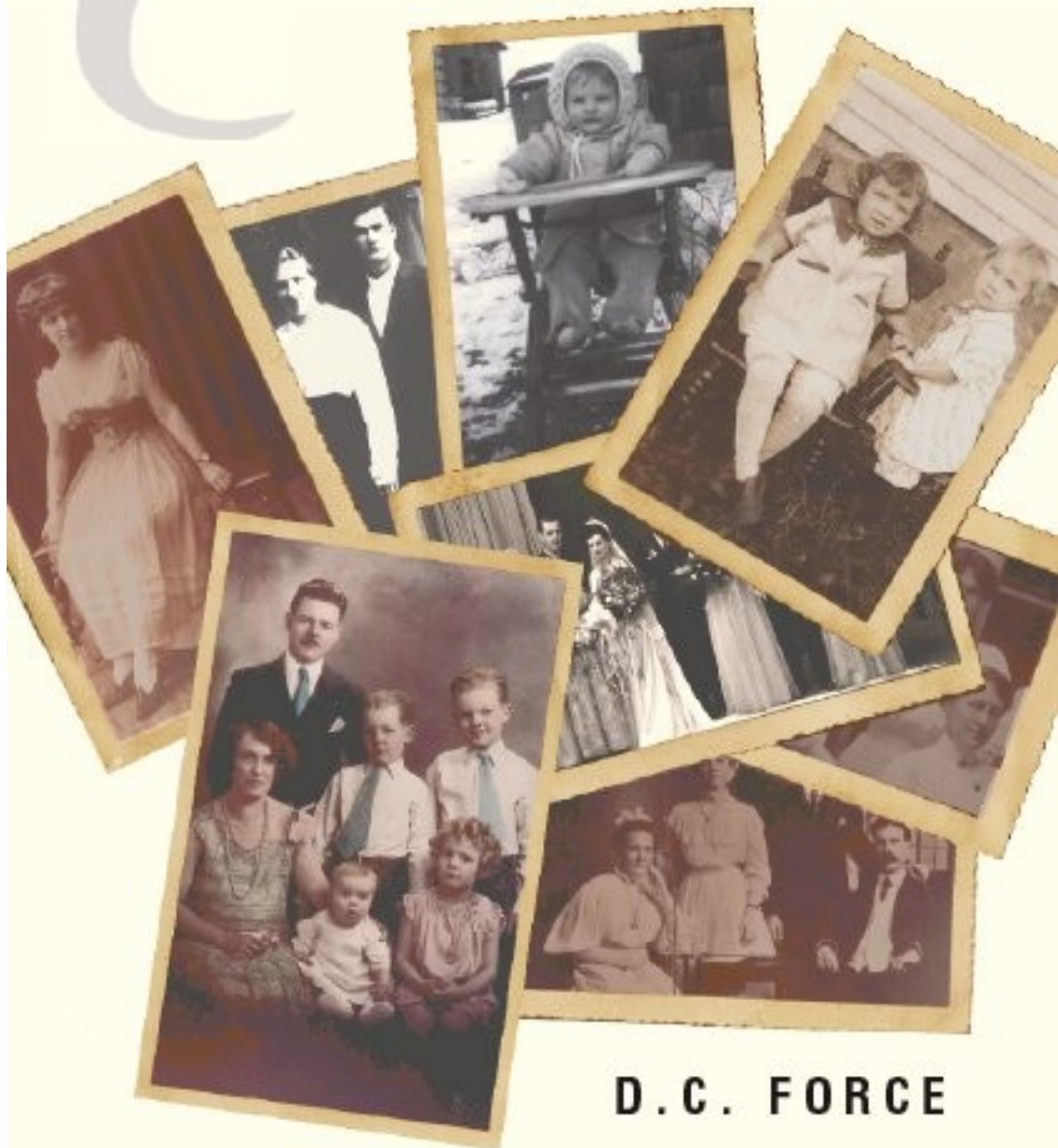


FAMILY

a CENTURY of BLOOD and TEARS



D.C. FORCE

Powerful...gripping...superbly crafted...*Family* paints an insightful portrait of the 20th Century generations within a single family, from their immigrant roots replanted in America's northern Midwest to the melting pot microcosm of the country that they become by the century's end.

MEET THE FAMILY THROUGH THE DECADES:

- 1911 – **Anja** must choose the lesser shame in her world, divorce or a fortune-hunting husband who beats her.
- 1922 – Married outside her Church, **Katherine** has God's forgiveness but not her kin's.
- 1933 – **Otto** won't let wedding vows or tough times keep him from his string of party girls.
- 1944 – About to be shipped off to war, **Al** is desperate for someone to care about him.
- 1955 – The Depression took career and wife; left alone with five children to raise **Thomas** never forgave Providence.
- 1966 – Sex, pills, and booze: a new generation's path to spirituality, misery, or the same old mistakes?
- 1977 – Spoiled son of an immigrant success, **Nick** loses everything because he doesn't value it.
- 1988 – Once a beauty, **Ruth** dwells in a past full of injustices and lives in bondage to her bitterness.
- 1999 – Used, abused, and ignored by parents who didn't want her, **Celeste** overcomes and finds true Joy.

