

ADOLESCENCE  
VERBOTEN

GUY BUTLER

POLKAJIG  
PRESS

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*September 1931 - Weimar, Germany*

From behind the paneled bedroom door the weary, pain-laden shrieks of his mother surrendered to the high-pitched cries of a newborn. The eleven-year-old boy returned to his preoccupation in front of the living room fire; armies of beer bottle tops lined up for another battle. The screams from Josepha Orlowski had been almost continuous since he had woken up and now without them in the background, young Czeslaw tried distracting himself from a mounting concern. It wasn't working so he turned to stare at the bedroom door. After an eternity, the doorknob slowly turned and his stepfather, John, emerged. Uncontrollable sobbing wracked his entire body as he cushioned his head with his left forearm and beat his clenched fist against the wall. When he finally turned to the room and saw the shocked confusion on Czeslaw's face, John knelt down, wrapped his arms around the boy, and whispered as best he could.

“Your mother is in heaven, Czeslaw. She used her last breath to tell me how much she loves you and your new sister....”

The bedroom door opened again as the doctor carried a small swaddled bundle into the living room. The young boy’s eyes darted from the baby to the darkness of the bedroom beyond. He needed someone to blame for this and his stepfather was an easy target. Czeslaw bolted out of John’s grasp and ran out of the front door, slamming it violently in his wake.

Czeslaw had never met his real father although his mother talked about him constantly. She carried a perpetual flame for the man with every breath she drew. The infatuation had lasted for twelve years, and was a constant source of embarrassment for the substitute she ended up marrying.

Czeslaw’s conception was the consequence of a week of intense passion shortly after the 1920 Antwerp Olympics. Josepha, a beautiful young gymnastics student, was the conquest of the great Albrecht Wah, a legendary German celebrity regarded by many as the most talented athlete in the world. Their five days together in Wah’s hotel suite were remembered as raw passion by Josepha and amused sexual fulfillment by Albrecht. When they parted, only one knew

that they would never meet again. Despite concerted efforts to inform Albrecht Wah about the wonderful swelling of her body, Josepha's messages received not a single reply. She unconditionally forgave him. After all, he was such a busy man.

Her subsequent marriage of necessity to John Orłowski was never more than a financial lifeline for Josepha, a painful fact that Czeslaw noticed from an early age. During Albrecht Wah's subsequent dominance at the Paris Olympics, a three-year-old Czeslaw remembered his mother collecting every press clipping she could lay her hands on and weaving stories about them to her young child as the docile John sat apart as if invisible.

And now, she was gone. Was it a broken heart? A trauma caused by the birth of a child with a man she had never loved?

The boy felt better once he was out of the house but his mind was numbed by the events of the morning. He needed solitude to sort through the myriad of images flooding his mind and exercise was his escape valve, so he started to run. When Czeslaw ran, his body became a machine, a tireless engine that allowed his mind to enter its subconscious. His feet pounded the ground as he headed towards his secret lair, an

abandoned factory about two miles from his house. In the background of his flight, irate shouts, bicycle bells and car horns tried to warn the youngster about his disconnection with reality, but he continued his familiar journey without heeding the distractions. After just over ten minutes, a granite wall materialized to his left with mature Linden trees between him and the road. The top of the wall had angry broken glass set into the concrete top but Czeslaw had circumvented this peril many times. He picked out his tree and scrambled up onto a horizontal branch that spanned over the wall with sufficient clearance. His weight on the diminishing diameter limb allowed him to drop into the overgrown land that surrounded his factory.

He landed softly and entered the cocoon that always successfully quarantined him from the worries of the world, his family, Weimar, Germany, and anything that troubled his young mind.

The city of Weimar dated back to the ninth century and had a rich cultural history established by composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach and Franz Liszt. It attained nationwide fame as the signing place of the German Constitution, a document that Adolf Hitler would nullify when he became Chancellor in 1933.

Czeslaw's stepfather had been born in Poland but raised in Berlin from an early age. After he obtained his degree in finance, the fledgling accountant was attracted to Weimar; he preferred the quiet demeanor of the city to the hussle-bussle of the busy capital. Of equal benefit to John, the old city was situated within convenient travel distance from his surviving sister in Berlin to the north and his Polish roots in the area surrounding Lodz to the east.

The wall, with its razor-sharp prongs was Czeslaw's first line of defense, but today, he needed more. Paying little heed to the nettles that attacked his exposed knees, he pushed purposefully through the weeds and bushes towards his secret entrance.

