

INSIDE SATAN'S LAIR  
By Alastair Harrison-Mills

Friday, March 10, 1939, 08.00 hours.

Felix Kersten, tall, stout, well-dressed, stood at the base of the stairs that led to SS Headquarters in Berlin. His hands were sweating and ice cold. His heart was beating hard, he felt a little queasy. He checked his watch; he didn't want to start his relationship with Reichsführer Himmler by being late for his appointment.

Kersten is the man who ministered to heads of industry and heads of state and royalty in Finland, Holland and even in Berlin. In fact, he began his specialized training in Berlin with Dr. Kollander, learning physio-neural therapy, the application of massage to heal the patient. In 1922, Kersten met Dr. Ko, a Chinese doctor, who was a master of this treatment. Dr. Ko, a devotee of horoscopes, had graphed one reading stating that an exceptional man would come into his life; Dr. Ko understood this to mean Felix Kersten. Kersten and Dr. Ko came to travel to Tibet to further Kersten's education.

"I will teach you my methods, methods as old as time," said Dr. Ko. "It involves a deep understanding of the body, this method of mine. You will learn how to massage the vital organs, the lymphatic channels and distribute the blood in such a way that the massage heals the patient."

"Yes, Dr. Ko," said Kersten, sitting cross-legged in the doctor's comfortable tent, the wind whistling outside.

"Very good," Dr. Ko said. "I shall practice on you first, and then you shall practice on me. Please, remove your shirt."

Kersten stripped to the waist and lied down on his back. Dr. Ko bent over, placed his hands just below Kersten's navel and began massaging Kersten's abdomen, pressing upward and downward in a rhythmic symphony of movement.

"Feel the muscles underneath. Stroke the organs gently but firmly."

The session lasted nearly an hour.

"Very well," said Dr. Ko, "how do you feel?"

"Rejuvenated, Dr. Ko," Kersten replied with a smile, stretching his arms.

"Good, now it's your turn."

One day in 1925, back in Berlin, Dr. Ko prepared his weekly horoscope. With Mars and Saturn forming a tight conjunction in his sign, Dr. Ko set the stage for a final chapter. Jupiter and Uranus retrograde were squaring Pluto retrograde, alerting him to imminent death! Immediately, he settled his estate and passed his practice in Berlin onto Kirsten. Shortly after, Dr. Ko passed away.

Kirsten rose the fifteen steps to the massive door of SS Headquarters and ushered himself through the entrance. He walked up to the guard seated before a solid oak desk adjacent to a black marble stairway.

"Guten morgen" Kersten said. "

"What is your business?" curtly asked the guard.

"I have an appointment with Reichsführer Himmler."

"And your name?"

“Felix Kersten”.

“One moment,” said the guard.

He picked up a green telephone to the left of the desk and pressed a bronze button on the intercom.

“Reichsführer, I have a gentlemen claiming to have an appointment with you. Yes, yes. I see. Very good, Reichsführer,” the guard said. “Ernst!” he barked.

A tall SS man appeared by the desk, clicked his heels and said, “Yes, sir.”

“Escort Herr Kersten to Reichsführer Himmler’s office.

“Yes,” the guard said, clicking his heels, again. “Follow me.”

Kersten followed the black clad guard up the stairs and to the left of the corridor.

“Excuse me, but may I visit the bathroom first?”

“If you must. Follow me, Herr Kersten. Two doors to the left.”

Kersten followed the guard and entered the bathroom while the guard stood at attention just outside the door.

Kersten moved to a basin, turned on the hot water and ran his hands underneath to warm his hands. He dried himself and left the room. “Very well,” he said to the guard. Kersten followed the guard who knocked twice at the door to Himmler’s office. The doorknob revolved and the door opened, revealing another German officer.

“Herr Doktor,” the officer said. “I am Reichsführer Himmler’s adjutant, Rudolf Brandt. Welcome. Please, wait here. Reichsführer Himmler will be here presently.” He clicked his heels and left the room, closing the door. The office was impressively large, all marble and gilt. To the left of the neatly appointed desk was a bust of Adolf Hitler. The walls were lined with books. Kersten looked them over: The ubiquitous *Mein Kampf*, several books on history along with Nazi propaganda and many volumes about religion, especially about the Muslim religion, biographies about Mohammed and the like. One subject stood out, though, books about Henry Fowler, the Saxon duke who became Germany’s first king along with volumes about Genghis Khan and other military leaders.

“Ah, Herr Kersten?” questioned Himmler, standing by the door. His right arm snapped to the Nazi salute.

