

# IRMA FUCHS

If Lies  
Be The Truth  
Of Men



SURREAL

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## Prologue

No matter how many aliases Irma Fuchs adopted, it always came back to: Irma Fuchs, Brockhorst Camp guard, ranked Oberaufseherin or Senior Overseer. Irma Fuchs sentenced to be hung by the neck until she was dead. Irma Fuchs who awoke in a Siberian Gulag wondering if it was indeed hell. Maybe her redemption was permitted because in the dying months of that living hell of Brockhorst she saw a light. Not a conversion to angelic humanitarian, more the scheming of a desperate mind. But there a spark of candour burned, refused to die and caught the attention of a Russian Colonel.

Released through chicanery and post war confusion, and then hidden within the disorder of Stalin's autocracy, dreams began to first trouble before escalating to horrors tossed from a disturbed subconscious. Beleaguered she lived for the waking hours and began to dread the depths of sleep. Often waking in a ball of sweat fearing the proffered comfort of those that cared, and they were few enough.

If the nightmares as they were, didn't scold the conscious then a mysterious old man certainly did. He appeared when Irma trod a questionable path to seemingly steer her back on one that was straight and narrow.

## Chapter One

A warm but wet spring day met Irma's emergence into an apocalyptic outside world. The distant thunder of Russian artillery had commenced earlier than usual and the woman guessed her daily malicious routine would soon be ended. Other guards were discussing what they would do as well as the last order from the SS hierarchy. They could go their different paths but Irma would remain and seek a mix of duplicity and clemency. She would maintain that above all she only followed orders, that not to do so meant certain death.

When the main body of guards forced more than twenty-four thousand remaining prisoners to march to Mecklenburg, Irma remained, losing her military uniform and adopting one from a deceased nurse, one she had carefully garrotted so as not to stain the uniform. Then she acted the angel of mercy tending the sick that were left. There starved exhaustion didn't kill their memories though and many a needy patient shrunk before the abrupt change of attitude, though remaining silent when the Reds did eventually arrive, their trust far from won.

Irma found herself in one of the cells she had slammed the door on so often. As far as the communists were concerned pretty as she was, she was not worth their usual lustful hand out. Circumstance until then had seemed real and sane. Logical progression was about to slip. Reality would become unreliable, fantasy unfathomable. Though never enough to adamantly say 'this is total madness.' The mind is an incredible organ and has the ability to adapt to most traumatic events. Time in her case would be an ally.

Eventually the Red Army found time to interrogate Irma; having left her to think matters over for a week. In that time she suffered the confinement horrors she had inflicted on countless prisoners. A bucket for the latrine. Stale bread and watery cabbage soup, which was more than she fed her

victims. Irma remained resolute. Her motto was 'it wasn't done until the chair was kicked from beneath her'.

A stony po-faced officer sat behind the previous camp commander's desk, Fritz Suhren who paid for his infamy in June 1950. The Russian spoke reasonable German. "You are Irma Fuchs?"

The captive shook her head. "She left with the forced march. I am Gelda Schulze."

"Several inmates have informed us that you are Oberaufseherin Irma Fuchs."

"Those patients are extremely ill. Most are drugged. They don't know where they are let alone know who's who."

"I could sit you down with the brigade medic but I feel you have probably done your homework." He tossed a nursing handbook on the desk. "Found in your room. Irma's room. Anything to say?"

"The sadistic bitch had ideas about posing as a nurse, but she couldn't learn fast enough and went with the others."

"You will be interested to know that our advanced scout unit have caught up with the prisoner column and we have captured one Greta Maier who we will ask to identify you. If you tell the truth then you will be released. If not you will be tried for humanitarian crimes. Is that understood?"

"Greta will tell you who I am," Irma replied fingers crossed behind her back.

"You may wait on her return in your cell."

Irma remained buoyant, she was a firm believer that she would prevail, that luck wasn't about to leave her high and dry. That perhaps the devil looked after his own. She only had to wait a day, Greta being brought to the Russian Commander's office. He told the SS guard. "We have a young woman captive whose identity I would like to know. When we bring her in just tell me her name."

Irma was dragged from her stinking cell and brought in hands tied behind her back. "Now tell me. Who is this

woman?" the Russian demanded.

"Why it's Gelda Schulze of course," the guard replied adding. "Camp nurse." The Russian really should have made Irma put on a camp guard uniform. It proved true, the devil did 'nurse' his own, Greta being a devil in her own right and soon to join her overlord.

