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Ten Men, Five Dachshunds

by

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"So that's what we want you to do. You can have a couple hundred men, what ever you need, but break up that damn Communist meeting, and do a good job. Break heads, if you need to, but I want them routed out of the hall in a way they won't forget soon! I've had it up to here with their bragging and boasting. Filthy traitors!" The stocky, brown shirted man paused, then continued. "And, look, Forst, I don't care if you are a medical student. This is the SA, not one of your collegiate dueling and debating societies. You don't stop and patch up those swine, like last time, understand?"

The young Sturmführer tried to keep the distaste he felt for this assignment from showing. Will I never hear the end of that? he wondered impatiently. Damn! I'm as good a National Socialist as any of them. That doesn't mean I have to let a man bleed to death! And, he rationalized, if I had let him die, it would have been another nasty headline about us. No matter that

the Communists had no compunction about murdering us, but let one of them die, and the whole damn press is on us like a hive of wasps.

"I mean what I say, Forst. We're not going to bail you out this time if you get yourself arrested again doing something that dumb. Let the bastards die, you get the hell out before the police come, you hear me?"

Karl Forst still smarted over the injustice of his arrest. He had been involved in a street brawl which occurred when a band of Communist bullies tried to break up a Hitler Youth troop march. He and a squad of other SA men had come to their rescue, and the ensuing fight had been bloody and brutal. At the sounds of police sirens, both sides had broken off the fight and scattered. One brawny Communist lay on the ground, screaming for help, blood pouring from a wound in his left arm. Karl had stopped to help the man, applying a tourniquet, twisting it tight to stop the arterial flow that threaten the man's life. A stunning blow from a police truncheon caught him as he knelt by the injured man. He awakened in a jail cell, charged with rioting, disturbing the peace and assault.

He had stood before the Judge, head aching, vision blurred from concussion, listening with dazed confusion as the man whose life he had saved accused him of assault and attempted murder. Only the attorney supplied by the Party had kept him from a felony conviction and a long sentence.

Aloud he gritted a clipped "Zu Befehl!" stiffening his

already rigid posture.

"Still squeamish, Forst? Well, you'll learn." He tossed a sheaf of papers at the young officer. "Here, study the situation, and let me know how many squads you think you will need. We expect they will have about 2000 to 2500 people present. It's their big, gala May Day celebration, so they'll be out in force with their overstuffed wives and sniveling brats."

Oh, great! thought Karl Forst, as he took his leave of his Sturmabteilungsführer. Now I get to beat up women and children! I don't mind getting into fights with Communists, but women and kids...? I can't believe the Führer really wants this. He stormed from the building, brushing aside a couple of brown shirted troopers who gaped after him in surprise. He made a valiant effort to slow his pace and control his expression as their startled comment reached his ear. "Wonder what put a wild hair up his..."

Karl worked off some of his anger on the long walk back to his dreary lodgings. Part way home, it started to rain, a cold drizzle that chilled him through and through. He folded the papers and put them inside his shirt, trying to keep them from getting too wet. He considered briefly taking a bus, but a quick check of his pocket ruled out that possibility. He hunched his shoulders and walked faster.

Karl closed the heavy Anatomy book, and stared unseeingly at the dark red cover. He had a major exam next morning, but his thoughts kept returning to the problem his Sturmabteilungsführer had posed. He added his own parameter to the problem: how to

break up the meeting without risking hurting women and children.

He hitched the threadbare blanket tighter around his shoulders, shivering slightly in the late April damp. His uniform hung from the wooden pegs that served as a closet. He glanced up, catching sight of the dripping shirt. God, I hope it dries before morning. The thought of wearing a damp uniform all day sent another shiver through his too thin body.

He stood, wringing the water from the bottom of the shirt, hoping it would dry faster. As he adjusted the pants on their wire stretcher, he heard a faint scurrying on the table. He turned just in time to see a rat make off with the scrap of cheese rind he had been gnawing on. An irrational anger seized him. He picked up the dagger from the table and started after the rat, cursing it, furious at the loss of his last bit of food. Then the idiocy of his action struck him. The rat was only doing what rats do, the fault was his for leaving the cheese unattended.

He sagged into the wooden chair, his elbows on the table, his hands over his face, It seemed so hopeless. The exhausting job on the docks barely paid his tuition and rent. He scrounged what food he could from discarded cargo and earned a few pfennigs at an occasional odd job, with which he bought stale bread and sometimes a scrap of cheese. He had been lucky last week. The cargo master had discarded a box of half spoiled fruit. Karl fell upon it as if it were a gift from heaven. He knew his diet was woefully inadequate. He had had to fight to keep his

treasure, but it was worth the bruises. He had feasted on the salvaged fruit, savoring each drop of juice, remembering a time before the great depression when there was always enough to eat, warm clothes, a loving home and family. Now it was all gone. His father had been killed in the last month of the first war. The ruinous inflation had swiftly eaten the family's savings and taken their home. His mother was living on a tiny pension and the charity of grudging relatives.

He pulled himself up sharply. Stop whimpering and act like a man. Feeling sorry for yourself is a waste of time! Put your mind to the problem, think! A particularly violent gust of wind and rain rattled the window of his tiny room. Somewhere a rat chattered and squeaked. Suddenly he sat up straight. A big grin split his face, and he pounded the table with glee. That's it! he shouted triumphantly.

Karl strode into SA Headquarters on the following morning. He handed his manpower request to the Sergeant on duty. "Forty men for preparation, ten for the raid itself, and five dachshunds." The Sergeant looked at Karl unbelievably. "Five dachshunds ? What in hell are you going to do with five dachshunds?