Kersten nodded and offered his hand. “Yes, my name is Felix Kersten.”

Himmler stepped forward and took Kersten’s hand; Himmler’s handshake felt limp and clammy.

Kersten pointed to a portrait hanging to the right of the desk. “I see, Reichsführer, you are a student of history.”

“A student of myself,” was Himmler’s quizzical reply. “Germany’s first king in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Please sit down, Herr Kersten.” Himmler looked ill. Pale and in pain. He looked small and insignificant; something repulsive about him struck Kersten, with his thin moustache, his weak chin, his owl-like round glasses. He was the last person Kersten would have imagined to be the most powerful member of the SS. “Let me come straight to the point, Professor—”

“Pardon me, but I am not a professor,” said Kersten, “I am merely a doctor.”

“Very well, Herr Doktor. If I seem distant and distracted, it’s probably because I was given a shot shortly before your arrival.”

“A pain killer, I assume.”

“Yes, you noticed something.”

“Just a slight slurring of speech.”

“Ah,” said Himmler, “but the pain was most intense.”

“Do you have many of these injections?” inquired Kersten.

“No, not every day.”

“Such drugs can become toxic after a while. Perhaps I can prevent that with my treatments.”

“Herr Doktor, I have been suffering from severe stomach cramps through out the day for a long, long time. So severe that they make me double up in pain and have caused me to miss my obligations and to change my appointments. Even with my Führer. All day, this time,” Himmler added.

“Hmm,” Kersten reacted. “If the pain has been going on for so long, the cause is probably not appendicitis. Have you had anything to eat today?”

“Some fish.”

“Ah, this particular attack could be from ptomaine poisoning. As to childhood diseases, what can you tell me about this?”

Himmler thought for a moment. “I remember contracting typhoid fever when I was very young.”

“Ah, this bout of the disease could have weakened the nerves. From that time on, you suffered from chronic stomach pain?”

“Yes,” Himmler replied, surprised, “I hadn’t thought of that. Herr Doktor, I have heard that you are a master of healing powers.”

“I have had some success,” said Kersten.

“You are too modest, Herr Doktor,” After an awkward pause, Himmler asked, “Can you help me?”

“Reichsführer Himmler, frankly I do not know,” Kersten admitted. “I shall need to give you some treatments and see how things stand.” Kersten cleared his throat and continued. “I will need to conduct many treatments before I can accept you as a patient.”

“Many treatments? Does it take so long?”

“Yes, I must be sure that I can help you with my massage treatments,” said Kersten. “A few ailments do not respond well to my methods.”

“Very well,” replied Himmler, sounding slighted.

“One other point. I shall make one concession to you. You are an important man with many obligations. I shall come to your office to conduct my treatments. Ordinarily, my patients come to me. And I shall need a space to conduct the treatments.”

“Very good, Herr Kersten,” said Himmler enthusiastically. “Let me show you,” Himmler said.

He moved to a side door and gestured Kersten to follow.

“My bedroom.” More marble and gilt, baroque decoration everywhere. Kersten noticed a book turned face-down on a side table, a copy of the Koran.

Tapping the back of the book, Himmler said, “I take it wherever I go.” With a sweeping gesture, he asked, “Is this suitable?”

“Yes, this will do well, Reichsführer Himmler.

“When may we start?”

“I have commitments today, but we may start tomorrow,” replied Kersten. “Would that be favorable for you?”

“Yes, Herr Kersten. Anything.”

“Shall we say, 10 o’clock?”

“Yes, very well.”

Himmler picked up a phone and uttered, “Ernst, allow Herr Kersten to leave.”

The men shook hands, and Kersten left Himmler’s office. How many men, Kersten thought, have entered this building and not walked out alive. A chill ran through his body as he departed and descended the outside steps.

Kersten arrived home in Gut Hartzwalde, a modest estate, about 50 miles from Berlin. He entered the portico and called to his wife, Irmgard. She appeared by the living room entrance and approached Kersten. They kissed.

“Now, how did it go, dear?”

“Well, I think, as far as it goes.”

“You sound unsure,” said Irmgard.

“No, but I swear, Irmgard,” Kersten disclosed, “sitting there in the headquarters of the SS, that I could hear someone screaming in the distance... Yes, Himmler is head of the SS. And the Gestapo. What if my methods don’t succeed? All of us could be in serious danger. And I couldn’t turn down his *request*. A request from Himmler is an order, not a request.”