"Very well put her with the others," Colonel Anatoly Kuznetsov ordered referring to who he temporarily regarded as Greta. The woman smiled at Irma and left with her guard.

"I am not convinced," he told Irma. "Hence you will be transferred for the time being. Somewhere where you can reflect on the last five years."

"Russian justice? You have no evidence."

"No, not at all. Russian justice like German honour would have put a bullet in your head by now."

"How long?" she dared to ask.

"There is a quaint English idiom I once heard. "How long is a piece of string? That about covers it. But I wouldn't make any short term plans. If you have living relatives then write down their names and where we might make contact and we will endeavour to do so." He knew she couldn't and smirked accordingly.

He leant back in the chair and invited. "I have dinner arriving soon. You are invited to share. I would accept as it may be the last thing you eat for some time."

She nodded and he indicated she sit. "Summer is not far away and Russia gets unbearably hot. However the winters are brutal, so if you have anything in your wardrobe that might fend of the cold then you should take it with you."

She hoped that Gelda did.

As dinner arrived she heard a rattle of gunfire close by. Again Anatoly smiled. "Russian Justice. You should be happy it wasn't you."

"The guards?" she questioned.

"Some."

"Greta?"

“Possibly.”

“Damn the war!”

“It might have been better saying that in nineteen thirty nine.”

“One voice would have had no effect,” she argued.

Irma guessed it would be a trial by dinner, Anatoly seeking the piece of trickery that would reveal Irma’s lies. He saw not a pretty face only a sadistic, murderous savage and he wanted a noose around her neck. As far as he was concerned she wasn’t worth a bullet.

“Don’t expect anything lavish,” Anatoly told her. “I eat the same as my men.”

“I haven’t eaten lavish since the war began,” Irma lied. “When your patients have little then one has to eat little too.”

“Open your mouth,” he suddenly ordered.

Bemused Irma obeyed expression questioning.

“I see no reason,” he admitted finally.

“For what?” she asked intrigued.

“It looks like any other tongue.”

“Why wouldn’t it?”

“Because the lies slide so easily,” he joked sarcastic, studying her face for a reaction.

She pushed her luck. “If you don’t believe me why not shoot me?”

“Simply because there is an element of doubt. Once an execution is done it cannot be undone. Thus I give you the benefit of the question, is she or isn’t she? There are still plenty to kill. I can give one a miss and still sleep at night.”

“I cannot for all the sick I have lost,” she admitted falsely.

“Keep it going Irma. You might wear me down yet. You need to find that crack in my defences. Then worm your way in and hit the sympathy button.”

She leant forward and said quietly. “I have a clean, disease free cunt. How would you like a piece?”



The officer remained unshockable. "I don't think there is a man here either sane or insane that would touch your cunt with a three metre lance."

That struck her hard. The implacable Fuchs felt the cut of his well-aimed insult. "If I can ever prove to you I am Gelda Schulze then you will rue your distasteful remarks."

"There is as much chance of that happening as Hitler saying sorry."

"Can I have my hands untied? Please. The bindings are cutting off the blood."

"You have blood? That Irma would suggest there is a human lying hidden within you somewhere." He nodded to the guard to do so.

"Thank you," she said rubbing her wrists.

"Now you are thinking that is a step in the right direction."

"I am thinking I cannot feel my fucking hands."

Dinner arrived, Anatoly introducing the dishes. "To begin Kulesh with flat bread. A filling nutritious soup. Then the main course stewed beef and potatoes. And naturally vodka, to wash the shit down. Such is the life of a soldier."

Spooning the soup to her lips she surprisingly offered praise. "Not bad. Better than most of my meals for a long time." She took a slug of Stolichnaya and gasped. "That is some shit. Petrol by any chance?"

The man laughed. "You have been spoilt with schnapps. Four of the vodka and you will crawl back to your cell."

"Then six might be a blessed release."

He called her back a week later. She stood implacable hiding a genuine nervousness.

"It is goodbye Irma. You go by truck to the railway tomorrow. There you will be transported to a camp in Russia. I am happy in the knowledge that what awaits you is far worse than a bullet. But having said that I will offer you a merciful end, although you do not deserve such a speedy escape."

“You still bark up the wrong tree,” she retorted. “I will trust in God and his mercy.”

“You want the bullet then?”

