

Straight into Darkness

Faye Kellerman

Published by Headline

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

love**reading**.co.uk

If you love reading, you'll love the unique benefits of lovereading.co.uk. You can download and print off the opening extracts of books, be guided by our exclusive author 'like-for-like' recommendation service and receive regular email updates of new books in your favourite genres. And it's all completely free. **Just turn to lovereading.co.uk today!**

helping
you choose
your next
book

Copyright © 2005 Faye Kellerman

The right of Faye Kellerman to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in Great Britain in 2005
by HEADLINE BOOK PUBLISHING

First published in paperback in 2006
by HEADLINE BOOK PUBLISHING

1

Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may only be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, with prior permission in writing of the publishers or, in the case of reprographic production, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

All characters – other than the obvious historical figures – in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

ISBN 0 7472 6537 2

Typeset in Garamond by Avon DataSet Ltd,
Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham plc, Chatham, Kent

Headline's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

HEADLINE BOOK PUBLISHING

A division of Hodder Headline

338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.headline.co.uk
www.hodderheadline.com

Prologue

New York 2005

I PAINT BECAUSE I am still able to do so. Stiff and knobby, my fingers can bend just enough to grasp a brush and dip the boar bristles into puddles of reds: crimson, ruby, garnet, cinnabar, rose, rust, magenta, vermilion, Venetian – the list seems endless – turning my wooden palette into the full tonal spectrum. I am known as the painter of red because that is how I see the world.

Back in 1980, at the opening of one of my many New York art shows, I was asked by a waif of a child what exactly did I mean painting in all those reds. Her expression was very earnest, and I noticed her face was very pretty. Midnight eyes were hooded by long lashes, and an alabaster complexion was surrounded by chin-length, straight black hair. Her lips had been painted bright red, and I flatter myself that she did so to honor me. She must have been in her early twenties, wearing a clingy black dress with spaghetti straps that crisscrossed over a smooth, creamy back. A lovely back to complement a lovely front: full breasts that spilled out of a plunging neckline. She could have stepped out from a page of my history: I saw her as a sultry hostess in a 1920s Berlin Kabarett.

Immediately, I wanted to take her to a room and liberate one of those luscious tits, sucking on it for hours. I even thought about making love to her. Back then, it would have been possible – not easy, but possible. Now, at my advanced age, even with the advent of the little blue pills, some things are better left in the perfect world of imagination.

FAYE KELLERMAN

What exactly did I mean by painting in all those reds?

Many critics have pondered and analyzed my art. The consensus is that given my background – growing up in a city consumed by horrible events, disarray, and death – how could I not express my soul in the color of blood? Then there are some who liken my reds to Picasso's blues, a different interpretation if you will. No matter that the master was years older than I and had painted his teals and slates while I was still in diapers. Why let logic interfere with facile thinking? Finally, there are the mavericks who say that I paint in red because red is the color of shame.

The last point is well taken.

When one is embarrassed, one turns red. The greater the embarrassment, the deeper the infusion of color. It is the shame of my generation, of a people who accepted genocide as the most expedient way to restore the Fatherland to purity and greatness. I paint in red because the children of my homeland, the children of my generation, must carry the burden of shame and guilt for their elders' unspeakable acts. This is the real German shame.

Ah, but this is not the German shame I remember. The German shame of my childhood was the shame of having to endure the injustices heaped on us good Volk by the November Criminals and the hated Versailles Treaty. The degradation of being bullied by the leaders of the Weimar Republic, those good-for-nothing Prussians who looked down their noses at Bavaria and all of Süddeutschland.

I must explain.

It is simple. Germany didn't really lose the Great War. We 'lost' because the hated fates conspired against us, the bloody Kommunisten, the licentious Americans, the impetuous, warmongering Serbs, and, most of all, the ugly, evil Jews with their hook noses and inferior bloodlines and their pernicious cabals and conspiracies to take over the world. Why should

STRAIGHT INTO DARKNESS

we take responsibility for a debacle that should have been settled internally by the Austrians, for a disaster that was not of our creation? And if, because of misinformation, you actually considered Germany a defeated country, think again. It wasn't we Bavarians who were defeated. No battles were waged on our soil, so how could the losses be attributed to us? No, you see, the responsibility and guilt do not lie with Bavaria in the south but, instead, with the hated Prussians up north and the despised Weimar Republic with its heinous rules and regulations, and the foreigners who carved up our beloved country. This is the shame that I remember – that inferior minds were allowed to control our land.

