



The Artist from Vienna

The man intently stared at the Iron Cross wrapped around the chrome barrel, no longer noticing the constant whirr of the generators nor the stale smell of the room. It had been so easy to buy into it all: the flagrant hate, the thrill of the roaring crowds. He thought he was furthering the advance of humankind, righting the wrongs of the world at the cost of those holding it back. Another order signed, another tally added again until they became to him just numbers. Albeit meticulously endeavoured for numbers: but still mere statistics.

It had all felt true when it began, their initial successes validating the fervent zeal for their beliefs and justifying the consequent oppression. Yet as the war progressed, it clearly wasn't so black and white as the 'inferior' people retaliated with a determination equal to theirs. In the wake of their failure to secure living space, the stark reality began to set in. A seed of doubt: maybe they weren't the superior race, maybe there was no master race.

Each defeat was like water and with each watering, the seed grew. He began to accept the observations he had previously refused to acknowledge. In his campaigns throughout Europe he had observed people working, people playing, people living. Light emanated through a cracked window revealing a family laughing as they share a meal, illuminated by the warm glow of a candle, seemingly oblivious in their tranquillity to the army marching by.

It was like peering into a tableau of lives as vivid and complex as his own, being able to view the strands of desire and joy woven throughout the mundane, each life forming their own elaborate tapestry of existence fraught with struggles and fears and hope. To which, in another world, he may have been just another part of the scenery, a painting on a wall, a stroke of a brush.

Instead he systematically extinguished each life one after another. Each tapestry disintegrated into a pile of dust, bleached of all colour, blended together until they all became mere marks on a page. He was sucked into the hate. He had pulled the wool over his own eyes, believing that they were parasites that needed to be exterminated for the greater good. However each defeat countered this notion, and with each one the wool slipped further and further off.

His hand shook, tilting the barrel. There was a harsh grating sound as gravity unwrapped the Iron Cross, leaving it hanging by the ribbon. It was the one achievement which he was still proud of. His lips subtly drew back at the corners, his eyes almost revitalised as he fondly remembered running dispatches back and forth during the battle of the Somme. His leg subconsciously twitched as he recalled the shell that exploded near him, deafening him as a piece of shrapnel impaled his thigh. Bleeding profusely, through some miracle of desperation and adrenalin, he managed to deliver the dispatch to lieutenant Gutmann. His lieutenant Gutmann had then recommended him for the Iron Cross, an honour rarely awarded to one of his *gefreiter* rank. Hugo Gutmann, a true German hero. How could he have forgotten this hero was Jewish?

His face dropped as the magnitude of what he had done dawned upon him. A true visionary he had been brilliant in conception and execution. He painted a glorious picture of his world. But visions can be



Lux Tuition

wrong. A great assembly of life burning bright with hopes and dreams; extinguished. All reduced to a tally, consigned to the annals of history. A final Solution, but not the right Solution.

All because of what? A difference in shape, a slight difference in parentage, a different perspective on life? He now saw how he had foolishly muted the vibrant colours of diversity and exchanged it for the monochrome shades of conformity. How could he have ever come to this?

Once upon a time in a past age, he had fallen in love with the colours. A younger carefree boy would idly stroll through Linz, captivated by its neo-baroque beauty. Later he would feel the cool grass under his skin as he watched the sun set over the serene Danube, dreaming of the great artist he hoped to become and the sights he would capture. Eventually, he set out for Vienna, determined to encapsulate its wonders. Even then his illustrations were never focused on people, indeed he shied away from representing them, unsure of how to depict them. He now realised his folly; in his uncertainty he had resorted to ignorance, embracing the cold hatred, the flat greyness of soulless statistics in lieu of the richness of life, the richness of people.

There was no master race.

Now, as his world was collapsing, reality confronted the man. The record filled pages peeled back to reveal the living breathing, colourful truths he had once sought to repress. His shoulders slumped and he gasped, Iron Cross sliding off the barrel. It hit the ground with a clink but he no longer noticed. He stared at the abyssal depths of the chrome barrel, and it stared back. He had started as the painter from Linz but would end as the artist from Vienna.

Atleast he hoped so.