“Put it where the sun doesn’t shine. I will take my chances. Maybe if I can’t trust in God I can hope the Devil will look after his own.”

“And that is the closest we have come to an admission.”

“Brockhorst is a messy pie that has had many a meddling finger in it. This hell hole has the tampering of Hitler himself. No one who worked here can leave with a clear conscience and claim to be human. Orders came from those that never set foot near the place. We were deprived of the essentials. Food and medicines.”

Anatoly interrupted. “I see many a corpse and many walking skeletons out there. But I see fat on your bones Irma. You did not go without.”

“If I had died through self-deprivation who would have looked after those wretches then?”

“So you did look after number one?”

“I cannot deny it can I? If I had made magic in the supplies and fed the thousands like Jesus with his fishes and loaves, then I would have brought the wrath of Himmler down on my life. Have you caught the bastard yet?”

“I haven’t heard. You blame all this on your superiors then?”

“I was between the devil and the deep blue sea, certainly.”

“I will follow your story Irma, for I am convinced you are she. But there is a compulsion within me not to destroy something so exquisitely intelligent and malignant. Perfectly evil one might say. I feel attracted from an intellectual aspect. I find myself intrigued as to how life will pan out for you. And put aside that vicious black heart and yes you are really quite attractive, in a mortal of the flesh way.”

“There are no angels in war,” she cited.

“I think there are.”

“You will have breakfast with me before you leave. You will change for real Irma. In the coming years you will realise that your outlook on your fellow man is twisted and you cannot exist without compassion. I wish to see that when it happens.”

“Shall I write you Anatoly? Shall I put pen to paper and tell of a great transformation where one was impossible. Shall I lie to you? I am content with my conduct and will not be writing confessions anytime in the future. You will grow old waiting.”

The goods train made up of cattle trucks might have been the same ones that propelled many to their fate at numerous concentration camps across Europe. Was it fitting that Irma should end up on one? Anatoly had insisted that Irma redress in the SS uniform for the journey. “Let us see if you survive the trek,” the Colonel teased. “Though to be fair the uniform doesn’t obviously state devil of Brockhorst.”

For once Irma said nothing.

There were no trucks to spare for the trip to the railway. Instead she and a dozen other captives were marched the few kilometres to the mainline to Berlin, the Brockhorst line having been discontinued. It wasn’t the best of May days, in fact nineteen forty five was due to be above normal temperatures and wet in general. It was too warm for her coat, and the cloth of her uniform absorbed the drizzle like a sponge. It doused the hair clear of the meagre service cap, and collectively ran down the back of her neck to wet her clothes from the inside as well. Finally, unused to walking far, foot sore she finally spotted her transport into Russia.

The place was obviously a gathering spot for prisoners as there were hundreds stood on the platform waiting to board. A Russian soldier spotted her small group and sauntered toward them. Irma tried not to look the man in the eyes. He reached out and rubbed the tunic between finger and thumb all the while watching her reaction. “SS govno kusok,” he finally said.

“Yesli ty tak govorish’,” she replied in faultless Russian. Her reward was a hefty slap to the face before he retook his position.

“You impressed him I see,” a colleague Marta remarked jokingly.

“But of course, Marta.”

“What did you say for heaven’s sake?”

“He called me a shit pile and I agreed with him.”

“Ah that’s where you went wrong,” Else, a particularly attractive and tall blonde criticised. “He thought you were being arrogant because all us krauts are just that.”

“Perhaps I might kill him,” Irma concluded.

“Where did you learn the Russian?” Klara inquired.

“In the camp. I guessed we would be overrun by them and I was right. I have always been good with languages and I thought it best to know some Ruskie. So I asked a Russian prisoner to teach me.”

“You asked?” Marta challenged incredulous.

“She was happy to help.”

Else sunk a hand in a pocket and retrieving a pack of ten cigarettes offered them around. “Artful persuasion,” she suggested as fingers quickly took the smokes.

“Maybe,” Irma agreed.

Klara waited to give her opinion. Then when the moment seemed right, she asked. “How hard did you hit her?”

“I only had to whip her the once,” Irma informed them with vindictive pride.

“Details,” Else urged.

“Her name was Katina. She was orthodox and quite a pretty twenty-three years old. They don’t all look like peasants, old and battered before their time. Unfortunately for Katina it was her looks that drew me to her. She was taken at the siege of Stalingrad, Christmas forty-two. She was a fighting soldier. Yes, their women wage war. And yes, they fight well. When I first suggested she teach me she said with a smile *‘otvali’*.”

