Neither will Helmuth.

He has learned to do the waiting right, not to concentrate too hard, not to faint, not to attract attention, knows the terrible blows and kicks that fainting brings. Knows not to drink in the morning, no matter how thirsty, because at the Hall of Mirrors, prisoners aren't allowed to use the toilet. And when it's his turn for interrogation, he will stick to his story, take all the blame for the radio and the leaflets, convince the Gestapo that Karl and Rudi were just curious onlookers, that Karl and Rudi are not traitors, that the leaflet campaign was all his idea.

The Gestapo are precise, methodical.

The Gestapo don't make mistakes.

Neither will Helmuth. He will do it right. If only he could warn Karl and Rudi. He squeezes his eyes shut. Prays.

Suddenly the door opens and another prisoner is brought into the Hall of Mirrors. Out of the corner of his swollen eye, Helmuth sees Karl.

The Gestapo have made a mistake!

Helmuth nearly makes a mistake, too. He nearly calls out to Karl. It takes all his strength to swallow the words in his throat. His throat tightens, swollen thick with words.

Karl spots him, too, and a stricken look crosses his

face. *Keepwalkingkeepwalkingkeepwalking,* wills Helmuth, and Karl does. Ten steps. Six steps. Three steps from Helmuth, and at that moment, that precise moment, their eyes lock. Helmuth twitches the left side of his mouth, the slightest smile, winks his left eye, not enough to attract guard's attention, just enough to signal Karl.

Karl blinks, hesitates, and then a flicker of understanding passes over his face. Helmuth swallows hard, gulps down a sob. He's sure that Karl understands, sure that Karl knows that Helmuth has taken the blame, sure Karl understands not to say anything that will implicate himself more during his interrogation.

Helmuth blinks back tears. Wishes he could warn Rudi, wishes he could save them both from interrogation, wishes he could tell them he tried to hold out, wishes he could ask for their forgiveness.

But there is no way to warn Rudi, and Helmuth does not see him or Karl or Düwer again until the trial six months later at the People's Court in Berlin.

The infamous Blood Tribunal.

The highest, most feared court in Germany.

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Six P.M. *A prison guard brings Helmuth paper, a fountain pen, blue ink. For his final letters. The paper, the pen, the ink — they are sweeter than Mutti's plum* Kuchen.

Helmuth pulls up his stool to the scratchy table, spreads out the first sheet of paper, smooths it with his hands. He knuckles away tears. What will he tell his family? That he was foolish to think he could wage battle against such evil?

No. Helmuth does not believe he was foolish. He did not risk his life in vain. God can bring good out of evil, but God can't do it alone. God needs people. People who will stand up. People who will dare to speak out. For what has a man profited, if he has gained the whole world and lost his soul? That's what the Bible says.

Helmuth feels something. His chest swells. A warm calmness fills him, and he knows that he has lived a life that stood for something.

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August 4, 1942. Helmuth leaves for Berlin. A guard handcuffs him, leads him to a green prisoner transport van.

Helmuth climbs inside, and his heart leaps as he sees Karl and Rudi sitting there. Gerhard Düwer, too. Each boy is handcuffed to a guard, and so all Helmuth can do is smile, and smile he does. They all grin at one another, all except for Düwer, who casts his eyes down, and stares at his hands folded in his lap. He cannot look Helmuth in the eye.

But Helmuth waits for Düwer to look at him, wills

Düwer to look at him, and when he does, Helmuth nods and smiles. A mixture of shame and relief crosses Düwer's face. *I'm sorry,* he mouths, his eyes pained. *Me, too,* says Helmuth with a nod. *Me, too.*

The boys ride in silence. At the Altona train station, the guards herd them into a special train compartment marked: PRISONER TRANSPORT — ENTRY *VERBOTEN.*

Once inside, the guards uncuff the boys. Rudi's guard says, "If I were the judge, I would give you boys a good thrashing, put you in uniform, and ship you to the front. Let the punishment fit the crime, that's what I say."

Karl's guard nods, agrees, then points the boys to a bench seat. "Sit. You may talk, but I'm warning you, do not stand up and not one word about your case."

The guards sit across from the four boys, take out a deck of playing cards. Helmuth looks at Rudi and Karl. Hot tears flood his eyes. "I'm sorry," he whispers to them. "I tried to hold out."

His guard shoots a warning look. "Not one word about your case!" he says firmly.

Helmuth falls quiet. Karl cups his hand over Helmuth's, squeezes. So does Rudi. The three friends sit there for the longest while, one hand atop the other.

It is Karl who breaks the silence first. "Remember when I brought the false teeth to church?" he says. Helmuth remembers, and he laughs. For the rest of the trip, the boys swap stories.

