

THROUGH THE WALL



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

Alida Sims Malkus



"Let go. Drop!" they cried to her.

CHAPTER 1

The Arrest

SUDDENLY THE sound of heavy footsteps drew nearer, coming up the stairs, tramp, tramp, tramp, nearer, strange and threatening. Hansi's father pushed his chair back from the table, Mama grew white, Hansi set down the forkful of *Wiener Schnitzel* made especially for his birthday dinner. They waited in silence. What was it?

Papa rose noiselessly and started toward the back, but the footsteps were already here at the front door. They did not stop, the door burst open; they were inside.

The Russian police of East Berlin. Five of them!

"You will come with us, Karl Gruner." The red-jowled lieutenant in charge looked fixedly at Papa. Two of the police stepped forward, one on each side of him. They were even taller and stronger than Papa—and armed.

"But what for?" Papa demanded. "What is the charge, Herr Lieutenant?"

"You know quite well, Gruner, and if you don't you will soon. Come along now." The harsh voice of the

lieutenant matched his heavy jaw, the rough stubble on his chin. Hansi would never forget that face. The others were just a blur.

Papa reached down and lifted Hansi in his arms in a tight hug, then turned to Mama. But the police jerked him away. Papa smiled reassuringly at Mama as they led him out. "I'll be back soon, *Liebling*," he said. "Take care of Mama, Hansi."

The soldiers pushed Hansi's father roughly through the door. Mama ran into the hall to gaze after him and wave, but he could not look around. His broad back, his blond head passed beneath the hall light, then the dark of the street swallowed him up, along with the police. The tramp-tramp of Russian great boots receding, that was all.

Hansi threw his arms tight around Mama's waist, and they went back into the room and sat down at the table. He felt cold and empty inside, and his heart was pumping fast.

"But why, Mama?" he pleaded. "What could it be?"

His mother's face was drawn and sick-looking. She did not answer. Suddenly she could not keep back the tears. They fell down her face like a thin waterfall. She put her head down on the table, trying to hide her face in her arms.

Hansi sat silent and still, his blue eyes dark with fear and speculation. What could Papa ever have done? But nothing, that was the only answer. Presently Mama sat up and wiped her eyes. "And on your birthday night," she said, "Your twelfth birthday. But come, Hansi boy; eat your supper now—the good *Wiener Schnitzel*. Everything will be alright."

"I am alright now. Just a little nervous—and disappointed—on your birthday. Papa may be back—even tonight, or tomorrow."

Obediently Hansi lifted a forkful to his mouth and chewed. But he could not swallow. They sat quietly, looking off into space, afraid to see each other's eyes and read the darkling thoughts there.

"Hansi," Mama whispered after a while, "I had best tell you, now. Come sit close to me. So... *Papa may never come back.*" Her breath was coming in wheezes. Now she would have an attack of asthma, poor Mama. He put his arms around her shoulders.

"*Ach,*" she moaned. "We should have gone—gone before—before this happened. Before the Wall was built. Listen, Hansi," she whispered. "You must never tell this. Papa was a prisoner, a prisoner of war—before you were born, the Second World War. After our country was defeated, he—he was taken by the Russians to Siberia, along with thousands of other German prisoners. To Siberia, to the mines. Dreadful, it was bitter cold. Thousands of prisoners died. But after five years of it, Papa escaped. He made his way back here to East Berlin. To his home—but there was nothing left of it. A burned mass of rubble."

Mama's breath was coming in dreadful gasps. "But he found me," she went on after a moment. "We had been betrothed before the war. I had waited for him, so long. And I had my parents to take care of; they were old, they had suffered much. So Papa took another name, and we were married, and stayed on because of the old folk. We moved into this old place—Papa's real name?" She looked fearfully around the old paneled room but could not speak again.

She rose and stumbled toward the couch in the alcove. Hansi put pillows at her back and ran for the medicine.

“Mama, I’ll call the doctor. I’ll go fetch him right now.” He pulled the quilt up over her.

“No, no.” She shook her head. “*He is one* of them, the Reds—they would take you away from me, I know, if they thought I was sick.” She caught his hand and held on to it tightly.

