

## Chapter 1

The small metal sign ~~displayed had~~ one word and ~~six-seven~~ bullet holes. ~~While The~~ ~~sheets of~~ rain pummel~~inged~~ the ~~metal~~ sign from above, ~~couldn't hide the~~ three holes ~~that~~ perforated the upper left corner, ~~a-~~testaments to the rebellious recklessness of the area's youth with their illegal firearms. The fourth, fifth, and sixth holes had been more deliberate, the projectiles shot with a goal. A *determined* goal, but little skill. Those holes hesitantly drifted toward~~s~~ the sign's one message, the word's blocky red letters as threatening in their boldness as the word itself. It hinted at danger. It played on fear. But it mostly promised retribution. The novice gunman who dared shoot those three bullets had possibly done so with defiant fear. His knees had perhaps shaken as he did so. And as soon as the final bullet left his gun, he ~~ha-~~d probably run ~~as fast as his legs would carry him possible~~ away from that sign.

### *Grénzgebiet*

### Border Area

The seventh bullet hole had been a ~~deliberate,~~ calculated, ~~expert~~ strike. The ~~gunman~~ would have been more than just a reckless youth or a marauder with a death wish. He would've been an eyewitness to the horror that word foreshadowed. He may have stuck around to witness the reactions of the soldiers in the crows'~~s~~ nest of the tower behind the sign. And he may have died there, for the ~~-~~crime of vandalism.

Three hundred yards past the guards' tower and across the *grenzgebiet* lay an abandoned church. ~~-~~Shrouded in darkness and surrounded by the border's Death Zone, the magnificent stone walls of the edifice rose into the falling rain. Somewhere ~~hidden~~ above ~~that~~, the bell tower pointed toward~~s~~ the heart of a heaven ~~which-that~~ had once been the topic of thousands of solemn sermons inside the building's walls.

**Commented [SU2]:** Great opening sentence!

**Commented [SU3]:** I replaced "as fast as his legs would carry him" because it comes across as a little bit comic (definitely not the tone we're going for here).

**Commented [SU4]:** Great opening paragraph! I love that it's descriptive, but it's not too descriptive—it tells a story.

**Commented [SU5]:** I removed "deliberate" because it's used in the previous paragraph.

**Commented [SU6]:** Addition OK?

**Commented [SU7]:** Is there any chance that one of these gunners could have been female? If not, then "gunman" is fine. But if there's a chance it could have been a female, we'll need to use something like "gunner" or "shooter."

**Commented [SU8]:** Hidden by what?

**Commented [SU9]:** Above what? This isn't quite clear.

Those ~~were~~ sermons ~~which~~ would never again rise towards heaven. ~~At~~ least not through that particular lofty ceiling. The Church of Reconciliation lay in abandoned disrepair. Some said the GDR would demolish it. Many prayed secretly that it would somehow survive, ~~and~~ that its bell would one day ring again.

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—Another wall paralleled the street, enveloping an ancient cemetery whose lawns lay dark and moist. Beneath it slept numerous long-deceased Berliners rarely visited by the living. Permits to enter a cemetery so near the border were rarely issued. No flowers lay on the graves of the beloved dead. No bereaved souls ~~prayed~~ ~~mourned~~ near the headstones. No one was allowed to remember.

Commented [SU10]: I revised this because “prayed” was used in the previous paragraph in a different context.

After three in the morning on March 31st, 1978, Anklamer Strauss was mostly deserted. The market on the corner had closed its doors several hours before, and the last bleary-eyed employee had stumbled home. The last street urchin had found refuge from the rain that pelted the uneven cobblestones, and the last stray cat had long since abandoned the alleyways. Several buildings lay dark; a factory half hidden behind a cracked stone wall ~~far to the left,~~ ~~followed by~~ ~~and~~ a war-damaged edifice ~~which that~~ had once held offices but that ~~had not yet been retrofitted~~ ~~by~~ the new government ~~had not yet retrofitted~~. Apartments surrounded and rose above a restaurant, but all windows on one side had been bricked closed.

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Commented [SU11]: Far to the left of what?

Commented [SU12]: Since there doesn't seem to be a sense of movement from the narrator/POV character yet, “followed by” didn't seem necessary.