“Which was?” Klara pressed.

“I didn’t find out until some months later. When she came to trust me as much as she ever would. She told me to fuck off.”

“And when you did find out? What did you do?”

“By then we had reached a different level of understanding. Katina lived well for an inmate. Especially for one of her persuasion. And in return didn’t complain when the urge came upon me. It became exceedingly sexual.”

“You mean you fucked with her?” Marta demanded disgusted.

“Oh don’t you knock it Marta. Cocks aren’t the be all and end all you know. Tongue can be far more appeasing.”

“You or her?” Marta returned, nose wrinkled.

“It depended. I love to cane a naked backside, and she possessed the perfect specimen. I did for her and she consented to my quirk shall we say. Oh, I know I could have taken what I wanted when I wanted, but with her I didn’t want to.”

Klara stamped out her butt saying. “It sounds like you fell for this Russian bitch. Where is she now?”

“I’m not sure.”

“So, who’s going to lick you out now Irma?” Klara persisted.

Ignoring the question she huffed instead. “How bloody long before they put us on those luxurious rail cars?”

A nearby German civilian overheard. “We are apparently waiting on a link. Another train already crammed to hell with civilian prisoners. And that might take an hour or ten. Who the fuck knows anyway? Welcome to Russian Railways mismanagement. At least we Germans could run a fucking railroad on time.”

A nearby Russian soldier moved close and spat his opinion. “Vy, nemtsy, ochen’ khorosho umeli ubivat’ nevinovnykh, v tom chisle detey. Iznasilovaniye russkikh zhenshchin. Genitsid i massovoye vorovstvo. Posmotri na

sebya seychas. Teper' vy poymete, kak oshchushchayetsya botinok."

The women turned to Irma for a translation.

"Basically Germans are very good at murdering the innocent, including children. Raping Russian women. Genocide and stealing. He says we will now understand how the boot feels. I assume he means we are in for a good kicking. Physically or psychologically? He wasn't precise."

"Both," the soldier told them in German.

The other transport arrived, eventually, some four hours later. Hungry, thirsty by then, people looked to their captors for sustenance. There was none forthcoming. For years the Reich had stomped on anyone that stood against their totalitarian regime, the German populace helpless puppets in their scheming. The worm had turned and many felt the need for some recourse, the obvious being revenge. Especially maligned were those from Eastern Europe who the Nazis saw as worthless. Many a Wehrmacht soldier expected nothing less than a general condemnation and retaliation for the horrors they themselves had inflicted on those helpless people. It was the civilian population that were swept aside by first rumour and then reprisals that knew little of the liberties levied by their army.

The crowded contents of the second train spilled on to the platform to be engorged by that first near empty transport. Once Irma had been hustled into the press, air to breathe rapidly became a luxury, especially once the doors were closed and bolted. Fuchs passed her time as the locomotive laboriously chugged its way across northern Germany on its way to Poland, selecting who looked likely to fade out before the next stop. Irma studied her fellow travellers as some did her. The abominable truth of what she had been, and where she had worked, were not as then general knowledge, so vilification was not a problem. It would be in time as their Russian accompaniment would no

doubt enlighten those willing to listen. By then Irma intended to have dispossessed the uniform.

The people were a mix of those the Russians failed to trust or were perceived to be a threat to the Motherland including many of their own nationality. Any prisoners taken by the Germans were seen to be traitors to the Kremlin, as they should have died fighting. The red army were to ship nearly three million Germans to camps across Russia of which four hundred thousand were civilians. Those that survived the war then had to endure the peace.

There are two main ways of exacting a retribution, which clearly the Soviets had every intention of doing. There was the physical and there was the psychological. A demeaning means of the latter was disappointment. To be permitted to attain hope and then see it dashed. The Russians were very good at manipulating hope and despair. Having allowed Irma's group to clamber into the cattle truck, the door was opened again and several soldiers boarded and hustled all but Irma out, with no word of explanation. As the door was slammed shut she heard shots and assumed the worse. The question thereby hung, why not her?

For a time she felt lonesome, vulnerable and miserable, just what her captors wanted. Gaining her 'sea legs' became the first obstacle to overcome as the train snaked its way through a war-torn landscape. The constant veering and shunting of transports threatened to destabilise those crammed standing. The ascending temperature inflicted heat stroke and the frail readily succumbed, those affected falling to be propped by those around. The smell of body waste began to assail the senses, old and infirm unable to restrain themselves, a single metal bucket provided for the purpose of relief.

