

Friday, July 20, 1943- Lovino, Axis second lieutenant

The high shrieking wail of an air-raid siren cut through the quiet early-morning air. At 1:00 AM, on Friday morning in Hamburg, Germany, July 1943, the allies were launching their seventh day of barraging the city. British and American planes flew over almost every day, leaving little columns of fire in their wake. The once-grand city had quickly been destroyed, and almost half of its occupants had fled. A base remained, blacked out against the sky, where I sat, mud staining my boots and my black uniform pants. My gun lay on the ground next to me, unused and in the same condition. The notebook that I wrote journal my entries in lay on my lap, open to the previous page. I was thinking, musing about who I thought would win. I knew my thoughts may have been considered treason against the third Reich, but I need somewhere to write down my day-to-day experiences. I do believe that though Germany may be doing well, the Allies are going to win the war. The Americans joining may have tipped the scales forever in their favor. A thunderous boom shook the ground, and echoed in my chest, the tell-tale sign of a drop nearby. Sirens continued to scream, and the lights of a plane cruised overhead, low enough that even in the dark, illuminated only by the distant explosion, I could see the rings on its side, the sign of the British military. It pulled up, missing the building, and was swallowed up by the darkness. Another zipped by, and I stood, brushed off what I could to make myself look more presentable, and turned for the door. Inside, two guards stood, quietly chatting. I nodded, and they nodded back. I left the room, still not comfortable with my new assignment. It was better that I had less time around them so that the reason I had to hide who I was would never be found. I had been christened at my birth, Lovisa, a girl. My parents were both dead before I was 14. My father died in the end of the Great War, and my mother committed suicide a few weeks later. I somehow survived in post-war Germany until the start of the war, when I cut my hair short, and joined the military, my gender unknown. I was a good fighter, so no one really cared, though I knew if I was found out, it would cause some really big problems for me. A radio blared out news of the war in a crackly voice, telling of the continued bombings, and the strong belief that Germany would win the war, aided by her noble allies, Italy, and Japan. I sat down, bored, and waited for the dull booms in the distance to fade.

December 12, 1943 Kiel, Germany

I had just reached Kiel, when I was informed that I would be accompanying a raid on Britain. This would be one of the biggest yet, and would hopefully give Germany a huge footing on which to attack the rest of the country, and then America. At first, I wondered why someone like myself would be sent up into the air, but was informed later by a Colonel that I was to be dropped from the plane, and integrate myself as a spy. That night, I lay sleepless in my bunk, staring up at the ceiling. Often times, officers did not come back from spying missions, though the information they passed on was priceless. I worried that when I went up in the plane, I would never arrive back in Germany. The gray, shadowed walls did nothing to ease my suffering, and soon, they became lighter, signaling day.

December 13, 1943 Kiel, Germany

As I waited for the plane to be prepped, I wrote a quick letter to my estranged brother. Though we had not seen each other in years, I still believed that he had a right to know that I could have been dead. Soon, I was being hustled onto a Messerschmitt BF 110, and watching the ground drop away beneath me. Up in the clouds, everything seemed so peaceful, it was easy to forget there was a war on. I smiled slightly, and looked over to the pilot, who seemed to be staring hard at a spot in the distance. He jerked back suddenly, and urgently yelled into the radio. "Allies ahead!" I looked to the spot he had been staring at, to see a dark smudge of planes in the distance. *There must be over 100 to be able to see them from here.* I thought, and heard the pilot yelling something about how there were probably over 500, and that they looked like they were going to raid Kiel. Then, there was a crunch as a bullet tore through the plane, luckily not hitting anything major. There was a burst of fire back, and all hell broke loose. German and British planes wove in and out of each other, and the radio voices yelled out positions. Flak hissed dangerous arcs around the plane, and a piece struck the tail, leaving the entire plane dragging to