Karl smiled. "Why, carry out my orders, Sergeant. I was told anything within reason, and this is certainly within reason." He turned on his heel and left, leaving the Sergeant staring at the requisition with combined amazement and disgust.

Karl swore his forty helpers to secrecy. Then he asked for volunteers to constitute the squad of ten who would actually

break up the meeting. There was such fierce rivalry that he finally had to resort to drawing lots to select the squad.

May Day finally came, and Karl and his men were ready. The evening was fine, warm and clear. The young SA men watched from their vantage point across the broad street as the Festival Hall, draped with red bunting for the occasion, filled with burly men, stuffed into their Sunday best, escorting girlfriends, wives and families. The broad center aisle was decorated with the red Communist Hammer and Sickle banners, and the podium was also bedecked with Communist symbols and flags.

There were to be speeches, entertainment and lots of beer and sausages. The evening got underway with a vigorous, if tuneless, rendition of the Internationale... "Arise, ye prisoners of starvation, arise ye wretched of the earth..." the crowd sang with more enthusiasm than harmony. Just as the final strains died away, Karl and his men made their move.

Spotting their brown uniforms, the burly guards stopped them at the entrance. "No SA men wanted!", one of them snarled, as he pushed Karl back.

"Don't be silly" Karl retorted, "We're the entertainment!" He jerked his head at the men, each one carrying a large sack and every other man leading a dachshund. The little dogs were wearing red collars, and the leashes were wound with red ribbons.

The head guard laughed. "You had me fooled. OK, go on in." He waved them in with a chuckle.

Heads turned as the eleven men marched down the center aisle at parade march, what the Amis call goosestepping, each one

carrying a large wriggling, chittering bag. The little dogs seemed to enjoy the attention, scurrying on their short little legs, yipping excited tiny barks, rolling their big dark eyes. The crowd was laughing and pointing at the little creatures.

One by one, the men and dogs stopped at intervals down the central aisle. Karl continued to the platform at the front. He leaped upon the podium and seized the microphone from the startled speaker. "We brought some of your comrades to the party!" he shouted, as he emptied his bag. Rats and mice poured out, squeaking, chittering, climbing up pant legs and onto tables, nipping at ankles and swarming over the entire podium. Down on the floor, the men simultaneously emptied their sacks full of excited rodents, and then unleashed the dachshunds.

Pandemonium reigned. Men swore, beating off the rats, women shrieked, children screamed. The dachshunds, their hunting instincts aroused to the maximum, began chasing mice and rats through the milling, screaming crowd. Clutching girlfriends, wives, children, sausage rolls, and steins of beer, the men bolted for the exits. They streamed from the hall, swearing, dragging hysterical women and screeching children. The maddened rodents swarmed all over them. The men beat at their pant legs, the women howled as thousands of tiny claws tore at their dresses and stockings. Within minutes the hall was empty of all but rats, mice, dachshunds, torn and tattered bunting and flags, overturned chairs and tables and a few guards, who beat a hasty retreat as the chase swirled around their boots. Cursing, kicking, beating off rats and dogs, they finally capitulated,

leaving the hall to the hunting dogs and their grey prey.

From their vantage point across the street, Karl and his men watched the spectacle with glee, doubling over with laughter. When they caught their breath, the Sergeant clapped Karl on the shoulder. "You certainly broke up that meeting about as thoroughly as I've ever seen it done." He collapsed again in a fit of laughter. "Who would have thought those Commies would be so afraid of their blood brothers?"

At last, Karl whistled to the valiant little dogs. Reluctantly they abandoned the chase and returned to their handlers, who greeted them as canine heros, praising them, picking them up and hugging them exuberantly. In the distance, they heard the sound of angry shouts. The Communists had hastily assembled a goon squad to look for the "entertainers". With magnificent understatement, Karl whispered to his men. "I think it is time to go!" Silently they slipped away through the dark alleys and passages, until they reached the relative safety of SA Headquarters.

The following morning, Karl stood at attention in front of an irate SA Commandant. "...Yes, you broke up the meeting, Sturmführer, but hardly the way I expected. You just don't have the SA temperament, I'm afraid. Turn in your equipment. You're through here! Dismissed!"

Karl paled. He had tried so hard. The Party had meant everything to him, and now he was disgraced, expelled from the SA. He squared his shoulders and marched, frozen faced, from the room.

His rigid self control held until he was out of the office. He walked slowly down the long corridor to the now empty common room. Slowly he unholsted his pistol. It was all over. He couldn't stand the shame and disgrace. Karl walked to the window and stood staring for a few minutes. He chambered a round, and raised the gun toward his temple.

A black clad arm reached over his shoulder and snatched the gun from his hand. "Don't be a fool, Karl! Didn't the Commandant tell you? He transferred you to the SS! We asked for you particularly, actually had to fight him for you. You're exactly what we want; smart, resourceful, original and self reliant."

The black clad SS man took a bemused Karl by the arm and led him toward the door. "We have plans for you! First off, we'll get you a decent uniform. I'm afraid, though, you'll have to move into barracks for a while. You are to go on with your studies, but you'll have to give up working on the docks. The SS pay is about the same as the Army, but you'll have a scholarship for your tuition, and room and board, so you should make out if you're careful..."

Karl listened, stunned, as the man continued to tell him about the unit he was about to join. They were going to pay him! No more working on the rat infested docks, eating scraps and living in a slum garret. His studies paid for, the military training he had wanted so badly, and best of all, becoming part of the very best, the elite Leibstandarte. He looked up, his step quickened. Suddenly, it was a beautiful day.