Determined to survive, Irma pushed her way to the door where gaps permitted some air to gain access. Face pressed to the wood she watched through the cracks at the ponderous progress of that human made calamity. Anyone

who objected met with the Fuchs stare and soon melted back into the suffering body of the desperate.

Their first stop was late that day, some place in Poland. There people were permitted to dismount and partake of frugal rations including great urns of tepid water. Those that had held their motions grabbed the opportunity to go wherever they could regardless of the public eye. Sustenance consisted of cabbage soup, or tepid water that might have seen a green leaf on its journey to the pot; plus a small hunk of hard stale bread. The time would come when she would have cut off an arm for a slice of fresh German rye bread.

Talking with her travel companions she was astounded to find out why they were being shipped as prisoners. Many were forced to an interview under the threat of being summarily shot if they didn't. They were evaluated and then in most cases jailed. They had been separated from husbands and children with no explanation. Irma found the revelation disturbing, probably as her own kind had executed similar if not worse conditions on those now holding the whip hand. Maybe then the first taste of guilt touched a callous heart.

At stops she bundled out and grabbed what she could utterly careless of others that were not so agile. The thought never occurred that she might help those less fortunate. Thus Irma kept her strength while others faltered. Losses mounted and the trucks became less crowded.

Those cattle trucks were periodically hosed out, not so much for the sake of the prisoners but more to prevent an outbreak of typhus. It had a temporary effect of cooling the box car. While the thousands milled about, Irma looked for her friends, perhaps in vain, maybe not. Next she scanned for an escape, the forests of Lithuania proving tempting. The guards were ever vigilant and the odd shot and fallen escapee kept most from trying.



## Chapter Two

Irma could only guess at how long she had been kept on the train. It felt like months but was probably about two weeks. Sometimes the transport would stop and not start again for hours, all those suffering in the carts with no knowledge of why or when they might roll again. With nothing to pass the time the stops proved more torturous than the motion.

Amazed she had actually survived the journey she stepped into the light of a Siberian wasteland, that suggesting an escape might prove improbable. It was then among the thinned ranks twenty cars up she saw Marta. Irma leapt into the air waving her arms trying to attract the woman's attention. That sighting lifted her heart, but as she came back down a rifle butt struck her in the stomach. She doubled and a second hit her on the back of the head. Irma's lights went out.

She awoke some hours later, partly from being knocked unconscious, partly from a mix of malnutrition, dehydration and exhaustion. Faces surrounded her, people she didn't recognise. One sat on her bed and rang a cloth dripping water onto her parched lips. "German?" the woman asked.

Irma nodded.

"Welcome to hell," she said softly.

Another came close and peering at Irma said. "You're pretty. They will like you. Especially as you still have some flesh on your bones. The captain likes his women meaty."

Struggling to sit Irma asked. "I don't expect to be liked. That's not why I am here."

"What's the uniform," another inquired.

"German army," Irma replied in an attempt to keep her true vocation secret.

"Yes, but what branch?"

"Anti-aircraft," she lied.

"And the war? It is over?" yet another asked hopeful.

"It's over. Germany lost."

“Win or lose wouldn’t make any difference to me.” the woman replied down hearted.

“It’s retribution all the way. Have any of you actually been told why you are here?”

Not one said yes.

“Where are we? In Siberia I mean?”

They shrugged as one.

“Does anyone ever try to escape?”

They shook heads as one.

An elderly stalwart who intellectually stood head and shoulders above the rest spoke from her bunk, slats of wood on a wooden frame with no blanket or place to rest the head. “In the summer we endure a searing heat. In the winter this is a frozen wasteland. It is likely a hundred miles or so to the nearest civilisation. No one escapes this. No one tries.”

“If you do run and are caught they will shoot you,” the woman continued.

“I take it this is a work camp? Slave labour.”

“It is. We log in the forests.”

“When do you work?”

“Tomorrow. For some reason the guards brought us back early today.”

“Inspection,” sounded from further up the room.

“What is there to inspect?” Irma asked puzzled.

“You would be surprised,” the elderly woman replied, she seeming to be the voice of the barrack room.

“I am Gelda by the way,” she lied deciding to keep up with the ruse. “Surprised? How?”