the right. The tilting threw off our navigation, and I could see that we were heading down. I closed my eyes, and prayed that I would make it out alive. I had heard many stories of planes crashing and the entire crew being lost, or captured as POWs. I felt my body slam forward as the plane impacted, then passed out. I woke to heat, as flames licked at the ruined plane. It took me a few seconds to realize that I was no longer in a training simulation, and could easily die if I didn't get out. When I stood, I felt dizzy, no doubt I had hit my head in the crash. The plane had been torn into in the impact, and there was a chunk of metal that had been ripped out of the plane's side. I could get out, if I could stand long enough to do so. I took a hesitant step forward, keeping my hand along the wall to make sure I didn't fall over. The wrenched metal bit deep into my palm, but I continued on, reaching for the little bit of smoky sky I could see. My lungs burned, and my vision was blurred with tears, but when I stepped out onto soft grass, I collapsed forward onto my knees, dragging in breath after breath of only marginally cleaner air. My head was bleeding profusely, I could see it dripping down my face, so I tore a strip of fabric off of the end of my coat and tied it as a makeshift bandage. Somehow still lucid after this, I looked to the sky where I saw a battle still raging. Little puffs of flame erupted where a shell hit, and as a plane flew lower, I could see the star on its wing. My eyes followed its path upward, where it shot at another Messerschmitt, bringing that one down as well. The Americans seemed to be winning this battle, I had only seen one of theirs go down, while I had seen at least four of our bombers crash. The world swam, and I fell backward, seeing another Axis plane go down just before the world went black.

December 14, 1943, Great Britain

I woke to realize that I had not been taken back to Berlin as I had thought, but had instead been dragged to Britain, and now sat in a holding cell. It was completely black, but as soon as I came to this conclusion, I realized that the darkness only came from a blindfold that had been tied around my eyes too tight for me to wriggle it off. My back rested against an unmoving, cold surface, most likely stone, and my legs stretched out in front of me, unbound. I could not tell where I was, or if there was anyone else there. I could not even tell if it was day or night. Once the shock of my position wore off, I began yelling.

"Hallo?" I called out in German, and waited for a response. When none came, I tried again, calling out louder this time. There was a shuffling of feet, then the blindfold was pulled off. I closed my eyes against the light for a second, a hiss of pain escaping my lips, then opened them to see a British soldier standing in front of me, blindfold in hand. He wore an expression not of hatred, but of simply disgust. I knew that the Allied forces believed that what the Reich was doing was dirty and wrong, but that they were obligated to treat us well. I would most likely be either sent to work in a camp in Britain, or be sent overseas to America or Canada. With this conclusion in mind, I swallowed, and waited for him to speak.

"What is your name?" He asked in rough German, and I sullenly looked the other direction. He tried again, sounding angrier this time, now asking for a service number. "What is your service number?" He asked, and again I stayed silent. "Stand" He barked, and I stood quietly, defiance etched in my entire being. I glared him down, unblinking, until he stretched out a hand and struck me hard across the face. I staggered slightly, but stayed upright even as a little trickle of blood dripped down from my split lip. "I will ask you one more time" He said, switching to English, "What is your name" I glared back silently at him before growling through clenched teeth

"Lovino" He smiled a little, and went back into German.

"And what is your age, Lovino?" I again remained silent, glaring but occasionally dropping my eyes. I felt my cheek throb where he had hit it, and I could tell it was bright red. "Lovino, would you like to contact your family, tell them you were captured by the British?" For a second, he seemed nice, but then I saw the meaning behind his smile, that I would have to talk before he would let me. *It's not like it matters anyway.* I thought, remembering the letter I had sent to my brother. There wasn't really anyone else to contact.

“No” I muttered, my voice dark. His smile lost a little bit of its shine, and he tried again.

“Are you absolutely certain?” He asked, still helpful. “After this, there won’t be many nice people to help you” I still shook my head, and he sighed slightly. “Let’s go” He ordered, his voice all business now. My hands were tied tightly behind my back with rope, and the blindfold was once again placed over my eyes. He led me away, and sat me down in what soon seemed to be a car seat, because soon I was moving, the sensation strange. I could feel myself moving, but could not see where I was, and could not even tell if it was night or day. I started by recording which turn we took, but soon became disorientated, and lost track. Then, I was pulled up again, and led away from the car. When the blindfold was untied, I was standing in front of a tall manor house. For a second, I was confused. *I thought I was a prisoner*, I thought, however once I was inside, I noticed something else. There was a German SS officer on all fours, scrubbing the floor, with a British officer casually holding his foot down on the man’s back, making the painful and humiliating process that much harder. I gulped and looked back up at the building. The officer next to me seemed to notice the sudden look of fear in my eyes, and smiled, pushing me forward by my bound elbow, away from the sight in the entrance hall, leading me deeper into what I was sure was nothing less than a house of horrors. I kept my eyes up, but did not make contact with anyone else in the hall, neither prisoner nor guard. Everything I saw could be the deciding factor in whether I lived or died in the future. From what I could see, the facility I had been taken to was specifically designed to break German soldiers. Whether or not this was supported by the British government was questionable, but I supposed this information could help me in the future.