Commented [SU13]: Where are the apartments in relation to the war-damaged edifice?

Only one streetlight of several ~~which~~ ~~lined~~ this ~~section part~~ of the Strauss was lit, and underneath its ~~hesitant~~ ~~tentative~~ glow stood a telephone booth.

Commented [SU14]: Revised to avoid unnecessary alliteration.

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~~Within another minute~~ The steady drone of rainfall was interrupted by the rapid, irregular smacks of shoes striking wet cobblestones, and a figure materialized. The man wore nothing over his suit to protect him from the weather; no overcoat, no hat, and no umbrella or raincoat. He moved at a stumbling run towards the streetlamp and its phone booth, and when he

Commented [SU15]: Revised because the previous page used “hesitant” to describe some of the bullet holes.

arrived within a few yards of them he ~~seemed to~~ launched ~~ed~~ himself at the door of the booth, throwing all his ~~energies~~ energy into forcing open ~~the~~ narrow bifold glass door. Only when he was safely inside, ~~with~~ and the door shut behind him did he pause to catch his breath.

He couldn't stop his hands from shaking. He looked down at them in the dim light of the streetlamp, the fingers clenched together so that the fine wrinkles along the backs of his hands grew smooth. Age spots expanded as his skin stretched ~~tight~~ across white knuckles. White and cold. He opened his hands, rotated trembling palms upward. One palm carried fresh scrapes from a recent surprise rendezvous with the pavement. The other carried invisible, emotional scars that would never heal.

~~His hand~~ never *should* heal, ~~Not~~ after what he had done with it. ~~---~~

**Commented [SU16]:** "It" is referring to the hand, but in the previous sentence it's the scars that would never heal. So does this work instead?

Rain ~~kept~~ pelting ~~ed~~ the outside of the phone booth, hitting the metal roof and running down in rivulets ~~downward~~ until ~~it~~ work inged its way through joints into the interior.

~~He~~ The man reached for the receiver. He took a deep, steadying breath, inhaling ancient cigar smoke and stale alcohol. He pressed the receiver to his ear. His eyes followed the steel cord from his hand to where it entered the black telephone box.

Rain-soaked clothes clung to his skin. His teeth chattered as he struggled to insert his index finger into the small, plastic hole corresponding with the number he sought.

He began to dial. Each number seemed to take an eternity to go around and come back again. The first number ~~---~~ the second ~~---~~ third ~~---~~

And then he had to wait for an other eternity before the call was answered.

"Berlin Steelworks." The woman's voice sounded young, bored.

"M-Major Johnson, *bitte*. Please ~~---~~"

There was the slightest hesitation, ~~and~~ then the female voice said, “I believe you have the wrong number.”

“*Nein!*” The man’s voice rose along with his panic. “I was given this number by—” ~~—~~ he swallowed ~~—~~ ~~“b”~~ “By a very reliable source. Please, put Major Johnson on the phone.”

There was a long pause, ~~and then the woman’s voice intoned~~, “*Eine moment, bitte.*”

The line went silent, then click, click, clicked as the shivering man in the phone booth waited.

He gripped the receiver and stared at the dark street, watching ~~through the glass~~ as the rain slid down the insides of the glass and pooled on the top of the phone box. A miniature stream had begun to follow the phone cord toward ~~s~~ his hand, only to rethink its trajectory when it reached the low point, turning back on itself and spilling over onto the floor. Cold wind vented the booth and penetrated his thin suit coat, burrowing into his bones.

~~A series of~~ More clicks, then a male voice spoke. “This is Major Johnson.”

Now the man’s mouth felt like cotton. He opened it and tried to speak. At first nothing would come out. Nothing but a whimper, rattling deep down in his throat.

“Major Johnson ~~—~~” ~~“The~~ male voice repeated, and then in German, ever calm, said ~~—~~ “May I help you?”

“*B-bitte . . .*” the caller managed, and the receiver rattled against the side of his head. “I am an ~~—~~ agent for the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung*.” — He was so cold. “The East German Stasi Police. M-my name is” —”

The voice cut him off. “No names, please.”