“They like to catch us out and inflict punishments,” she explained.

The revelation was like a bolt to the brain, how many times had she done the same?

“That’s a reasonably good uniform you have there,” the woman observed without moving. “Take it off and you will

lose it. No matter where you are. If you are in a sweat over the trunks then tie it around your waist. Don't hang it up."

"What about showers?" Irma suggested.

"Showers! Good grief Gelda where do you think you are? Holiday camp? You will get filthy and stink like the rest of us. Unless of course you want to entertain the troops?"

"By entertain you mean fuck with."

"They will ask and then they will take. I will give you two days before one drags you off into the woods."

"Something to look forward to I suppose."

"They like rough sex," the one sat on her bed told Irma.

"So do I."

"You would be better off hiding your assets," the elderly woman Nadia advised. "Dump the bra and try and flatten your tits."

Yula, the girl sat on her bed added. "Get your head shaved or the lice will have a field day. Same with your underarms and pubic hair."

That struck horror in the otherwise hard-nosed Irma. "Lice!"

"An army of them. Surprised you aren't feeling their presence already. And there are bed bugs that sneak up and suck your blood when you are asleep. We have some of the biggest mosquitoes anywhere too."

"Christ! That fucking Anatoly knew what he was doing."

"Anatoly?" Yula questioned.

"The Red that arrested me. I might have been shot had it not been for him."

"Is that better?"

"It's looking that way. Sounds like after I'm starved, I will be eaten alive."

"That's about it. But on the good side there are those that survive and get to be released," Nadia pointed out.

"What happens if I resist a guard's advances?"

Nadia finally left her bunk and settled her butt on Irma's. "You must learn how to handle the pests, including the

guards. Accept they are not fussy. Not that you aren't attractive. But they will take your cunt through the filth and stink of your unwashed body. Even the vaginal pox doesn't seem to put them off. And if you catch it off of one of them there is no medication. We have a camp doctor who tries, but he has little to work with. A word of advice. Don't complain and don't argue. Keep your head down and mind your own business."

"What does dinner consist of? She dared to ask.

"There is no such thing as dinner. Not as you are probably used to anyway. "It is broth without the vegetables and a hunk of rock hard bread."

"Hot water and stale bread you mean?"

"Something like that. Except the soup is never hot. Have you a bowl?"

"I have nothing except what I am wearing."

"We'll find you one. The dead don't take their possessions to the grave. And there are no kin to claim them."

"The camp provides nothing then?"

"The captain will give you a whipping if he sees fit. He's a sadist. Barely a week goes by without some poor bitch being strung up outside his office. He likes to carry out his so called punishment on trumped up charges in public. He usually selects the victim from the newer intakes as the women are in better condition. It's a sexual thing you see."

"You're saying I might get picked?"

"You're German, young, pretty and still have flesh on your bones, so the odds are against you."

"Being shot for running sounds better by the minute."

The Russian was right about the inspection. A well fed pompous asshole called Motya Berezin arrived preceded by a non-commissioned officer who shouted everybody to attention. Stood by their beds they waited.

The camp commandant had close set eyes and a long nose which he peered down as he 'inspected' the barracks,

a matter of wiping a white gloved finger along a few surfaces. He stopped before Irma, staring intently. "Name!" he snapped.

"Gelda Schulze," she replied.

An eyebrow lifted. "I know that name. You will come with me." His grasp of German proved adequate.

Maybe, entered her thoughts, her grip on possibility. Maybe they wanted her to take up her kidnapped profession as nurse. Nurse to aid the doctor. Surely that would proffer better conditions than knocking down trees?

She stood to attention before the commandant's paper littered desk heart hopeful, a lick of nerves affecting her gut.

"You are Gelda Schulze?"

"Yes sir."

"Nurse stationed at Brockhorst Concentration Camp?"

"Yes. That is me, sir."

"I have received a dossier on you from Colonel Anatoly Kuznetsov. You know this man?"

Dossier! Hope began to fade. "I know Colonel Anatoly Kuznetsov. He was temporary camp commander Brockhorst."

"After you were transported the Colonel made enquiries among the wretches you had overseen on a medical basis. It doesn't speak well of you."

Heads you lose, tails you lose went through her mind.

"The treatment you levied could be in many cases deemed as torture. And your association with the camp doctor Karl Franz Gebhardt is condemnation in itself. Have you any defence?"