“Here” The officer said, and motioned for me to enter a room that he held the door of. I stepped in hesitantly, and jumped a little when the door slammed shut behind me. The room was clean, unsurprisingly, and had a table in the center, with cabinets along the walls. Nothing else was present in the room, nor were there any other people. A door opened suddenly behind me, making me jump again, and a man with a white coat walked in. He ignored me for a second, and busied himself with checking something in the drawers.

“What is your name?” He asked, still facing away from me. I stayed silent, but this elicited no reaction from him. “I’ll repeat myself, what is your name?” He asked, still facing away. By now, I assumed he was not ruffling through the drawers, as the noise had stopped, but was facing away from me for a reason. I wondered why he did not want to show me his face. “Hello?” He asked, still directed at me. “Well, since you seem to be mute, I suppose we’ll have to make a name for you.” He mimed thinking for a second, then gasped as if a genius idea had come to him. “How about Joseph Stalin?” He asked, his voice mocking. “I heard you two get along well” He looked over his shoulder and smiled at me, and I got my first look at his face. I was expecting some sort of disfiguration, however, he looked perfectly normal, short black hair, gray-green eyes, and glasses. The normality of his appearance, however, was not enough to deter me from my hatred of the insult he had just thrown at me, and every other German person alive. I clenched my jaw, and tried to keep from yelling back at him. Instead, I simply turned my head away, and stared at the ground angrily. “Oh well, it was worth a shot, Stalin” He smiled at the nickname, seemingly impressed with his own genius. “Now, onto business. First off, before anything can start, we have to make sure you don’t have any previous injuries, you know, legal stuff and all that. All useless rubbish if you ask me, but formalities are formalities” He walked towards me slowly, and I was surprised to realize that he was actually shorter than me, by about 4 centimeters. He reached for the front of my uniform, and unbuttoned it, revealing the wrapped fabric around my chest. He processed the information, then looked up at me, I met his eyes for the first time, defiance shining out of blue orbs, without a hint of shame. He turned and left the room without a word, leaving me alone again. I stood awkwardly, unsure of whether this discovery would make my time here any more or less pleasant. The door was re-opened, and the guard who had escorted me to the room entered. He was very obviously trying to look anywhere but at me, and specifically at the front of my uniform.

"Come with me" He said, and led me back to an empty cell. There, he untied the rope around my arms, and locked the door. There were no windows, and after all the bright sunlight, my eyes could not see far in front of me in the near blackness. My arms tingled as I held them in front of me, trying to get the blood flow back. Once the tingling had subsided, I re-buttoned my uniform as best I could, and curled up on the ground, trying to sleep while they let me. My first day of captivity was over, with an indefinite number to come.

December 15, 1943, the London Cage: No 8. Kensington Palace Gardens

My first thought when I woke up was to wonder why I was so cold. *Had I fallen out of bed, and was now lying on the floor in the barracks?* I opened my eyes, and found that I was as incorrect as I could have been. I was met with darkness, but it was easier to see now, and I could tell just barely where the door was. My joints popped slightly as I moved to sit up, and I knew that the night of cold stone floor for a bed had made my entire body stiff. My arms ached as I pulled them in front of me, no doubt the muscles had cramped, and now I was left without most of my strength. I pushed myself up, so that I sat against the wall, instead of laying down, though even that took a tremendous effort. As soon as I had reached this position, the door was opened, and the light streaming in blinded me for a second. Arms pulled me so that I stood, and then re-bounded my arms, marching me out of the cell once again. I was led back to the same room as before, but now people stood inside. The man who had found out my identity yesterday, and another, who had a monocle in his right eye. Both were whispering softly until the guard cleared his throat to announce his presence. Both looked over to me, and I met their gaze confidently.

"You can leave, now" The one with the monocle said, and the guard left the room, locking the door behind him. "You're sure, right?" He continued, and turned to the man with glasses.

"Yes, I'm sure. He, or should I say, she-" The man was cut off by the other, who turned towards me carefully.