Heinrich Himmler tapped his pencil sharply on the oblong table several times and noted the time. 02.00 hours. The cramped map room was stuffy and hazy blue with cigarette smoke.

“Gentlemen, order. Order!”

A general rose from his chair. “Reichsführer Himmler,” he said as the group quieted down. “I believe that the Jewish question is our top priority. Since the beginning of National Socialism, we have stressed the urgency of taking care of this problem. The Nuremberg laws was a start, not an end. The children of these Jews may grow up to rise up to endanger us, to endanger our military stance. They will become the resistance of the future.”

Another general entered the discussion. “This can best be handled by relocation. According to our research, the island of Madagascar,” he said, pointing to a spot on the map, “would be a suitable location for such a solution.”

Himmler gestured with his hands to stop the chatter as he shook his head.

“A study of mine conducted in November,” said Himmler, shuffling through a stack of documents, “concluded that Madagascar *was not* a suitable answer to this problem.”

Himmler threw the folder carelessly on the map draping the table. “Especially since France governs the island. I think, though, we all agree something must be done. For the sake of our nation. For the sake of our women. Something must be done.”

“Perhaps a general edict” said General Yodl, “calling for emigrations and evacuations of Jews best handles the problem. Then we can funnel them as quickly as possible to those states willing to take them.”

“Yes...” remarked Himmler, “your suggestion strikes me as reasonable. It seems like an answer the Führer would approve of. Of course, the question is, Would anyone be willing to take on this rabble? So, does anyone disagree with General Yodl?”

The group mumbled to each other, then quieted down.

“Very good, if there is no more to discuss at this time, I call this meeting adjourned. We will take up the issue again at our next meeting.”

The group of high-ranking officers of the General Staff disbanded and left the room, leaving Himmler alone in the map room. He bent over the map showing the whole of Europe, spread the palms of his hands to the center of the map, then spread his hands apart to the edges of the map with a self-satisfied smile.

Saturday, March 11, 1939, 03.10 hours.

The phone rang. Kersten rubbed his eyes and checked the time. With the third ring, he picked up the receiver.

“Yes?” he questioned dully.

“Doctor Kersten, this is Rudolf Brandt, Reichsführer Himmler’s assistant. He requests your presence as soon as possible. He is in great pain.”

Kersten picked up the clock off the nightstand and double-checked the time.

“Yes, I’ll leave immediately. I should arrive within the hour.”

“Reichsführer Himmler will be most pleased. Heil Hitler!” And he hung up.

Irmgard turned round in bed as Kersten slipped into his slippers.

“And so it begins,” Irmgard said with a sigh.

“Yes,” Kersten said. “Now it begins.”

Kersten dressed while Irmgard slipped into a nightgown.

They walked downstairs, and Kersten kissed Irmgard on the forehead.

“Go back to sleep, now,” he said.

“I’ll try, dear.”

One more kiss at the door and Kersten traversed the pavement to the car.

Kersten walked up the stairs to SS headquarters. There was no moon; the night sky was pitch black, and all but a handful of windows were alight streaming yellow. A guard stood just inside the door and snapped to attention with the Nazi salute. Perplexed at the absence of reciprocity, the guard questioned, “Herr Kersten?”

“Yes, Reichsführer Himmler is expecting me.”

“Follow me.”

They walked up to Himmler’s office where the guard knocked twice.

“Yes, come in!” Himmler said excitedly.

“Herr Doktor,” announced the guard with a click of the heels.

“Very well, return to your post,” ordered Himmler.

The guard left, and Kersten approached Himmler, sitting in his chair and doubled up in pain.

“I’ve been like this since midnight, Herr Kersten.”

You were alright till then?” questioned Kersten.

“It was tolerable, which to date has been the norm for me since I can remember. The doctors”—his voice rose to a high pitch—“all they want is to give me pills, worthless pills. And injections!”

“Have you had time to prepare a room for us?” inquired Kersten.

“My bedroom next door, Kersten,” Himmler replied, his face distorted with pain.

Kersten moved to Himmler’s side and offered his arm. Himmler grasped Kersten’s arm and slowly lifted himself off the chair. They took short steps and entered the bedroom.

Still holding onto Kersten’s arm, Himmler placed himself on the edge of the bed, then swung his body onto the center of the mattress. “God,” he declared, wincing.

“Try,” instructed Kersten, “lying completely down and relaxing. Slowly, slowly.” Himmler grimaced as he lowered himself on top of the bed.

“Very well. Now we must raise your shirt so that I can access your abdomen.”