D.C. Force captures the day-to-day emotions of a flesh and blood family, struggling to adapt to 20th century America. It might be the family across the street, the owners of the local deli, or perhaps it is your own in

Family: a Century of Blood and Tears.



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Part One

January 1, 1911

Sunday

12:01 a.m.

Bells ring out across the frozen landscape. Church bells. School bells. Cow bells. Sleigh bells. Hand bells. Dinner bells. Bells of all sizes are produced as if by magic from pockets, reticules, corners, and cubbyholes. They join the big bells of the church towers and civic buildings ringing merrily all across the countryside.

“Happy New Year!”

“Happy New Year!”

“Happy New Year!”

The salutation is thrown out to anyone and everyone from anyone and everyone. The enthusiasm goes beyond logic. The tick of a clock, the turn of a calendar leaf, and one is borne upon a wave of wishful anticipation. The human will to believe in magic. A clean slate. The bells chase the bad away and herald in a new year, unblemished and full of promise. For a few moments, the mind reels under the heady prospect. One can hope that this is the year dreams will come true.

The party at the Tri-County Grange Hall continues as the bells finally fall silent.

The elevated buzz of happy conversations mixes with loud outbursts of laughter and fills the hall to capacity. The band begins another raucous polka and the music pushes out all other sounds, spilling itself onto the icy, snow-covered countryside through every opening in the hall, including its chimneys.

Outside, the entire area around the hall glows with the light of many lanterns reflecting off the snow. But as far as the eye can see, the landscape is free of electric poles and overhead wires. The inhabitants of Marathon County, Wisconsin, have not yet seen that invention credited to Mr. Thomas Edison—the electric light bulb.

Overhead, the sky is a mesmerizing theater of vibrant stars, twinkling in some indefinable place, while the air beneath moves clean, cold, and calm. Snow upon the fields and hills is at least five feet deep and frozen over sufficiently to hold the weight of small animals and children. For adults, there is a need for snowshoes to keep from foundering if one chooses to leave the beaten paths.

At the back of the Grange Hall, paths have clearly been beaten to the privies, one of which is marked “*Herren*,” and the other, “*Frauen*.” There is nothing odd in this as all the folk in these parts speak German; some have no English at all. A general trampling of the grounds around the hall and barn has been accomplished by a multitude of sleighs, large wooden bobsleds, toboggans, animals, and human feet. Beyond the hall and barn, the white mantle grows more pristine. Only the runner-slicked road, glazed hard with the day’s traffic, cuts a rough trail through the frozen blanket as it runs off into the night.

Inside the hall, with its large, crackling fireplace and cook stoves, the temperature runs warm. Skirts with colorful petticoats whirl, braids fly, and fancily embroidered aprons and vests flap and billow as young and old alike step out the moves to the quick

beat of the music. Thick shoes set a vibration going that can be felt far beyond the dance floor. Bodies mill unceasingly around the whirling figures at the center. Brows shine with perspiration and smiles abound on most of the faces.

“I brought you to a dance, I expect you to dance,” the beefy man growled between his clenched teeth. He had a vice-like grip on his wife’s arm as he pulled her onto the dance floor. “And smile!”

The wrenching of her arm caused a stabbing pain in her side and tears sprang, against her will, to her deep violet eyes. She kept her head down. She dare not look up into the hard eyes of the man who was her husband. She feared what he would do if he saw tears.

The music grew faster. Anja Jenkin tried to fall into step. Normally, she was a good dancer, one of the lightest on her feet. She tried to keep up, but every breath she took sent a stabbing pain into her chest. She couldn’t get enough air. The edges of her vision started to go black.

Helmut shook her. “What is the matter with you?” he demanded, pushing her on.

“I...I am sorry, Helmut,” she gasped in apology. “I...cannot...breathe.”

Gretchen Gerter caught the look of anguish on her friend’s face and Helmut’s scowl as they passed each other on the dance floor. She poked her husband and leaned into his ear. “Ask Anja Jenkin to dance,” she said.

Wilhelm picked up quickly on his wife’s suggestion, having learned after many years of marriage to trust her instincts. He immediately turned to clap Helmut on the shoulder. Beneath his mustache, Wilhelm’s broad mouth widened in an ingratiating grin.

“Helmut, my friend, may I dance with your wife? Gretchen wants to dance with you.”

Helmut was very proud of his dancing prowess and did not question when the smiling Gretchen suddenly exchanged places with Anja and took him off in another whirl. Their spouses were soon left far out of sight.

Wilhelm turned to Anja. Putting his arm around her in a normal dance posture, he saw her wince. “Anja? What is it? What is wrong?”