"Lovino, would you like to tell us your true name?" He asked, and I stayed silent, yet again. "It might save you from some humiliation. I know my subordinate here likes to give the quiet ones nicknames." He turned towards the man with glasses. "What did you decide to call her?" He asked, and the man giggled madly a little, then replied.

"Well, you see, I even surprised myself a little with my genius on this one. I called him, oh, sorry, her, Joseph Stalin, you know, because they're such good friends" He giggled a little, and wiped the tears out of his eyes. He grinned gleefully, oblivious to the monocled man's annoyance.

"Lovino, I will repeat, that you could simply tell us your name. It is, in fact, in the Geneva Convention to ask a soldier for their name. And since you've been using an alias in Germany, it wouldn't matter anyway, because we wouldn't be able to trace you." He pointed out, and I saw red before my eyes in rage.

"Don't you even mention the Geneva Convention!" I yelled, which seemed to shock both of them. "This place is in no way in compliance with those guidelines, from the way I see it now, so don't go quoting it around me like you are the good guys!" I was panting by the end of my rant, angered, but also stressed to the breaking point. All of this skirting around me, and being unable to tell how horrible my life was going to be was wearing on my sanity. There was some hurried whispering on the other end of the room, and the two men looked at me carefully.

"Lovino, do you want to leave?" The man with the monocle asked, and I looked up, confused.

"Of course. Who wouldn't?" I asked, surprised that an interrogator would ask such a stupid question.

"What would you do to leave?" The other asked, and I was caught off guard by the question.

"Ah, well" I stopped myself, and locked my jaw, determined that no matter what happened, I would not betray my country. I may not have been as loyal to Hitler and the Reich as some, but I was still loyal to Germany.

“Okay, Lovino, I see your limits” The man with the monocle said, and motioned for the other man to leave. Once I was left alone with him, he quickly turned on me. “You know, it would be so easy to dispose of you, especially if you don’t talk.” His voice was dangerously low and quiet, and filled with no remorse or guilt for ending my life and hiding the evidence “I have no use for disobedient prisoners, and you know you’re shaping up to be?” He asked, his face still completely straight and serious. “I’m sure that with a smart mind like yours, you’re wondering if the British government approves of what is going on here.” He paused, as if expecting me to say something, then continued. “Well, I can assure you that everything that happens here is completely legal. Don’t go trying to press for a trial, because no matter what you do, you will always lose.” He ended the sentence threateningly, and gave me a light shove away. The door opened, and a guard walked in, different this time. I was led away, with the man watching me go, smiling slightly to himself. When I was out of sight, the guard turned to me, and smacked me hard across the cheek with the back of his hand. It left a stinging red mark, and I flinched away as his hand came up again, and again landed the same blow. He pulled me by my arm, down to the ground, and forced me to kneel, with my hands still bound and raised above my head. From there, he pulled out a long wooden stick, and landed a blow to my head. Pain bloomed, and my ears rung from the impact, but no blood had been spilled. There was another blow, this time closer to my face, and a cut appeared over my eye, close enough that when I blinked, some of the blood made a little rivulet over my eyelid. My knees shook, but I refused to move, fall, or lower my arms. Again, I was hit, and the stick made bruises on more tough skin, while splitting thinner layers. My nose broke after a few hits, and now the blood running down my face began to drip onto the floor steadily. The man finally stopped, and dragged me up so that I stood dizzily, waiting for more pain to come. I was led down a flight of stairs, though my eyesight was unreliable from the many cuts and bruises that marred my skin. I was sat in a chair, and a bucket of cold water splashed over me. I shook my head to free the droplets from my eyes, and gasped from the sudden shock. The room I was in was colder than upstairs, and being sopping wet only made me feel it more.

The man dragged me to my feet with a gruff “Get up” and marched me from the room. Blood and water dripped down my face, making me constantly blink my eyes, and my soaked uniform was only aiding in keeping the cold in. The man moved behind me to untie my arms, and handed me a rag. He shoved my shoulders down, so that I was kneeling in front of a staircase, and placed his boot in between my shoulder blades, and pushed down, forcing me to bend my back. Grudgingly, I began to work, every little movement causing pain in my stiff muscles. The boot on my back was unforgiving, forcing me to not only hold up my own weight with one arm, but the weight of his force, as well. My arm began to shake, and I stopped working and set my other arm down, to get a little bit of the pressure off of my arm and give it a rest. The officer removed his foot, and hit me hard between my shoulder blades with the cudgel. As soon as I moved back to working, he placed his foot on my back again. Every time I stopped to rest, even for a second, he would hit me again with the bat. I moved tediously up the stairs, every hour being more and more painful, until, finally, the soldier removed his foot, pulled to my feet, and grunted;

