

Konrath tells the story of a poor Bavarian family, who cross the ocean and move into the tenements in the Lower East Side of New York City. They join the abolitionists, the Underground Railroad, and the Union Army to fight at Gettysburg.

Konrath

By W. Schildt

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KONRATH

A detailed historical painting of a battle scene, likely the Battle of Gettysburg. The scene is filled with soldiers in dark uniforms engaged in combat. In the foreground, a large wagon pulled by several horses is moving across the field. Soldiers are seen on horseback and on foot, some holding bayoneted rifles. The background shows a large-scale battle with many soldiers, flags, and a hazy, smoke-filled sky. The overall atmosphere is one of intense action and chaos.

W. SCHILDT

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This is a work of historical fiction based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

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Chapter 1

I grunted when Anton helped me sit. As he gently wiped my back with soap and water, he said, “The stripes are not deep. You will not have scars.”

I arched my back each time the rag scraped my skin. “Next time you steal a chicken, Brother, you take the stripes. You are old enough now.”

“I’m sorry, Jörg. I was so hungry, and I couldn’t look at another bowl of pottage.” He patted my back dry and pulled down my shirt.

“Then you must become a better thief so you don’t get caught.” I smiled at Anton who, at fourteen, had grown almost as tall as me in the last few months and was always hungry. The two of us lived in a half-fallen down shack on the edge of town. We were the only sons of our father, Louis Konrath. After he and my mother died, Anton and I were on our own, so we often went hungry if no one would give us work.

“You could court Maria. Then her father would give us work.” Anton’s eyes were wide at the idea. “She is pretty. Maybe she knows how to cook.”

“Maria is just a girl, and she doesn’t care for me. I heard she is promised to Emil, who is learning to be a banker like his father. Maybe she wants to live in a house in town and not on a farm.”

“But Emil is a moron. Herr Adler knows he is lazy and will never amount to anything unlike his rich father.”

I nodded. Winter would soon be upon us, and we had been unable to save any money and our vegetable crib was less than full. "Maybe I should visit Maria. The fall asters are yet blooming in the garden on the sunny side of our house. I could take her a bouquet."

"You are better looking than Emil. Unlike you, he is short and his skin welts on his cheeks." Anton laughed, "I could hear the Brinkmann sisters whispering in church. With our blue eyes and dark brown hair, we stand out in a crowd of pale-haired men."

"Still, Maria seems wildly happy one moment and sad and melancholy the next. What would we speak of?"

"Jörg, tell her she is pretty. Maria does have clear blue eyes, pale blonde hair and smooth skin."

"Maybe you should visit her, Anton. I never know what to say to girls."

§

I did go to Herr Adler right before Christmas and asked for help. Anton and I had nothing to eat, so I offered to work for food. After he agreed, we spent the cold winter chopping wood for his stove and mending his plow and his tools. We fed the horses and the cow and took them to the fields when the weather was fair. My brother and I managed to catch a fish and occasionally steal an egg or two from Herr Adler's coop. Once he saw us with an egg, but he never whipped us. He would watch us, and sometimes he had Anton and me sit next to Maria in church.

We spent the next three years working in the barley and hop fields. We scattered the barley seeds in early spring and kept

the rows weeded, so the plants would not get rot. After sun and some rain, about eighty days later, we would use a scythe to cut the golden stalks and separate the seeds. We did this twice a year in late spring and late summer. Anton and I worked fifteen to twenty hours a day to gather the dried seed, especially if it felt like rain was coming. One winter we built a new barn for Herr Adler. He paid us in day-old bread and soup, and because our shack was cold, he let us sleep in his barn after it was finished. With all the animals on the main floor, the loft was warm.

One stormy night in May as the thunder and lightning filled the barn with light, I lay in the straw with my hands behind my head. I looked up, as lightning split the sky, and saw a green woodpecker perched in the rafters. It must have flown into the barn to escape the storm. I nudged Anton and pointed. "Look!"

"Why did you wake me, Brother?" He turned over in our straw bed.

"How often have you seen such a bird?"

"I only like birds I can kill and eat." He made a face. "When we went to the kitchen today, I saw you with Maria. What did she say?"