She tried to smile, but instead she felt her face begin to crumble. The single note of concern in his voice had sent a shattering crack through her mask of pretense. Hot tears spilled down her cheeks. She tried to hide them. “...air,” was all he heard, and he immediately set about escorting her off the dance floor and through the table-filled perimeter of the crowded hall. The closest door was the one all the men were using to get out to the privy. That would not do. There were always a few fellows hanging about, smoking and exchanging dirty stories. He looked around and saw the door to the kitchen. There was a backdoor that might provide privacy. He guided her and she followed his lead blindly.

The air outside was dry. The snow squeaked underfoot. Anja sought to control her breathing. As long as she could control it, the pain was tolerable.

“T...thank you, Wilhelm,” she said quietly, seeking the shadow of the corner.

“What is it, Anja? You are in pain.”

“*Nein*, I will be all right.”

“You do not look all right. Are you ill?”

She shook her head. “*Nein-kein*, it is nothing. Something I ate perhaps. That is all.”

Wilhelm was not quite certain what to do. Helmut was not the most stable tempered of men. Who knew what he would think if he discovered his wife was out here alone with another man? Gretchen would know what to do. Maybe he should go fetch one of the women. He did not have time to deliberate long before Katarina, Anja’s young daughter, found them.

“Mama?” The worry on the fifteen-year-old’s face was obvious as she shot out the door. “Mama, are you all right?”

“Katarina!” Anja started in surprise. “*Ja, ja*. I am fine. Where is your papa?”

“He is not my papa,” the girl responded quickly. “I will never call him my papa. And you are not fine, Mama. You should come back inside and sit down. I sent Stanley to fetch Doctor Dietrich.”

Anja gave her daughter a look. “There is no need for that. You go stop him this minute.”

“*Nein*, Mama. You must let the doctor see you”

Anja had no time to protest any further. Stanislaus, her youngest, came bounding out next, his young face filled with very adult anxiety. After assuring himself that his mother was not in any immediate danger, he wordlessly stepped aside for the doctor, who had now joined them.

It was too many people, Anja thought in growing panic. Soon someone would notice and then word would get back to Helmut. She could not withstand another quarrel with him, not this soon.

“Anja, what is this I hear? You do not feel well?” The doctor immediately took her wrist in one hand and withdrew his pocket watch with the other. “Hmm...” he said, studying the watch in the light of the lantern hanging by the door.

No one else said a word.

“Umm...hmm.” Doctor Dietrich calmly slipped the pocket watch back into his vest and looked around. “Well, surely there is somewhere we can have a little privacy, *ja*? And let us get in out of the cold.”

Anja forced a small laugh. “Oh, but Herr Doctor, it is not necessary, really. I am afraid my daughter imagines things.”

“I do not imagine things,” Wilhelm looked at the doctor. “She was in pain.”

“I only needed some air.”

“There is a pantry, Herr Doctor,” Katarina suggested, pointing inside to the far side of the kitchen. “It is where the dishes are kept. It is small, but you could take Mama in there. We will make sure no one disturbs you, Mama.”

The elderly doctor looked over his spectacles at the stocky, young girl and gave a nod of approval. “*Ja*, I am certain it will do. Stanislaus, be a good lad and fetch my bag from my sleigh.” The boy took off pell-mell. Everyone knew the doctor’s sleigh on sight. It was huge and had been brought all the way from Germany.

Anja gave in. She could not protest any longer. To do so would simply create more of a scene. Wordlessly, she followed the doctor into the pantry. He lit the lantern within the small room, and when he had closed the door, she spoke. “

“Too much the children worry.” She smiled. “I took a little fall before coming here tonight, and I am beginning to feel the bruises. That is all. It is nothing. I will be

fine. I suppose I really should not have come, but it is the New Year. How could I keep away? The whole family looks forward to it.”

The old doctor eyed her as he let her talk. “Um...hmm. A little fall you say? How did you fall?”

“I slipped on the steps of our porch. The ice builds up, you see, if we do not watch it. It was very foolish.”

“Where does it hurt?”

“Oh...it does not really hurt, ahh...!” She stifled a cry as his hand pressed against her side. “It hurts there, a little,” she confessed.

“Open your corselet, please.” His voice was stern. Anja loosened the front laces on her corselet and the doctor plucked up the peasant blouse beneath just enough to expose her side. “You have some very fancy bruises there, young woman. I do not wonder that you are feeling them.”

She said nothing. She was forty-four years old, but aged Doctor Dietrich still referred to her as a *young* woman. He pressed again against her flesh and this time she could not keep the tears from springing into her eyes.

“I am sorry, my dear, that hurt a great deal, did it? Tell me if this hurts as badly.” He pressed another spot and Anja gasped. He pulled back immediately. “Let us get this out of the way.” He pulled off the corselet all together. “Can you raise your arms a little, please?” He noted her wince. He lifted her blouse to look at her back. Then, he continued his inspection to her other side. “Hmm....” After a long moment, he drew back, removed his spectacles, and began cleaning them with his handkerchief. “And if I made you remove all of your clothing, where else would I find bruises?”

