

## PROLOGUE

May 1946  
Hann-Munden,  
Germany

Dear Matthias,

*It is with great hope and prayers that this letter finds you and that you are well. I don't know how to begin to tell you what happened to us.*

*So much has changed since the last time we could write. You know the big story from your side of the Atlantic from newspapers, but not of the millions of individual tragic stories here like ours. So many horrible things have happened. It should not have ended the way it did. No one expected that our country would decay into what it is today. It was supposed to be different...*

Matthias Schmidt read the letter several times over, studying every character in every word in every sentence looking for something not on the paper. He received her last letter and letters from others in the Heimat near the end of August 1939. He did not recognize the return address on this letter. Where is she?

The last time he saw her was July 1929, when he left her to pursue an uncertain future in a foreign country where he did not speak the language. It was a simple plan; get established, be successful, and make her proud of him. He tried, but in the intervening years, events beyond his control changed everything.

On September 1, 1939, the day after her last letter arrived, radio broadcasts and newspaper headlines reported the news that upended his and the plans of millions around the globe. The announcement was not surprising. There were many signs that the disaster was coming, but the world, in general, was in denial. By the morning of September 2, he dreaded that she and others close to him could be gone from his life forever. The letter in his hand reassured him that she is alive, but she is not well.

The tone of her letter is different from the messages she sent during the years before 1939. Then they were usually cheerful, hopeful, optimistic, imploring him to return to the Heimat. This letter is sad, dark, and desperate. She missed him dearly and needed his help, but he cannot return to her because the country is destroyed, so there is no place where he can stay. The catastrophe is shamefully unbelievable.

It isn't likely that he can get there anyway. He has responsibilities and cannot leave quickly. He finally realized his dream, so it is impossible to go. He cannot spare the expense and the time, and there would be no income in the meantime.

He concluded to agree with her and help from a distance until his life and theirs settled and stabilized.

He reread the letter hoping he would uncover more, and visualized the last time he saw her...