

Prologue

Manya felt a presence in the darkness. She stopped walking and glanced around the shadowed perimeter of Brookings Quadrangle. The courtyard was unusually quiet and tranquil, but she saw nothing out of the ordinary. She took a quick breath to restore her calm, but a growing unease clung stubbornly to her chest. She set her jaw and stepped forward again. She was leaving later than intended, but after the hour-long history department meeting had led to an impromptu venting session with her friend and mentor, she was now leaving her office in Busch Hall after dark and in the cold--winter was almost upon them. Competent security kept the campus safe. The route she chose to walk was well lit. Still, she kept her senses alert as she had learned in the self-defense class.

Manya neared the jutting edge of January Hall and gazed at Ridgley Hall before her. She had always admired the architecture of Ridgley, had always enjoyed walking past the row of arches of the Hall arcade, lit at night by hanging wrought iron fixtures. It felt so welcoming and warm. The sight calmed her. Washington University was really a beautiful campus.

A wind whipped her jacket open, pushing the chill further into her. It was indeed cold. She looked up. The sky was still clear. No snow was predicted in the seven-day forecast, but the first snow of the season had already come and gone. Manya tightened her coat and plodded on.

The door to January Hall flew open, and a figure jumped out in front of Manya. A sudden expletive escaped from her mouth, and she leapt back before she could ascertain who it was. One of the students from a seminar she had taught.

Manya raised a hand to her laboring heart and laughed. "Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

The face before her contorted and billowed, as if vapors rose in front of it. Harsh, barking laughter erupted from its mouth, a low and guttural sound. "Sie werden behauptet."

Manya's heart dropped. She recognized those words. A chill ran up her spine. She kept her hand raised to ward off an attack. The dark and raspy voice that claimed her, in an unexpected language, did not match the student. Her father had spoken of how the Nazis had persecuted the Jews. She had experienced some while teaching the Jewish Studies classes, but never a direct, personal attack. Manya stepped backward in shock, swiveling to run, but the figure

was upon her and knocked her to the ground before she could execute the turn.

Pinned to the ground near one of the columns, Manya felt the ripping and shredding of her arms and back, as if razor-sharp claws gouged into her flesh. She saw her blood splattering the door near her. She flipped over and tried to push away but struck hard, cold stone. She opened her mouth to scream, but her throat was torn away before she could fill her lungs, and all she could manage was a pathetic gurgle. Hot breath sprayed her face, burning her with agony like acid. An alien presence wormed into her body, heightening her senses, keeping her conscious, tormenting her from within as her body was reduced to tatters from without.

Yahweh, preserve me!

More ripping. Tearing. Slicing. The flesh along her arms and legs felt as if it was burning, frying and bubbling in hot flames. Her eyes no longer provided her with sight. All she could smell and taste was charred flesh and hot blood. Her ears were filled with a cacophony of maniacal cursing. She shrieked continuously within herself--*Please just let me die!*--but her anguish continued, unrelenting. Unforgiving.