"She asked me if I wanted more bread. She had trouble asking that simple question. She was so sad."

"Last week in church she sang at the top of her lungs and made a spectacle of herself, until her father put his hand over her mouth. Then she giggled throughout the sermon."

"She has few friends. I feel sorry for her." I smiled sadly.

"Emil has ended his engagement to Maria, and Herr Adler has failed to find her another man though she is fair of face.

Jörg, why don't you offer to marry her? You are twenty years old, old enough to take a wife. The girls in church talk about Maria's dowry. We would have some money."

"I have no money, no land and little education. If it wasn't for Mama teaching us to read the Bible, we would be illiterate. Herr Adler would want a better prospect than me for his only child."

Anton sat up. "Maybe we should leave Kirchheimbolanden. Brother, I have listened to men talk in the rathskeller when I deliver beer. The Boehm brothers have left for America. The men say if you work there, you get rich."

I looked across to where Anton sat in his drawers and long shirt. "I have heard talk of America also. It is said the Americans ignore class or your father's name. If one is willing to work, one could become wealthy. How would we get the money for passage?"

"You can marry Maria and Herr Adler would be obliged to give you the dowry."

"...and let her to travel to America?"

"No, Brother, I would go. You can stay here, until I make enough to send for you both."

"I won't marry Maria for money. I am not too sure I like her. We need to come up with a plan to make cash in our spare time."

"What spare time?"

"We will have to work by candlelight."

Anton shrugged his shoulders and put a stalk of straw between his teeth. "Jörg, I've heard men talk in the rathskeller. Do you know what a man does when he marries?"

“Do you mean on the wedding night?”

Anton nodded. “Did father ever speak of such things?”

“No, but you have seen animals mating. When people marry, it is called the marriage bed so you must do it in a bed.” I threw a handful of straw at Anton.

“After you do it, will you tell me how, Jörg?” He threw a handful of straw back at me.

§

We bathed in the pond behind the barn every Saturday in warm weather. In winter Frau Adler heated water, and we took it to the barn. Every Sunday we marched with clean faces and clothes along with the household to the Paulskirche in our town of Kirchheimbolanden. The elders of our Lutheran church, without a bell tower or a steeple, bragged about our organ with its 2,830 pipes. They said Mozart played it when he was a child. We could not afford the yearly expense for a pew, so we stood at the back of the church during the service with the other poor families in the town. The town mayor and his family sat in the first row of the church and never talked with those of us who stood. They lived in the castle inside our walled city. Even though we worked long hours for the wealthy, we were always pariahs in our hometown.

Sometimes Maria would stop and visit with us as we exited the church. Anton usually got her to smile, and I did notice that she was pretty. I would practice words to say with her, but if she was happy and laughing, I forgot the rehearsed words because she flitted around and couldn't stay still.

Both Anton and I had grown tall, taller than almost all the men in the village. Families would announce the betrothal of their sons and daughters during the church service, but my brother and I could only listen and wonder how we would ever marry. When my parents were alive, we knew they would find a match for each of us, but now, neither of us had money for a matchmaker. We would become old bachelors and always be marginalized.

During the fall we managed rabbit traps or duck traps and what we didn't eat we sold to buy heavy linen. My mother had made our clothes, and I had watched her sew when we were boys. A needle and thread did not seem threatening. I sewed a shirt and sold it. Then we had enough money for two shirts. Anton was a better salesman than me, so he sold the clothing, and I continued sewing by the candlelight.

Herr Adler worked us every day and we saved the few *pfennigs* he paid us. Once the barley was ready, we cut it and boiled the grain with a little honey. Then we threw in the hops. When the mixture cooled, we strained it and added the yeast. Herr Adler had us store the mixture in barrels for two months. Afterwards, we sold the best beer in town.

While we cooked the beer, I watched as Frau Adler made bread. I took note how she scalded the milk and when it cooled, just like the beer mash, before she added yeast. On a cold October day, I offered to knead the dough for her. She gladly accepted, even though she laughed that a man would do woman's work.

