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First printing of Living Books edition March 2002.

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ISBN 0-8423-4293-1

Printed in the United States of America

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6 5 4 3 2 1

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Interlude of Isolation

East Berlin

What did it actually feel like, she wondered, that rough, thick vertical gray slab of stone and cement that so deeply represented life in this city and stood as the symbol of Europe's division?

To her it had always been. It had existed right there, less than two kilometers from her home, every day of her young life.

Familiarity notwithstanding, however, *Die Mauer* yet remained to the impressionable eyes pausing a moment to behold it a compelling yet confusing enigma. Its proximity drew her in a way she could not understand, as a slumbering evil presence, awaiting some future moment of wakefulness.

Her parents told her often of the summer days when it had been built, when soldiers, dogs, and tanks patrolled every inch of the border, when escape attempts had been a monthly, sometimes a weekly or even a daily occurrence, and when many had been killed.

She had also heard the numerous stories of her father's own involvement. Only eighteen years had passed. Yet for her, those were events of another era, another lifetime. She had grown up with the Wall and had known nothing else.

Most Berliners had managed to accustom themselves to the silent symbol of separation during the interlude since. Being whose daughter she was, however, she had also grown up with the conviction constantly reinforced that everything that could be done *must* be done to help people from this side get to the other. Her father was a leader in the underground network, and her family, and those like them, would never get used to the barrier. In what ways lay open to them, they would always, even if it cost their lives, resist the tyranny that Communism had imposed upon their countrymen. So at least said her father.

Between deserted buildings of Markgrafenstraße she continued to stare down the two empty blocks at the somber stone

barrier, whose height was strung with coiled and deadly barbed wire. Partially visible on her right stood one of the hundreds of guard towers, occupied by soldiers of her own race who now took their orders from Moscow.

An eerie feeling swept suddenly through her, as if foreshadowing a day when the sleeping gray serpent would wake, and when her destiny *would* take her closer to the Wall than she dared walk today.

For this moment, however, she could only gaze from a distance and wonder what it all meant.

With an unconscious shiver, Lisel Lamprecht jerked her head back in the direction she had been bound, and continued her way along Leipzigerstraße with the package that had been the object of her errand. She continued occasionally to glance at the Wall down the side streets she passed, for its direction paralleled hers for another short while, before she veered left on Gertraudenstraße.

But though she knew it not, events were approaching that would alter her outlook about everything and would eventually bring her—as something within her subconscious had just sensed—face-to-face with the Wall. When that day arrived, she *would* press her hand against the cold stone, challenging its presence. Perhaps she would even see the other side like those her father and mother now helped.

For today, however, she was but one German teenager caught up in the silent clash over ideology that overarched world events. She was of the *next* generation, those who had been taught of but did not remember the great war. Therefore she could not quite grasp the complexities and implications of the very different kind of conflict that had been being waged throughout the world ever since.

Though history is rarely neat, nor the cleavages into which events order themselves so tidy as pundits later organize them, that forty-five-year conflict in the latter half of the twentieth century known incongruously as the *Cold War* divided itself roughly into two uneven segments surrounding the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1963.

This most dangerous war the world had ever seen produced but a handful of casualties, and those mostly accidental. Yet for

nearly half a century the globe of humankind had stood poised on the brink of wholesale destruction the likes of which could only be imagined by the most pessimistic of doomsday prognosticators.

Prior to the Cuban missile crisis of 1961 and the shattering events on the streets of Dallas in November of 1963, much of the steadily mounting East-West tension was played out on the visible world stage, where diplomatic bravado and technological prowess were the criteria used to judge superiority. The late forties, fifties, and early sixties acted as a prelude, during which both sides postured and bluffed and threatened, developed and tested their bombs, increased their stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and then raced for the conquest of space. The Soviets pushed out their borders, and the Americans sought to eradicate Communism from their land.

Nineteen sixty-three was the year Lisel would always consider significant as that of her birth. The rest of the world would remember 1963 as the year when everything changed.

The two men who had squared off eyeball to eyeball over Cuba, and who had come to symbolize the essence of the new age of conflict, were gone—Kennedy cut down by an assassin's bullet; Khrushchev shortly thereafter ousted from power.

As Lisel grew from infancy into childhood, the world's attention turned elsewhere, to Southeast Asia, whose faraway jungles began to witness a cold war that was suddenly heating up. It was a localized clash between democracy and communism that, if the superpowers did not keep it contained, could escalate into World War III.

It was a time of change. The world was being reshaped at many levels and in a host of diverse ways.

The Beatles forever revolutionized pop music, Vietnam permanently mutated the American perception of war, and Watergate cynically altered the political climate of Washington. But the Cold War went on, its most serious battles being waged far from the public spotlight.

Lisel matured and began to cast her young gaze abroad upon her world. She lived in an environment of tension and danger. Subtleties of the conflict between Moscow and Washington increased. No longer did presidents and premiers yell and

threaten. Détente replaced ultimatum, test bans replaced nuclear detonations, and congenial words masked hidden motives.

Indeed, the sixties and seventies had transfigured everything about how people looked at their world. But silently the behind-the-curtain theater of the Cold War continued unaffected by it all.

Foot soldiers of the conflict took over from world leaders—men and women like Lisel's own parents, those whom in most parts of the world would have been considered an unremarkable citizenry. It was now these who waged an invisible war for that most basic of human rights and desires—that commodity known as liberty. Much of the Cold War turned silent and sinister, its battles fought in ones and twos, in neighborhoods and candlelit basements, from behind drawn curtains, along deserted byways, and in lonely prison cells, hidden from the public eye.