Moabit Prison, Berlin. Helmuth meets his court-appointed lawyer, Herr Doctor Knie. He's a nervous man wearing a crooked red bow tie and a Nazi party pin on his lapel. He spends the short time rifling through papers, asking simple questions, but not taking any notes. Helmuth's heart sinks. His lawyer does not work for him. He works for the Nazi government.

Nighttime. Another sleepless night. Helmuth goes over the terrible interrogations again and again, turning each over in his head. Wants to be able to recall each detail so that he's consistent in his answers.

August 11, 1942. The People's Court. The four boys are hustled into the courtroom. Helmuth wears the same clothes he wore the day of his arrest, seven months ago. His trousers hang loosely, his white collared shirt flutters about, so thin he has grown. It is the same with his friends. But they have been permitted to shower with real soap, and so they look scrubbed.

The courtroom has dark oak floors. Dark wood-paneled walls. Three bloodred-swastika black banners hang from ceiling to floor. A large portrait of Adolf Hitler. And it's packed with spectators, mostly reporters. Murmurs ripple over the room as the boys enter.

A guard uncuffs Karl, Rudi, and Gerhard, but Helmuth is left cuffed, his hands chained behind his back. That tells Helmuth something. That the justices have already decided he is the most important criminal, that he has committed a most serious offense. He feels nauseous. The more serious the justices consider the offense, the less likely that Helmuth will be tried as a juvenile.

Helmuth looks around the crowded room, spots Herr Doctor Knie. Gestapo agent Müssner. Heinrich Mohns, his boss from the Bieberhaus, wearing his Nazi Party uniform. Werner Kranz, the apprentice. Werner looks pained, as if dragged there by the scruff of his neck. Herr Schnibbe, Karl's father. No Mutti. No Oma or Opa. Helmuth is relieved. He couldn't bear to see their anguished faces.

At ten o'clock the tall wooden doors swing open, and the courtroom falls quiet. At once, everyone rises as seven justices enter. Three wear bloodred caps and flowing red robes with a large golden eagle emblazoned on the front. The others wear stiffly pressed SS

and military uniforms. There is no jury. The justices are the jury.

The trial opens with a slam of the gavel that rings throughout the courtroom. One of the red-robed justices — Justice Engert — asks the boys simple questions — name, birth date, residence, occupation — and then reviews the charges against each boy. *Deliberate listening to foreign radio stations . . . Willfully distributing newscasts of foreign radio stations . . . Conspiracy to commit high treason.*

Chief Justice Fikeis takes over, barking out question after question, testing each boy's knowledge about Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. "Wobbe, what is our Führer's birthday?" "Schnibbe, what are the words to the 'Horst Wessel'?" "Düwer, how many points in the Nazi Program?" Helmuth gets the hardest questions. "Hübener, what are the political aims for the Nazi Party?" He answers each question sharply.

Witnesses are called. Werner Kranz and Heinrich Mohns recount the events of January 20, when Herr Mohns caught Helmuth trying to press a leaflet into Werner's hand.

Gestapo agent Müssner details each interrogation, word by word from his notes, saying things like, "after lengthy remonstrations" and "after emphatic admonish-

ments Hübener was moved to make a confession about the extent of his destructive activity."

Helmuth grunts at the words. That's what the Gestapo call beatings and torture. Remonstrations and admonishments.

The justices don't miss a detail from the boys' lives: their Party record books, their school records, their Hitler Youth records, even Rudi's Lord Lister Detective card becomes evidence against them.

Soon the questioning turns to the boys' crime. Justice Fikeis rehashes the same questions the boys had answered under interrogation, but there's a different edge to his questions now. Helmuth concentrates, tries to put his finger on the shift.

Slowly it dawns on Helmuth: Fikeis is questioning them as adults. They are all being tried as adults, not juveniles.

Hot fear spreads through Helmuth. An adult conviction means much worse. A longer prison sentence or possibly the death sentence. He can't let that happen.

Helmuth focuses, clears his mind. He knows what he must do: He must keep the attention of the justices, he must convince them that he was the ringleader, that Karl and Rudi and Düwer were simply followers, no matter what.

It's Helmuth's turn. Chief Justice Fikeis takes out the pamphlets and fliers and clears the courtroom to protect the spectators from the enemy propaganda. The sight of the pamphlets and fliers enrages the judge. "Why did you write these?" he barks at Helmuth.

"To let the people know the truth," answers Helmuth in a loud, clear voice. The other justices fall deathly silent. He can feel Karl, Rudi, and Düwer stiffen next to him. But Helmuth knows what he's doing. There's no other way.

"Do you really believe that the British are telling the truth?" says Fikeis.

"Absolutely. Don't you?"

Fikeis's face grows purple with rage. "Do you doubt Germany's ultimate victory?"

"Do you actually believe that Germany *can* win the war?"