“I do not know what you...” she began defensively, then caught herself. “What I mean to say is, I do not remember hitting anything else. I suppose I might have. But I am fine,” she added with a hard note of defiance.

“You are not *fine*.” An edge of frustration was rising in the doctor’s voice. “You have badly bruised ribs, possibly fractured. *Gotte der Himmel!* I cannot believe trying to dance you were. Home you should be, and in bed.”

She said nothing but began the painful task of tucking her blouse back into her skirt waist.

“Did not Helmut see you fall?”

“*Ja*, of course, but...”

“So, what kind of man drags his wife to a dance when...”

“*Nein-nein*, it was my fault.” Anja realized her mistake. “It was me. I begged to come so I could see my oldest boys. I do not see them so often any more and I... Please, Herr Doctor. Do not make a fuss. You are right, more careful I will be.” She began again trying to tuck her blouse.

His hand reached out gently to stay her activity.

“I will have to bind you, Anja.” His gruff voice softened. “You can not go about like this. You are very fortunate your corselet is stiff and helps to support you. If something is broken, a lung you could puncture. I must listen, but I need my bag. For the pain, something I can give you. Wait.” He opened the pantry door and found Katarina and Stanislaus standing sentry. “My bag,” he gestured and took the small, worn leather satchel from the young boy’s hands. “*Danke*.” He closed the door again.

Katarina looked at the plain surface of the closed pantry door but she did not see it. *So, he had beat her.* Katarina had suspected as much, despite Mama's excuses. The rage within the young girl was mounting as her fingers gripped the sides of her skirts.

Katarina had heard the fight earlier that day, but Helmut had locked them out of the house. She and Stanislaus had sat cringing on the porch while the awful sounds had leaked out to them. Muffled cries; Mama's cries. Dishes breaking. Furniture being shoved about. Helmut's oaths and curses. It had not been the first time.

Ever since Mama had married Helmut, there had been fighting in their home. It had become worse since the older boys had moved out. Helmut drank too much and he cursed all the time when company was not around to hear him. Life had never been like that when Papa had been alive. *Oh, Papa. Why? Why did you have to leave us?*

Katarina had been only nine years old, but she remembered very clearly the day they had come home from school and found their yard filled with strange buggies and wagons. Josephine, Stanislaus, and their half-sister, Heidi, had been with her.

They hurried their step in bewilderment. What was it? What was going on? What did all the wagons mean? People were everywhere talking in hushed voices, on the porch, around the house. No one seemed to notice the children as they walked up the porch steps and went inside, threading their way through the whispering adults who congested every room. Then, Karl was standing before them. He awkwardly put his arms around all four of them. He was the eldest. They could hear someone crying. It was Mama. Mama was crying. They had never ever heard Mama cry before that day.

ZZZZZ

The young girl still felt the emptiness within her, still could feel the same sick roll of her stomach as when she had first seen the coffin sitting up on trestles in their Sunday parlor. It had been Karl who had picked her up in his arms so she could look down and say a last good-bye.

She peered at the body. The figure in the pine box did not look like her Papa. It looked like a life-size doll that was supposed to be Papa. The color of the skin was wrong. The smell was wrong. It was cold and stiff like a doll. The hair was combed flat and plastered to the head. Papa never wore his hair like that. His hair was bouncy with a big curl that fell over his forehead. And Papa was always full of winks and smiles. The face she saw was stiff and grim.

“That is not Papa, Karl,” she whispered.

“*Ja*, Katty, it is,” he replied softly.

“It does not look like him.”

“Because his soul has left.”

“Why?”

“When people die, their souls leave their bodies behind. They do not need them anymore.”

“*Nein*. Papa would not leave us.” Her head shook in denial.

“He had no choice, little one, he is with God now.”

“Why?”

“There was an accident.”

“Why?”

“He fell, Katty.”

“Fell?”

Karl nodded. “From the hayloft.”

“Nein, Karl. Papa would not fall. He was very careful. He taught us to be careful. You remember, do you not? He taught us all to be careful.”

“I am sorry, Katty.”

“No, Karl, no. That is not my Papa, it is not. It is not! It is not! It is not Papa!” Katarina screamed and flailed out in anger and Karl held her tightly until she collapsed in wails and sobs against the rough texture of his shirt.

Six years had gone by but the memories were still sharp with pain. It had been a double blow to their happy family. Not only had they lost Papa, but nothing else remained the same. Heidi left them soon after that. She was Papa’s daughter by his first wife. Heidi’s grandmother took her away since Mama was not really blood kin. Katarina loved Heidi. So had Mama. Mama had always called Heidi her oldest daughter. When Heidi left, Mama put on a brave face and tried to make a joke. “I still have two daughters left,” she said with a crooked smile. “Two out of three is not so bad.”

Spring rushed into summer, summer had flown, and when autumn came, she and Josie were unable to return to school. There was always too much work to be done.