The garment sweatshop had been abandoned after World War One when the need for military uniforms evaporated. For the past three years, Czeslaw had used the empty shell as a sanctuary from his possessive mother and stepfather. The ground floor doors and windows were long boarded shut, but by using a downspout to reach the roof, the boy had discovered a hinged skylight that opened into the roof trusses that spanned the main workspace. Over many visits, Czeslaw had hoisted loose planks up into these trusses and for the past year, made this platform his

base, a retreat from reality where he could read, draw, daydream and talk to his friend Sebastian.

But, today was not a normal day. Today, the moment his bottom sank onto the platform to complete his personal cocoon, his mind opened up to the harsh reality that his mother had died less than an hour ago and Czeslaw put his head in his hands and sobbed uncontrollably.

When he woke up in the late afternoon, a chill in the air and hunger pangs replaced the torrent of images that had been flooding his head. A rapid movement flashed silently across his vision.

“Sebastian, don’t worry, I’ll be okay.” Sebastian, a giant spider, retreated to her funnel web above the platform. Her leg span was over three inches; her body predominantly brown was overlaid with a dark herringbone pattern. The noiseless spider was exceedingly fast when she picked up the boy’s movement but slowed down at the mouth of her nest, perhaps remembering that this young human had never hurt her and often brought her treats. Czeslaw sat up and talked to the web. Sebastian’s eight eyes, arranged in two rows of four, fixed back on him from within the tunnel.

“I’ve never met my real father and now, I’ve lost my mother. If it were not for John, I’d be an orphan.

He's probably worried so I'd better go home. I'll come back tomorrow and bring you some flies. Auf Wiedersehen, Herr Spinne."

The youngster's best friend was an *Eratigena Duellica*, a giant house spider and most likely, the fourth or fifth generation that had shared his platform over the years. Czeslaw did not know or care if Sebastian was male or female, he just appreciated that the giant funnel weaver was always there for him to listen to his adolescent problems, something he would never do with his local school friends, none of whom he really liked anyway.

Czeslaw was born a bastard and everyone in Weimar knew it; his mother, Josepha, was branded a whore and stepfather, John, a Polish immigrant. It was more than enough baggage to brand Czeslaw as *'different'* and, in the world of pre-pubescent school-boys, *'different'* singled you out for trouble. At least the bullying and fights had stopped but that was because, thanks to his genes, Czeslaw was faster and tougher than any kid his age.

Czeslaw walked into the house to find John seated in front of the parlor's fireplace. The timid accountant looked up and smiled wearily at the boy.

"Glad you are home, Czeslaw. I guess you have

realized that our lives are changed forever and I am going to need your help. Let me introduce you to your new sister, Helen.”

“Why did she kill my mother?”

John Orlowski had been dreading the inevitability of this question all afternoon. He had been Czeslaw’s emotional anchor since he first met the boy seven years ago. Throughout Josepha’s ongoing obsession with the myth of Albrecht Wah and her subsequent declining health, John had managed to prioritize his responsibility to Czeslaw’s youth over his sad marriage. Now he had to marshal all his sparse parental skills in shepherding his stepson through the most traumatic experience of his life.

They entered the bedroom together. Josepha’s body had been transported to a funeral home and an elderly nurse sat in a rocking chair beside the crib to comfort a small white bundle.

“Czeslaw, Frau Hannah is going to stay with us for a while to look after Helen. Please help wherever you can. Helen has your blood in your veins and you will be bonded by your mother’s memory all your lives. No one is at fault for her death; your mother has been battling cancer for several years. Only her amazing inner strength kept her alive until Helen’s birth.

“She and I decided not to burden you with the inevitability as you grew up but now, on her behalf, I beg your forgiveness and ask for your help.”

Czeslaw gave his father a long hug in response.

“Father, I’ve seen this coming for a while but that didn’t make it any easier. We both loved her in our own special way and we must face the future as a family.”

When he finally returned to school, yet another barrier was in place between Czeslaw and his classmates. They all had mothers.