“Yes, of course” declared Himmler, removing his tie and unbuttoning his shirt and loosening his belt. He lowered his pants with a wince.

“Now, I must warn you, Reichsführer, that at first my massage may be painful. But by the end of the session, the pain should be gone. If my attempts are successful.”

“I understand, Herr Doktor. Please,” said Himmler with some effort, “begin.”

“Very well,” replied Kersten, stooping over Himmler’s body.

Kersten placed his hands on Himmler’s abdomen and firmly pressed. With sweeping moves, he massaged Himmler. Sweeping moves. Pressing and squeezing. Stretching and kneading. Kersten was manipulating muscle, lymph channel and blood vessel with precision.

A half hour passed by. Himmler winced with each move of Kersten’s until suddenly the pain passed. A dull feeling of bruising persisted, but the sharp pangs of pain magically disappeared.

“Herr Kersten,” said Himmler, in his high-pitched voice, “you are a miracle worker! The pain is gone. The horrible, gripping pain is gone.” He grasped Kersten’s arm. “I feel something. But it’s not pain.”

“That feeling is not uncommon,” said Kersten. “With more treatments, that feeling will disappear. But,” Kersten stressed, “I cannot yet say that I can help you in the long term. I still need to apply more treatments and see what happens.”

“But I feel better, so much better!” declared Himmler.

“Do you understand the term, placebo?”

“Yes, I believe so. A sugar pill or something to test the worthiness of an experiment.”

“Precisely, Reichsführer. But this may apply to what I have just done, as well,” explained Kersten. “My massage may be like a placebo, a trick of the mind temporarily allaying your symptoms. A psychological explanation of what you are feeling. Or not feeling. So, Reichsführer,” Kersten asked, “shall we have more treatments?”

“By all means! I must have more treatments,” declared Himmler. “You are my *magic Buddha*.”

Clutching Kersten’s arm, Himmler rose off the bed and stood up.

“No pain, none,” said Himmler, almost more to himself than to Kersten. “I shall make you a member of the Nazi party. An officer in the the SS for your service.”

“No, Reichsführer,” said Kersten forcefully. “Thank you, but I do not want to join any group; I am apolitical. I am a doctor, that is all. I do not want to join the party or the SS. So, shall we say Monday in the morning? Ten a.m.” asked Kersten.

“Anytime,” uttered Himmler. “Anything you need. Just let me know.”

It was past four in the morning when the men parted company. Kersten forced himself to stay awake as he drove home, thinking to himself, I shall not be able to cure Himmler, but I think I can alley his pain from treatment to treatment. And, beyond that, he may be of use to me! By six, he was parking the car and moving to the front door. Inside, everything was dark and silent. His tabby cat meowed and crossed past Kersten’s shadow.

9 a.m. came quickly. Kersten pulled the blanket over his head and moaned. Irmgard rose and tiptoed out the bedroom. Irmgard and the housekeeper, Frida, met half way by the stairs.

“See to breakfast, would you?” Irmgard ordered.

“Yes, m’am,” Frida replied and stepped down the stairs.

The family met at the dining table. Arno and his two brothers slipped into chairs. Kersten rubbed his eyes and tried to shake the morning fog from his head while he sat down.

Frida brought forth breakfast: scrambled eggs, toast, milk, black coffee.

Irmgard spoke. “Dear, I’ve been hearing some disturbing things about your new client, Himmler,” passing eggs along.

“Yes?”

“He is head of the SS, no?”

“That’s what I understand.”

“Isn’t the SS Hitler’s bodyguard, father?” asked Arno, as he spooned eggs onto his plate.

“He is also head of the Gestapo,” explained Kersten.

“Doesn’t that concern you?, Irmgard asked.

“Of course,” Kersten replied, “it does, but he seems to be very enthusiastic about my services. As the Americans say, ‘that’s our ace in the hole.’” He poured black coffee into his cup.

“He’s a very powerful man, second only to Hitler, I hear. If you fail,” Irmgard said, “that could be very dangerous, dear. For all of us.”

“Himmler’s *request* is an order, not a request, Irmgard. It would be more dangerous to turn him away.”

“Please,” as she sipped coffee, “be careful, dear.”

“You may be relieved to know that I am going to visit the Finnish consulate today and see if I can extricate myself from this. I do share your concerns. But now, I must dress.”

Kersten entered the Finnish consulate, all wood paneling and marbled tiles. He moved to the reception area.

