

*Gerhardt Stark, a young German architect, compromises every belief to become a key part of creating a Jew free Europe. In 1944 he flees Europe and becomes a prominent architect in New York. He is uncovered by two of his victims in New York.*

## **The Architect of Auschwitz**

By S.J. Tagliareni

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# *The* Architect of Auschwitz

*A novel*

S.J. Tagliareni

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# The Architect of Auschwitz

## Chapter 1

### *Early October 1916, Berlin*

The sky was black, gloomy and quite chilly as the north wind blew the “Wir haben Gott bei uns” (We have God with us) banner violently against the façade of the Lehrer station. The Victorian Gothic-style railroad station was an imposing wonder supported by a plethora of Doric marble columns and ornamental plastered vaulted ceilings. The ornate building appeared to be more castle than railroad hub. On an ordinary early autumn morning, the station would be the site of German citizens and tourists making their way to multiple cities within Germany and Europe. However, it was filled this morning with a massive crowd of military personnel and family members. The occupants and well-wishers were not ordinary citizens. Today was the demarcation of thousands of German troops on their way to the trenches in France. The sounds of the brassy military band reverberated against the steel beams as the notes rose to the heights of the vaulted ceilings. Relatives and soldiers were jammed together like mussels on stone, searching for individual platforms. As they jostled and made their way, they removed their hats and joined a choir singing “Heil dir in Siegenkranz,” the unofficial German national anthem.

The morning had the aura of Oktoberfest without the free-flowing beer and traditional peasant food. The reality of the horrors of war was not even remotely present to this vibrant assembly of warriors. Many of these young men imagined that they were leaving routine jobs to be part of a marvelous adventure. The idea of being killed or maimed had been pushed to the recesses of their minds. Somehow, they entertained the belief that these tragedies only happened to the other side. Their

fervor for the cause was kindled by the jingoistic speeches of politicians. The soldiers believed they were privileged to wear their uniforms and fight for the Fatherland. Those who would sleep in warm beds tonight had assured them that the war would last but a few months. Politicians promised they would be home by spring bathed in victorious glory.

Captain Wilhelm Stark entered the station through a side door with his wife and eight-year-old son, Gerhardt. Captain Stark was a graduate of the prestigious Prussian Military Academy. However, unlike his father and grandfather, he had chosen architecture over the military. At thirty-five, he was one of the most prominent architects in Germany. Tall, with angular features and blond hair streaked with tinsels of gray, he exuded strength and confidence. He was as patriotic as anyone else in this gathering, but he did not desire to join this war. Unlike the joyous neophytes shouting their slogans, he understood the consequences that would soon be evident to these soldiers. He knew that weaponry had significantly advanced; cannons were larger, and there would be flame throwers and gas employed by both sides. He had enormous respect for the German government and did not casually resist the need to defend German soil. However, as an architect, he was more disposed to the building of communities and fervently aspired to a united Europe in which countries would live in peace together.

Christina Stark was the eldest daughter of successful industrialist Ludwig Von Furstenberg. A beautiful woman in her late twenties with an infectious personality, she was slender and pale, with unblemished milk-white skin and dark chestnut hair. She was fashionably attired in a tunic-style dress with pleats that allowed graceful movement. Normally gregarious, she was subdued this morning and though

trained to be stoic, she was on the verge of tears. Her steel will allowed her to contain her emotions.

Their son, Gerhardt, was a bright, adventurous, and clever eight-year-old. Dressed in green lederhosen and a fur cap, he was thrilled by all the hoopla in the station. He had no knowledge of war and was filled with pride at the sight of his father in uniform. The two were bound not merely by blood but also by temperament and interests. Every weekend, they spent time building model cities in their basement.

In the midst of thousands of goodbyes, a piercing whistle brought the crowd to attention. A sergeant climbed the steps of one of the trains and announced that boarding would begin in the next five minutes. On hearing the call to leave, Captain Stark opened his duffle bag and withdrew a packet. He knelt in front of Gerhardt and embraced him for what seemed longer than usual. He opened the packet and showed his son new detailed blueprints of an imaginary city. He smiled and said, "Gerhardt, this is the most beautiful city that I have created for us. When I return, we will build this together, but while I am gone, you can start by yourself." Overwhelmed, Gerhardt thrust himself again into his father's embrace. Captain Stark then kissed his wife and quickly turned toward his destination. He bounded athletically up the three steps and placed his luggage overhead. He secured a seat by the window and waved to his family. He stood smiling as though he did not have a care in the world. As the giant iron engine began to emit massive bolts of steam, the train slowly emerged from the station. Gerhardt waved and waved until his father had completely vanished.