However, the shunning had a positive aspect. Czeslaw noticed that the boys were developing an intense fascination with the *Hitler-Jugend*. The Weimar branch for youths aged 10 to 14 was burgeoning after a visit by Kurt Gruber, its founder. German boys were easy to convince that they were part of an Aryan super race and Heinrich Klungstat, a sixteen-year-old local bully, was recruited to build a Jungzug unit at the school. No Jews or oddballs were allowed so Czeslaw was left to himself; all the other boys at the school enthusiastically donned the uniform and spent their free time training to take over the world after swearing:

*“In the presence of this blood banner which represents our Führer, I swear to devote all my energies and my*

*strength to the savior of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am willing and ready to give up my life for him, so help me God."*

Czeslaw began to feel increasingly ostracized when the other boys in his neighborhood began wearing the Deutsches Jungvolk uniform of black shorts and tan shirts with breast pockets. Before long, these items were supplemented by black neckerchiefs and berets. Arm patches and flags denoting a white lightning bolt on a black background soon appeared, leaving the young Orlovski associated more with the Jewish community than as a native Weimarian. His stepfather's Polish name and employment at the prominent Jewish accounting firm of Chasnov & Harary deepened the gulf of distrust. *'If you are Polish, you are most likely Jewish!'*

There were regular incidents in the schoolyard. One day, the normal taunting escalated when a couple of young Jewish boys, Mort Goldberg and Adam Abramovitz responded angrily. It was all the excuse the Jungzug needed and fists began to fly. Mort and Adam curled up on the ground, trying to protect their vital organs as best they could. Czeslaw was drawn to the commotion and felt morally obligated to step in.

“Hey, Klungstat, don’t you think ten against two is a little unfair?” The melee paused as Heinrich Klungstat spun around to identify the questioning of his authority.

“Not one word, Jew-boy, or you are next,” the bully spat, his face creased with hatred as he pointed an accusing finger at Czeslaw.

“Then why not now, arschgeige. Just you and me—or do you need your flunkies to do your dirty work?”

The Jungzug leader was taller, heavier and a couple of years older than Czeslaw but the ice-cold grey eyes of the youngster froze the schoolyard. Every boy and girl watching recalled a similar confrontation from barely six months past. Two boys from Heinrich’s class had decided to pick on Czeslaw for no reason. The pushing and swatting raised no visible reaction from the younger boy so a crowd, eager for a little entertainment, circled the three. The principal, Doctor Jurgen Schmitt, watched the schoolyard dynamics develop from the window of his office, two storeys above the fray.

“Herr Vimmerstad, please go down to the quad and rescue the young Orlowski boy before he gets the scheisse beaten out of him. Give Möller and Schultz detention slips while you are at it.” The old teacher had seen this scenario a hundred times, or at least he thought he had. The three boys below him

were now constricted by a ring of students that had closed to within twenty feet of the combatants. The Orłowski boy always kept to himself but you could see he was developing quite an athletic physique. Principal Schmitt was one of the few members of staff aware that Czesław's natural father was the legendary Albrecht Wah and the genes were starting to manifest. He leant on the windowsill to stare as Herr Vimmerstat appeared below and strode towards the crowd.

Czesław finally leaned back into the two bullies and then spun off into a crouch. Both Möller and Schultz were shocked but grinned. The crowd noise amplified until it was stilled by Orłowski's calm voice.

"Please leave me alone and walk away. I wish you both no harm."

"WHOAAA," enjoined the innocent crowd. Piotr Schultz hesitated but under a hundred eyes, he had no choice but to attack with Möller in support. Czesław parried his haymaker by pushing it upwards with his right forearm to expose Schultz' right rib cage to a short and powerful left hook. Planting his left foot to accelerate the punch became the pivot for a spinning backheel to Ernst Möller's jaw. It was over in less than five seconds.

The crowd was stunned into silence as it parted for Herr Vimmerstadt. Orłowski turned to him apologetically as the teacher knelt to check the two

bullies as they lay groaning in incapacitating pain.

“Move along everyone. Orlowski, go immediately to Doctor Schmitt’s office and, on your way, have the nurse report to me here.”

Czeslaw picked up his books and left the quadrangle to chattering gossip and staring eyes. He entered the principal’s office to find Doctor Schmitt seated at his desk. His lips were pursed; his forearms and hands formed a perfect triangle.

“Sir, Herr Vimmerstadt asked me to.....“

“...I saw the whole thing from my window, Czeslaw. Quite remarkable and I doubt you will be troubled again as word spreads. That is all.“

Heinrich Klungstad had been in the circle that day and remembered that his friends, Schultz and Möller, had spent a long time recovering from their injuries before suffering the ignominy of expulsion for starting the fight they lost.

“Your days are numbered, you bastard. Come on lads, I have no time for this little pimfen.“

Czeslaw cut a small slice of vurst, flicked it off his knife into an empty jam jar and then waited. A large bluebottle buzzed in to investigate but the boy did nothing and stayed perfectly still. The fly flew off carrying the pungent smell of the sausage with it.