*'The bitch!' she cursed mentally. 'Miss bloody goody two shoes! Telling everyone she was an angel. Yeah an angel of fucking death!'*

She offered nothing. No words or defence could save her. She knew then where she was headed, and it wasn't the

forest cutting trees. Irma or Greta, it didn't really matter. She had played her hand and lost.

"Probably best you say nothing," the Captain, Pavel Milavitska, told her. "Until your hearing you will be kept in solitary. Have you any questions?"

"On what charge?"

"Crimes against humanity."

"And if I am found guilty?"

"Which I suspect you will be. You will be hung."

He waited for the statement to settle and then informed her. "The detention cell is here in this building.

With nothing more to be said he led her to an eight by six cell in the wooden building, the door more solid than the walls. Within she had a sink and tap, a bucket and the usual wooden slatted bed. She viewed the sink and tap in awe. A quick test proved it actually worked, for the condemned woman maybe.

She didn't wait. Screwing a stocking into a ball she rammed it into the plughole as the plug was missing. Then she filled the sink, leaning from time to time to drink to assuage a desperate thirst. Stripped to the waist she used her other stocking as a facecloth, the feel of cool water on her sweat soaked torso pure heaven. She was naked by the time she heard a key turn in the door. Covering herself occurred, but she chose to brazen it out and remain as she was, with no attempt to cover her nudity.

The arrival transpired to be a guard with a food tray. For a moment he stared in disbelief, and then gazed in pure lust.

"Tebe nraivitsya to, chto ty vidish'?" she asked. (Do you like what you see?)

The soldier smiled and nodded.

Irma laid a hand to her pubic bush and said. "Mne nuzhno mylo." (I need soap.)

He shrugged.

She continued in Russian. "What do you use to shave?"

His finger and thumb indicated he had a small piece.  
“That is all I have. It’s because of the war. There is not much of anything.”

“Are you my guard?”

He nodded.

“All the time?”

“Yes.”

She moved closer deliberately jiggling her breasts. Perusing the food she criticised. “Not much for a growing girl is it?”

“It is the agreed amount.”

“Agreed by who? Not me that’s for sure. Not by the Red Cross either I shouldn’t wonder. I shall probably hang in a few weeks, so aren’t I entitled to a decent meal before I dangle?”

“Eat.” He thrust the tray at her, turned and left, locking the door behind.

“Well that went bloody well didn’t it Irma?”

Sat twiddling her thumbs day in day out she could hear much of what went on in the commandant’s office. It was about her only interest apart from swatting mosquitoes.

With an adequate understanding of Russian she was able to eavesdrop on Pavel’s conversations and phone calls. After a few days it became obvious that the man was a scoundrel, using a beleaguered system to his own ends. Supplies were being sold and dropped at his contacts warehouses while Pavel wailed about the regime’s shortages. All down to the Germans he would say, trying to push guilt onto the majority of prisoners to prevent comebacks, though any would be unlikely.

Kept for just over a month and without any notice, two guards came for her one Friday morning. Pavel curtly informed her that she had been tried and found guilty. There could be no defence, so giving her the opportunity to tell her side was pointless. She had been sentenced to hang at

ten a.m. that day. She glanced at the clock on the wall and noted she had about fifteen minutes.

A guard tied her hands behind her back and then led her out into a yard in full view of the camp inmates. There had been built a crude gallows, a long pole ten feet off the ground and supported by two crossed poles at either end. Five ropes with nooses dangled from the pole, and five stools awaited the condemned.

A chill crept through her, the realisation with no friendly faces, settled. It was the end of her. Would it be eternal hell or an endless nothing, the latter being preferable?

A door on the opposite side of the compound opened and one by one her friends stepped into the light, hence the five stools. It was a time of uncertainty, a moment to crap oneself. A nudge from behind forced her forward. "Well," she whispered to herself, at least I won't have to wake up in this shithole again."

Legs beyond control Irma stepped onto a stool, the piece at least having four legs avoiding a premature throttling. Her ashen faced colleagues took their places, Marta physically throwing up. She recovered and said so all could hear. "Well I don't know where that came from. I haven't had a decent meal since these retarded fucks locked me up."

Grins broke the solemnity, Irma shouting. "That's it Marta you tell these mongol cunts how it is." She then repeated her words in Russian so everybody understood. "Vot i Marta, ty etim mongol'skim pizdyam rasskazhi, kak eto."