## Chapter 3

### *November 1916, Munich* *An unimaginable loss*

Christina hadn't heard from Wilhelm in ten days. Daily she waited anxiously for a letter. Despite Wilhelm's assurances in his letters, she tried to wish away the foreboding thought that he was in constant danger. The late fall had been exceptionally hard, and it was almost impossible for her to stop thinking about the peril of the man she so deeply loved. Munich had experienced weeks of freezing rain and snow, and she shuddered at the thought that her husband was exposed in an open trench to the terrible weather.

Gerhardt, on the other hand, had been encouraged by the few letters that he had received from his father. He especially focused on the parts where his father mentioned that they would build not only the model but the actual city sometime in the future.

This morning, Gerhardt was finishing a model railroad station, following the specific directions of his father's blueprints. After sanding the rough edges, he was cutting pieces of balsa wood to begin the process of building the city hall. He gingerly began to glue the front of city hall and smiled because he had accomplished precisely what his father designed. At that very moment, a scream shattered the stillness of the morning, followed by a series of harsh, blood-curdling sounds that reverberated through the house. Gerhardt was frightened by the sounds and quickly ascended the cellar stairs. He was in such a hurry that he tripped, ripped his trousers, and sandpapered his knee. He raced through the dining room and opened the kitchen door to find his mother totally prostrate on the kitchen floor, mumbling. He ran to

her side and knelt before her. In a quivering voice he asked, “Mother, what is wrong, what is wrong?” He turned and looked up at Aunt Margret, whose face was red and blotchy. She had a letter in her hand. “Aunt Margret, why is Mother screaming and crying?” Aunt Margret gently knelt down, placed her arms around Gerhardt, and said, “Gerhardt, I have terrible news.” The young boy froze with fear. “We have just received a letter that your father was killed in action.” Gerhardt violently pushed her away and yelled, “That cannot be true, it cannot be true. My father is not dead! He’s coming home soon and is going to build a model with me. Some day we will build the city. You’re wrong, you’re wrong.” With that, he bolted from the room, raced up to his bedroom, and slammed the door. He jumped into bed and pulled the covers over his head. He was certain that his father’s death was a mistake, and soon he would return home from the war. He went over and over his memories of his father—so tall and strong, his warm, confident voice—and these memories told him the news must be a lie.

Over the next three days, as the house was steeped in gloom, gifts of food and handwritten notes arrived, and his mother kept to her room, Gerhardt began to realize that his father was truly dead. He could no longer control himself; tears flooded his face. He, too, stayed in the darkness of his room, scrunched up against a wall with his knees tucked under his chin. He only came out when summoned to meals by the servants.

His parents’ friends visited his home once the news of Wilhelm’s death became public, and they would invariably speak with Gerhardt. They all tried to assure him that his father was now with God. This assurance, meant to alleviate his grief, did just the opposite. He was



confused by these statements and began an anger toward God that would last for the rest of his life.

The morning of the funeral, leaves blew like skirts of folk dancers against the stone walls of the burial church. The winds swirled the crystals of snow, coating the stained-glass windows of St. Mark's. Gerhardt's mother, Aunt Margret and Uncle Isidore slowly ascended the steps of the church and waited in the vestibule with Gerhardt. This was a totally new experience for Gerhardt, and he had no idea what was happening. Suddenly a hearse appeared, followed by two military cars. Soldiers exited the vehicles and lined up at the rear of the hearse. They lifted the coffin, and six pallbearers ascended the steps of the church. The silence was deafening as the pallbearers entered the vestibule. The only sounds were the swishing of the priest's cassock and the squeaking of his shoes on the marble floor as he came forward from the front of the church accompanied by two acolytes with lit candles. The darkness of the interior was gently broken by the flickering candles along the side aisles. The church was unheated and bitterly cold; each breath formed a cloud. In a dull monotone, the priest began to say prayers and sprinkle water onto the casket. Gerhardt was confused by this; why was this priest sprinkling the large, dark cherry-stained coffin with water? He looked up at Aunt Margret and asked, "Is my father in that coffin?" His words pierced her heart, and she gently replied, "Gerhardt, your wonderful father is inside."

"Can I see him?" The tenderness of this request made his aunt tear up.

"No, Gerhardt, it must remain closed."