Five minutes later, a squadron of five landed on top of the sausage in the jar. This time, Czeslaw's palm containing a square torn from newspaper slammed over their escape. He secured the paper with string and listened to the angry buzzing of his captives.

"I'm off for a walk, Frau Hannah. How's my little sister doing today?" At the sound of his voice, the eight-month-old waved her arms and legs frenetically and gurgled an excited laugh.

"I am not sure what your gift is Czeslaw but Helen reacts to you with a love I've seldom seen."

"Well, Frau Hannah, she looks more like Mother every day. If this continues, I will be spending the rest of my life fighting off her suitors." Czeslaw laughed, grabbed his jam jar and headed to his secret hide-out.

*I don't much like the look of this*, he thought as he landed inside the wall. The grass had been cut and the bushes trimmed. Boards still protected the lower windows but as he cautiously continued his perimeter inspection, he noted that the front entrance sported a brand new padlock and chain. *Well, no one's inside or the padlock would be open; still, I'd better be careful.*

With the jam jar tucked inside his shirt, he shimied up the downspout and slid through the skylight and onto his platform. The floor below had been swept clean and the old tables and sewing machines removed. The space now looked ten times bigger than he was used to.

“Well Sebastian, something’s up. I wish you could talk.”

He held the jam jar horizontal to the mouth of the funnel web and released the string. The squadron made a noisy escape in the only direction they could and stopped buzzing one by one.

“Bon appétit, Sebastian.”

After a time, Czeslaw heard voices outside and the padlock clattering as it was unlocked. Czeslaw flattened onto the platform. His access skylight provided a backlight that would profile his movements to anyone below and precluded his leaving so he lay perfectly still.

“Good job, Heinrich. Have your Jungzug pull the boards off the windows and clear out these last piles of junk. Looks like our new headquarters will be ready for its first Deutches Jungvolk meeting tonight.”

“Jawohl, standartenfuhrer. Come on mein jungs, let’s get to it.”

Czeslaw risked a look down from the rafters. As the light began to flood the space from the old windows, it was easy to identify the arrogant sixteen-year-old, as he did absolutely nothing but order his minions around. The older Hitler Youth commander who had first spoken called Heinrich Klungstat to join him on a couple of chairs right beneath Czeslaw’s

platform. From twenty feet above, he had no problem in eavesdropping the conspiratorial conversation. He adjusted his ear to a crack between planks and his heart almost stopped as the structure creaked.

“What the hell was that noise?” the Youth commander said.

Czeslaw held his breath and then lightly drummed his fingers across the boards.

“Damn rats. We’ll have some sport shooting them later.”

“They make my skin crawl. Heinrich, how is your recruiting going?”

“Excellent, mein standartenfuhrer. The only boys not registered are non-Ayrian ethnics and, of course, the stinking Jews.”

“Let the ethnics in if they want. Our main goal is to paint all Jews as traitors who do not support National Socialism. Eventually we will have the political cover for the provision of a solution. Verstehen sie mich?”

“What are you going to do about that Orłowski kid?”

“He is a total goofball. There is plenty of evidence to paint him as Jewish and pretty soon he’s going to meet with a terrible accident. Enough time has past since our confrontation that I doubt I will be associated. The crazy bastard likes to collect flies so we’ll make sure his corpse is left where it will attract all the flies in Weimar.”

“But I’ve heard his real father was Albrecht Wah, the epitome of Aryan perfection. How can he be Jewish...?”

“...His mother was a whore and the bastard’s father could really be anyone. We’ll be well rid of him.”

The two below laughed hideously as Czeslaw was pondering, *How the hell did Heinrich find out that I trapped flies?* Then it dawned on him. *Frau Hannah!*

An hour passed before Czeslaw heard the retreating boys securing the front door with the padlock. He waited another five minutes to be sure and then raised the skylight to its fully opened position. He then angled a plank from the platform into a makeshift ramp.

“I am not leaving yet, Sebastian, but I want to make sure you have a way out after I torch this place. Good luck, my old friend. You have taught me a lot but we’ll most likely never see each other again.”

With that, Czeslaw swung hand-over-hand along the bottom chords of the trusses until he reached the exterior wall of the factory. There, his feet found a windowsill and he was able to drop the last ten feet to land softly on the factory floor.

