

### PROLOGUE III

Marty Kraussen crouched on the floor of a store that he hated; Kraussen Kollechts in Somis, California. He hated it because it was his father's. He hated anything to do with Henry Friedrich Kraussen. It was not a mutual hatred. Rather, it was a simple disdain for the history of a young Austrian soldier who came to America but never became completely Americanized. How could he? Any soldier that survived the 44<sup>th</sup> Division, Hoch van Deutchmeister in Stalingrad would be proud to carry that fact amidst the stunning defeat with him for life.

Marty Kraussen would know. Photos of dead soldiers in folders hidden away in his father's &&&&

As a young boy Marty worried that the tall strong man that was his father would get thrown out, shipped back. Playing soldier took on a whole new meaning with the kids on the block when a kid's own father was the same race as the enemy they fought, pretend or not. Marty tossed through fitful nights, worried that he'd be hauled out of slumber by armed men in camouflage fatigues. Was his father communist, a Nazi collaborator? Was he a conspirator or merely a man who never lost the heaviness in his voice, the resonant grumble in his consonants? He never lost the stature of a bear, even in his sixties, even in his seventies. An intimidating man to be sure.

In every way, Marty grew up in the shadow of this frightening father. He felt tiny and slender against legs that may as well have been massive redwoods compared to the twigs upon which he teetered. He loved Henry Friedrich Kraussen at that time, a time when hardly anyone had a black and white television. Marty never understood that really,

as television seemed more to be in shades of gray. He wondered if he was allowed some gray then maybe he could love the father but keep a safe distance? Marty called him Da.

Russia was feared as much as Henry in those days, more because Henry read the papers and threw them down onto the breakfast table in disgust. Marty grew up wondering about the Russians, learning about them from the newspapers and from Da.

It wasn't until third grade that worship cooled to a wrinkle in Marty's brow. Da was perhaps part of the problem, not the hero who could save the world from the threat of post Stalin and Malenkov Russia. Da spoke of them often, with venom that could only have sprung from a deep well of mistrust, cultivated over generations and political borders. Marty knew all about Stalin and Malenkov, Krushchev and Kosygin.

All Marty wanted was to listen to Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, not about Russia. He didn't want to hear about the Motherland or about Aryan pride. It made his feet crumble, wondering who his hero was supposed to be. A cloud permeated the portion of his heart reserved for the hero father, Henry Friedrich Kraussen.

Marty crouched in the middle of a store he hated, remembering that he used to go to his friends' houses to hear Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Crouched and ticked off, Marty was surrounded by all of his hatred wound up into a pile of jumbled boxes.

He'd become his father in the end, perpetuated the cycle of hatred after all. Marty hated himself for it, as much as the wasted years that added up to so many gray hairs for each reason. He slammed books and threw trousers into boxes, haphazard, uncaring.

That's why Marty Kraussen was pissed off and in a foul mood. Had there been one close by he might have slammed a cat across the room. And he liked cats. He was

supposed to be at his meeting. What little pleasure he got, and that was certainly precious little, it was from his meetings.

But no, here he was up to the ceiling in junk, junk of the worst sort and not even his own junk. This was his father's junk, his dead father's stuff that Marty couldn't have cared about less.

Marty didn't want it, like it or care about his father's junk. Neither did he care one whit for the store for that matter. Shoot, he'd grown up in this store, had spent so much time here that he could smell the scent of the store at will, no matter if he was in the jungles of Vietnam or in the forests of Oregon at his rallies. The smell of dusty books and used propaganda pamphlets, yellowed and dog-eared, old war boots, hats, uniforms and memorabilia revisited Marty at the oddest times, always at the worst moments. They may as well have shot through his brain into his nostrils as easily as the acrid smell of a spent shell.

When he was young he had to spend weekends at the store filling shelves or fixing rumpiled jackets. There were times when he could smell the dead soldiers who wore them. Those and the flight suits, the German helmets, water canteens and duffle bags. Maybe, he'd thought, the ghosts just hung limp inside the lifeless uniforms, misted around the boots and gear.

Those thoughts scared him when he was ten. His father taught him to shoot a rifle and to hate the people that polluted the purity of the American constitution. His father taught him to hate black men and Jew men, to hate the Roman Catholics and the twisted ideas that diluted the ideal society that America *could* be. His father said that learning

how to be strong would make him brave, he wouldn't be scared ever again. He wouldn't be confused about who his heroes should be.

Marty always wondered how his father knew about that but his father was wrong. A black man saved his life in the battle for Hill 937 in May of 1969. It was a dumb ass thing for a black man to do for Marty; Marty wasn't so sure he'd have done the same, even in the throes of battle. At least, that was true up until May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1969. After May 11<sup>th</sup>, he'd have saved anyone with round eyes on Hamburger Hill.

His father lied. Black men saved white. Jew saved Christian. White saved black or Jew, it didn't matter. They were all Americans; all going to either live or die. The only question was, did the dead die well saving another and did the living live with the blood of one of his own on his hands? That changed everything.

Marty remembered his father's disappointment, the rage upon learning that the KKK rallies were not Marty's destiny. The only rallies that Marty wanted to attend were for the Coalition for an Equal America, a Christian organization that open armed those of all faiths, those of all colors. Marty was their Chief Financial Officer and also served as their main public speaker. &&&&

Marty was in a piss poor mood, going through his father's store. Kraussen Kollecks. Stupid metaphor. Trapped up to his ass in yellowed pages of odium. He rifled through them, tossed them into boxes. The dusty store was piled high with boxes destined for a bonfire, though not the type his father's cohorts enjoyed, that was for sure!

Marty got a chuckle out of that one. He intended to sell none of it. No one would profit from this legacy of hatred. Tossing books into a box, one of twenty surrounding him, Marty stopped. A worn leather ledger book in his hands caught his attention.