After a while her breathing grew easier, and she seemed to doze. Hansi carefully slipped his hand from her clasp and stood up. He tiptoed over to the window and looked out over the dark streets of East Berlin, so dark and quiet. People were rarely abroad at night; the Wall police would arrest them or take a shot at them.

His eyes roamed the city, looking for the Wall. Yes, there it was, way beyond, there to the west. He could see the row of lights following the River Spree. Then a broken row hidden in places by the buildings bordering the Soviet sector. His father had forbidden him ever to go near there—that terrible Wall which the Russians had built to keep the German people apart, to separate families and let no one leave the east half of the city. The Wall that cut Berlin in half.

Some of the boys at school had watched the Soviet soldiers and the People’s Police build it. First they had strung the barbed wires up, and criss-crossed them, and tangled them, until nothing could get through, and afterwards they began to build a real wall of stone, with spikes and more barbed wire on top.

Papa had taken him down there once himself, to see it. The day they started the Wall was a Sunday, August 13th, 1961. The People’s Police, those were the young trained soldiers of East Berlin itself, and the “Factory Combat Groups,” all armed, stood in a solid line. And there were

armored cars, and big water throwers to keep anyone from passing over the borderline into West Berlin, and tanks—crowds of people were watching on both sides of the Brandenburg Gate. The Soviet police were turning the powerful hoses on West Berliners who were shouting angrily at this new outrage.

“I never thought to see such a thing as this,” Papa had said in Hansi’s ear as he held him up so that he could get a look at the whole thing. “Germans turned against Germans, brother against brother—you will never forget this, Hansi.” Papa had expressly forbidden him ever to go down there again. “It is dangerous, my son, dangerous for all of us, believe me.”

“But there are other Germans on the west side, right on the other side of the barbed wire,” Hansi had said. Some of them were always there, watching. The boys said that there were guns and tanks, as well. Hansi had never seen a tank, and when he asked Papa later if he couldn’t go down with the boys just once his father had been very much upset.

“Do you want to be shot at?” he said fiercely. “They don’t stop at children, remember. The Communists don’t want any German to leave East Berlin, and never forget that Communist Russia is in charge of our city now. Thousands of Germans have already fled, and thousands more will get across to West Berlin,” his father had said.

But why then had the police come and taken his father away? In his heart Hansi knew the answer. The Communists would send Papa back to Siberia, to the mines. This was all due to the war, World War Two, before he was even born. The Allies and Russia had won the war, and they had divided the city of Berlin between



There was starlight, and the sentinel could see plenty well enough.



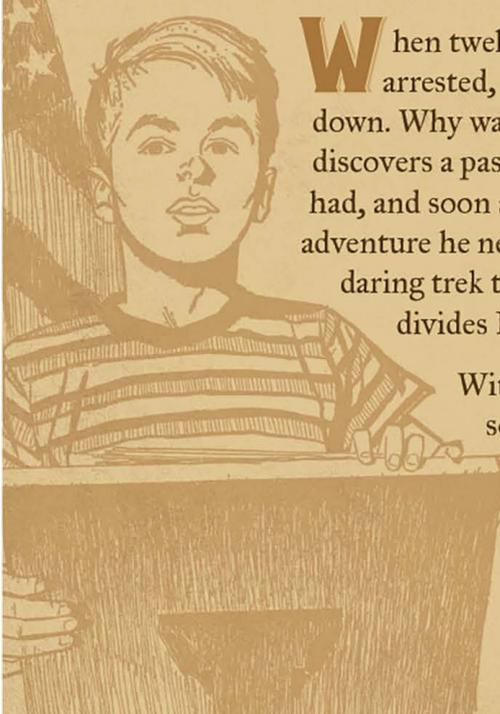
A bullet struck the water beside his head.



"I am speaking today for the American Constitution."

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Suddenly the sound of heavy footsteps drew nearer, coming up the stairs, tramp, tramp, tramp, nearer, strange and threatening. The Russian police of East Berlin. Five of them!



When twelve-year-old Hansi's father is arrested, his world is turned upside down. Why was his father taken away? Hansi discovers a past he didn't know his family had, and soon after, he embarks on an adventure he never could have imagined—a daring trek to cross the great wall that divides East from West Berlin.

With the help of a small dog and some other friends he makes along the way, Hansi comes to realize that the things he's been taught in post-World War II East Berlin may not provide the best way to live after all.



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