The organ gently played the *Ave Maria* as the priest turned and headed for the main altar. Once the coffin was blessed, the acolyte covered it with a German flag. The ushers placed it on the trolley to be

set in the center aisle of the church. The freezing cold church forced clouds of human breath in the air throughout the service. The entire process confused Gerhardt. No one explained the funeral rituals to him. He paid no attention to the Mass and stared at the coffin during the service. Gerhardt barely noticed the hymns, pungent smells of incense and musty prayer books. The eulogy, which hardly mentioned his father, did little to alleviate his sorrow and confusion. At communion time, his aunt guided him to the communion rail. He automatically opened his mouth as the priest placed the wafer on his tongue. After the Mass, someone led Gerhardt back to the limousine while the coffin was placed in the hearse. The silence in the car was broken only by his mother, who was crumpled against the door weeping with soul-wrenching sounds. She seemed incapable of speech. The car followed the hearse to the cemetery, just five minutes away. After waiting for the pallbearers to carry the coffin to the grave, the family left the car and walked slowly into the cemetery. The only sounds were the rusted iron gate moving back and forth, the biting wind and the crunching of frozen snow and ice under their feet. Gerhardt saw a deep hole in the ground and his father's casket next to a large mound of dirt. The priest mumbled some prayers that the mourners could barely hear because of the howling wind. Gerhardt was cold. His aunt tied a scarf around his neck and wrapped her arms around him. As the prayers ended, he watched his mother thrust herself onto the casket. She was inconsolable. The funeral director and Uncle Isadore kept her from collapsing to the ground. Gerhardt shivered as soldiers fired three shots into the wind. After that, the cemetery caretakers wrapped ropes around the casket and slowly lowered it into the grave. Gerhardt trembled uncontrollably at the sound of the thud when the coffin struck the dark, deep bottom. A sob was mired in Gerhardt's throat. He was worried that his father would be cold and alone in the darkness.

## Chapter 7

### *July 1930, Munich* *The Nazi Seduction of Gerhardt*

Rolf saw in Gerhardt the perfect candidate for the growing Nazi party. He knew that Gerhardt was exceptionally bright, had excellent organizational skills, and was already an accomplished student of architecture. There were many brutish thugs in the Nazi party but few intellectuals who could assume leadership positions. It was not pure love of party that motivated Rolf – he knew that he could attach himself to Gerhardt’s coattails. Gerhardt had been, up to this point, very resistant to taking National Socialism seriously. Rolf decided on a multifaceted strategy to convince Gerhardt to become involved.

He would begin by soliciting the support of his sister Frieda, who was an avid member of the University National Socialists. Gerhardt was totally smitten with her. The once casual dating had blossomed into a genuine romance. If he could convince her to share her reasons for participating in the party, it would certainly enhance the possibility that Gerhardt would take the party more seriously.

Rolf also decided to share this challenge with Hans Becker, his National Socialist group leader, who was a key recruiter for the party. One evening after a leadership session, Rolf asked Hans to have coffee at a local pastry shop. After stirring his coffee and taking a sip, Hans said, “Rolf, I have the feeling that you wish to discuss something personal with me.”

“I do, and it is about someone I believe would be a perfect candidate for the party.” “Tell me about him.”

“His name is Gerhardt Stark, age twenty-one. He is finishing his architectural degree at the Blenheim Institute and taking some classes

at the university. He is an exceptional student and an obvious leader with significant speaking and organizational skills.”

“What do you know about his personal history? Is he a full-blooded German?”

“I believe he is because his grandfathers were both officers in the German army. However, I know little about his immediate family. He occasionally mentions his mother, but I cannot recall one time that he referred to his father.”

Hans lit a cigarette and blew a smoke ring. “That is where you must start. The way to convert any candidate is to begin with the family history. Once that is known, you can build the key concepts of opportunity, the new Germany, and the traitors that are in the way of our glorious future.”

Rolf made mental notes of this counsel and decided to take direct action with Gerhardt.

After a few beers at the local biergarten one night, Rolf began to execute his strategy. “Gerhardt, I know something about your mother, but I literally know nothing about your father.”

Gerhardt thought for a moment. “I have only vague recollections of my father because he died when I was eight years old.”

“How did he die?”

“He was killed in the World War. He was an accomplished architect but was drafted into the military. I know he went to military school but chose architecture over becoming a career officer.”

“Was he a foot soldier?”

“Yes, I have a document that states he was a captain in the Army and was killed in France in 1917.”

Rolf saw this as an opportunity to explore. “Do you know where he was killed?”

“The document states that he was killed in the battle of the Somme.”

Rolf thought, this is critical! This was an opportunity to score some points for his beliefs. “The battle of the Somme was an important battle in the war. Do you know anything about that battle?”

Gerhardt responded, “Very little.”