Justice Fikeis is screaming now: "Are you suggesting that your leaders are lying?"

Helmuth takes a deep breath, and in the most contemptible manner he can muster, says, *"Jawohl, ihr lügt."* Yes, you are all liars!

Pandemonium breaks out among the justices. Helmuth's attorney snaps back, scowls at Helmuth as if to say, *Are you crazy?*

Helmuth's insolence launches Justice Fikeis to his feet. He leans over the bench, purple with rage. "You snot-nosed kid, what do you know about war? You are scum! A traitor!" He snaps the file shut, addresses Helmuth's attorney: "Is there anything else you'd like to say?"

Herr Doctor Knie argues that Helmuth succumbed to the enemy propaganda because he was too immature to resist the temptation. "I ask the court to be lenient, in consideration of his age," says the attorney.

"That's enough!" Fikeis glares at Helmuth. "Hübener is no average boy." He brings another paper out of a folder. Helmuth recognizes the paper: It's his graduation essay, "The War of the Plutocrats."

Fikeis rattles the essay at Helmuth's attorney. "This is the work of a person far above eighteen years. This is no immature youth! The people must be protected from traitors like him! The Fatherland is at stake!"

He replaces the essay, claps the folder shut, slams his fist down on top. "This defendant acted with the thought and cunning of an adult! Consequently he is to be sentenced as an adult. Without exception this precocious young man has long since outgrown his youth."

Justice Fikeis beckons to the two other justices.

They hover behind the bench before drawing back to their chairs. "We are ready for sentencing," says Fikeis.

The courtroom doors swing open, and the spectators fill their seats. Helmuth's heart pounds against his rib cage as Justice Fikeis begins. "The court orders the following to be sentenced," he says in a smug, satisfied voice. "Hübener, for listening to a foreign radio station and distributing the news heard in connection with conspiracy to commit high treason and treasonable support of the enemy: *to death and the loss of his civil rights during his lifetime.*"

All around Helmuth, the courtroom, the justices, the swastika banners explode. Red white yellow blue streak his eyes. His knees buckle. The guard yanks him to his feet. He hears Fikeis pronounce, "Wobbe . . . conspiracy to commit high treason . . . *ten years imprisonment.* Schnibbe . . . *five years imprisonment.* Düwer . . . *four years imprisonment.* . . . The defendants are to bear the costs of the proceedings."

"Have you anything to say?" said Fikeis. "Düwer?"

"No."

"Schnibbe?"

"No."

"Wobbe?"

"No."

"Hübener?"

Helmuth struggles to regain his thoughts, to bring the pieces together. He points a finger at the justices. "All I did was tell the truth, and you have sentenced me to die, just for telling the truth. My time is now but your time will come!"

The courtroom erupts in a roar.

"Shut up!" screams Justice Fikeis. "Push him down! Shut him up!" His gavel slams again and again.

The guards leap upon Helmuth, force him to his seat. His heart slams against his rib cage. He gulps for air. He did the right thing. He knows he did. Otherwise, the justices would execute them all.

The trial is over. The boys are shackled and led to a small holding cell in the basement. A guard removes the handcuffs from Karl, Rudi, and Düwer, but leaves Helmuth shackled.

"Helmuth!" cries Rudi. "Why did you do that?"

"Because it's the truth," says Helmuth. He feels his eyes well with tears and he blinks them away. "I did the right thing. I have no regrets."

"They will reduce or cancel the verdict," says Karl. "You're too young."

"No," says Helmuth. "They will make an example out of me."

A guard returns, says, "Wobbe, Schnibbe, Düwer, get ready to go. You're going back to Hamburg."

The boys surround Helmuth, embrace him tightly. "We'll meet again," says Karl.

"Good-bye, my friends," says Helmuth. "We *will* meet again."

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Helmuth huffs the ink dry on the last letter. It is 8:05 P.M. *He reads it again, wonders what his family will think, wonders who will tell Mutti. He feels sad for Mutti. He knows his death will be hard on her. For Oma and Opa, too. And Hans and Gerhard. He hopes his letters comfort them. Bring them solace.*

The brusque pound of feet. The jangle of keys. The scrape of metal against metal. Helmuth stands, ready. He has made up his mind to go quietly, with dignity and courage.

The door swings open. Two guards enter. "Prisoner Hübener, come with us," says one. "It is time." The other shackles Helmuth's hands behind his back.

Helmuth walks without stumbling, down the long corridor, outside into the courtyard. He draws in the crisp night air. It feels good. It smells like Mutti's sheets on wash day.

Above the tall redbrick execution shed, between the leafless

tree branches, the moon is full, opalescent, and he remembers a night long ago:

Mutti tucking them in,
three brothers,
three dark heads nestled against white pillows,
white moonlight shimmering the walls,
and Helmuth is floating.

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