Throughout the winter I worked in the kitchen. I could make bread with my eyes closed. When March began to warm the ground, I got up before dawn to make the dough and let it rise. After the sun came up, Anton and I turned the soil and raked it so it was ready for planting. We scattered the barley seed and cleaned the weeds from the hops perennial garden. In late afternoon I put the bread in the oven fireplace. Anton and I worked eighteen to twenty hours a day.

Frau Adler had taken to her bed in late winter, and by June she was dead. They called what had ailed her the wasting disease. Herr Adler had doctors examine her every week with the hope they could find a cure, but she got progressively weaker. He bought her fine cuts of meat and expensive elixirs. She had a fondness for beer and drank all day, but it never seemed to quench her thirst. She looked like a skeleton by the time she took her last breath. Maria was of little use. She slept with her mother in the same bed, and the nurse Herr Adler employed tended to them both.

“Jörg, we must leave here. The townspeople are saying that we will catch the wasting disease. Herr Adler now looks terrible too.”

I nodded. “Every week we have less work and coupled with the crop failure; we will starve by next year. You have clothes thanks to our business, and we have enough guildens for one passage in steerage. I will tell Herr Adler you have run away. Just leave. Send word once you have money for my passage.”

“How can I leave you, Jörg? It has always been the two of us.”

“Anton, there are hunger riots in München. You are eighteen and old enough to make your way in the world. Go to America.

I will follow you once I have the money. But don't tell me before you leave. Just go. It will be easier that way."

A month later when I arose to make the dough, Anton's bed was empty. On a little piece of paper, he left me a note:

Brother-i sail to New York-i love you.

I sat in the straw and cried.

Philippina

Chapter 2

I smiled at my music teacher. He had red curly hair and full lips. I knew he liked me, but I knew he would never make advances. Sometimes I would sit close to him on the piano bench and he would sigh. My father had insisted I learn to play a piece of music by Ludwig van Beethoven, and I managed to play the first part of "Für Elise." It was the only music I learned, although my teacher gave me a lesson every week for two years. His wild hair flew around his head as he hammered the keys, and I would pretend to be enamored with him even though I thought him a dunce. After my lesson, he would always praise my playing to my father.

I had a crush on my language tutor, Matthias, who was almost as tall as me and his blue eyes were so pale. He radiated an animal magnetism that took my breath away. I worked tirelessly on my French, English and Latin to impress him during our two-hour lessons twice a week. As I watched his lips move, I imagined what it would be like to kiss him. I learned English with speed. Languages came naturally to me. We read poems by Shelley, as we looked into the other's eyes and repeated,

"Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine,
In one spirit meet and mingle,

Why not I with thine?’²”

My heart fluttered. If only he would carry me away to wherever he lived, I would love him forever.

“Our lesson is completed for the day, Fräulein Philippina.” After he closed his book and gave me an assignment written on a piece of paper, he put his head near mine and whispered, “You are my most intelligent pupil. I will await anxiously our next meeting.” He smiled and I felt my heart explode.

“The weather has turned warm and mild. Could we take class outside in the garden next time?” I fluttered my hazel eyes and smiled.

“I will enquire about that with your father. Should we leave the library, we would need a chaperone. You are such a beauty!” He kissed my hand.

After he left, I pulled the blue ribbon from my almond-color hair and took some deep breaths. Matthias was the most wonderful person I had ever met. I imagined how we would run away to some faraway castle where no one would find us and quote love poems and kiss away the day.

“Miss Philippina, it is time for your ride today,” said my maid.

“Mila, I am having the most exquisite daydream. Let me be!”

“Nonsense! Quickly, let me help you dress into your riding clothes. Your father is expecting you.”

In the paddock I handed Heidi, my Friesian, a carrot. Her long black mane and tail were braided with the colored ribbons

² Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Love’s Philosophy*, 1792-1822

of the House of Wellesbach, white and royal blue. We walked through the gate, and I dipped my head to my father. My brothers and I never spoke to him unless he spoke first.

“Philippina, we will walk along the ridge, so I can inspect the vineyard.”

I dipped my head again. “Ja, Papa.”

I followed him, as his eyes scanned the land before us. He dismounted once to check the young Riesling vines that surrounded the castle where we lived. His lips moved and he seemed to be communicating with the grapes which had made our family wealthy. Then he mounted his black Friesian, and he and the horse walked alongside mine.

