

## “Shoot, Shoot!”

The following is a segment from Erik Larson’s *In the Garden of Beasts*. This segment helps illustrate the events that took place between June 30, 1934 with Hitler’s purge of the SA and culminates in Hitler’s appointment as Fuhrer and Reich Chancellor in August.

The next morning, Saturday, June 30, 1934, Boris drove to Martha’s house in his open Ford and soon, armed with picnic larder and blanket, the two set out for the Wannsee district southwest of Berlin. As a setting for trysts it had a turbulent history. Here, on a lake named Kleiner Wannsee—Little Wannsee—the German poet Heinrich von Kleist shot himself in 1811, after first shooting his terminally ill lover. Martha and Boris were headed for a small, uncrowded lake well to the north called Gross Glienicke, Martha’s favorite.

The city around them was sleepy with nascent heat. Though the day would be another difficult one for farmers and laborers, for anyone intent on lakeside sunbathing it promised to be ideal. As Boris drove toward the city’s outskirts, everything seemed utterly normal. Other residents, looking back, made the same observation. Berliners “strolled serenely through the streets, went about their business,” observed Hedda Adlon, wife of the proprietor of the Hotel Adlon. The hotel followed its usual rhythms, although the day’s heat promised to compound the logistical challenges of catering a banquet for the king of Siam to be held later that day at the Schloss Bellevue—Bellevue Palace—at the northern edge of the Tiergarten, on the Spree. The hotel would have to shuttle its canapés and entrees in its catering van through traffic and heat, amid temperatures expected to rise into the nineties.

At the lake, Boris and Martha spread their blanket. They swam and lay in the sun, entangled in each other’s arms until the heat drove them apart. They drank beer and vodka and dined on sandwiches.

"It was a beautiful serene blue day, the lake shimmering and glittering in front of us, and the sun spreading its fire over us," she wrote. "It was a silent and soft day—we didn't even have the energy or desire to talk politics or discuss the new tension in the atmosphere."

ELSEWHERE THAT MORNING, three far larger cars raced across the countryside between Munich and Bad Wiessee—Hitler's car and two others filled with armed men. They arrived at the Hotel Hanselbauer, where Captain Röhm lay asleep in his room. Hitler led a squad of armed men into the hotel. By one account he carried a whip, by another, a pistol. The men climbed the stairs in a thunder of bootheels.

Hitler himself knocked on Röhm's door, then burst inside, followed by two detectives. "Röhm," Hitler barked, "you are under arrest."

Röhm was groggy, clearly hungover. He looked at Hitler. "Heil, mein Führer," he said.

Hitler shouted again, "You are under arrest," and then stepped back into the hall. He advanced next to the room of Röhm's adjutant, Heines, and found him in bed with his young SA lover. Hitler's driver, Kempka, was present in the hall. He heard Hitler shout, "Heines, if you are not dressed in five minutes I'll have you shot on the spot!"

Heines emerged, preceded by, as Kempka put it, "an 18-year-old fair-haired boy mincing in front of him."

The halls of the hotel resounded with the shouts of SS men herding sleepy, stunned, and hungover Storm Troopers down to the laundry room in the hotel basement. There were moments that in another context might have been comical, as when one of Hitler's raiding party emerged from a hotel bedroom and reported, crisply, "Mein Führer! . . . The Police President of Breslau is refusing to get dressed!"

Or this: Röhm's doctor, an SA *Gruppenführer* named Ketterer, emerged from one room accompanied by a woman. To the astonishment of Hitler and his detectives, the woman was Ketterer's wife. Viktor Lutze, the trusted SA officer who had been in Hitler's plane

that morning, persuaded Hitler that the doctor was a loyal ally. Hitler walked over to the man and greeted him politely. He shook hands with Mrs. Ketterer, then quietly recommended that the couple leave the hotel. They did so without argument.