“That’s enough” I dropped the rag in relief, and followed him as he led me back to the cell. I lay gratefully down, easing the pain in my back as best I could against the cold floor. I assumed that because the sun was going down as I had walked in the corridor that I had been working all day. Mentally, and physically, I was exhausted. There was a constant stress in the air, almost to the breaking point, and it tired anyone out, no matter how strong their resolve was. I was closing my eyes, when there was a sharp rapping on the door. I jerked back to awareness, blinking blearily. There was silence, and I laid my head back down to sleep. There was another rapping, and now the door was opened, making sure that I was awake. Then it was closed again. This same process was repeated every fifteen minutes throughout the night. Every time, I became less and less surprised, until I began to anticipate the knocking. Finally, it stopped, and a guard entered the room.

“Follow” He said, and waited for me.

December 16, 1943

When I stood, there was a moment of intense dizziness, then I crumpled to the floor. There I lay, quiet, waiting for the pain of disobedience. As I sat up, I saw that the guard had not moved, but was looking at me with disapproval. "Get up" he commanded, and I struggled to get back to my feet. When I was standing, he walked swiftly out the door, prompting me to follow him. I was led back to a different, but still blank room, in which the same man who insisted upon calling me "Stalin" sat, behind a cleared desk. As I was pushed into a chair, he folded his hands together, and looked at me.

"Hey there, pretty face" He said, his voice singsong. "So, first off, I wanted to know if you were hungry" He placed a candy bar on the desk, and smirked happily. He watched as my eyes flicked down towards it, then back up. I swallowed, and blinked a couple of times. I was, in fact, very hungry. "But first, I want to know what to call you, 'pretty face' just doesn't seem to suit you in that uniform, and I am already tiring of calling you 'Stalin'" he met my eyes for a second, and I was pulled into the green orbs. My jaw remained clenched, however tempting the promise of food was. "Anyway, since you seem to still be silent, I guess I'll just have to force it out of you" He moved his hand a little to the side, then hit me hard across the face, just below my cheekbone. My head snapped to the side with the force, but I remained in the chair. I could feel the mark throb, and fresh blood well as the slap aggravated the cuts from the day before. I turned my head back to face him, but kept my eyes averted to the ground. *After only two days, I'm already giving in*, I thought, but continued to look away from him. I heard the chair scrape across the floor as he stood to leave, then a strong grip on my arm as I, as well was pulled from my chair. A strip of cloth was tied around my eyes, and my hands were handcuffed together behind my back. A guard pushed me down so that I was in a crouched position, my weight back on my heels, and my legs bent forward at a 90 degree angle. In the first few minutes, I felt nothing, but soon afterward, my ankles, calves, and thighs began to ache. The stress position put all of the force onto muscles that had not been trained for combat. I began to sweat, and clenched my jaw to keep from crying out.

"If you just told me your name, I could let you stand" I heard the man with glasses say, and felt a light hand on top of my head. In my head, memories surfaced, battle plans, attacks. All things I had been trained to push to the back of my mind, so that, if I was ever caught, I would be able to bury them under other emotions. I felt my jaw begin to move, forming words, but caught myself, changing their subject to something I knew I could bury them under.

"Mein brüder!" I yelled, and heard the intake of breath above me. "Mein brüder, Lutz! Hilfst mir!" I called, reverting back German.

"Who?" I heard him ask, and couldn't stop myself.

"Mein brüder. Lutz! Ich leibe dich! Hilfst mir!" The man grasped my elbows, and pulled me up to standing, pushing me back into the chair.

"Tell me more" He said, and I forced myself to talk, knowing that if I didn't say something, I might let valuable information slip.

"M-My brüder, brother, Lutz" I said, voice shaky. "We grew up together on the streets, but I haven't seen him for years. He has a wife, now, I would presume. But he doesn't fight in the war" The blindfold was removed from my eyes, and I was met with the smiling face of the man with glasses.

"That's nice" He said, his voice warm like we were friends catching up. "And would you tell me your name, as you seem so willing to divulge your brothers" He continued. *I've told him so much already*, I thought.

"Lovisa" I muttered, ashamed that my name was going to be used by this man, in a place like this.