“Hello,” he said to the man behind the desk. “I’m here to see Ambassador Kivimakki.” Kersten handed over his papers. The man behind the desk said, “I see that you are a Finnish citizen. Very good. Please be seated,” handing back Kersten’s papers.

Ten minutes later, someone called out Kersten’s name. A door was opened, and Kersten was ushered into a brightly lit room. Ambassador Kivimakki rose from his chair and offered his hand. Kersten moved to the desk and shook a warm hand.

“Please be seated,” Kivimakki said. He tapped a pen on the desktop. “How may we help you?”

My name is Felix Kersten, and I am a Finnish citizen. I am a doctor with a practice in both Finland, Holland and here in Berlin.

“I see,” said Kivimakki. “Do you specialize in something, Doktor?”

“Yes, I am a physiotherapist.”

“Physiotherapist? I am not —“

“I cure my patients with massage,” explained Kersten, “which partly explains why I am here today.”

“Please continue.”

“One of my clients is Heinrich Himmler.

Kivimakki sucked in air and dropped his pen.

“Himmler—“

“Yes, Reichsführer Himmler. How I came to enlist him as one of my patients is a long story. Rather, he enlisted me! As you might imagine, a call from Reichsführer Himmler is not a simple request. Suffice it to say that Dr. Diehn, President of the German Potassium Syndicate, one of my patients, set up my initial meeting. He was aware that Himmler suffered from serious symptoms and he had firsthand knowledge of the success of my treatments. Dr. Diehn thought that after I built up my relationship with Himmler, I might be of some use. He had some crazy notion I could help people out of imprisonment. Help the resistance, that sort of thing. But I’m here to see if you and your influence can get me out of this...quagmire.”

Kivimakki picked up his pen and tapped it on the desk again. “Very frankly, Doktor, I don’t see what we could do for *you* without placing us in dire circumstances. As you said yourself, Himmler’s requests are not to be taken lightly.”

“I see,” Kersten said disappointedly.

“And I agree with Dr. Diehn.” Kivimakki tossed the pen on his desktop. “You may be of assistance. Once you gain Himmler’s confidence...”

“This is dangerous enough, Ambassador. I have a family. My wife and three sons. And now you want me to...to spy on him?”

“I don’t know if I would put it quite that way. But I imagine information must be flowing in a steady stream all around him. Secrets at that level don’t stay secret for all. And you’ll be privy to it all. We have intelligence that Germany is planning to invade the Low Lands. We also have information that some of the Führer’s staff is, let’s say, unhappy with him. This may, in fact, include Himmler, and other high profile members of the General Staff, General Canaris, for example. Your relationship with Himmler would be of immense interest to us. See if he shares some of the sentiments by some of the General Staff. Ah, I have something to show you.” Kivimakki slid open a drawer and removed a manila folder, tossing it on the desk. “Here, you may find this of help.” Kivimakki pushed the folder forward to Kersten, who leafed through the reports. “Walter Schellenberg, highly placed SS officer, said to be in favor of an unconditional surrender to England, an interesting man.”

“This Schellenberg, he is stationed here?”

“Yes, you may very well come to meet him before long,” declared Kivimakki. “As you see, he was appointed to the SS in July of 1933. In a couple of years, he was transferred to the security-intelligence arm of the SS where he was most happy. Some women were implicated in a spy ring. The *femme fatales* were guillotined, except for two of the women, who were saved by Schellenberg and coersed into becoming double agents against the Poles.

“Schellenberg also had a friendship with Lina Heydrich, Reinhardt Heydrich’s wife, that became an object of gossip, as you might imagine. It is said that one day, Heydrich invited Schellenberg to his home for lunch. There, so it’s said, Heydrich poisoned Schellenberg and demanded a confession of treachery from him. Schellenberg denied the accusations, Lina Heydrich pleaded innocence as well and even the Gestapo could not

verify any wrongdoing. Heydrich was forced to give Schellenberg the antidote, reluctantly. As you might imagine, there is no love lost between these men.

This Schellenberg is something of an enigma. He has committed some crimes; at the same time, it is known that he is opposed to Hitler and would welcome a putsch against the Führer.

“In 1938, he was involved in something called the von Fritsch affair. It sparked anti-Hitler sentiment in the armed forces, gave rise to a military resistance movement led by Bech, Canaris and others of the General Staff. They hoped to block a move to take over German-populated Sudetenland as a prelude to dismembering Czechoslovakia. Seizing Prague. The Wehrmacht feared the move would bring France and England to the defense of Czechs, at a time Germany was not ready for war. This is interesting. Reinhardt Heydrich heard of this movement and ordered Schellenberg to guard him against a possible Wehrmacht putsch. Apparently, he cowered in a barricaded quarter. Schellenberg saw a new side of Heydrich, as a coward, not *the man of steel*, the image he tries to impress people with.