IN BERLIN THAT MORNING, Frederick Birchall of the *New York Times* was awakened by the persistent ring of the telephone beside his bed. He had been out late the night before and at first was inclined to ignore the call. He speculated, wishfully, that it must be unimportant, probably only an invitation to lunch. The phone kept ringing. At length, acting on the maxim "It is never safe to despise a telephone call, especially in Germany," he picked up the receiver and heard a voice from his office: "Better wake up and get busy. Something doing here." What the caller said next captured Birchall's full attention: "Apparently a lot of people are being shot."

Louis Lochner, the Associated Press correspondent, learned from a clerical worker arriving late to the AP office that Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, where the Gestapo was headquartered, had been closed to traffic and now was filled with trucks and armed SS, in their telltale black uniforms. Lochner made a few calls. The more he learned, the more disturbing it all seemed. As a precaution—believing that the government might shut down all outbound international telephone lines—Lochner called the AP's office in London and told its staff to call him every fifteen minutes until further notice, on the theory that inbound calls might still be allowed through.

Sigrid Schultz set off for the central government district, watching carefully for certain license plate numbers, Papen's in particular. She would work nonstop until four the next morning and then note in her daily appointments diary, "dead tired—[could] weep."

One of the most alarming rumors was of massed volleys of gunfire from the courtyard of the old cadet school in the otherwise peaceful enclave of Gross-Lichterfelde.

AT THE HOTEL HANSELBAUER, Röhm got dressed in a blue suit and emerged from his room, still confounded and apparently not yet

terribly worried by Hitler's anger or the commotion in the hotel. A cigar projected from the corner of his mouth. Two detectives took him to the hotel lobby, where he sat in a chair and ordered coffee from a passing waiter.

There were more arrests, more men shoved into the laundry room. Röhm remained seated in the lobby. Kempka heard him request another cup of coffee, by now his third.

Röhm was taken away by car; the rest of the prisoners were loaded onto a chartered bus and driven to Munich, to Stadelheim Prison, where Hitler himself had spent a month in 1922. Their captors took back roads to avoid contact with any Storm Troopers seeking to effect rescue. Hitler and his ever-larger raiding party climbed back into their cars, now numbering about twenty, and raced off on a more direct route toward Munich, stopping any cars bearing SA leaders who, unaware of all that had just occurred, were still expecting to attend Hitler's meeting set for later that morning.

In Munich, Hitler read through a list of the prisoners and marked an "X" next to six names. He ordered all six shot immediately. An SS squad did so, telling the men just before firing, "You have been condemned to death by the *Führer!* Heil Hitler."

The ever-obliging Rudolf Hess offered to shoot Röhm himself, but Hitler did not yet order his death. For the moment, even he found the idea of killing a longtime friend to be abhorrent.

SOON AFTER ARRIVING at his Berlin office that morning, Hans Gisevius, the Gestapo memoirist, tuned his radio to police frequencies and heard reports that sketched an action of vast scope. Senior SA men were being arrested, as were men who had no connection with the Storm Troopers. Gisevius and his boss, Kurt Daluege, set off in search of more detailed information and went directly to Göring's palace on Leipziger Platz, from which Göring was issuing commands. Gisevius stuck close to Daluege in the belief that he was safer in his company than alone. He also figured no one would think to look for him at Göring's residence.

Although the palace was an easy walk away, they drove. They were struck by the aura of utter calm on the streets, as though noth-

ing unusual were taking place. They did note, however, the complete absence of Storm Troopers.

The sense of normalcy disappeared immediately when they turned a corner and arrived at Göring's palace. Machine guns jutted from every promontory. The courtyard was filled with police.

Gisevius wrote: "As I followed Daluege through the succession of guards and climbed the few steps to the huge lobby, I felt as if I could scarcely breathe. An evil atmosphere of haste, nervousness, tension, and above all of bloodshed, seemed to strike me in the face."

Gisevius made his way to a room next to Göring's study. Adjutants and messengers hurried past. An SA man sat quaking with fear, having been told by Göring that he was to be shot. Servants brought sandwiches. Although crowded, the room was quiet. "Everyone whispered as if he were in a morgue," Gisevius recalled.