"Thank you, Lovisa" The man said, and left the room. I sat silently, waiting to be taken back to my cell, or tortured once more, but he returned, holding a file folder of papers. "Tomorrow, you are going to be sent to The United States, to stay indefinitely in a POW camp there" He looked up at me, and waited for a response. "You'll stay here tonight, but your POW status has been renewed. If you

would like, you may contact your brother. However, you are not allowed to ever speak of this place, to anyone ever." He unbound my hands, and I was led through the hallways to a different wing of the house. When I left the room, I could hear him muttering to himself, and caught the words "No valuable information". I was left in a small room, not much unlike the military barracks back in Germany. I lay down on one of the many beds, shocked, and a little disbelieving that I would be leaving this hell tomorrow. Of course, I couldn't be sure if going to America would be any different, but anything could have been better than this. The sun was going down on my third day in British hands, and tomorrow would be my first on American. I closed my eyes, and for the first time in three days, did not worry about waking up dead the next morning.

December 17, 1943

I woke alone, still locked in the small room. The sun was barely peeking out from the horizon, and I could see the beautiful London Street in the foggy haze of early morning. *It really is beautiful*, I thought. *Why am I fighting in a war to destroy these people's lives?* I asked myself, and put my head in my hands. I started to sob quietly, but quickly stopped, fearing that someone would notice the tear tracks. I sat in silence for an unknown amount of time, before the door opened.

"Please follow me" A guard said, and led me out to the front of the house. As I left, I turned to catch a last glance, and saw the man with the monocle staring out of one of the windows, scrutinizing me. I quickly whipped my head away, and followed the guard to a car waiting outside. Once the door was closed, the car sped off, south towards the British channel. As relieved as I was to be leaving Britain, there was still a nagging thought at the back of my mind.

"What if the boat we're on gets sunk?" I asked, and the driver paused for a second before answering.

"Well, then that's your problem, isn't it?" He said, not assuaging my fears at all. I looked out the window nervously, suddenly fearing for my safety during the journey. The rest of the drive was spent in silence, until we stopped, and the door was opened. I was rushed onto a ship which I never even managed to get the name of. Here, other prisoners of war, both German and Italian were waiting as well. I looked around the faces, and saw that few looked as worse for wear as I did. I made my way to the back of the space, quietly leaning against a wall. Another Wehrmacht soldier approached me, and it took me a second to remember him.

"Erich?" I asked, and he nodded. "They got you, too, huh?" I continued, in German, and he smiled wryly and nodded again. He leaned against the wall next to me, and I turned to look at him.

"Your face" He said, and gestured to the still-fresh cuts and bruises that littered my face, head, and even my arms. I opened my mouth to speak, but thought better of it when I remembered the man's warning.

"They'll heal" I said, and turned my face away, indicating that the conversation was over. The boat had started moving by now, cutting smoothly through the calm waters. I looked around at the others, and started to recognize a face here, a face there, mostly people I had either trained with, or seen during duty. Erich was the only person whom I knew personally, and I knew none of the Italian troops. However, making friends was a thought that crossed my mind, as I was almost certain that when we were going to be divided up among the many camps in the US, we would not be placed into the same one.

"Did they torture you?" Erich asked in a soft voice, almost hesitant. I had never seen Erich act this way in all the years that I had known him. I considered the meaning my answers could have, then asked myself why I was defending my captors.

"Yes" I replied, quiet at first, but then I repeated it louder. "Yes, I was" I averted my eyes, ashamed, and waited for his answer.

"I thought so" He said, and looked away. "Your real name isn't Lovino, is it?" He asked, and I was a little startled by the out-of-the-blue question.

"I, well, um" I started to say, but he stopped me.

"Wait. I don't care what it is, but I'll keep your secret." He said, and held up his hand. "I just want to know. Okay?" He smiled at me, and I smiled back.

"You're right" I said and took a breath before continuing. "My name is Lovisa. I'm not actually a guy either" I blushed slightly, and took a step back.

"You," He started, "enrolled in the military anyway, knowing that if you were found, it could mean serious punishment?" He asked, trying to clarify my statement.

"I guess so" I respond, looking up at his eyes to try to get a hint of his emotions.

"You're probably braver than half of the guys on this ship. You deserve to have your secret kept" He said, a hint of admiration showing in his light gray eyes. He pushed himself off the wall, and started a conversation with another soldier.

