

Munich Spring
by Bruce Zielsdorf

Part I
Chapter 1

Vorsicht, bitte!

“München Hauptbahnhof... Endstation... Jeder aus dem Zug!” the conductor bellows.

Meanwhile, expat Heath Winslow busies himself scribbling thoughts in his spiral notepad.

A Teutonic trainman – festooned in wheel hat, dark blue vest, horn-rimmed glasses, and a handlebar mustache nearly wide as the corridor – slides open the compartment door to find a tall, husky reporter slouched across the bench seat.

“Keine Füße auf Sitze!” the engineer’s helper barks as he grabs Heath’s pant cuffs and drops his feet to the floor.

“Danke,” the writer snarls, snatching a crumpled newspaper from where his shoes once rested.

Casting an indifferent glance, the conductor mumbles, “Dumme Amerikanische,” then slips out the door, continuing to yell about the train’s imminent arrival in Bavaria’s bucolic heartland.

----- Notebook Scribble -----

Pax Americana et Sovietica – a Cold War by any other name couldn't ring as true... Gorbachev – the new Soviet savior – and a John Wayne wannabe's in the White House... Superpower conflicts, tension & competition jostle unabated... The more things change the more they stay the same... How everyone schemes while shifting gears... Where are the truths amidst all the falsehoods? Who will find time to fix the glitches? And why play this spy game on a European chess board?

An anxious Heath readies to exit. As questions swirl in his head, he slides the pad in his attaché and pulls a scruffy duffle bag from the overhead. Does this train stop hold his escape from the mundane, or is he forever stuck in this world of yellow prose?

Can I write my ticket out of this rut? Can I pen a Pulitzer about the how and why things are changing? Or will my writing taint everything around me? I fear people will either want to ride these altered waves, or buttress against them.

The communicator is quick to change focus. His new resolve: Find an S-Bahn platform and catch

the next Biergarten train. *Music awaits... and it's time to chill*, the tall Texan muses. The InterCity screeches to halt as he reaches the wagon's end and waits for the door to whoosh open.

Heath's greeted by a cacophony of lunacy. Announcements blare incessantly as passengers scurry like rats down the platform. All the while, a burly Turkish guest worker with grease-blackened hair and reeking of garlic, screams, "Vorsicht, bitte! Vorsicht!" The hireling continues to trudge forward, begrudgingly dragging the overloaded baggage cart.

"Make room yourself... And why don't you damned Gastarbeiters go home?" a dapper man in a dark tweed suit grumbles at the laborer draped in sweat-stained coveralls.

"I couldn't help notice you speak English," Heath calls out as he struggles to keep pace with the gent.

"The queen's, if you don't mind."

"So, what the hell's going on? Everything's in flux. This station's like a madhouse."

"Do you not read the newspapers? Chernobyl had a meltdown," the bloke shouts. "Listen to the loudspeakers... Oh, I'm so sorry. How quickly one forgets about American fluency with other languages."

"Fünfzigtausend Menschen tot! Waschen sie ihre Tomaten!" booms overhead.

Heath's caustic companion is now bent over in a fit of laughter. "And what's so funny?"

"The announcement... Reports of thousands dead," the man chuckles, "but be sure to wash your tomatoes!"

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Still puzzled by the businessman's reply, Heath moves inside the sterile '60s-era train station framed in brushed steel and smoked glass. Beyond stowing his gear, Heath searches to find an exit from the track insanity while leaving the angry Brit to bask in his own bitterness.

Baggage secured, relief rushes over the restless man. He spots a sign sporting a foot-tall S inside a green circle. A placard with a stick man descending a staircase hangs below. "My freedom train awaits," he sighs. Thrusting shoulders back, Heath storms the crowd to reach the escalator with haste. Pleased by his mob maneuvering, he leans against the staircase as it glides into the underground.

"Vorsicht, bitte! Vorsicht!" a determined, but gnarled, little woman draped in a dark green Loden coat yells.

Heath realizes the error of his ways. *One must always stand to the right and walk on the left. God forbid I upset the status quo.* He quickly moves aside while the bag lady – topped out with a multi-

colored floppy hat stretched tight over her straw-like mop – tromps down two steps and stops in front of him.

Amused by her aged arrogance, Heath steps around the pint-sized prima donna and stops two steps in front of her. The grumpy gal with bright orange socks and shiny black clogs repeats the move. The game's afoot!

A couple drunken soccer hooligans on the ascending stairs begin shouting, "Zugabe! Zugabe!"

Encore, indeed, Heath thinks, but the platform approaches and the impromptu must end. "Danke sehr, madam," he states with a bow to the putzfrau who stomps off in a huff.

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The sleek, silver S7 glides into Großhesselohe rail station. Hearing the riff of a clarinet rising from the nearby gazebo, Heath realizes he's but a short stroll from tranquility.

Ah, how those transforming sounds do oscillate through the air.

A ruddy Biergarten host, bedecked in Lederhosen suspended by embroidered straps, tips his Alpine hat, and declares, "Herzlich Willkommen in der Waldwirtschaft."

"Vorsicht, bitte! Vorsicht, bitte, bitte, bitte!" a bosomy bierfrau shouts as she swirls up the gravel path with half a dozen mugs pressed against her

dirndl and ruffled blouse. Heath steps back, not wishing to impede the buxom beauty's business. He scopes the outdoor eatery, searching in vain for a place to sit. A sky of blue and white diamonds on Capri umbrellas floats over the drinking yard like low hanging clouds, further impeding his view. The place appears packed as hordes of revelers continue streaming through the gate.

"Come to us," a jolly fellow shouts while making a broad arm motion for Heath to sit.

"Thank you," Heath replies with relief as he approaches the narrow green table. Those gathered scooch down the wooden bench. "But how'd you know I was..."