Through an open doorway, he saw Göring conferring with Himmler and Himmler's new Gestapo chief, Reinhard Heydrich. Gestapo couriers arrived and left carrying white slips of paper on which, Gisevius presumed, were the names of the dead or soon-to-be dead. Despite the serious nature of the endeavor at hand, the atmosphere in Göring's office was closer to what could be expected at a racetrack. Gisevius heard crude and raucous laughter and periodic shouts of "Away!"

"Aha!"

"Shoot him."

"The whole crew of them seemed to be in the best humor," Gisevius recalled.

Now and then he caught a glimpse of Göring striding around the room dressed in a billowy white shirt and blue-gray trousers tucked into black jackboots that rose above his knees. "Puss-in-Boots," Gisevius thought suddenly.

At one point a red-faced police major burst from the study, followed by an equally enflamed Göring. Apparently a prominent target had escaped.

Göring shouted instructions.

"Shoot them! . . . Take a whole company. . . . Shoot them. . . . Shoot them at once!"

Gisevius found it appalling beyond description. "The written word

cannot reproduce the undisguised blood lust, fury, vicious vengefulness, and, at the same time, the fear, the pure funk, that the scene revealed.”

DODD HEARD NOTHING about the cataclysm unfolding elsewhere in the city until that Saturday afternoon when he and his wife sat down for lunch in their garden. At almost the same moment, their son, Bill, appeared, having just returned from his drive. He looked troubled. He reported that a number of streets had been closed, including Unter den Linden at the heart of the government district, and these were being patrolled by heavily armed squads of SS. He had heard as well that arrests had been made at the headquarters of the SA, located just blocks from the house.

Immediately Dodd and his wife experienced a spike of anxiety for Martha, out for the day with Boris Winogradov. Despite his diplomatic status, Boris was a man whom the Nazis even in ordinary times could be expected to view as an enemy of the state.

## CHAPTER 48

# Guns in the Park

Boris and Martha stayed at the beach all day, retreating to shade when the sun became too much but returning again for more. It was after five when they packed their things and with reluctance began the drive back to the city, “our heads giddy,” Martha recalled, “and our bodies burning from the sun.” They traveled as slowly as possible, neither wanting the day to end, both still relishing the oblivion of sunshine on water. The day had grown hotter as the ground cast its accumulated warmth back into the atmosphere.

They drove through a bucolic landscape softened by heat haze that rose from the fields and forests around them. Riders on bicycles overtook and passed them, some carrying small children in baskets over the front fenders or in wagons pulled alongside. Women carried flowers and men with knapsacks engaged in the German passion for a good, fast walk. “It was a homely, hot, and friendly day,” Martha wrote.

To catch the late afternoon sun and the breezes that flowed through the open car, Martha hiked the hem of her skirt to the tops of her thighs. “I was happy,” she wrote, “pleased with my day and my companion, full of sympathy for the earnest, simple, kindly German people, so obviously taking a hard-earned walk or rest, enjoying themselves and their countryside so intensely.”

At six o'clock they entered the city. Martha sat up straight and dropped the hem of her skirt “as befits a diplomat’s daughter.”

The city had changed. They realized it in phases as they got closer and closer to the Tiergarten. There were fewer people on the street

## Only the Horses

But like seemingly everyone else in Berlin, Dodd wanted to hear what Hitler had to say about the purge. The government announced that Hitler would speak on the evening of Friday, July 13, in an address before the deputies of the Reichstag at their temporary hall, the nearby Kroll opera house. Dodd decided not to attend but to listen over the radio. The prospect of being there in person and listening to Hitler justify mass murder as hundreds of sycophants repeatedly thrust out their arms was too abhorrent.

That Friday afternoon, he and François-Poncet arranged to meet in the Tiergarten, as they had done in the past to avoid eavesdropping. Dodd wanted to find out whether François-Poncet planned to attend the speech but feared that if he visited the French embassy, Gestapo watchers would observe his arrival and conclude that he was conspiring to have the great powers boycott the speech, as indeed he was. Dodd had called on Sir Eric Phipps at the British embassy earlier in the week and learned that Phipps too planned to forgo the speech. Two such visits to major embassies in so short a time would surely draw attention.