“Here’s another interesting tidbit. Heydrich ordered Schellenberg to create a brothel for high ranking officers, named Salon Kitty. As a bonus, the rooms were bugged, preserved on 25,000 wax discs. Clients included Ribbentrop, Sepp Dietrich, the commander of Hitler’s bodyguard, and sometimes even Himmler and Heydrich. The bugs were turned off then. However, one time the bugs were not turned off. No one’s sure why this happened, but Heydrich made it an excuse to blame Schellenberg. He denied the charge, another attempt by Heydrich to discharge Schellenberg.

By the way, Schellenberg, participated in *the night of the long knives* at Bad Godesberg in 1934; it’s not clear what part Schellenberg played. SA officials were executed to decapitate the organization that came to compete with the SS. Even Hitler participated in this slaughter.”

Kirsten closed the folder and tossed it back to Kivimakki.

“Well,” Ambassador Kivimakki said, “there you have it.” He rose from his desk, adding, “Think about this, Doktor. Let us know what you decide.”

Kersten rose, shook hands and walked out the door.

Kersten’s mouth was dry. He felt the danger as a palpable thing. He felt his options slipping away.

Two weeks later.

Kersten waited in Himmler’s office for him to arrive. The doorknob turned, and in stepped a tall, blond SS officer. He walked up to Kersten and eyed him for a moment. He clicked his heels, gave the Nazi salute, then said, “I am Reinhardt Heydrich.”

Kersten rose from his chair and nodded.

“Felix Kersten.”

“So,” said Heydrich, “you are Himmler’s *magic Buddha*. I would like you to step into my office for a moment.”

“Reichsführer Himmler should be here any moment.”

“I will take full responsibility for your absence. If you will follow me,” replied Heydrich.

Kersten trailed behind the black clad SS officer, turned right, took several steps down the corridor and entered Heydrich’s office.

“Please be seated,” said Heydrich as he placed his peaked hat on a stand by the door. In the center of the hat was the silver death’s head insignia of the SS. He ran his fingers through his hair. “So you are the Reichsführer’s doctor.”

He removed a cigarette from a silver box and offered one to Kersten. Kersten took one and waited for Heydrich to finish lighting his cigarette with a silver lighter. Heydrich then offered the flame to Kersten who sucked the flame into his cigarette. Kersten breathed deeply, then released smoke through his nose.

“Let’s see,” Heydrich said, reaching down to a drawer in his desk. He dropped a leather clad folder on the green beize-clad desktop, “you were born on September 30, 1898. In the Baltic provinces. Good student. Ah, attended Agricultural College in Holstein and later became the manager of a 3,000 acre farm. I see you have something in common with Himmler. He owned a chicken farm at one time,” said Heydrich slyly. “I wonder,” he mumbled to himself, “how one kills a chicken?”

Kersten drew forth a handkerchief and patted his forehead and upper lip.

“I also see, Herr Doktor, you fought in the Finnish army until a bout of rheumatic fever. In hospital, several doctors noted that you had an uncanny talent for massage. They recommended you to others, your clientele grew including many leaders of German life, even royalty of Finland, and here you are.” Heydrich closed the folder, and added, “I understand you have complete reign of the place. Is that true?”

“I have an understanding with Reichsführer Himmler,” said Kersten. “We have an agreement.”

“Agreements can be broken,” whispered Heydrich.

A tense moment passed. Kersten clutched his knees.

“I believe that Reichsführer Himmler is happy with our arrangement,” replied Kersten.

“Ah, but the question is, am I, Doktor Kersten?”

Kersten’s chair creaked as he shifted the weight of his body.

“Well, I wanted to meet you and see what Reichsführer Himmler saw in you.” With a wave of his left hand he ordered, “You may go...for the time being.”

Kersten moved to the door when Heydrich added, “Oh, by the way...” Kersten turned back to Heydrich, “we know your wife is Jewish. Good day.”

Kersten’s hair stood on end at the back of his neck. He pivoted again to face the exit and left.

January 22 Monday, 1940, 14.00 hours.

Kersten was halfway through an hour treatment. Himmler, lying on his bed, squinted when Kersten pressed the right side of his stomach.