"Trust you to show off Irma," the woman replied.

Pavel stared at them. "What did you call this woman?" he demanded pointing at Irma.

"Irma. She is Irma Fuchs."

"Not Gelda Schulze?"

"Nein," Marta confirmed.

The man was confused. He had no file on an Irma Fuchs, and feared hanging someone without evidence to convict.



“Take her down!” he barked. “And carry out the sentence on the rest.”

So as Irma stepped down. She witnessed her colleagues take the final trip, Marta winking at her seconds before her fall. The woman was a stranger to tears, but they welled nonetheless as she watched her friends pay the final debt. Irma was then hustled back to her cell, while Pavel made urgent inquiries.

Still expecting to be executed for her crimes, she looked upon the recess as temporary and Pavel would still have her hauled out to the compound where her friends still swung. When he did appear it was with uncertain news.

“You are pardoned today. But you will remain in this cell. Someone will come for you in a few days.” He offered nothing else and ignored Irma’s sarcastic remark as he left.

“I still haven’t had my condemned prisoner’s last meal.”

The door slammed as she shouted. “Sausage, egg and bacon would be just dandy.”

The watery gruel persisted as she waited bemused as to what they were up to. Whatever Gelda was guilty of she had not been far off, so why did fate keep dangling the carrot? Was it a matter of psychological punishment, or piss poor management? Finally she decided she was alive and that was all that mattered.

At the stage where she just wanted to bash her head against a wall through sheer boredom her saviour arrived. She heard his voice in Pavel’s office, her heart lifting. After an interminable length of time the guard let her out. Not wanting to appear eager she took her time shuffling to Pavel’s arena.

There he stood, tall, rakish and handsome with a heart-warming smile, a face that came close to familiar.

Irma accepted her place assuming it to be Anatoly that saved her from the noose. Or did he still play fuck your mind games? She said nothing, merely tendering a what happens now expression.

“Yes Captain, that is the woman I have come to take back. One Irma Fuchs.”

“And you are sure she killed Gelda Schulze?”

“There is a witness. She strangled the bitch with her bare hands.”

The revelations flew over Irma’s head. What was happening? Was she being hailed a heroine for a totally selfish act? “Actually,” she corrected. “I throttled miss loathsome with a piece of rope.”

“Speak when spoken to,” Pavel barked. “You were still a camp guard and that yet has to be investigated. As far as I am concerned you were part of a heinous crime and should be either shot or hung. End of.”

She bit back. “I am glad you are not my judge and jury then.”

“Damned insolent...”

Anatoly spoke. “No Captain Milavitska, that is fire in the belly. One that no one will put out.”

“You sound like you respect this piece of shit Colonel Kuznetsov.”

“That is beginning to sound like insolence Captain.”

“I beg your pardon. That was not my intention. I apologise.”

“Good. We understand one another then.”

“We do.”

About to leave Irma cast a glance back across the compound, the rough gallows waiting on the next customers. About to turn she caught sight of Marta the woman stood ghostly by the stool she had died on. The spectre smiled and winked and was gone. A shiver ran the length of Irma’s spine. She hovered a short while then slipped into the passenger seat of Anatoly’s car, herself a ghostly white.

### Chapter Three

"You could do with a bath."

"No soap. I did my best with cold water."

"Is there anything you would like to say to me?"

"Why?"

"Not thank you?"

"If your intentions are honourable."

"You mean your cunt is no longer on offer?"

"As is!"

"Maybe a bath first."

"But why? You know what I am. Why save me and not my friends?"

"Your lie saved you. Had you not maintained you were Gelda, this conversation would not be happening. You would be buried in the Siberian permafrost."

The purloined Mercedes ran as smooth as could be expected on a dusty stone road, Anatoly aiming for civilisation.

"And you? A hunch. I have a feeling that you could make reparation."

"Dropping me off at a convent are you?"

"I don't think so."

"What did you dig up on me that didn't make it to a dossier?"

"We look forward, not back. Wipe Brockhorst from your memory."

"Tell my subconscious that."

"Nightmares? A scourge of guilt?"

"More like nostalgia."

"You are kidding me!"

"I am being honest. Hang me for Christ's sake! I am not worth shit in the human race."

"Acceptance of what you are could be the beginning of atonement," Anatoly suggested.

"Are you a cleric in your spare time because you don't half spout some self-righteous bullshit."