The walls were brick and the floor concrete but the desks and chairs might make a big enough pyre to set the roof structure on fire. He pulled every piece

of combustible material he could find into the center of the factory floor, checking every desk drawer for paper to kindle the initial flame. Only one drawer was locked and he could tell by feel that it was full, so he turned the desk over and smashed through the bottom. *Excellent*, he thought as he pulled out reams of files. It was only as he was setting the flame that he read the word 'Buchenwald.' His mind raced to read more before the languid yellow river turned the paper to ashes.

Time to go.

He was halfway home when the agitated siren of a fire truck rushed by him. Turning to walk backwards for a few paces, the glow on the horizon gave him a satisfying buzz.

*I think this Nazi movement will blossom into a real problem for my country and maybe they will kill me, but I have struck the first blow*, he thought as he rounded the final corner to his house.

He saw the white 'Star of David' painted on his front door and sprinted the final hundred yards, bursting into the parlor to find his father sobbing as he held Helen tightly.

"Oh, thank God, Czeslaw. I called the police. The house came under attack about twenty minutes ago."

He pointed towards the shattered glass on the floor. “That brick shattered the parlor window and landed right where I normally sit. Thank God, Helen and I were in the bathroom.

“Young people, about twenty or thirty of them, yelling and screaming ‘Filthy Jews.’ For the love of Christ, we are Catholic but I think they must know where I work and...”

“No Father, calm down, it’s me they are after. I refused to join the Weimar Hitler Youth and so that brands us as Jewish in their eyes. Get Helen out of here, I will surrender and give them their pound of flesh.”

“No, son, we are a family. The wisest man I know is my boss, Mr. Chasnov. I’ll talk to him first thing tomorrow for advice. The firm is already planning on relocating their Jewish accountants to Geneva so I will request to be part of the exodus.”

“We might not have the luxury of time, Father. The Nazis are planning to build a secret camp outside town. It will be called Buchenwald. The plan is to exterminate every Jew in Weimar ...”

“Czeslaw, that is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. You must never, ever repeat that. The Germans are a good people; they would never allow such a thing to happen. These Nazis are a small faction of fanatics; they will all be thrown in jail in a matter of months.” John Orłowski spoke words he

wanted to be the truth but he was holding Helen so tightly she started to squirm. The young boy fixed his father with his colorless grey eyes and whispered a chilling prediction.

“Father, I read about Buchenwald not twenty minutes ago. This Nazi Party has a magnetic leader in Adolf Hitler but behind his charisma is a hatred of anybody who does not portray his vision of the perfect Aryan race. The Jews are top of his hit list and his secret agenda is to annihilate them. You must drive to Mr. Chasnov’s house immediately and warn him.

“By the way, where is Frau Hannah?”

“She has the night off. Why?”

“She is a Judas.”

John moved the family car to the back door and they hurriedly packed everything they deemed important into the boot. Their worldly possessions were mostly memories; photographs of Josepha, family ornaments, clothes and food. They were scrubbing the white graffiti off the front door when the angry mob returned.

“What do you people want of us?” John yelled. The reply was a brick that smashed into the wall just above his head. He scrambled through the door and bolted it behind him.

“Too many windows, Father, we have to move

fast. Write a quick note to Frau Hannah. Tell her we are taking Helen on a picnic to Grosser Ettersberg Forest and we'll be back tomorrow. Then get into the car and wait. I'm going to create a distraction so you can get away from here. I'll meet you at Mr. Chasnov's house in an hour.

Czeslaw sprinted up the stairs and climbed onto the roof through a dormer window just as the crowd were mustering the courage to edge towards the front of the house. He lobbed down a wine bottle that shattered on the sidewalk in front of the youths.

"Greetings, arseholes, I take it you are looking for me?" The anger welled below and a large stone was thrown up at him. He caught it easily and tossed it back down, scattering those below. "You will have to try and catch me. I know all about your Nazi plans for Buchenwald and I'm going to the *Hildesheimer Courier* to expose them.

"Auf Wiedersehen."

With that, he theatrically leapt across an eight-foot gap onto a neighboring roof and dodged behind the chimney. He was able to repeat this feat several times as he progressed north towards the junction of Geschwister-Scholl and Bauhausstrasse. Czeslaw could have used the steep roofs to hide his progress but that would have been completely contrary to his plan. The young teenager showed himself periodically and every time he did, the mob squealed their

excitement and followed below. A shot rang out and Czeslaw grabbed his left shoulder as shards of brick peeled off a gable wall and ripped through his shirt.