The day was cool and sunny, and as a consequence the park was crowded with people, most on foot but quite a few on horseback, moving slowly through shadow. Now and then the air was punctuated by laughter and the barking of dogs and plumed with the ghosts of cigars fading slowly in the stillness. The two ambassadors walked for an hour.

As they prepared to part company, François-Poncet volunteered,

"I shall not attend the address." He then offered an observation that Dodd had never expected to hear from a modern diplomat in one of the great capitals of Europe. "I would not be surprised any time to be shot on the streets of Berlin," he said. "Because of this my wife remains in Paris. The Germans hate us so and their leadership is so crazy."

At eight o'clock that night, in the library at Tiergartenstrasse 27a, Dodd turned on his radio and listened as Hitler took the dais to address the Reichstag. A dozen deputies were absent, murdered in the purge.

The opera house was just a twenty-minute walk across the Tiergarten from where Dodd now sat listening. On his side of the park, all was peaceful and quiet, the evening fragrant with the scent of night flowers. Even over the radio Dodd could hear the frequent risings and *Heilings* of the audience.

"Deputies," Hitler said. "Men of the German Reichstag!"

Hitler detailed what he described as a plot by Captain Röhm to usurp the government, aided by a foreign diplomat whom he did not identify. In ordering the purge, he said, he had acted only in the best interests of Germany, to save the nation from turmoil.

"Only a ferocious and bloody repression could nip the revolt in the bud," he told his audience. He himself had led the attack in Munich, he said, while Göring, with his "steel fist," had done so in Berlin. "If someone asks me why we did not use the regular courts I would reply: at the moment I was responsible for the German nation; consequently, it was I alone who, during those twenty-four hours, was the Supreme Court of Justice of the German People."

Dodd heard the clamor as the audience leapt to its feet, cheering, saluting, and applauding.

Hitler resumed: "I ordered the leaders of the guilty shot. I also ordered the abscesses caused by our internal and external poisons cauterized until the living flesh was burned. I also ordered that any rebel attempting to resist arrest should be killed immediately. The nation must know that its existence cannot be menaced with impunity by anyone, and that whoever lifts his hand against the State shall die of it."

He cited the “foreign diplomat’s” meeting with Röhm and other alleged plotters and the diplomat’s subsequent declaration that the meeting was “entirely inoffensive.” It was a clear allusion to the dinner François-Poncet had attended in May at the home of Wilhelm Regendanz.

“But,” Hitler continued, “when three men capable of high treason organize a meeting in Germany with a foreign statesman, a meeting which they themselves characterize as a ‘working’ meeting, when they send the servants away, and give strict orders that I should not be informed of their meeting, I have those men shot, even if in the course of those secret conversations the only subjects discussed were the weather, old coins and similar objects.”

Hitler acknowledged that the cost of his purge “has been high,” and then lied to his audience by setting the death toll at seventy-seven. He sought to temper even this count by claiming that two of the victims killed themselves and—laughably, here—that the total included three SS men shot for “mistreating prisoners.”

He closed, “I am ready before history to take the responsibility for the twenty-four hours of the bitterest decision of my life, during which fate has again taught me to cling with every thought to the dearest thing we possess—the German people and the German Reich.”

The hall resounded with the thunder of applause and massed voices singing the “Horst Wessel Lied.” Had Dodd been present, he would have seen two girls give Hitler bouquets of flowers, the girls dressed in the uniform of the Bund Deutscher Mädel, the female branch of the Hitler Youth, and would have seen Göring step briskly to the dais to take Hitler’s hand, followed by a surge of officials bent on offering their own congratulations. Göring and Hitler stood close and held the pose for the scores of photographers pressing near. The *Times*’ Fred Birchall witnessed it: “They stood face to face on the dais for almost a minute, hand grasping hand, looking into each other’s eyes while the flashlights popped.”

Dodd turned off his radio. On his side of the park the night was cool and serene. The next day, Saturday, July 14, he sent a coded telegram to Secretary Hull: “NOTHING MORE REPULSIVE THAN TO

WATCH THE COUNTRY OF GOETHE AND BEETHOVEN REVERT TO THE BARBARISM OF STUART ENGLAND AND BOURBON FRANCE . . .”