I wonder where Heidi is now, Katarina thought. She must be almost twenty. The last they had heard an aunt had taken her west into Minnesota. Poor Heidi. She had lost

both mother and father. Katarina clenched her fists. She, too, had lost her father. But she was not going to lose her mama as well.

The door to the pantry opened and Anja stepped out, looking somewhat more relaxed, although she moved with a stiff erectness. She patted her children, one with each hand. "I told you I am fine. The doctor says I must rest a day, that is all."

Dietrich scowled at the words. "I tell you to rest not just one day, but several days, Frau Jenkin. You must take more than the medicine, several weeks you must take care."

"*Ja, ja, danke*, Herr Doctor. Thank you very much. I do feel much better. Come now, children, we must find your..." she stopped herself. Helmut was not a father to them, and she was not going to try and force them to address him as such any longer. But for better or worse, he was her husband and the children must show him the proper respect. "We must find Herr Jenkin."

The band was taking a short break and Anja looked all about the hall for Helmut. *He might have gone to the privy*, she told herself, and then she saw him at the kegs. He was drinking a great deal, but he usually did not get really mean unless he had whiskey.

"Stanley, have you seen your brothers?" she asked her youngest.

"I saw them earlier, Mama. Looking for you they were."

"Ah, *gut*. Then, they are here. I will see them," she smiled. The laudanum the doctor had given her was taking effect. "Have you eaten yet your first meal? No, of course you have not. Such a silly question. Shall we go get a plate together?"

Stanislaus shrugged.

“Where has Katty gotten herself to?” Anja looked around her and realized her youngest daughter had vanished from sight. “And Josie, she was to be here with her young husband, have you seen them?”

Stanislaus shook his head.

It worried Anja that Josephine had married so young. Barely sixteen, she was. Both she and her husband were little more than babies. *Escaping*, Anja told herself. Josie had never said so, but Anja suspected that Helmut had been pawing on the girl. *Oh, my dear God*, Anja sighed to herself, *what have I done to my family? Why did I ever marry him? We could have managed. The boys were big enough. Now, he has driven off my grown sons. Driven Josie away. I have only Katty and Stanley left. We have no life. Why did I do it?*

But Anja knew very well why she had married Helmut Jenkin. He had been charming and generous while courting her, and she had had a hole in her heart the size of Lake Michigan after Stephano had died. For a time she had thought she would die. In an odd way she had wanted it. She had never experienced anything like that before. It had not been that way when her first husband had passed away.

She married the first time when she was eighteen. He was sober and hard-working, and more than twice her age, a good man who never wore his muck boots into the house. Anja had, in turn, respected, honored, and obeyed. And she had bore him three sons to carry on his name, first Karl, then Victor, and finally, Hans. He had been kind and, in time, she had developed an honest affection for him. It was all she had known and she had been content. It had been gratifying to hear him exclaim over her meals. But his love of her cooking kept adding inches to his already considerable girth.

Then, one Saturday night, as she dutifully lay beneath him in their bed, his heart gave out and she had narrowly escaped being suffocated to death.

No one had expected her to grieve for long. She was too young. With a large farm and three small children to raise, she needed another husband. And who could have been a better match than Stephano Koppa, the young widower with his baby daughter? It became the consensus amidst the Catholic German immigrants of two counties that the couple made a perfect pair. A respectable twelve months after her first husband's death, Anja married again.

Physically, Stephano was everything her first husband had not been—young, lean muscled, and playfully lusty. It was from him that Anja had learned there was more to a marriage bed than duty. Together, they became a family of nine with her three children, his one, and the three they took immense pleasure in conceiving together. It had been a bustling home filled to the chimney tops with love.

“Your mother is not so often wrong about things,” Anja spoke as much to herself as to young Stanislaus, who had stayed seated with her at the side of the dance floor, “but when she is, it is a doozy.” The child looked to her and grinned. He did not know exactly to what she was referring, but it was fun just hearing her joke.

“I could eat now,” he said, stifling a little yawn.

She ruffled his straw-colored hair. “*Ja*, you had better eat before you fall asleep or hungry you will live for the rest of the year.” She smiled. He got up expecting her to follow.

“Go,” she waved, “for a few minutes more I want to sit.”

“Happy New Year!” Anja called out as she stood beside her husband, waving to her neighbor, Frau Schmitt, as she spun by on the dance floor in the arms of Herr Schmitt.

“Happy New Year!” the ruddy-faced woman called back with a laugh. Just then her husband whisked her off in the opposite direction. The man was amazingly light on his feet for his size and age.

“Happy New Year, Anja!” cried out a golden-haired matron as she approached the couple who were watching the dancers whirl by. “And a Happy New Year to you, Stephano. Oh, just let me catch you under the mistletoe,” she teased the man at Anja Koppa’s side, “and I will steal a kiss from this handsome husband of yours,” she spoke boldly to Anja and then burst into a giggle exposing her large and prominent teeth. “Look...look now... He is blushing. Five years you are married and this man can still blush? Anja, you always were a lucky one.”

