

Chapter One

The Choice

Rummelsburg Prison, East Berlin, Friday afternoon, 15 July 1977

The guard shoved Stefan Malik across the threshold and slammed the cell door. The scraping of the giant key sliding the deadbolt into place bore the sound of permanence. A stench from the toilet at the far wall, its splintered seat hanging off to one side, pervaded the damp cell, but the foul smell was the least of his problems. His apprehension turned to alarm at the sight of three prisoners staring him down. Two lurked behind a burly redhead, the obvious ruler of this space.

An ugly smirk spread across the stout man's fleshy face, barely visible in the faint light spilling through a small, iron-barred window high on the wall. "What's the matter, pretty boy, never smelled shit before?"

His two cellmates, leaning against one of the bunk beds, cackled—the forced laugh of subordinates at a superior's bad joke.

The redhead asked, "What's your name?"

"Stefan."

"We are your new best friends. I'm Emil." He turned to his left, "Anton," then to his right, "Hans."

Both gave slight nods at the mention of their names. But Stefan kept his eyes on Emil, who appeared to be listening to the sound of the guard's boots striking the cement floor in the hall.

When the sound faded, Emil turned to his cellmates. "Don't you think Stefan has a nice ass? What say, boys, we get better acquainted with him?" He leered at Stefan. "Lots better."

Stefan took a step back. He'd heard about Rummelsburg housing homosexuals, branded social deviants by the state, and now perhaps he'd fallen in with three of them. Gays or not, they had rape on their minds. Before he could react, Hans and Anton had circled behind him. One twisted his right arm against his back while the other pushed him onto his knees. He struggled against excruciating pain. It felt as if his arm were coming out of its socket.

"Just relax, pretty boy." Emil lowered the trousers of his striped prison uniform. "Do as you're told and we'll get along fine."

Stefan stared at the bulge in the man's gray boxer shorts. The next few seconds would determine his fate. Sweat popped onto his forehead. Raped in prison? If he succumbed now, there'd be no end to it. Yelling for the guards was pointless. Even if they heard, they probably wouldn't care. He was on his own.

Stefan quit straining against the hold the two guys had on him. "You want a blow job?" He feigned a smile. "Why didn't you just say so?"

Emil wasn't so easily duped. "Anton, bring him over here. Hans, don't let go."

Stefan forced his eyes from the yellow stains on Emil's shorts and made his body go limp. The ploy worked. When the grips loosened the slightest bit, Stefan jerked himself free. He jumped to his feet and thrust his right shoe into Emil's groin, hard.

The bully stumbled backward. He snarled through clenched teeth, "You'll pay for this. Grab him, guys!"

Stefan pivoted to face Emil's minions, but not in time to fend off a violent kick to his right leg. He collapsed, scraping his knee on the cement floor. He tried to roll off to the side, but one of the convicts straddled him, keeping him pinned while the other pressed his face against the floor. He strained to breathe.

Emil's angry voice rang in Stefan's ears. "Big mistake, boy. I'll show you who's boss."

Stefan winced at a violent jerk that forced his head back and upward at a sharp angle. His eyes transfixed by the boxer shorts moving toward him, Stefan fought panic. He would not give in. If he had to, he'd bite the brute's cock off. But wait, why was Emil retreating?

The sound of the deadbolt sliding back provided the answer. Emil yanked his pants up from around his ankles. The cell door flew open and two guards rushed in.

One pulled Stefan to his feet. "Starting a fight on your first day?"

"These perverts—"

The guard yanked him from the cell. "Save your excuses for the boss."

He pushed Stefan down the hall, while the other guard locked the cell. There was no point in trying to explain. The whole thing stank. The guards had appeared so fast, as if they'd expected the brawl.

When the police had picked him up at his apartment less than an hour ago, they'd told him it was just to clear something up. Of course, he hadn't believed them. He'd heard of too many citizens being swept up in the dragnet of the secret police. The Stasi was the most feared institution in all of East Germany for a reason. To clear something up was a euphemism for harsh interrogation, torture, long prison sentences, or worse. Was his name about to be added to the growing list of missing East Germans?

During the ride in the unmarked van through the city streets, he'd mentally reviewed the article he'd submitted for publication earlier this week. Always careful to toe the party line, he couldn't think of anything that could have gone against official doctrine. Still, one never knew when the winds in a totalitarian state might shift. Perhaps he'd unwittingly offended one of the party bosses.

The guard shuttled him through the cellblock gate toward the administrative offices. Stefan wondered what disciplinary action he'd face. The thought of being locked up with rapists was unbearable. He slowed when they reached the prison director's office, but the guard pushed him past toward an unmarked door and knocked.

"*Herein*," a deep voice bellowed.