He swallowed and tried again, this time carefully pronouncing the strange, guttural English syllables he had memorized. “I am an agent for the Chief Intelligence Directorate of the

**Commented [SU17]:** “Rattling” was used two sentences ago. Is there another word here we could use instead, like “shook”?

Deutsche ~~...~~—German Democratic Republic. I have information vital to the GDR ~~—~~ information that ~~..~~— your government will want to have.” He clenched the receiver, rested his forehead on the telephone box. “Please! I have betrayed my country. The MfS is going to arrest me. I ~~—~~I want to defect.”

“Don’t worry.” ~~†~~The voice ~~said, probably trying to sound soothinged~~. “We have help on the way to your location. Someone will be there within the next two minutes. When I say, you are to drop the receiver and exit the phone booth. Wait for the man in a trench coat and hat.”

The caller’s heartbeat was a sledgehammer against his skull where it ~~contacted-touched~~ the sweaty receiver. ~~In panic~~, he reverted to almost incoherent German. “They’re coming. The Stasi is going to find out everything I’ve done!”

Unruffled, the voice ~~intonedsaid~~, “Leave the receiver off the hook and exit the phone booth. Cross the road and approach the man walking around the corner.”

The caller dropped the receiver and fumbled for the door, ~~in-his~~ ~~panic-fear~~ ~~causing him to~~ ~~pushing~~ instead of ~~pulling~~, ~~and he~~ ~~struggleding~~ with it several times before finally bifolding it correctly against the frame and slipping outside. He saw a figure across the street, forty meters or so to his right. The newcomer was dressed in trench coat and hat, and he had his hands shoved into deep pockets. He strode towards the phone booth, his footsteps sounding each time his shoes ~~traversed-crossed~~ pooled rainwater. The figure glanced up, raised a gloved hand, and gestured for the caller to join him.

Relieved, the caller exited the phone booth, stumbled over the curb, and rushed towards the waiting figure.

Halfway across the street he hesitated. Another figure had appeared, walking out of the shadows around the corner of a building not thirty yards to his left. This one was also dressed in

**Commented [SU18]:** Is this supposed to be a pause or a stutter? If a pause, then an em dash (with no spaces on either side) will be needed.

**Commented [SU19]:** Revised because for some reason “soothed” made it sound like the voice was a bit oily.

**Commented [SU20]:** Why did he panic all of a sudden?

**Commented [SU21]:** “In panic” was used a few sentences earlier, so it might be best to go with a different word/phrase here.

an all-weather trench coat and hat, and he carried an umbrella. He, too, began to move towards the caller, and he, too, gestured for the caller to join him.

The newcomers saw each other and hesitated. The caller panicked, looked from one man to the other and back again. He stood uncertainly in the middle of the street, rain pelting his head and shoulders. He heard the sound of an approaching automobile. ~~He looked from one man to the other as he~~ He clutched his suitcoat tight about his body. Rain pummeled him as he then stumbled backward, terrified at the realization of what was happening. Both men approached him. Both men called him by name, gesturinged for him to join him come.

**Commented [SU22]:** I removed this because it was said earlier.

**Commented [SU23]:** Revised to show that at first he was standing still, but now he's moving because of the sudden realization that he's now in extreme danger.

An automobile roared around the corner to the right, spraying rainwater from its tires as they spun towards the terrified man in the middle of the road. Brakes squealed as the vehicle slid to a stop. Before the caller could react, the first man in a trench coat produced a gun and brandished it at the other. Two other men sprang from the automobile and flung themselves at the caller, throwing him off his feet and onto the wet cobblestones. They half dragged him, half hauled him by his jacket and the seat of his pants to the back seat of the car. They forced him inside and threw themselves in after him. Their accomplice with the gun lunged for the front seat and the vehicle roared away, water from the tires threatening shooting toward the man left standing with his umbrella by the side of the road.

**Commented [SU24]:** "Roared" was used at the beginning of the paragraph. Is there another word we could use here or there?

He ~~let out a~~ yelled, ran several yards after the rapidly retreating getaway vehicle, and ~~threw~~ hurled his umbrella at the back bumper. The open umbrella arched through the rain and circled back on its owner, before falling into the gutter and rolling away. The man raised both hands in a universal gesture of frustration and anger at the retreating automobile, ~~and~~ then stared after it until it disappeared from sight.