We Bavarians did not need Prussia and its ridiculous experiment of American democracy. Nor did we need the Soviets tutoring us about the ideals of Kommunismus. We needed the restoration of our beloved Wittelsbach monarchy, although we knew that wasn't going to happen, not with the Prussians at the helm. So in lieu of a king, Germany would accept a dictatorial leader who would take from us the shame of defeat and lead us back to glory.

And didn't the Fatherland find the perfect Führer, the anointed one who would erase the humiliation of ignoble failure and eradicate the abasement suffered by the people of the Aryan race.

That is the shame I remember. That is the shame of my youth.

The shame of genocide came later to the Fatherland, after the Allies pointed out that the Germans might garner more sympathy if, at the very least, they felt a tiny bit disconcerted by the corpses spilling out of the gas chambers, and the bone and ashes clogging up the ovens.

So I paint in reds because I express myself in paint. Words have always been harder for me. I have tried writing, but it is not the same. Painting involves corporeal participation – the eye, the hand, the

FAYE KELLERMAN

fingers, the physicality of the sweep of the brush against the blank canvas, the palette knife gouging through layers of impasto. There is no bodily participation in writing, in punching out little black letters in the same script, the same hue, the same size – all in neat little lines. No, I cannot write. Still, as I clack away at this letter on my old Remington, if I were to write, I think I would have a good story to tell you.

Chapter One

Munich 1929

‘PAPA, IT’S THEM again!’

The banging on the door accompanied by the panic in Joachim’s voice roused Berg to action. Flinging off the covers, he bolted from the warmth of his feather bed, scarcely registering the frigid air as his bare feet contacted the worn oak floor, running into the common room of the family’s apartment. He was awake and ready for confrontation.

It was still dark, but Berg could make out the duvet draping over the sofa. Of late, his son had taken to sleeping on the couch, leaving his sister alone in the room they had once shared. Privacy issues: typical of a boy of fifteen. His body demanded attention without his sister as an audience. Joachim was tall, lean, and movie-star handsome with hound-dog blue eyes and a thick mop of hair, blond in color from his mother, but the curl came from Berg.

The room shook from hurling rocks hitting the outside stone.

‘That’s it!’ Berg turned on the lone electric bulb that hung over the dining table and fit the crank into the window. It was a blessing that his family lived on the top floor. The hoodlums below did not have enough force to propel the rocks up to their unit. ‘That is *it!*’

‘Axel, what are you doing?’

His wife’s voice. Berg stopped and turned. Her eyes were still heavy with sleep, and her tresses stuck out at odd angles. Even though the rainstorm had passed, the air was

filled with static electricity. He said, 'Go back to bed, Britta. It's cold.'

'If it's cold to me, it's cold to you.'

'Then be a love and get me my coat.'

'Axel, leave them alone. At least, they don't break anything.'

'Not yet.'

'You don't know who they are.'

'Of course I know who they are. They are the Austrian's finest –'

'How do you know? They're not even dressed in brown.'

'I know punks!' He leaned into the window crank and felt his face get hot from exertion. 'They are punks.'

'If they are from Hitler, it's not you they want. It's probably the Jews down below.'

'Which Jews?'

'The Weinstocks on the second floor. Or the Maslanokovs.'

'The Maslanokovs are Russian, not Jewish.'

'Kommunisten. What's the difference?'

'I thought they were Social Democrats.'

Britta dismissed him with a wave of her hand. 'Same thing.'

'I beg to differ. I voted Social Democrat in the last election.'

'I wouldn't publicize that if you want to keep our windows intact.'

Berg ignored her and gave another push on the crank. 'What is it with this window? You would think we glued it to the framework.'

'We did. We shut it with paste because it was letting in so much cold air.'

'What? When was this?'

'About a month ago –'

'Aha!' The window sprang open, and immediately a

STRAIGHT INTO DARKNESS

bitter cold wind slapped Berg's face. He could almost taste the snow from the Alps. He shouted at the boys below. His displeasure just egged them on. The projectiles began to fall at a faster rate. 'Shout at them for me, Britta!'

'I will not!'