“You are almost fifteen. I have been so busy with my work that I have neglected to find you a husband. The Stolenberg boy is almost sixteen and will inherit the family estate of five hundred *Hektars*. His mother is difficult, but his father is pleasant and Uwe, although a silly boy, will grow into a fine man.”

“But Papa...he smells and has a pimply-face.”

“His father has accounts all over the world. You will travel to America for your honeymoon with the family. They are said to know the American President, James Polk.”

“I don’t want to travel. I want to marry a professor.”

The look my father shot in my direction filled me with fear. “When will you learn to keep your mouth shut and not argue? No husband will tolerate your insolence. It is too bad your mother died so long ago. You have never been trained properly. Your unfeminine gait, thanks to your height, has always been a

problem. Not many men want a bride a head taller.” Then he rode ahead of me toward the paddock.

From that day forward my life became filled with shopping and dress fittings. My day dresses were made of silk with cotton under-linings. A boned corset squeezed my chest, so the tight bodice showed off my ample figure. The skirts were full with voluminous crinolines and a hoop underneath to keep the bell-shape that skimmed the floor. My evening dresses clung to my shoulders and the bodices were low cut.

Along with all the gowns, my underclothes were hand-sewn of sheer silk or cotton. My chemises could be worn under my corsets or as nightgowns in the summer, but for the winter my chemises were made of fine wool. My pantalets were split down the front and reached to my knees. The crotch seam was open so it was possible to use a chamber pot. My stockings, which reached to my thighs were tied with ribbons. These exquisite wedding clothes filled two trunks. When I inquired about my wedding dress, I was told my mother-in-law-to-be would have a dress made for me.

Dame Rihnilt gave etiquette lessons and was paid to coach me in deportment. As a lady of wealth, I needed to be mindful of my actions and never to cause my husband-to-be embarrassment. She was emphatic with her instructions, that a husband and wife are not equal. A married lady would always avoid arguments and always ask forgiveness from her husband before retiring every night should she had embarrassed him in anyway during the day. She would praise her husband liberally, be honest, trustworthy, and initiate the act that says she respects his needs. When I asked about his needs and the act, Dame Rihnilt said I would learn those answers after I was wed.

Many days I still managed to escape to the kitchen. I loved our cook who made the most wonderful sweets. She showed me how to measure and stir. She would serve what we had made after our dinner meal. Should my father tell our butler to compliment the cook regarding a dessert, for my father also had a sweet tooth, I would hide my smile and tell the cook the next day.

Because I was to visit America with my new husband, my English tutor came daily. This pleased me greatly. *Mein Lehrer*, Matthias, was the most wonderful teacher. We had moved from learning lists of nouns and verbs to reading English novels. First, we read stories of princes and princesses. My favorite was the story of a prince, who hid his person as a penniless serf but still stole the princess's heart. I was almost breathless when the two held hands at the end of the novel. Matthias suggested we read *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

"This novel is a bit racy, my beautiful muse, but I will be so interested to see how you react to the two main characters, Miss Bennet and Mr. Darcy." Matthias looked me over and smiled.

After we had read some of the story, Matthias asked if I thought that a woman's reputation would be compromised if she were to kiss her beloved before the two were properly wed.

"If true love is precious, a kiss would seal their deep feelings. Would it not?" I asked.

Matthias smiled and ran his tongue across his lip. "Most undoubtedly. Have you ever been tempted to kiss a gentleman? I have never taken the liberty of becoming so intimate with a lady."

“No...no, I am innocent of such things, but I wish not to be.”
I giggled breathlessly.

“My Sweet Philippina, our lesson for today is over, and we are near the end of the novel. Think about how you would end the story.” He kissed my hand and took his leave.

I ran up to my bedchamber and threw myself on the bed. I only had two more lessons with Matthias, before I was to leave for America. I prayed he would take me away from Bavaria, and we would live happily ever after. Would he ask me to marry him tomorrow?

§

I sat in the dining room across from my father and our guest Franz Sigel. He and my father had been comrades in arms in the Baden army. The soldier boasted of his conquests, while he drank schnapps. My father often smiled, but he seemed a bit uncomfortable when the man began his tirade against the American stumbling block of slavery.