“It’s very strange,” said Himmler. “Every time you press my stomach, it hurts. And yet, after you remove your hands, I feel wonderful. No pain.”

“That means that the treatments are working,” replied Kersten, smiling and running his hands down below Himmler’s navel. “An ancient art, acupressure, works in a similar fashion,” explained Kersten. “Numerous acupressure points are spread throughout the body.” Kersten lifted his hands and moved to the right side of Himmler’s stomach. “The patient feels a dull pain when one of these acupressure points is pressed. But after the pressure is released, the patient feels whole again. And no pain.”

After a moment of silence, Himmler spoke. “Kersten, Herr Doktor, I have a favor to ask.”

“Yes?”

“I think we know each other well enough for me to ask a favor... Ribbentrop, the Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, has similar symptoms to mine. Bad stomach aches, headaches. But don't tell him that I told you this; this is a matter of gossip. He heard about your healing powers and asked if I might introduce you. Do this for me; I would like to think that I may *lend* you out on occasion. And I'll do anything you like in return.”

Again, Kersten knew that a request from Himmler was more than a request. But Kersten also knew that failure meant danger for him and his family. He thought for a moment, weighing the danger against his creed to do no harm and to offer aid to those who are sick and in need of help. He also thought that if successful, he had bought a bargaining chip he might be able to cash in down the line, perhaps to save a life.

As for Himmler, he knew that Ribbentrop was a rival for Hitler's favor and that he resented Himmler's interference in foreign matters through his intelligence apparatus, Reich Security Main Office Amt VI. This *gift*, Himmler thought, might mitigate Ribbentrop's criticism and doubts. Also, through Kersten Himmler might learn something valuable against Ribbentrop.

“I have heard,” Kersten confided, “that he is, well, *difficult*.”

“Ah, you have been listening to rumors again, Herr Doktor. Don't worry; he won't bite.”

Kersten cleared his throat. “Yes, I suppose I can accept one more patient, but no more. I try to limit myself to eight patients, Reichsführer. You must understand that these treatments are very draining on me. I must have time to rest in between them. To recuperate.”

“I understand,” said Himmler. “Thank you. I shall phone Ribbentrop immediately and have him contact you.”

Two days later, the phone rang. Irmgard picked up the receiver.

“Hello,” she said.

“This is Rudolf Brandt. Is Herr Kersten available?”

“Yes, one moment,” she replied, placing the receiver on the table.

“Felix,” she called, “it's an important call.”

Kersten appeared at the top of the stairs and descended the steps.

“Yes?” said Kersten.

“This is Brandt. I have your appointment with the Foreign Minister. It is for tomorrow at 10.00 hours.”

“One moment,” said Kersten, moving to a writing desk. He leafed through a little black book, then picked up the receiver.

“Yes, tomorrow at 10 a.m.”

“Very good,” said Brandt, “And good luck. I have great respect for what you are doing.”

Kersten set the receiver down and sank into a chair facing Irmgard.

“What is this all about, dear?”

“Tomorrow I see Foreign Minister Ribbentrop. If I am not successful, it will not only reflect badly on me but on Himmler, as well. He would not be very happy with me.”

Kersten ran his fingers through his hair. “And that would be dangerous. For us all.”

Kersten massaged his temple with the fingers of his left hand.

“You’ve never failed yet, dear.”

“Oh, but I may not be able to cure him. Or I may not be able to stand him. I have heard bad stories about him, Irmgard. One story is about Ribbentrop meeting the King of England and giving the Fascist salute instead of a handshake as he handed over his credentials. This made quite a stir throughout the diplomatic circles. He has made other, similar gaffs; he’s renowned for them. Apparently, he coaxed Hitler into invading Poland, getting Germany into a shooting war.”

January 24, Wednesday, 1940 09.00 hours.

Kersten, briefcase in hand, entered the Reichstag, the seat of the German Parliament. All marble and gilt. Kersten approached the guard sitting behind a desk.

“Guten morgen,” said Kersten. “I have an appointment with Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop.”

Kersten was escorted by a black clad SS man who led him upstairs and to a door to the right of the stairs. The black clad SS man knocked on the door.

“Enter,” someone barked.

The black clad SS man pulled the door open, clicked his heels and snapped his right arm to attention in the Fascist salute.

“Herr Kersten,” shouted the SS man.

“Very well,” the man behind the cluttered, massive desk said. “Come in, Herr Doktor.”

The SS man closed the door and left. Ribbentrop rose and gave the Fascist salute, saying “Heil Hitler.” Kersten nodded his head and uttered, “Guten morgen, Foreign Minister.”