"Thanks" I muttered, and smiled a little.

There was a crunch of metal tearing through metal, and I realized that my biggest fear was coming to pass. A few seconds after the first explosion, there was a second, presumably the engines, which tore the ship apart. I hit my head hard, and blacked out.

My eyes opened to water, and it took me a few seconds to realize that I was floating downward from the wreckage, and that there was a piece of metal in my leg causing my descent. I immediately struck out towards the surface, dragging myself agonizingly slowly towards the light. My head broke the surface just barely enough that I could get another breath before I fell back under again. I pushed myself back up again, and reached for a piece of wood which had remained above the water. Clinging to this, I could reorient myself. The wreckage of the ship was slipping beneath the black waves, and a U-boat had surfaced next to it. I swam as fast as I could towards the silver shape, and called for help as loud as my sea-choked lungs would allow. Finally, someone noticed me, and I was helped on board. Shivering from the frigid water, I was escorted down to the captain, who sat me down in a chair across from him, and began to ask me questions.

"What's your name, soldier" He asked first, to which I easily replied

"Lovino Edelstein, sir"

"Welcome back to Germany, Lovino" He said grimly, and sent me out. The crew were amazed as I told them my story from the battlefield to the ocean, and pieced together a dry uniform that I was no longer wearing my soaked, bloodstained one. I took a roll of bandages and settled myself on the floor in the barrack room, not wanting to intrude on other people's space. I pulled the piece of metal out, thankful that it had not fractured the bone, and was smooth enough that it did not catch on the skin. I tied the bandages as tight as I could around my leg, hoping that it would be enough to stop the bleeding. *Why am I fighting this war?* I asked myself once again, and sighed, resting my head on my uninjured knee. Slowly, my breathing evened out, and I fell asleep.

December 24, 1943

Never before has Germany looked so beautiful. Even in its half-destroyed state, it is still home to me, and I felt nothing but joy as I stepped out onto land. The past couple of weeks had been an exhausting crash-course in how to operate and behave on a U-boat, and it was a relief to finally be back to the life I was used to. I had radioed my brother a couple of nights back, and he stood, waiting, smiling like always used to.

"Lovisa, welcome back" He whispered in my ear, and I wrapped him in a tight embrace. Nothing and no one else around us mattered at the moment, I no longer cared about keeping up appearances, and I cried quietly into his shoulder.

"Thank you for coming" I muttered, and he squeezed me tighter. When we disengaged, he smiled slightly, then waved as I walked away.

"Goodbye" He called, and I waved back. I turned, and the captain stood behind me, holding a creamy envelope.

“You’ll be called back to active duty, I suppose” He said, and handed me the paper. “Right now we need all the soldiers we can get” He turned around, back towards the ship, leaving me alone. I looked down at the envelope, and sighed. I had known that when I arrived back in Germany, I would be called right back, but a part of me wanted to simply stay here, be like my brother and contribute in some other way. I tucked the envelope into my jacket, and pulled my cap down over my eyes. All of my previous belongings, including my war diary were still at the base, and I needed all of them, as well as a place to stay. That was, assuming that the building was still standing.

“Lovino, I thought you were dead” My commander said, as I stood in his office.

“I’m sorry sir, I’ll try harder next time” I joked, while still managing to keep a straight face. He laughed, and dismissed me, saying that I would be back on duty the next day. I smiled back at him, but as soon as I reached my room, my smile disappeared. *The next day?* I asked myself. *Maybe I shouldn’t fight in this war at all.* I told myself, and flipped open to a new page in the war diary. Here, I started a new note. *To any whom it may concern:* I titled it, and began to write underneath it. *For me, fighting has always been a part of my life, first, fighting for survival, then fighting for my country. Recently, I have begun fighting with myself. I hope that while Germany can win the war, we can do it in way unlike how we are fighting now. I have seen too much bloodshed to think that either side is good. Right now, I would rather be dead than fighting in this god-forsaken war.* I finished it, tore it out, and placed it on the desk, where anyone could read it. Next, I removed a long coil of rope from the chest in my room, and tied it around one of the beams in the ceiling. Taking a chair and scooting it under, I tied the rope tightly around my own neck. I took a breath and kicked the chair way, feeling the rope constrict tighter, cutting off air from my lungs. *Brother, I’m sorry.* I thought, then saw black.