“I am surprised at the vehemence in your voice, Franz. That is an American problem.”

“I plan to sail for New York again soon. I believe the country has so much potential that in a year or two, I could become an American millionaire. I may take the oath of citizenship, but I am afraid the nation will crack in half like an egg over the issue of slavery. One side of the nation’s mouth prides itself on its commitment to freedom, while the other side of its mouth accepts endless cruelties of its unjust racial system. I’ve been to concert halls where white men in blackface make jest of their Negro neighbors, who they characterize as lazy, licentious and vulgar, when in reality, those in bondage do all the work.”

“The Northern states have passed a resolution that endorses Negro colonization. Henry Clay wants to deport the Africans to their former homes on the African continent to end the problem.”

“How would all those white plantation owners pick cotton without the Negroes? They would go broke without slavery and so will never agree to colonization.”

My father drank another glass of schnapps. “Like I said, slavery is an American problem. I will not be losing sleep over it. My concern is the weather and my vineyards.”

I listened to Herr Sigel, as he told troubling stories of the treatment of disenfranchised African families who were rendered powerless because of the color of their skin. I wondered if I would meet any of the people in America of whom he spoke.

The next morning, I took my breakfast with my father, who was surprised as I tried to make conversation with him.

“Since when do you join me so early, *Tochter*.”

“It is raining, Papa. Maybe we could play a game of dominoes until the sun shines.”

“Young ladies never play such games, but I will talk with your etiquette teacher, Dame Rihnilt. Maybe when you are a married lady, your husband will find such games amusing.”

My shoulders slumped. “Papa, can you not cancel this marriage? I do not wish to leave you.”

“Cancel! I have promised your sizable dowry to Herr Stolenberg. The marriage contract is almost complete. You will sail on the *Argo* with your new husband and his family, and be thankful I have secured such a fine match for you. Keep in mind

your size. You are a handsome woman, but considering your height, most men would reject you.”

“I will miss you so, Father. And I will miss my brothers.”

“All of your brothers are in the Bavarian army and haven’t lived here for several years. Child, you are just timid.” My father stood to leave. “I expect soon after you are established, your husband will send for me, as I long to see America.”

“*Ja*, Papa.” I put my head down. “Will I go riding in New York?”

“I am told that there is a large wood near where you will live. I am sure the Americans will have a stable for ladies wishing to take the air.”

“In a year you will return to Europe...with your husband and a *Kind*. How proud I will be of you.”

§

I had Mila dress me carefully in one of my fanciest day dresses. The green voile complemented my fair complexion, and my hazel eyes looked green when I wore that color. I was desperate to have Matthias propose a marriage.

“This dress is too fancy for a language lesson. We should put this into your trunk and take it with us to New York.” Mila smiled. “*Fraülein*, can you imagine how you will be welcomed in America? I have heard talk in the kitchen. You will be so rich!” She smiled. “Maybe there is hope for me. I may find a husband as well in America. It is said it doesn’t matter who fathered you. Everyone is equal.”

“I have no interest in America. I imagine the people are uncouth barbarians.” I left my bedchamber for my meeting with

Matthias, who was waiting for me in the alcove by the library where we read and studied.

“My most beautiful pupil...how sad I am to part from you so soon.” He kissed my hand. I almost cried at the thought of never seeing him again.

We sat together facing each other, and he opened his copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. “How do you think this novel will end, Fraülein?”

“Please, call me Philippina.”

“Only if you will address me as Matthias.”

I blushed. “Matthias, the only way this story can end happily is if Mr. Darcy and Miss Bennet marry.”

His face contorted into a strange grin. “Let us read through to the end.” He picked up his copy and read. Then it was my turn to read. After I turned the last page, our lesson time was over, and I was breathless at the story’s ending.

“My beautiful Philippina, will you agree that true love is precious?”

“Oh yes, Matthias!”

Matthias leaned very close to me and kissed my cheek. “I can repeat Mr. Darcy’s confession, dear Philippina, ‘you have bewitched me body and soul.’³” If only there would be a place where we would have privacy.”

³ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, T. Egerton, Whitehall, 1813.

