

And yet all the news is good. *We are at the gates to the Caucasus*, proclaims Hauptmann's radio, *we have taken oil fields, we will take Svalbard. We move with astounding speed. Five thousand seven hundred Russians killed, forty-five Germans lost.*

Every six or seven days, the same two pallid casualty assistance officers enter the refectory, and four hundred faces go ashen from the effort of not turning to watch. The boys move only their eyes, only their thoughts, tracking in their minds the passage of the two officers as they move between tables, seeking out the next boy whose father has been killed.

The cadet they stop behind often tries to pretend that he doesn't notice their presence. He puts his fork in his mouth and chews, and usually it is then that the taller officer, a sergeant, sets a hand on the boy's shoulder. The boy looks up at them with a full mouth and an unsteady face, and follows the officers out, and the big oak double doors creak shut, and the lunchroom slowly exhales and edges back to life.

Reinhard Wöhlmann's father falls. Karl Westerholzer's father falls. Martin Burkhard's father falls, and Martin tells everybody—on the very same night his shoulder is tapped—that he is happy. "Doesn't everything," he says, "die at last and too soon? Who would not be honored to fall? To be a paving stone on the road to final victory?" Werner looks for uneasiness in Martin's eyes but cannot find it.

For Werner, doubts turn up regularly. Racial purity, political purity—Bastian speaks to a horror of any sort of corruption, and yet, Werner wonders in the dead of night, isn't life a kind of corruption? A child is born, and the world sets in upon it. Taking things from it, stuffing things into it. Each bite of food, each particle of light entering the eye—the body can never be pure. But this is what the commandant insists upon, why the Reich measures their noses, clocks their hair color.

The entropy of a closed system never decreases.

At night Werner stares up at Frederick's bunk, the thin slats, the

miserable stained mattress. Another new boy sleeps up there, Dieter Ferdinand, a small muscular kid from Frankfurt who does everything he is told with a terrifying ferocity.

Someone coughs; someone else moans. A train sounds its lonesome whistle somewhere out beyond the lakes. To the east, always the trains move to the east, beyond the rims of the hills; they go to the huge trodden borderlands of the front. Even as he sleeps, the trains are moving. The catapults of history rattling past.

Werner laces his boots and sings the songs and marches the marches, acting less out of duty than out of a timeworn desire to be dutiful. Bastian walks the rows of boys at their dinners. "What's worse than death, boys?"

Some poor cadet is called to attention. "Cowardice!"

"Cowardice," agrees Bastian, and the boy sits while the commandant slogs forward, nodding to himself, pleased. Lately the commandant speaks more and more intimately of the führer and the latest thing—prayers, petroleum, loyalty—that he requires. The führer requires trustworthiness, electricity, boot leather. Werner is beginning to see, approaching his sixteenth birthday, that what the führer really requires is boys. Great rows of them walking to the conveyor belt to climb on. Give up cream for the führer, sleep for the führer, aluminum for the führer. Give up Reinhard Wöhlmann's father and Karl Westerholzer's father and Martin Burkhard's father.

In March 1942, Dr. Hauptmann calls Werner into his office. Half-packed crates litter the floor. The hounds are nowhere to be seen. The little man paces, and it is not until Werner announces himself that Hauptmann stops. He looks as if he is slowly being engulfed by something beyond his control. "I have been called to Berlin. They want me to continue my work there." Hauptmann lifts an hourglass from a shelf and sets it in a crate, and his pale silver-tipped fingers hang in the air.

"It will be as you dreamed, sir. The best equipment, the best minds."

"That is all," says Dr. Hauptmann.

from
All the Light We Cannot See
Doerr
Anthony

Werner steps into the hall. Out on the snow-dusted quad, thirty first-formers jog in place, their breath showing in short-lived plumes. Chubby, slick-chinned, abominable Bastian yells something. He raises one short arm and the boys turn on their heels, raise their rifles above their heads, and run faster in place, their knees flashing in the moonlight.

Visitors

The electric bell rings at Number 4 rue Vauborel. Etienne LeBlanc, Madame Manec, and Marie-Laure stop chewing at the same time, each thinking: They have found me out. The transmitter in the attic, the women in the kitchen, the hundred trips to the beach.

Etienne says, "You are expecting someone?"

Madame Manec says, "No one." The women would come to the kitchen door.

The bell rings again.

All three go to the foyer; Madame Manec opens the door.

French policemen, two of them. They are there, they explain, at the request of the Natural History Museum in Paris. The jarring of their boot heels on the boards of the foyer seems loud enough to shatter the windows. The first one is eating something—an apple, Marie-Laure decides. The second smells of shaving balm. And roasted meat. As if they have been feasting.

All five—Etienne, Marie-Laure, Madame Manec, and the two men—sit in the kitchen around the square table. The men refuse a bowl of stew. The first clears his throat. "Right or wrong," he says, "he has been convicted of theft and conspiracy."

"All prisoners, political or otherwise," says the second, "are forced to do labor, even if they have not been sentenced to it."

"The museum has written to wardens and prison directors all over Germany."

"We do not yet know exactly which prison."

"We believe it could be Breitenau."

"We're certain they did not hold a proper tribunal."