Rolf sensed that the facts blended with the personal might persuade Gerhardt. He decided to start with historical data. “Gerhardt, it was the most critical battle of the great war! The German military initially overwhelmed the French and the British, despite their advantage in numbers and materials. Thousands of the enemy were killed, and the German army retained the advantage of holding the high ground when the betrayal came.”

Gerhardt asked, “What betrayal?”

“The Jewish industrialists working worldwide despised Germany. They controlled all the necessary resources vital to Germany’s ultimate victory.”

Gerhardt seemed confused. “I’m not sure what you are referring to.”

“I’m talking about the railroads, supply chains and all the things that the Jews completely controlled. It was their intention to cripple Germany and make sure that we would lose the war. They destroyed Germany economically by the vicious anti-German treaty known as the Treaty of Versailles. Are you aware of what that treaty has done to the people of Germany?”

“I have only a vague idea,” Gerhardt said.

Rolf replied sharply, “The Jews not only tilted the war against Germany, the treaty insisted that Germany pay all of the war’s cost. That alone has caused the depression in our country.”

Rolf now moved to the personal. “Were you close to your father as a child?”

“I was, but I only have vague recollections of him now.”

Gerhardt recounted the story of the model city and shared the discomfort of living with the man who married his mother after his father's death. Rolf instinctively understood that this was key to his strategy. "I believe your life would be very different if your father had lived."

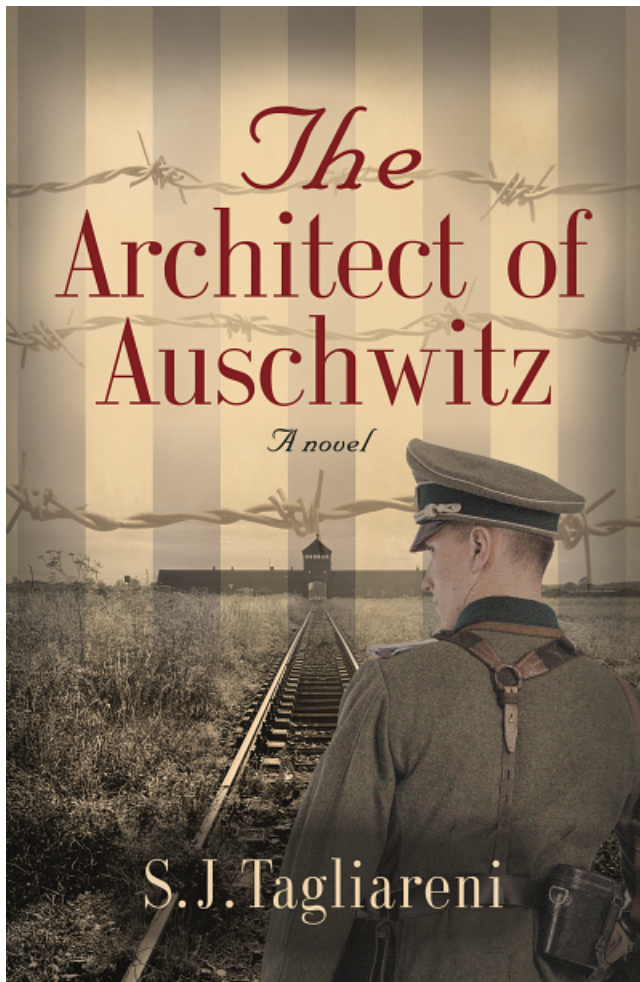
That deeply touched Gerhardt. "I'm sure it would be. I know that I am studying architecture because my father was an architect."

The question about his father opened the floodgates, and Gerhardt poured forth the pride he had in his father's accomplishments. "Many of the notable buildings in Munich and Berlin were designed by my father. His partner once told me that, had he lived, he would be the premier architect in Germany today."

Rolf shook his head and replied yes. "And to think that he died so that the Jews could profit financially from his death."

Gerhardt initially felt unconnected to that statement, but Rolf pursued the insidious logic of his argument. "We never explore the personal pain that the global conspiracy has caused, punishing a German family like yours. You grew up without a father because rich Jews sitting around a table decided that money was more important than morality."

Gerhardt had never attached his father's death to a conspiracy. It was compelling, and he saw no harm in reflecting on this view of history. He began to explore the possibility that his father died because of the greed of a Jewish conspiracy. Without letting himself decide if he believed it or not, he invited in the waiting emotion – it wasn't just "war" that had orphaned him but identifiable villains. That evening while seated on his bed, he wept for a long time. He had never stopped missing his father and this evening was a sharp reminder of what he had lost.



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