“Happy New Year to you also, Gretchen,” Anja returned the greeting good-naturedly. It was all harmless fun. Gretchen Gerter was a good friend and her husband was jealously watching his wife from only a few feet away. The freckle-faced young matron seemed to like keeping Wilhelm Gerter in a state of anxiety. “And Happy New Year to you, too, Wilhelm!” called over Anja. When she caught his eye, he nodded quickly and shifted on his feet. “Have you seen the spread for the First Meal, Wilhelm? I brought pickled pigs’ feet. Grandmother’s old recipe. You must try them.”

Wilhelm looked at her and then smiled broadly, exposing a gold tooth. He had a weakness for pickled pigs’ feet.

“Have you eaten yet?” Anja turned back to Gretchen.

“*Nein*, we were just going to get a plate now. Why don’t you and Stephano join us?”

“Stephano? Do you want to eat now?” Anja looked to her young husband.

The man shook his head, a dark shock of hair bouncing over his forehead.

“Not yet. Excuse us, Gretchen,” he added and he pulled his wife gently toward the dance floor with a wink. “Once I eat, I will not want to dance for a while so, better we dance now, *ja*?” he smiled down at her pleasantly. The glitter of lights reflecting in his dark blue eyes added to his air of merriment.

“Whatever you say, *liebchen*.”

He patted her backside and she giggled. Then, he whirled her around the dance floor to the beat of a *schotish*.

Anja sighed. She had adored Stephano. And when he took the fall that broke his neck, she was pushed to the brink of madness. The children had pulled her back from that brink. Life must go on, she finally realized, but she had longed so intensely for that intimacy again. Foolishly, she had thought she could have it with Helmut.

“Mama, some spareribs and sauerkraut I get for you,” Stanislaus interrupted her thoughts as he brought the plate over. “With some black bread. I know you like it. You do like it, don’t you? Mama?” The child knew something was not quite right. His mother looked unfocused.

“Oh, *ja, ja*, I like very much. *Danke. Danke*. Very nice of you, son, you are a good boy. Very good. You remind me of your father.”

“Be sure you get some of the spare ribs and sauerkraut...and the little potato dumplings...and don’t forget the black bread...” Anja called after Stephano as he moved off to the serving tables to fill two plates. She had become dizzy on the dance floor, and he insisted she sit while he get them their first meal of the New Year.

He was passing a clump of tables close to the kegs filled with beer when he heard his name.

“Stephano, you know what they say, whoever serves first will serve all the year through,” Wilhelm Gerter called from a table at the side. “You should send your wife to get the food.”

“Like you did?” Stephano called back with a grin. There was laughter from several sources around them.

“*Ja*, Wilhelm, why for you try to give advice when your own chicken coop is ruled by the hens?” called out another of their neighbors and another wave of laughter followed.

Wilhelm said nothing but his face turned bright pink. He then drained the last of his beer and set his empty mug down before his wife.

“Gretchen.” He looked at her and then looked at the empty mug.

“My little turnip is thirsty,” she said with mocking concern. “Let me get you something to drink, my little thirsty turnip.” She bound up and went to the keg to pull a mug full of brew. Coming back, she dipped the froth with her fingers and painted it on his mustache, then she kissed it off.

“Gretchen!” he said, turning red with embarrassment while the on-lookers guffawed in amusement. Gretchen gave him a cross-eyed look and took up his mug again. Throwing her head back, she chugged the contents in one breath. She deposited the empty mug on the table before him.

“*Das ist gut!*” she declared, then tried to stifle a surprise belch behind her hand. Even Wilhelm was laughing now, watching his wife clown around before she collapsed in giggles onto his lap. They would all sleep well before this day was over.

Anja looked at her son’s small glass of beer. “How much have you had tonight?” she gestured to the glass.

“Only this, with my food.”

“*Gut.* You are too young to drink much.”

“I know, Mama. Ferdie drank two glasses and had to lie down.”

“Ferdie better hope his belly does not complain.”

“I know.”

“Remember always to be a temperate man, Stanley, like your papa. A little beer is good for you, it flushes the kidneys but...” Anja saw Helmut approaching them. “... too much has made many fools.”

“Where have you been?” Helmut asked, swaggering up to her. “Hiding?”

“*Nein.*” Anja felt surprisingly calm. “I have been waiting to eat the First Meal with you, my husband. Would you like me to fetch you a plate?”

He looked down at the plate before her. “It looks like you have been waiting.”

“It is only a little something Stanley brought to me. I have not yet gone to the serving table. Would you like a plate?”

Helmut sat down hard, the chair creaked beneath him. “Go,” he gestured. “You,” he looked to Stanislaus, “make yourself useful. Get me another beer. My mug is almost empty.”

Stanislaus looked to his mother, who gestured for him to go as he had been instructed.