'I need you to distract them. I ask little of you.'

'And risk being stoned?'

'I'll do it, Papa.'

Britta glared at her elder child. 'So you join your father in stupidity! One moment I have a clever son. Then he grows to a certain age and becomes idiotic like all men!' She huffed and went back into the bedroom, slamming the door.

Joachim suppressed a smile. He turned to his father. 'What should I do?'

'Distract them.' From the closet, Berg took out his jacket, his boots, and thick woolen socks. 'Yell at them, make faces at them, whatever comes to mind. Just keep them occupied.'

The boy looked out the window and frowned. 'There are four of them, Papa.'

After pulling on his socks and boots, Berg quickly tied up the laces. 'That's good. When they scatter, my luck at catching one of them will improve.' He put on his coat.

'You're going outside in your pajamas?' Joachim asked. 'You will freeze.'

'Ice doesn't form on a moving object.' Berg kissed his son's forehead. 'They seem to be losing interest. Curse at them, Joachim. Be loud and vile. That should fire them up again.'

Berg slipped out the door, down the hallway, and into the nearly black stairwell. Using the wall as his guide, he jogged down four stories' worth of steps, heels clanging against the metal. The air was pure frost, making it hard to breathe. He scrunched his face in disgust as odors

assaulted him: rotting garbage, fresh cat piss, and predawn cooking smells, specifically sizzling sausage. That anyone had money for breakfast meat surprised him. Berg's own breakfast – when he ate breakfast – was a roll with butter. Times were better, yes, but no one had any savings. The city was still reeling from the Great Inflation of five years earlier. There was little trust in the present currency or the fools in Berlin who now claimed a healthy monetary system.

As soon as Berg hit the ground floor, he threw open the outside door and pumped his legs to full speed. The boys homed in on the squeaking hinges, saw the charging figure and took off in all directions. Berg elected to take on not the one closest to him but, rather, the biggest, the ringleader.

The boy appeared to be around Joachim's age but stockier, more muscled across the chest like a typical Bavarian. Like Berg, Joachim had the lean build of an effete English schoolboy. But also like Berg, he had strength in those sinewy arms. More than once Joachim had come home with a bloody nose and a sly smile. At the Gymnasium, he was known as a boy who could hold his own.

Berg lengthened his stride, having an advantage over his quarry because he was already running while the teenagers were warming up. But the punk managed to elude immediate capture. The kid turned right, then left, then right, then left, in an effort to shake Berg off, but all it did was slow them both down. Finally, the boy realized he could pick up speed if he ran in a straight line, and was able to pull ahead by several meters. He appeared to be heading northwest toward the Isar, a debatable strategy because it limited his options. Once there, he'd either have to run alongside the river or cut across one of the bridges. Although Berg wasn't the fastest runner, he had

STRAIGHT INTO DARKNESS

endurance. He decided the best plan was to keep up a steady gait and increase his speed later, after the kid had tired from the wind, wet, and cold.

Dawn was imminent but there was no glory in the skies, just a mass of pewter clouds wafting through charcoal globs of sooty smoke. The little light that did break through only served to make the city more depressing; it revealed lines of row houses with thatched roofs and locked shutters instead of the newer glass windows. Interspersed among the residential buildings were the infamous cigarette rooms, but it was too early even for the prostitutes. Heart banging against his chest, Berg flew by several fleabag hotels that housed jobless men curled up in blankets, sleeping behind the display windows. When the kid hit the levee, he abruptly turned left and scrambled down the knoll until he was at the riverbank. He continued north.

Berg kept apace, his body in rhythm to his run.

Last night's rainstorm had turned the ground into a treacherous slush of mud, debris, and lumpy tree roots, all working in tandem to trip him up. The churning river was deafening, especially in contrast to the empty streets. Lungs burning, Berg continued his chase, each step spraying mud against his pajama bottoms and the hem of his coat. Working hard to keep his balance, he choked back icy spray from the roiling water as the river danced over rocks and collided with huge boulders. A sticky, gelid mist chilled his face. His nose and ears had turned numb. His fingers had become stiff and lost feeling, but internally he was warm from running, sweat accumulating under his armpits and around his neck.

His body in sync with the metronome of his feet: thump, thump, thump, thump.