And now, during her sixteenth year, while the world anxiously watched the heated chess game playing itself out between Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and President Jimmy Carter of the United States, this silent, unseen drama continued unaffected. The eyes of the world were riveted upon Tehran, yet it was still the Cold War between democracy and communism that remained the global dividing matrix between good and evil, between autonomy and servility—aligning nations, creating adversaries, separating families, and artificially disrupting long-established ethnic unities.

At the heart of this focal center still sat the divided nation of Germany, formerly the cause now the victim of events it could no longer control. As the superpowers played out their impersonal maneuvers on the game board of the world, nowhere did a rising postwar generation feel more helpless and ill-used by their gambits than in the figuratively and actually divided capital of Berlin.

It was a land where the Cold War made enemies of friends, family, and neighbors, where *Stasi* informants lurked everywhere, where KGB infiltrations had been effected at every level of life, and where treachery loomed always nearby. Desiring freedom too greatly, or helping others who did, was a lethal

business. The blood that was often spilled in consequence, and the tears of those left behind, was all too real.

The global standoff continued year after year, nowhere symbolized more visibly than at the Friedrichstraße border crossing known as Checkpoint Charlie, not far from the shop out of which Lisel had recently come.

All the while, the most recognizable symbol of this unseen drama remained the gray, malevolent, unbreakable, unscalable barricade slicing its way through the center of Berlin, separating a nation . . . dividing a world.

Yet if it was an era producing treachery, it also gave rise to bravery. For seasons of danger produce heroes as well as martyrs. Of the courage and selflessness of both, the world seldom hears. From time to time, however, individual stories become known . . . and those who hear them are changed forever after.

The energetic young East Berliner quickened her stride once the Wall was at her back, walked for another ten minutes through a drab neighborhood, then turned from the street along the uneven concrete of a broken walkway, and was soon entering her home.



Sisters of Danger

Do you have the package, Lisel?"

"Yes, Papa," she answered.

"No trouble?"

"None, Papa."

"Good," replied her father, taking the small parcel. He unwrapped the paper hastily and began examining the book his daughter had apparently just bought. He did not pause long enough on any page to read, however, for he was uninterested in the content intended by the author. Rather he now leafed through the volume in order to piece together a cryptic communiqué from his shopkeeping contact.

Within five minutes he satisfied himself that he had thoroughly deciphered the message.

"We must bring an important man into Berlin next week," he announced to wife and daughter as he rose from the chair where he had been sitting intently studying the book.

"How, Hermann?" asked Frau Lamprecht.

"The friend of my cousin will pass him off to us in the wood south of the city," he replied.

"Can I go with you, Papa?" asked Lisel.

The big man did not answer immediately. "Hmm . . . perhaps it might be time," he mused at length.

"May I visit Girdel?"

"There will be no occasion, Lisel."

"I have not seen her for a year."

"When we are about the business of the network, the safety of those who place themselves in our hands must be our only thought."

Even as he spoke the words, Hermann's thoughts trailed back to a time long past. It had not then been his own daughter's safety he had been thinking about, but that of another.

So many memories, so many individuals—it all seemed from another lifetime. She now occupying his thoughts had been an important part of this work he was engaged in. She was one of its founders and most loyal members. She had finally used her own *Network of the Rose* to flee herself.

Hermann smiled at the thought of the successful escape to freedom through the cemetery.

Karin had tried so strenuously to convince him to accompany them. Now he wished he had confided in her the reason he had had to remain behind—that he was planning to be married soon. But at the time he thought the less any of them knew about one another the better.

He had been a different man back then. Smiles and tender thoughts had not been part of his nature. Having a wife and daughter had tempered his gruff exterior. He wished he could see Karin again, though he knew that was not her real name. He wished she could see him, now that he too was on intimate terms with the Master whom she had always served.

Hermann sighed. But he had not laid eyes on his former comrade since that day, though occasionally there were reports. He only prayed his own Lisel might become so brave a woman.

In the brief seconds while Hermann reflected on his former associations and what they had been through together, his daughter found herself likewise remembering the first day she had seen her friend Girdel.

The two girls could not have been more than four or five at the time, far too young to possess the slightest inkling of the import of the meeting that had brought their fathers and several others of like commitment together. While the men of God prayed and plotted together, Lisel and Girdel had played in the innocence of childhood.

Ever after, though the occasions of visits were not many—for the mutual work of their fathers was necessarily a clandestine one—they remained friends and grew as sisters, not realizing to what an extent theirs was a sisterhood of danger.

Neither were they aware of the parental discussions concerning how much to include growing boys and girls such as these in the secretive activities that bound them together. Like the baron, whom none had known but most in this region had heard of, the faithful men and women of the network desired that their convictions outlive their own brief mortal years. Thus they prayed to be able to inculcate in their offspring a vision of helping the larger family of God's people, and they necessarily sought opportunities to teach them such work firsthand. But for the fathers and mothers in this particular part of the world, such was a dangerous legacy to pass on to their sons and daughters, and they did so with great soul-searching and prayer.

Seeds must be planted. Some must die in order that others might bear hundredfold fruit.

Girdel, a year older, had now been active in her own father's affairs for some time. But Hermann, more cautious—brave enough yet newer to the life of intimate faith than Girdel's father—had been reluctant to allow Lisel to participate quite so fully with him. Today's thoughts of Karin, however, suddenly made him aware how quickly his daughter's womanhood was approaching and that he could not prevent its coming.

He sighed, then took Lisel's hand and led her out of the kitchen and to the worn couch, where he motioned for her to sit down beside him. She did so. They remained several moments in silence.