Late that afternoon, he devoted two quiet hours to his *Old South*, losing himself in another, more chivalrous age.

PUTZI HANFSTAENGL, ASSURED of his safety by Foreign Minister Neurath, sailed for home. When he arrived at his office he was struck by the somber, dazed aspect of those around him. They behaved, he wrote, “as if they were chloroformed.”

HITLER’S PURGE WOULD BECOME KNOWN as “The Night of the Long Knives” and in time would be considered one of the most important episodes in his ascent, the first act in the great tragedy of appeasement. Initially, however, its significance was lost. No government recalled its ambassador or filed a protest; the populace did not rise in revulsion.

The most satisfying reaction from a public official in America came from General Hugh Johnson, administrator of the National Recovery Administration, who by now had become notorious for intemperate speeches on a variety of subjects. (When a general strike had taken place in San Francisco in July led by a longshoreman who had emigrated from Australia, Johnson had called for deportation of all immigrants.) “A few days ago, in Germany, events occurred which shocked the world,” Johnson said in public remarks. “I don’t know how they affected you, but they made me sick—not figuratively, but physically and very actively sick. The idea that adult, responsible men can be taken from their homes, stood up against a wall, backs to the rifles and shot to death is beyond expression.”

The German foreign office protested. Secretary Hull replied that Johnson “was speaking as an individual and not for the State Department or for the Administration.”

This lack of reaction arose partly because many in Germany and elsewhere in the world chose to believe Hitler’s claim that he had suppressed an imminent rebellion that would have caused far more

bloodshed. Evidence soon emerged, however, that showed that in fact Hitler's account was false. Dodd at first seemed inclined to believe a plot really had existed but quickly grew skeptical. One fact seemed most clearly to refute the official line: when the SA's Berlin chief, Karl Ernst, was arrested, he was about to set off on a honeymoon cruise, not exactly the behavior of a man supposedly plotting a coup for that same weekend. Whether Hitler at first believed his own story is unclear. Certainly Göring, Goebbels, and Himmler had done all they could to make him believe it. Britain's Sir Eric Phipps initially accepted the official story; it took him six weeks to realize that no plot had existed. When Phipps met Hitler face-to-face several months later, his thoughts harked back to the purge. "It has not increased his charm or attractiveness," Phipps wrote in his diary. "Whilst I spoke he eyed me hungrily like a tiger. I derived the distinct impression that had my nationality and status been different I should have formed part of his evening meal."

In this appraisal he came closest to grasping the true message of the Röhm purge, which continued to elude the world. The killings demonstrated in what should have been unignorable terms how far Hitler was willing to go to preserve power, yet outsiders chose to misinterpret the violence as merely an internal settling of scores—"a type of gangland bloodbath redolent of Al Capone's St. Valentine's Day massacre," as historian Ian Kershaw put it. "They still thought that in the business of diplomacy they could deal with Hitler as a responsible statesman. The next years would provide a bitter lesson that the Hitler conducting foreign affairs was the same one who had behaved with such savage and cynical brutality at home on 30 June 1934." Rudolf Diels, in his memoir, acknowledged that at first he also missed the point. "I . . . had no idea that this hour of lightning was announcing a thunderstorm, the violence of which would tear down the rotten dams of the European systems and would put the entire world into flames—because this was indeed the meaning of June 30, 1934."

The controlled press, not surprisingly, praised Hitler for his decisive behavior, and among the public his popularity soared. So weary had Germans become of the Storm Troopers' intrusions in their

lives that the purge seemed like a godsend. An intelligence report from the exiled Social Democrats found that many Germans were "extolling Hitler for his ruthless determination" and that many in the working class "have also become enslaved to the uncritical deification of Hitler."

