First Lieutenant Zepernick had not fallen in the field, which was what caused him the grief. He had been run over by his own men when he drove around the bend to the right on his way home at night and the fools from the infantry drove their truck around to the left. Zepernick was killed instantly, the report said later. This unfortunate change in traffic regulations had already claimed many a victim because no one really knew which side was the right one. And then there was a letter from home, his old lady was giving him trouble over a trifle. None of this helped to improve his bad mood. He went to the desk, pulled the bottom drawer, took out a bottle of cognac and poured himself a double. Just as he was about to start drinking, the phone rang. Growling, he picked it up.

"Yes, what is it now!" he snarled into the receiver. It was the guard at the entrance gate.

"This is SS-Colonel Müller, Colonel. He asked if you had time..., it would be very important!"

"I specifically said no disturbances! Tell him to wait, I'll get back to you!" He slammed down the phone.

That suited his mood, the State Security Service with SS-Colonel Müller. That busybody, he was sure to talk again



about his observation, which subsequently turned out to be a bust. He can wait, Schumacher thought, and poured the full glass down his throat, coughing and swearing at the same time.

Even back then, when he joined the NSAP, he couldn't stand guys like that, who only performed with their big snouts and when things got tough, they weren't around. He was a convinced National Socialist, fanatical, and totally devoted to his Führer Adolf Hitler. The Third Empire, he was absolutely certain, was a part of him. He and his comrades had worked hard under the leadership of their beloved Führer. Long before the 'Reichskristallnacht', he swore an oath to the Führer and was one of the first to invade Poland. This was the beginning of his steep career, which, he was also confident, was far from over for him after the war and after the reshaping of Europe. Although at the beginning it did not look like he would ever be able to assert himself.

Even as a young boy, he struggled to defend his interests and was always taught otherwise by beatings from his father or from his siblings. Guilty or not, he got the grease. As an adult, he wanted to eradicate these shortcomings and found in his opportunity in the Nazi Party to finally gain the recognition and affirmation he had longed for since his childhood days. The first thing he learned was to fight back, to strike for no reason, and to feel a whole new sublime feeling, a feeling that made him addicted to more: power. Finally, he could repay the dishonor he had endured, even if he didn't hit those who had inflicted it on him. He needed this kind of outlet in order to exterminate Jews, Gypsies or the mentally ill, all people who were not normal in his eyes, not Aryan, third-class people, so that they would not dispute the place of the strong and healthy

in the Greater German Empire.

When it came to finding a commander for the Channel Islands in 1940, Colonel Leo Schumacher was second choice. Major General Count Rudolph von Schmettow was placed in front of him, which Schumacher considered an insult. This distinguished aristocrat from Silesia, bumpy in his views, lax in doing dirty work, became a problem for Schumacher, who was used to digging in the dirt from the front. At his behest, crimes of the most serious nature were committed, he signed death warrants, deportations of thousands to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Sobibor and Treblinka without batting an eye. For him, no crime was too cruel, no matter how perfidious, vicious, and dirty, as long as he could carry it out on third-class people. Colonel Schumacher did not know any remorse; he did everything on the orders of his euphorically beloved Führer. He was subject to his direct orders, which were obligatory for Schumacher, even if they meant the most bizarre things. Since then, he commanded *Jakob*, *Gustav*, and *Adolf*, as Jersey, Guernsey and Alderney were called in the construction plan of the German Armed Forces, like a despot. Schumacher worked like a berserker just to fulfill the desire to turn the islands into fortresses. Many thousands of forced laborers, prisoners, deportees of all nations, which were in a state of war with Germany, were taken by ships to the islands in the Channel to turn them into a defensive wall of steel and concrete.

The creation of the Todt organization brought Schumacher together with a friend and comrade from the early days. Fritz Todt, Minister of Munitions and Construction, a genius in the construction of military defenses. With him, he accomplished the greatest task he faced. Vast quantities of men and materials were consumed to create a work of this size. He was proud of himself.