The guard eased the door open and pushed Stefan onto the tattered linoleum floor of a small room. Flaking olive-green paint on bare walls made for a drab place. Behind a large imitation teak desk sat a man in gray uniform, black hair neatly parted. Dark eyes peered at Stefan through wire-rimmed glasses.

Gone was the guard's officious attitude. He addressed the man, who looked to be in his fifties, in a deferential manner. "*Generallieutenant*, prisoner Stefan Malik."

The officer leaned forward, affording Stefan a glimpse of the two-star insignia of a lieutenant general on his shoulder. "Guard, close the door behind you and wait in the hall."

While the guard complied, the general pointed to an angular metal chair that proved to be as uncomfortable as it looked. But more important things occupied Stefan's mind. This was no ordinary army general, but a Stasi officer. What could he possibly want from him? Whatever it was, nothing good ever came from run-ins with the secret police.



Lieutenant General Werner Heinrich watched the prisoner take the chair. So far his plan was working. He liked what he saw. Malik appeared cautious, but not obsequious like the guard. The task he needed to recruit him for demanded boldness. It was not for the demure or faint of heart. Malik's eyes spoke of intelligence, and most important, he was as handsome as his file had promised. Who could resist the open face that suggested sincerity, the black hair combed straight back, the athletic build?

First pleasantries, then pressure. “May I call you Stefan?” At the silent nod, Heinrich continued, “I’m Lieutenant General Heinrich. You may address me as General.”

No response.

Heinrich opened the large manila folder on the desk. “If you’re as smart as this says you are, you’ve figured out by now that I’m a Stasi officer.”

No reaction.

“But you don’t know why you’re here.”

Stefan shifted in his chair.

“It’s not your writing. Your articles are entertaining and stick to the party line or *Neues Deutschland* wouldn’t publish them.”

Heinrich looked for signs of anxiety or fear. If Stefan felt either, he hid it well. Perfect. A poker player mentality was ideal.

Almost time to start the recruitment, but first a little more praise. “You’re here because you’re good at something we can use.”

Stefan arched his eyebrows but said nothing.

Heinrich made a show of flipping through the folder on his desk. “You’re a regular Don Juan, aren’t you?” He looked up. Still no reaction. “We know of at least a dozen women who . . . to put this delicately . . . who’ve succumbed to your charms.”

“Having sex is not illegal, is it?” Stefan’s baritone rang measured but firm through the small office.

Another plus.

“Illegal? Not usually.” Heinrich paused for emphasis. “Except for a couple of things.” He stared at Stefan. “One, several of the women you seduced are married. Two, you bilked them out of money, because you can’t live on your writing. And three, our state does not look kindly on freeloaders who don’t contribute to society.”

“That’s why you had me thrown into a cell with a bunch of queers?”

“I’m asking the questions here.” Heinrich leaned forward. Time to apply pressure. “I hoped we could clear all this up with a friendly chat. Regrettably, you attacked your cellmates.”

“I didn’t start it.”

“So you say. Unfortunately for you, it’s your word against that of two guards and three prisoners.” After a pause to let his message sink in, Heinrich continued, “Well, there is a way to get yourself out of this. Put those charms of yours in service of the state.”

“An informer for the Stasi?”

“Something more important, more difficult, more challenging, and more fun.”

Heinrich relished the quizzical expression spreading across the prisoner’s face. “If you’re as good at seduction as this file indicates, you can get laid and serve your country. It pays well enough so you won’t have to hit up your lady friends for money.”

“Are you asking me to become a Stasi spy?”

“We call it ‘ ficken fürs Vaterland.’ Fucking for your country is a nice privilege, don’t you agree? You’re uniquely qualified for the romance part, and we’ll teach you the tradecraft.”

“General, I have no interest in spying for you, fringe benefits or not.”

Heinrich shot up from his chair, moved around the desk, and towered over the seated prisoner. “Let me put this in plain language, Stefan. Either you join us and serve your country or you languish in this prison. You just got a taste of what that might be like. An easy choice, don’t you think?”

Stefan twitched in his chair, possibly weighing whether to challenge the accusation of starting the fight with his cellmates. But he held his tongue, clearly sharp enough to realize that

protest was futile; the court would hand out whatever sentence the Stasi dictated. Heinrich returned to his chair, all the while keeping an eye on the prisoner.

Stefan met his gaze. "What do I have to do?"

"I knew you'd make the right decision," Heinrich said, as if the prisoner ever had a real choice.

He rose, stepped around the desk and shook Stefan's hand. "*Willkommen*. Report to me at Stasi headquarters at nine Monday morning. And not a word to anyone. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"There's a car waiting to take you to your apartment."

Heinrich escorted Stefan into the hall and instructed the guard to have him discharged. Long after they had disappeared around a corner, the image of one of his most attractive recruits remained with Heinrich. Stefan Malik was handsome indeed. He would no doubt make a seductive Romeo.