I whispered, "Come with me." I took Matthias by the hand and pulled him to the back of the library near the fainting couch. "No eyes will see us here."

I felt arms encircle me and Matthias' lips on mine. Soon his hands were touching my bosom and his lips were pressed against my neck. His hands worked quickly, as he lifted my skirts above my knees.

"Do you care for my lips on your young breasts?" he asked.

I could not answer.

"Be brave, sweet Philippina, and I will show you true love." He unbuttoned his britches and lifted my chemise as he lowered me on the fainting couch. "Be brave. Do not cry out, and I will never wish to be parted from you."

I inhaled and let out a small cry, as I tried to be brave. He worked against me over and over and then shuddered and grunted. As I lay unmoving beneath him, his breath warmed my neck.

"Sir, I love you," I whispered.

"Dear Philippina, you render me enthralled. When I return for your last lesson tomorrow, I will ask your father for your hand. Until then you must hasten to your bedchamber and have your maid redress you." He was stuffing his shirt into his britches and pulled on his coat. "*Auf Wiedersehen, bis morgen.*" He hurried out of the door.

I caught my breath and ran to my bedchamber in my rumpled gown. Mila stared at me openmouthed. "Fraülein, what has happened?"

"I am to be married! He loves me! It will be so wonderful!"

As she adjusted my chemise and skirts, we both saw the little blood stain.

“He loves me!”

“Fraülein!”

§

I stood in my father’s office with my head down. In the days that followed, someone had spread rumors in Kirchheimbolanden.

“It is all around the city. You are unchaste! What do you have to say?”

“Papa, I love Matthias.”

“Who? What do you mean you love?”

“I am waiting for him. He wants to marry me.”

“Matthias? You mean that effeminate tutor?”

“He is coming to marry me.”

“You little fool! He is long gone, and you will never see him again.”

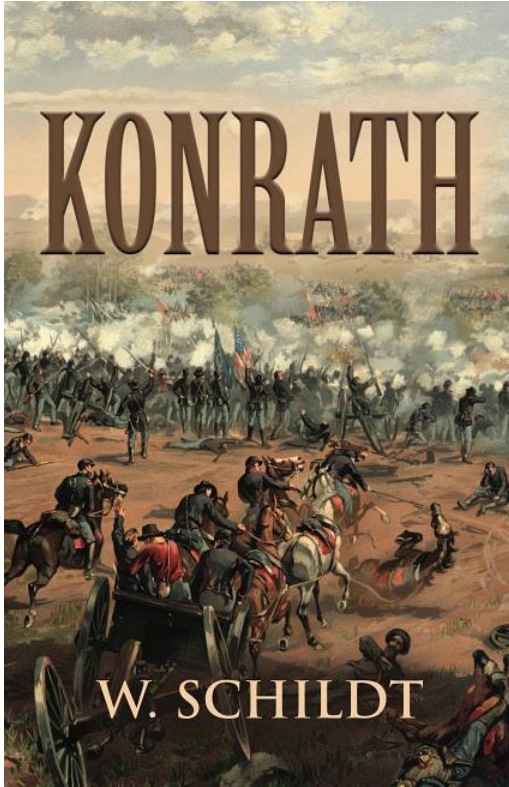
My father left the room in a rage. I was confined to my room for a month. Then I was made to stand again in his office.

“I have managed to find a replacement for Uwe. You will marry Aleksander Kannofsky, who traces his bloodline to kings of the Stanislaw family, although Aleksander is just a prince. He lives in New York City with his mother, so you will embark on a forty to ninety day crossing of the Atlantic depending on the winds. Once you no longer live in Kirchheimbolanden, the

scandal will die down. You have made this last month hell for me.”

I started to cry. “I don’t want to travel to America. Matthias will come for me.”

“Put that behind you and be thankful your life is not ruined. You will soon preside over a mansion and be part of the New York social society of aristocrats. True, the Kannofsky family is Polish, but they are known for their great wealth and influence. No one will know of your shame. You are little better than a trollop.



Konrath tells the story of a poor Bavarian family, who cross the ocean and move into the tenements in the Lower East Side of New York City. They join the abolitionists, the Underground Railroad, and the Union Army to fight at Gettysburg.

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