

**NS-Jubel dritte
Stufe (National
Socialist
jubilation,
third stage)**

“Highest volume
of prearranged
applause at Nazi
Party meetings.”

34 The librarian witnesses the burning

Berlin, 10 May 1933

*“Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende
Menschen (Where they burn books, they will also ultimately
burn people).”* – German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, 1820–21

The room offers sanctuary, holding her while adrenaline
palsies her limbs. At the back of her eyes flames flare.

Singed skin, the reek of burning, as if bodily doused.
Images repeat – spiralling smoke, black and acrid,

soldiers’ mouths pulled out of shape, their arms arcing
to lob handfuls of hate. Thousands of flimsy pages ascend

on updrafts like souls departing. Her arms reach,
desperate to catch charred paper. Momentary heat,

text lit like a negative, a few seconds straining to decipher
the script before pages collapse to dust in her hand.

*

All day charred odour clings to hair, clothes. All day
griefs gather, tugging hem, hand. All day – the relentless

rain of once-were-words, falling like black snow.
The city’s loss reverberates, a dirge repeated.

A city without a library, a library without books? And
she – guardian. So visceral the memories – thick pages,

the must of old volumes. She grieves for the sheer
physicality of books – bodies you can hold in your

hand. Mourns the loss of the sparks within – tolerance,
peace between people, ideas worth killing for.

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A blanketing dark falls at last. She collapses, drifts, dreams
she is peering through the window. Wind stirs ash into

billows; beauty in the sweep and stoop of floating cinders.
She watches, incredulous. Ideas rise from the ruins,

liberated from the bodies of books, the chastity of words.
Released from the confinement of shelves, stacks, at large

in the world. People rush into the street with faces
upturned. Some who have never known ideas reach and

stretch, feel their touch. Others come running to find
renewal in words. A democracy of words, for all to read.

Words from
the Nazi
lexicon Berlin,
10 May 1933

***Bücherver-
brennung (Book
Burning)***

“On a swastika-
bedecked
rostrum, on
the Unter den
Linden, a wide
tree-lined street
running past the
University and
the State Opera
House, Goebbels
proclaims:

*The age of
extreme Jewish
intellectualism
has now ended.”*

The book he
then threw on
the fire was
the first of
thousands. As
each name was
mentioned “the
crowd booed
and hissed.”

40 Felix's patient gives a testimonial
Berlin, 1935

My doctors give up on me; no treatment works
and they advise a quiet life. But a friend mentions

Dr Kersten's special massage and I consult him,
full fee-paying, like everybody else. Apparently

he treats only those capable of a total cure.
He takes me on, gives me hope, says I will

resume an active life. I make steady progress
when dear Rudi, manager for twenty years, is fired!

They say it's the expense, but I think it is anti-
Semitism – he is the only supervisor they sack.

Bigotry abounds in these awful blighted days.
The Nazis hate us, want to grind us underfoot!

Decree after decree about work, school, where
we can go, what we can do. Holding gravest fears,

we know we have to get away. Luckily we have
savings, not destitute like others. I could not continue

treatment if not for Dr K's generosity. Not strong
enough to travel yet but our aim is emigration.

Ever-gallant Dr K assures me his many wealthy
patients underwrite those in need, like us.

1 April 1935
The Jehovah's
Witnesses
are banned
throughout
Germany as they
refuse to swear
allegiance to the
Nazi state and to
Hitler as leader.

Nazi use of
technology

New developments
in microphone
technology now
enable those who
attend the Nazi
Party Rallies to hear
every single one of
Hitler's emotionally-
charged,
manipulative words.

41 Himmler gloats

10 February 1938, Berlin

Today the Reichstag passed
the *Gestapo Law*. Now we

have the means we have long
sought to patrol the populace,

protect the Führer and eliminate
those inimical to his great work.

We have deprived the scum
of redress, the vermin of means

of appeal – but tell me, where
on earth is the harm in that?

Words from
the Nazi
lexicon

Rosengarten
(Rose Garden)

Named
derisively after
the frozen red
heads of inmates
whom the SS
battered, leaving
them to die of
exposure and
starvation (in the
Stacheldraht-
Haus [barbed
wire enclosure])
in front of the
gas chambers at
Buchenwald and
Majdanek.

110 Felix decides he has to do more

Gut Hartzwalde, July 1942

I am rocked. Is this really what
the Nazis are up to, behind

our backs? Not just Jews in their
sights, as if that were not bad

enough. Overnight the world
has become unrecognisable.

The only way I can see to help
is to do more. But what? Firstly

I ask H to release another twenty
Jehovah's Witness women to labour

on our farm. 'Happy' does no justice
to how they feel to leave the foetid,

deadly environs of the camp,
to come to the fresh air and safe

haven of Hartzwalde. Nor to how
relieved Irm and I feel to give

real help to some of those in need.
The women know the threat we

face in harbouring them; will do
anything to protect us. We have

done a tiny good thing – a teaspoonful
in an ocean of suffering. Impossible

not to feel dwarfed by the need.
Next time I treat H, I decide, I will

tackle him directly about the horror
of what happens in the camps.

111 Felix tackles Himmler

Field HQ, Zhitomir, Ukraine, 5 July 1942

Fortuitous that H has ordered me to accompany him to field HQ where I treat him many times each day

and can prosecute my plan. Tonight after dinner I steel myself: "Reichsführer, is it true that men and women

are systematically tortured to death in the concentration camps? I do not like to mention it to you, but I have

received some information which makes me ask." He lets out a laugh: "Come now, Herr Kersten, you are falling

for allied propaganda!" "It is not a matter of propaganda at all, but facts from a very reliable source," I shoot back,

adept as any sportsman. "What source is that?" he parries. "I met two Swiss journalists at the Finnish Embassy

who were en route to Sweden." I begin the story I devised to protect my Jehovah's Witness sources.

"They have many photographs bought from SS guards." (I hear in the Reichsführer's Mess that SS

camp guards are ordered to photograph and film all executions and tortures. Such barbarism ...

I only just manage to bite back bile). H immediately sits up on his camp bed, and that abrupt movement

tells me that what I had hoped was not true, is indeed true. "Where are they now, those journalists?" he fires

at me. "I must immediately get in touch with them and buy back those photographs! Absolutely

imperative!" I reply that they would have left Germany already, would have arrived in Sweden. I add that

the stories about the camps are not just enemy propaganda. H sighs. "I admit," he says soberly,

The Rasse-und Siedlungshauptamt-SS (SS Race and Settlement Main Office) (RuSHA)

Established by Himmler in 1931. A 1942 pamphlet states that "subhumans only seemed biologically similar to Aryans because they had 'hands, feet and a kind of brain, with eyes and a mouth.' But they [are] 'a completely different, dreadful creature, only a rough copy of a human being, with human-like facial traits but morally and mentally lower than any animal. Within this creature there is a fearful chaos of wild, uninhibited passions, nameless destructiveness, the most primitive desires, the nakedest vulgarity. For all that bear a human face are not equal. Woe to him who forgets it."

“regrettable things do happen on occasion ...”
Minimising of course, and it gives me confirmation

I dreaded having. All the fears kept at bay, surge
into the forefront of my mind. My whole being twists

with revulsion and helplessness. I do not know
how, all I know is that I must find ways to do more.