Helmut turned around and glared at her. “I thought you were going to get my food, woman. Stand not behind my back.” Anja hurried off to the serving tables. “And you,” he scowled at Stanislaus. “If I give you instruction, you do as I say. Look not to your mother for permission, understand?”

“*Ja*, Herr Jenkin.”

“Now go. Get my beer.”

The doctor had told her not to drink any alcohol with the medicine he had given her for the pain, not even beer, but Helmut had insisted, taking offense that she would refuse to drink to the New Year with him. Not wanting to explain, not wanting him to know she had seen the doctor, she had no excuse not to drink at least one glass of beer. It had terrible repercussions.

“What is the matter with you, woman?” Helmut asked harshly as Anja weaved and stumbled.

“I am tired, Helmut. Tired. I want to go home.”

“Home? Are you crazy? The party has barely started.”

“I need to sleep.”

“You look like a drunk. You fool. Sit down before you fall into someone’s table and embarrass me.” He grasped her shoulders and pushed her into a chair.

“By all means, my husband. God forbid I should embarrass you.”

“What did you say?”

“I want to sleep, I said. I am exhausted. I have been up late for three days cooking for this night and I am tired.”

“Woman,” he growled behind clenched teeth. “We go home when I say we go home. Understand? Now, sit up and look alive.”

“Helmut, I can barely keep my eyes open,” she pleaded, holding on to the sides of her chair. “Let me go join the children in the straw.”

“I said sit!”

His ferocious expression did nothing to her. She did not even see him. She was drifting in the past. Remembering again all the New Year parties with Stephano.

Stephano glanced back at Anja and a note of concern flickered across his face. She looked pale to him. Frau Mueller saw the expression and turned to look in Anja’s direction. “Is she feeling unwell?” she asked bluntly.

“A little dizzy. I think she has done too much. She has been cooking for three days for this party.

“Ja,” the older woman nodded her head, but a bit of cooking never hurt a strong German *Hausfrau*, she thought. “Hannah?” Frau Mueller caught sight of her thirteen-year-old daughter. “Where are the little ones?”

“Sleeping, Mama.” The young girl pointed to a spot by the sidewall near the fireplace where straw and blankets had been spread for the children who had reached their limit of keeping the New Year watch.

“*Gut, gut.* Now, help Herr Koppa bring food to his wife.”

“*Nein-nein,*” Stephano shook his head and waved off the offer. “I can manage.”

“Of course, you can,” Frau Mueller agreed. “But only two hands have you. How do you carry the beer, huh? Hannah, get mugs of beer for Frau and Herr Koppa.”

“*Ja, Mama.*” Hannah was more than happy to help. She had an enormous crush on Herr Koppa. He was popular amongst the youngsters. He looked at them when they spoke and he listened to them with an animated face that was full of conspiratorial winks or approving smiles.

Hannah went to the kegs and pulled two mugs of beer, carrying them carefully over to the table where Anja sat. “Here, Frau Koppa, for you and the Herr,” Hannah said shyly.

“*Danke, liebchen, danke,*” Anja smiled in appreciation, her violet eyes sparkling. “But, before I drink this, I think I should check the baby.” She started to rise.

“I will check on him,” the young girl volunteered quickly.

“Do you know where his cradle is?” Anja asked in surprise.

Hannah nodded. “Right over there. I will be right back.”

Anja gratefully sat back down. She was still feeling a little dizzy. She was overly hungry, she told herself. She could not possibly be eating for two again so quickly; little Stanislaus was still nursing. No, she reminded herself, the problem was she had not eaten anything since... She tried to remember if she had eaten any lunch. Small wonder she was dizzy. Her thoughts were interrupted when Stephano arrived with two heaping plates of hot food.

“Oh, my goodness!” She stared at the plates. “It is enough to feed the Kaiser’s army.”

“Eat what you want, I will finish the rest,” Stephano grinned. “We cannot skimp on the first meal of the New Year. Happy New Year, Frau Koppa.” He saluted her with his mug.

“Happy, Happy New Year, Herr Koppa,” she replied, saluting him in return. She took only a sip, however, and, keeping an eye out for Hannah to return with her report on the baby, she dug into her food.

“Anja!” Helmut jerked her out of the chair. “I was speaking to you. What the devil is wrong with you?” He pulled her toward the door. “You stupid cow,” he muttered in her ear and pushed her outside. She was startled as she found herself being shoved into the deeper snow near the wall of the building. A man coming back from the privy saw them, stopped, and after a few seconds, retreated back into the privy. Several others hanging around the door smoking quickly disappeared into the hall as Helmut’s voice rose.

“So, you are tired, are you? Can not keep your eyes open?” He reached down into the crusted snow, grabbed up a chunk, and began rubbing it roughly over her face.

The ice tore at her skin. She toppled backward into the snowbank in an effort to get away and felt the pain flash out again in her side.

“Helmut!” she cried out, suddenly wide awake, the shards of ice scraping her. “No, please, Helmut, stop. I... I am sorry. Please.” She tried to defend herself, covering her face with her hands, but he was standing over her and she could not escape. Her knuckles were scraped raw. “Stop, please... *bitte, bitte...*” she begged.

