Chapter 2

Pacts

My name is Tymon Karpenski. I have dark brown hair and blue eyes. I was 23 in 1939.

Dark, brooding, and fearful, I was living in these conditions. I am the only son of Borys and Berta Karpenski, but I look just like my grandfather when he was twenty-three years old. As a child, I would watch in wonder as my father would pack sausages and other meats to be sold in our little shop. My grandfather started the shop in my town of Koszalin in Northwest Poland, and it was considered the best around town. However, as I grew up, I learned the real troubles and depressions that were overtaking this peaceful land. Later, I also learned to hate the sight of packing sausages and butchering meat for sale.

Pity and fear was all I could feel for the people of the Sudetenland as the new power of Germany rose from the ashes of the Treaty of Versailles. The treaty was in place to protect weaker countries like my Poland and to ensure that another war like the Great War would never happen again. Hitler tore apart the treaty and watched as England and France allowed this to happen. I fear for what will happen next. If Hitler can take the Austria, Sudetenland, and the Rhineland back, what would stop him for stealing Poland? This seemed more and more likely as I watched announcement after announcement come in from all news stations of the pacts Germany was making.

During the beginning of May, spring had fully arrived and the shop was busy with everyone coming in for meat. This was not for spring, however, but for the fear eating up the population from every country near the Nazis. I remember the day well when I thought there was no way to turn back now. The fates of everyone were signed and sealed on May 22, 1939. Hitler had met with the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, for a formal conference. Hitler had greatly admired Mussolini for his takeover of the Italian government and wanted to forge a pact. This pact was called the “Pact of Steel”, and it formally gave birth to the Axis Powers. The term was coined by Mussolini who wanted a friendship with Hitler as strong as steel. This event lead to such a surge of people buying shop goods in case of the possibility of war erupting.

For the rest of spring and into a good portion of summer, everyone, including me, lived in a perpetual state of fear. I tried to act calm and normal for the sake of my family. We did not need more stress and heartache then we had already experienced because something tragic happened. My grandfather passed away on June 29, peacefully in his bed while he slept. He was 87 years old, and I always thought the world of him. Nothing could keep him down and nothing could stop him from doing what he loved every day and building his dreams from the start of his life. Grandfather is the lucky one out of all of my family and not of my town. He does not have to see or hear what is happening now.

On August 23, Germany and the USSR signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. A representative from the Nazi went over to Russia to meet with the leader, Joseph Stalin, to forge the pact and create a mutual bond. During the Great War, Germany and Russia had been enemies against each other with a strong hate for the other with such different political and general points of view. I, like everyone else in my town, was shocked to hear the news of such a bold action! According to the news coming in, the agreement was to last for ten years where neither party was to take military action against the other. Only later did I find out that the pact not only described this, but it also outlined how Germany and Russia would carve up Eastern Europe for their own gains.

The people of my town came pouring into town for essentials, food, and anything else they felt would help them in what was to be the inevitable. I had never seen my mother so scared than when the signing of the pact was announced. Lucky, I have never seen her more relieved than the two days later.

On August 25, we were informed by our Polish government that it had signed a pact with Great Britain called the Mutual Assistance Pact. Relieved by the turn of events, the people felt their tension ease. This pact was meant to dissuade Germany from attacking my Poland, and if either country were attacked, the other would come to their assistance. England had an excellent military, and I felt confident that Hitler would not try anything as long as this five-year pact was held. I had heard rumors of Hitler’s armies coming close, but I had not paid any mind now that the mutual assistance pact was signed. I was 23 years old. I should have listened to those rumors more.