*Translated Journal for the Advancement of Human Medical Treatments.* His father held onto that one for dear life, turned many away. Sure it was special. Henry treasured it as if he personally participated in the activities of those demented men. He opened it. Dog eared pages and written in a foreign hand, ink spattered, brittle. *Volume 1.* He read. *Article 1-1.* He read. *Article 1-2.* He read. *Articles 1-3 through 1-18.*

Marty didn't understand any of it. "Experiments? Fucking Nazis." He set the book aside and continued. Hour after hour, as morning light gave way to dusty shafts of sunlight through dingy glass, Marty boxed the store. Only the one book remained and that he put on the counter near the empty register.

The door opened, the bell jingled. Marty looked up. A woman walked in, a woman that had no business in a place like this. She was the kind of woman that Marty only saw in television movies; well dressed, groomed beautifully, way out of his league. A lady. He stood up.

"Uh, can I help you, Miss?"

"Maybe. Oh, you're moving." She stepped between boxes.

"Yeah." He dusted himself off. He was behind the counter, near the register.

"I'm looking for books. A book. I'm looking for a book."

"I got lots, too many. Damn things take up a lot of space. Most are packed. A particular book or just browsing?" He gave a chuckle, as if he was in the literary section

of the Library of Congress. In his dreams. That would have gotten the old goat's blood pressure up!

"Don't know really. I think it would be Dutch, World War Two related."

Marty glanced at the ledger by the register. His expression changed. "What sort of book? Fiction?"

"No. Non-fiction."

"Don't have much in Dutch. Maybe if you were more specific I might be able to help."

"I can't be really. I'm not sure what it is exactly. I'm a doctor, a research scientist."

"Ah. Hm, don't think you'll find anything of interest around here, Miss. Most of this stuff is ancient history and bad history at that. Feel free to go through what's there if you like. I'm just packing the stuff on these shelves and in the cases."

Marty palmed the ledger and slid it under the counter.

Doctor Samantha Goldinger browsed through piles of boxes, lifted the tabs on the open ones, poked through the books piled inside. "These arbitrary or in some kind of order?"

"One hundred percent I couldn't care less, if you know what I mean. This place was my, uh, relative's. I'm packing it all up, getting rid of it."

Samantha looked up at him. "Oh?"

“Yeah, I hate this crap. Bad history, you know?” He ran his fingers through his messy hair, dust feathering up after him. He pulled up his jeans and straightened the two day old stale flannel shirt.

“Oh, I know. If it wasn’t for the research I wouldn’t be here. I find it difficult to deal with, really.”

“What kind of research?”

“Medical.”

“And if you found this . . . uh, book, what then?”

Samantha stopped looking, stood up and sighed. “Oh, I don’t know. I guess I’d try to make sense of it, see if it could help.”

“Help what?”

“My, you’re curious aren’t you? Well, help me find a cure.”

“A cure. From this junk? Ha! I doubt that. A cure, huh? From these old books. Imagine that.” He shook his head and boxed. He loaded lighters and tie tacks, bullet casings and pocket knives into a box, all of them clinking and clanking. Marty didn’t care what hit what or how they landed. The sound rankled through the diminishing store. He looked under the counter at the ledger, his brow creasing with the reasons for his curiosity and more so for his odd possessiveness. “Would such a book be, um, valuable, do you think?”

Samantha sighed a great heave. “Oh, who knows. I’m just looking for needles in haystacks. This must be the ninetieth store I’ve been through. Valuable would be difficult to say. I suppose it would be valuable to the people it could help.”

“Not where this stuff came from. Don’t you think it’s wrong somehow?”

“Well, Mister, um, what’s your name?”

“Kraussen.”

“Mister Kraussen, you sell this stuff. Is that any more wrong?”

“I don’t sell it. It was my relative’s, remember? I think this shit stinks to high heaven. But a lot of people thought it was fine to make a living off of. Me? I don’t know. I guess it depends on the end result.”

“I haven’t really had to deal with that much. I suppose that if there were an end result, I would have to decide then. Right now, I’m just a scientist looking for science.”

“You don’t much look like a scientist, Miss.”

Samantha laughed. “I know. I’ve heard that for a long time. Well, and I guess you don’t much look like the kind of man I’ve met in these other stores either.”

“I’m not,” Marty said. “I’m quite the opposite actually. Like I said, I’m just boxing it all up.”

“Right. For your relative.” She turned back to the books.

“Right. Listen, suppose if I looked for a book for you and found it, what would you be willing to pay for it?”

Samantha looked at him. Her expressions ran through a gamut of motions; thought, curious, contemplative, unsure. “How much do any of these books cost?”

“Shit, you can take whatever you want. I don’t care what happens to them.”

“Then I guess I’d pay whatever you wanted me to pay. But I don’t think it’d be much use to anyone else.”

“I see your point.” He looked under the counter.

Samantha stood up and straightened out her jeans and sweater. “Well, I don’t see anything like what I’m looking for here. Thanks anyway. It was nice talking to you, Mister Kraussen.”

“No problem.” He held his hand out. Samantha shook it. “Hey, want me to contact you if I come across a Dutch non fiction from World War Two?”

“Sure, that would be fine.” Samantha dug in her purse and then handed him a business card.

“Doctor Samantha Goldinger, Guardian First.”

“Bye. Thanks.”

“Bye.”

Marty placed the card into the center of the ledger, sticking out a bit at the top. The bell jingled and echoed as Samantha left the store. The door slamming shut stayed with Marty for ten minutes as he stared off into space, thinking of experiments and the glory of a Nobel Prize, millions of dollars and a ledger written in a foreign hand.