Within minutes, he passed the new German Museum of Science and Technology, Munich's proof to the rest of the

country that it was a forward-thinking city. The sky was turning light gray. Soon the streets would fill up with bicycles, pushcarts, motor scooters, buses, streetcars, and the ever-growing population of privately owned automobiles.

It would be easier for the punk to lose him in traffic, so Berg lengthened his stride. The kid turned his head and looked over his shoulder. The action slowed him down, allowing Berg to narrow the gap between them. Now he was on the punk's tail . . . just a little more momentum.

A final sprint, legs extended to the maximum, then Berg reached out and grabbed the punk's coat, trying not to trip over his own feet as they both pitched forward. The teen tried to get away by slipping his coat off, but Berg was ready. He grasped the scruff of the boy's neck with his long, dexterous fingers, yanking him backward. Then he gave the kid a solid kick behind the knees. The teen buckled and slipped, then fell facedown in the mud. Berg jerked him back up to his feet and slammed him into the wire fence that lined the river.

'Heil Hitler!' the punk groaned out as he dropped to his knees.

'Your devotion is touching.' Berg was breathing hard but remained in control. He pulled the kid's arms behind his back, took out a pair of handcuffs from his coat, and locked the boy's hands together. Once again, he snapped him to his feet. 'Perhaps he can visit you in prison. It is a place he knows well from firsthand experience.'

'Your days are numbered. There are more of us than you.'

'Yes, yes. Still, you are in handcuffs and I am not.' Berg pushed him up the hill and onto the street. Without speaking, they walked a couple of minutes until they reached Ludwigs Bridge. Berg pushed him left. 'This way.'

Berg was surprised. The kid offered nothing in the way

STRAIGHT INTO DARKNESS

of physical resistance. He had some girth but was soft in the arms. Short, too. He had a pink face but any face would be pink in such cold weather. Piggish blue eyes. To Berg, they all were pigs. Underneath his worn coat, the boy wore a beige work shirt, the rough fabric probably woven from nettles, thick woolen pants, and boots with more holes than leather.

Abruptly, the young Nazi broke into song. ‘Oh Germany, high in honor . . .’

Berg tightened his grip. ‘Quiet! People are still sleeping.’

The teen changed the song but not the volume. ‘*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.*’

Berg kned him in the back. ‘I said, Quiet!’

‘You object to Germany’s great national anthem?’

‘Not the anthem, only your voice.’

Weighing several options, Berg decided on the main police station on Ett Strasse. It was ten minutes away, and Berg felt more comfortable holding the kid in his own territory. A push forward, and the two trudged through the fog and the cold on the cobblestones, trying to avoid the numerous puddles. Berg could hear the city begin to stir: the occasional clopping of hooves, the squeaking of wooden wheel axles on wagons, the purr of motor vehicles, the clanging of streetcars. Heavy objects – most likely crates of food being unloaded and delivered – were falling to the ground at Viktualienmarkt, only blocks away. Berg decided to bypass the market in order to avoid unwanted attention, specifically from the punk’s compatriots who seemed to be everywhere these days.

‘What’s your name, *Junge*?’

‘I don’t have to answer your questions.’

‘You will eventually.’

‘No, you are wrong. One day, you will have to answer *my* questions.’

‘That day has not come, *Junge*. What is your name?’

The kid shrugged. 'Lothar.'

'Lothar what?'

'Lothar Felb.'

'Lothar, why do you throw rocks at our building? It houses many of your own.'

'But it also has many degenerates – Jews, Kommunisten, Independent Socialists, Social Democrats, Bavarian Workers, German Democrats, Liberal burghers, German Socialists –'

'That's a lot of people, *Junge* – everyone in the city other than Nazis.'

'Exactly.' The kid stopped walking and turned his head. 'Do whatever you must. But we both know, Inspektor, that I will find a sympathetic ear with the police. Especially when they see you dressed so comically.'

Suddenly Berg realized he was still in his pajamas. Embarrassed and angry, he backhanded the teen across the left side of his face. 'You underestimate me, *Junge*.' Before the kid could respond, Berg back-handed the right side. 'Don't talk anymore. You're irritating.'

The kid opened his mouth, but no sound came out. They plodded the rest of the way in silence. Berg shivered. He was chilled, wet, and very troubled. There was more truth than lie in the young Brownshirt's words.