“Maybe now you can wake up and look at your husband when he speaks to you,” he snapped with disgust. “Do you think you can do that? Do you?”

“*Ja-ja,*” she nodded her head. She was afraid to uncover her face. He was still so close to her, hovering over her, a looming mountain of doom.

“Look at me when I speak to you!”

Slowly, she removed her hands. He hauled back and slapped her sharply, putting his weight into it and numbing the side of her face. She cried out as the pain shot up into her ear. “No more, Helmut, please...have pity, no more.”

He straightened up. “Get up!”

She struggled, trying with all her will to comply, but her side was on fire, and she could not get her balance in the snowbank. “I cannot, Helmut...please, help me.”

“Ahck, stay there and freeze for all I care,” he snapped, and feeling chilled himself, he turned to go back into the hall.

Anja began coughing and with each cough a wave of fire tore at her side. She heard someone come out.

“Help me, *bitte...*” she called weakly, which caused another paroxysm of coughing. Josephine, Katarina, and Stanislaus were by her side in a second, helping her

up, trying not to hurt her any further. Once on her feet, she could breathe more easily and the coughing subsided. She spit out blood.

“Do not speak, Mama,” Katarina said quietly. “Save your breath.”

None of them said anything but helped their mother inside and back to the kitchen. Anja had never felt so utterly defeated, her pride in shreds. There was no sense in pretending any longer. With humiliating shame, she knew that within minutes her entire universe would know she was married to a wife-beater and somehow that made her feel incredibly guilty.

Josephine blinked back tears when she saw her mother’s face. Her forehead and nose were wet and scraped raw and one side was turning a dark, ugly red. Her beautiful eyes already looked puffy.

“Stanley, go fetch Herr Doctor, quickly,” Katarina gritted to her brother. “He beat her yesterday,” she said to Josephine. Anja did not try to deny it. “The doctor already had to treat her. And it was not the first time.”

“Mama!” Josephine gasped in shock. “Ohh, Mama.”

“Stay with her,” Katarina commanded.

“Where are you going?” Her sister looked at her.

“Never mind. Just stay with Mama.”

Josephine nodded.

Katarina walked quickly back out into the main room. She was looking for Karl. With some relief she saw Stanislaus leading the doctor back to the kitchen, but she kept going her own way. She saw Helmut and circled around, keeping a wide distance between them. Her eyes raked over the crowd. She had been looking for Karl earlier but

had not yet seen him. Then, she spotted Hans on the dance floor. Weaving between the dancers, she tugged his sleeve and spoke directly into his ear. His face went from a pleasant smile to a tight-lipped frown. He made his apologies to his partner and left with his sister.

Together they found Victor, who led the way to Karl. Solemnly, all three followed Katarina back to the kitchen. They passed near Helmut, who was once again by the kegs drinking and exchanging stories with his cronies, but the foursome did not look in his direction.

The three husky young men walked silently into the kitchen. They took a long look at their mother as she sat submissively before the doctor's ministrations. Josie was holding a towel filled with snow to her mother's left eye.

"Herr Doctor, I will be back shortly to take my mother home," Karl said evenly, betraying no emotion except for the tell-tale clenching of his jaw muscle. "Tell the girls what she needs and I will see that it is done."

Doctor Dietrich looked up from his patient and nodded.

"Stay here with her," Karl instructed Katarina and Josephine. "We will be back in a little while."

Instinctively, Stanislaus knew something was brewing, and he started to follow his big brothers. Karl put up a hand. "*Nein*, stay with Mama." The young boy looked up into Karl's grim face, then at Victor and Hans. Their lips were drawn tight. He decided this was not a time to argue.

Hans followed Victor, who followed Karl out of the kitchen. Karl walked straight over to the kegs and confronted Helmut.

“Jenkin, I want to talk with you,” Karl said, looking the older man straight in the eye and purposely choosing to attach no title of respect to his name.

“Talk.”

“Outside.”

“You got something to say, say it here,” Helmut feigned disinterest.

“I said *outside*.”

Victor and Hans came up on either side of Helmut and each took an arm.

One of the other men started to say something and another caught his sleeve and lifted a brow. “Do not interfere,” he said slowly. It was the man who earlier had retreated into the privy. “It is family business.”

“That is right,” Karl agreed evenly, his eyes never leaving Helmut’s face. “This is family business.”

Helmut’s gaze darted around. He saw everyone staring at him. Drawing himself to his full height, he shook off Hans and Victor.

“Very well,” he replied to Karl, “if you think you are a man, we will talk man to man.” He would indulge them and hear what they had to say, not that it would make any difference to him. He was master in his own home.

The three escorted Helmut out of doors to a quiet spot behind the barn.

“We have a score to settle,” Karl stated without preamble and let go with a solid and unexpectedly swift punch to Helmut’s soft gut.