"All Americans wear too much polyester," the burly man jokes. "But excuse me... I am Klaus, and these are my friends. Join us for some trinken und essen... and very good jazz."

Hands extend as greetings are exchanged. "Heath Winslow... reporter for the *Europa Sentinel*. I recently moved here from Frankfurt. Good to meet everyone."

"Und so, Mr. Newsman," the robust ringleader chides, "What do you think of so many things happening?"

"The Cold War's at a stalemate for sure, but politics, terror and technology... they seem to be shifting the world before our very eyes. Everybody's feeling threatened but want more and

more while holding tight most everything they already have.”

“Of course,” Klaus’ wife, Harriet, interjects, “but more importantly, inquiring minds want to know: Have you washed your tomatoes?”

Laughter bursts from the cluster of drinkers as Klaus slaps the table with his meaty hand.

“Not so serious, mein freund. We know of all these causes, but who knows what of the effect? And today, who cares? So, we prost you coming to München and all success...”

“Mein Gott! You have no beer. This is a Bayerisch sin, but I will fix it,” Klaus affirms as he leaps from the bench in a graceful, almost dance-like, fashion.

Before Heath can say thank you, the jovial fellow is stomping into the bierhalle. “And your English, ma’am...”

“Klaus’ dad was in the Luftwaffe; mine, the RAF,” Harriett explains. “We met in Koblinz long after the war, fell in love, married and moved here. I teach English while he runs a club for expats. My apologies for the jab, but it’s not often I get to rib an Englishman.”

“Texan... please,” Heath insists as the boisterous bar owner returns with three frothy steins of golden delight. “Ah, danke, Klaus. I was deadlocked on how to solve this problem.”

“We have no problems... And here we say Bayern is to Deutschland as Texas is to USA. So, welcome to East Texas!”

“And as we say, ‘Texas is not a state; it’s a state of mind!’”

The assembled laugh again and cheer, “Oans, zwoa, g’suffa!” Mugs rise, and a series of clanking sounds ricochet around the table as bierkrüge repeatedly meet.

Seeing the confused look on Heath’s face, Harriet clarifies, “Where most Germans say ‘One, two, three, four,’ Bavarians cut to the chase... “One, two... drink!”

The banter grows as the beer flows. Klaus and his wife confer, then he announces, “I must to the Tomato go. Danke für alles. I take my new friend Heath to work with me, so he can meet some soldiers, spies, and football players... Go Munich Cowboys!”

“Oans, zwoa, g’suffa!” his friends shout as a farewell.

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Klaus pilots his cream-white Mercedes station wagon through the winding cobblestone streets of Schwäbin – Munich’s bohemian ward. It breaks to rest in a narrow alleyway. Pointing to a dimly lit archway with a large tomato painted on the brick wall, he proclaims, “Welcome to my club... Oh, we

come in the back way. You find the inside more rich. Like a tomato, my bar only grows at night.”

The sun’s barely set and already the Tomato Club’s jostling. Scanning the joint, Heath’s impressed by a flag-draped wall plastered with license plates from across Europe and the Americas. Bon Jovi’s *Livin’ on a Prayer* pulses from high-end speakers as Casey Kasem’s Top 40 *Rocks the Kasbah*. At the room’s far end, an NFL game flickers through the smoky haze. A cluster of football fanatics – complete with drinks in hand – guard the improvised projection screen.

Meanwhile, several spirited gamers huddle over video screens in a vestibule next to the front door. The alcove flickers with lights and pulses with electronic sounds as *Pac-Men* try mounting *Donkey Kongs* and a galaxy of *Space Invaders* prep a raid on the arcade.

“What do you think? Harriet and I marry in Lost Wages. We find a crazy local bar off the strip. I bring it here for GIs and more away from home people... a little port in a big storm.”

“It’s fantastic!” Heath yells over the din. “I’m trying to take it all in. It’s kind of crazy. So much of my past rushing before my eyes. And yet, I feel a transformation coming on. I really like how it all flows together.”

“Ja, ja... all that and it sprouts like a tomato too.”

“Vorsicht, bitte! Vorsicht! Vorsicht!” a curvaceous barmaid shouts, maneuvering through the boisterous crowd with a tray of cocktails held high.

“One of my lovely daughters... They pour beers and serve drinks. I make music and spread kuhscheiße... That’s bullshit to you.”

“I think I stepped in it, Klaus. I’ve found my new home away from home.”

“Sit here, Heath, on the corner stool. Maybe I make a stammtisch for you some day – a special sitting place. I must work now. You drink beer. We roll dice. I send people to talk. All is good, ja?”

The night grows long as the beats get stronger. Videos flicker, shots are slammed, and people laugh as Heath charms the regulars with rambling writer’s tales. Hours pass. The bar crowd thins to a few stragglers. Klaus kisses his daughters as they scurry off to party the late night away. It’s time to count the till and close the club.

“So, what are you thinking, mein freund?”

“I’m just so struck lately by how everything’s shifting... I know we have choices,” Heath slurs, brandishing his index finger back and forth. “Do we ride the waves of change, or buttress ourselves against them?”

“Big drunken words... und so impressive.”

“No, really, it’s like Betty Davis in *All About Eve*... ‘Fasten your seatbelts; it's going to be a bumpy night.’”

“You got that right, Mr. Heath. That is why you crash in my house. Harriet makes great hangover breakfast.

“As for the other stuff, from where comes your big storm? Should I make my sea wall more strong? I want no one to drown, you know. How long must we ride your wave of change? Und the storm will come to hit us when?”

“Okay, okay... You can stop the damn ribbing now. Maybe it’s just the beer talking.”

“Jawohl... just maybe. We take it home to sleep now... Football practice come early in the morning.”

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