*That could easily have been my eye so I must be more careful,* he cursed. With that, he ducked low and determined to offer his teasing glimpses with a less cavalier attitude.

John Orlowski waited nervously in his black 1928 Standard. The angry yelling seemed to move away from the front of his house and got fainter and fainter as it chased the taunting from his stepson's familiar voice. He glanced down at Helen who was lying in the footwell of the passenger seat, started the engine and edged slowly along the back alley.

It took almost thirty minutes for the two Orlowskis to reach the house of Brahm Chasnov. After knocking on the door for several minutes, a female voice questioned them from within.

"I am John Orlowski, I work for Mr. Chasnov and need to talk to him urgently." A mature male voice took over the conversation.

"John? What were last year's gross receipts from the Linden account?"

"That is strictly confidential, sir, but there are seven digits before the word deutchmark."

The bolts drew back and the door opened to an anxious Brahm Chasnov who ushered them quickly inside. Once the locks were re-engaged, the kindly man smiled,

“How about some tea? Sarah, if you would be so kind.”

John recounted his afternoon, including the details about Czeslaw setting fire to the fledgeling Hitler Youth headquarters. He hesitated to bring up Buchenwald as he still had trouble believing it but, when he did, Chasnov let out a humorless chuckle.

“Our intelligence came to the same conclusions, John. Hitler wrote a manifesto over five years ago called *‘Mein Kampf.’* Something must have happened in his youth that has fermented into an irrational hatred of anything Jewish. Could have been rejection by a beautiful Jewish girl, or maybe as simple as being served an undercooked bagel. Regardless, we acknowledge he has an irrational hatred for all things Jewish, but to build a death camp outside Weimar in Ettersberg? Truth be known, we suspect several similar camps are planned to be constructed around this God-forsaken country if or when, he comes to power.

“The megalomaniac is currently riding a wave of fanaticism, so we are encouraging all our people to evacuate to safer pastures. You should do the same, John. Do you have any relatives in the United States?”

“Poland is our best bet, Mr. Chasnov. I still have my papers and both children can travel with me by default.”

“Go there as soon as young Czeslaw gets here. It’s about 180 miles to the border but will take you close to six hours. The roads are in a terrible state of disrepair. You’ll have to spend the night in Gorlitz and cross over into Zgorzelec first thing in the morning after the control point opens.” He walked to an armoire and returned with an envelope. “Here are some deutchmarks to keep you going for a couple of months. Convert them into Zloty and contact your relatives in Rekle once you cross the border.”

The wounded Czeslaw sped up to give himself time to climb down onto Geschwister-Scholl Strasse. He glanced south towards the mob advancing towards him on Bauhausstrasse and ran across the intersection, pausing to fake horrified surprise that the throng was so close. Then the pied piper jogged towards the large *Park an der Lim* and disappeared into the trees.

A breathless Heinrich Klungstat finally held up his hand and halted his troops.

“The bastard is feeding us a trail of breadcrumbs. Volker, take a couple of jungs and go back to his house. Arrest his father; we can use him as bait. The

rest of you, follow me to the *Courier's* office. We will intercept him there.”

Of course, Czeslaw never went within two miles of the *Hildesheimer Courier* offices, eventually staggering up to his stepfather's car almost an hour later. The last mile had been hell; his shoulder was bleeding quite badly and he was feeling light headed. Brahm Chasnov and John Orlovski were chatting nervously on the sidewalk when they saw the boy weaving towards them. The two men rushed to grab him.

“Quickly, John, get him into the house and I'll call a doctor.”

Clean bandages covered the stitches and the doctor joined the Orlovskis and Chasnovs in some of Sarah Chasnov's chicken soup before they hit the road.

“Jewish penicillin,” the doctor joked. “Better than any medicine in my bag.” With that, they piled into the car and Czeslaw fell straight to sleep on the back seat.

“Go with God,” pleaded Mr. Chasnov.

“Thanks for everything, Mr. Chasnov. Will you be all right?”

“Don’t worry, John, look after yourself and your children. My people would not have survived these last four thousand years if we were not resilient.

“By the way, young Czeslaw has proved himself a remarkable young man.”

John nodded in proud agreement. “It makes me sad that circumstances have robbed him of his adolescence. He has jumped from being a boy straight into manhood.”

Had the two men possessed the ability to transport themselves forward a decade in time, they would both have agreed that the word *‘remarkable’* was a hopelessly inadequate means of stating the impact Czeslaw Orlowski would have upon the looming war.

THE END