Dodd continued to hope for some catalyst to cause the end of the regime and believed the imminent death of Hindenburg—whom Dodd called modern Germany's "single distinguished soul"—might provide it, but again he was to be disappointed. On August 2, three weeks after Hitler's speech, Hindenburg died at his country estate. Hitler moved quickly. Before the day was out he assumed the duties of president as well as chancellor, thereby at last achieving absolute power over Germany. Contending with false humility that the title "president" could only be associated with Hindenburg, who had borne it so long, Hitler proclaimed that henceforth his own official title would be "Führer and Reich Chancellor."

In a confidential letter to Secretary Hull, Dodd forecast "an even more terroristic regime than we have endured since June 30."

Germany accepted the change without protest, to the dismay of Victor Klemperer, the Jewish philologist. He too had hoped the blood purge would at last cause the army to step in and remove Hitler. Nothing happened. And now, this new outrage. "The people hardly notice this complete coup d'état," he wrote in his diary. "It all takes place in silence, drowned out by hymns to the dead Hindenburg. I would swear that millions upon millions have no idea what a monstrous thing has occurred."

The Munich newspaper *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* gushed, "Today Hitler is the Whole of Germany," apparently choosing to ignore the fact that just a month earlier its own gentle music critic had been shot dead by mistake.

THE RAINS CAME that weekend, a three-day downpour that drenched the city. With the SA quiescent, its brown uniforms prudently if temporarily closeted, and the nation mourning Hindenburg's death, a rare sense of peace spread over Germany, allowing Dodd a

few moments to muse on a subject freighted with irony but dear to that part of him that remained a farmer from Virginia.

In his diary entry for Sunday, August 5, 1934, Dodd remarked upon a trait of the German people that he had observed in his Leipzig days and that had persisted even under Hitler: a love of animals, in particular horses and dogs.

"At a time when nearly every German is afraid to speak a word to any but the closest friends, horses and dogs are so happy that one feels they wish to talk," he wrote. "A woman who may report on a neighbor for disloyalty and jeopardize his life, even cause his death, takes her big kindly-looking dog in the Tiergarten for a walk. She talks to him and cuddles him as she sits on a bench and he attends to the requirements of nature."

In Germany, Dodd had noticed, no one ever abused a dog, and as a consequence dogs were never fearful around men and were always plump and obviously well tended. "Only horses seem to be equally happy, never the children or the youth," he wrote. "I often stop as I walk to my office and have a word with a pair of beautiful horses waiting while their wagon is being unloaded. They are so clean and fat and happy that one feels that they are on the point of speaking." He called it "horse happiness" and had noticed the same phenomenon in Nuremberg and Dresden. In part, he knew, this happiness was fostered by German law, which forbade cruelty to animals and punished violators with prison, and here Dodd found deepest irony. "At a time when hundreds of men have been put to death without trial or any sort of evidence of guilt, and when the population literally trembles with fear, animals have rights guaranteed them which men and women cannot think of expecting."

He added, "One might easily wish he were a horse!"

## CHAPTER 53

### Juliet #2

Boris was right. Martha had packed her itinerary too full and as a consequence found her journey anything but uplifting. Her travels made her cranky and critical, of Boris and of Russia, which struck her as a drab and weary land. Boris was disappointed. "I am very sad to hear that you do not like everything in Russia," he wrote to her on July 11, 1934. "You ought to review it with completely different eyes than America. You should not settle with a superficial glance (such as bad clothes and bad food). Please, dear Miss, look 'inside,' a bit deeper."

What most annoyed Martha, unfairly, was that Boris did not join her on her travels, even though soon after her departure he too had gone to Russia, first to Moscow, and then to a resort in the Caucasus for a vacation. In an August 5 letter from the resort, Boris reminded her, "You are the one who said we do not have to meet each other in Russia." He acknowledged, however, that other obstacles also had intruded, though he was vague as to their precise nature. "I could not spend my vacation together with you. It was not possible for various reasons. The most important reason: I had to stay in Moscow. My stay in Moscow was not very happy, my destiny is unresolved."

He professed to be hurt by her letters. "You should not write such angry letters to me. I did not deserve it. I was already very sad in Moscow after some of your letters, since I felt that you were so far away and unreachable. But after your angry letter I am more than sad. Why did you do that, Martha? What happened? Can you not be 2 months without me?"