Ribbentrop frowned, noting that Kersten did not reciprocate the gesture.

“We start badly, Doktor Kersten,” said Ribbentrop. “You do not give the Nazi salute?”

“Foreign Minister, I am apolitical. I do not side with anyone’s political beliefs. I am a doctor. Just a doctor. I am here to heal you, if possible.”

“I see,” Ribbentrop spat out. “Sit down, Herr *Doktor*, he said sarcastically.

“Reichsführer Himmler praises you most highly. I am hoping that you can help me as well.”

“I am willing to try, Foreign Minister. That’s all I can try. Some ailments I cannot help with my treatments.”

“Very well,” said Ribbentrop. “When may we start?”

“I will need to know your medical history first, then we can have your initial session.”

“Very good.”

“The address of my office is on the card.”

“But I understand you treat Reichsführer Himmler in his office!”

“That’s true. It is a special gesture.”

“Well, you can just give me the special gesture as well.”

“My clientele meet me at my office,” replied Kersten. “If it is not possible, well...”

“Very well,” grumbled Ribbentrop. “When can we start?”

“Tomorrow morning?” asked Kersten.

“Let me check my calendar.” Ribbentrop pulled a small, red booklet from his coat pocket and thumbed it to January. “Yes, that’s fine. I will see you then.”

Ribbentrop snapped his arm to attention as he barked, “Heil Hitler.”

Kersten nodded his head very slowly, deliberately, turned round and exited the office.

Kersten and Irmgard strolled down the wide thoroughfare in Scheveningen, Holland, glancing into the large window panes of various shops. Suddenly, something raucous came from behind! They turned to see a train of cars swerving down the street. Men in paramilitary garb were spilling over the cars. They were Dutch fascists, members of the Nationaal Socialistische Beweging; they hooted and hollered, waving their arms spasmodically. One of the men in front raised his arm fully and the train came to an unwieldy halt. The men spilled out and tossed something at the stores' windows. Shards of glass flew. Another man held a can of yellow paint. He slapped his brush against one of the windows and painted a large Star of David. Another man spelled out "Jewish Proprietor" on the door of a store. One of the men entered a shop and hurled the owner to the sidewalk, kicking him to the ground.

Shocked, Kersten and Irmgard ran to the car and sped away to their estate at 18, Badhuisweg, a suburb of Holland. Entering the house, Kersten moved straight to the phone and dialed a friend, Karl, and waited anxiously for the call to be answered. Finally, Karl answered the phone and said, "Yes?"

"Karl, this is Felix. Do you know what's happening? We just saw a group of thugs destroying the downtown area."

"I know, everything's turned upside-down! Dutch fascists are tearing up the place. Gestapo policemen have replaced Dutch police on street corners. German radio is boasting that the Lowlands are being successfully invaded. It's pure hell!"

Kersten and Irmgard heard a car pulling up to the house; a chill ran down their spines. Kersten said, "Karl, I need to call back," and hung up. Kersten drew the front curtain aside and watched as six officers exited the car. In a moment, one of them was knocking on the door.

Irmgard answered the door, four SS officers and two Gestapo agents pushed their way inside. One of them was SS Standartenführer Rudolf Brandt, Himmler's adjutant. Until now, he had been gracious, friendly, to Kersten whenever he visited Himmler at SS headquarters.

Hands inside the pocket of his long, black leather overcoat, a Gestapo agent asked, "Felix Kersten?"

"Yes."

"Felix Kersten, you have been ordered to relocate to Berlin, to give up all ties to Holland and relocate to Germany. There are only two kinds of people, those who are faithful to the German cause. And those who are traitors, such as the English, Dutch, Norwegians and Danes.

"If you choose to remain, you and your family will be branded as traitors to the cause. This includes your father-in-law, Oberforstmeister Neuschaeffer, representative of the Grand Duke of Hessen, Dormstadt. He has been marked as sympathetic to the resistance."

"Who has ordered this?" demanded Kersten.

"Direct orders from Reichsführer Himmler," one of the Gestapo agents declared. Himmler, Kersten thought.

One of the officers cleared his throat. "Felix Kersten," he said, "let me make it clear; it is in your and your family's interest to continue treating Reichsführer Himmler *successfully*."

The six officers let themselves out. Brandt paused and turning to Kersten, said in a hushed voice, "I'm sorry, Kersten. An order is an order. Beware of Heydrich, he's out to destroy you anyway he can." Brandt left and the entourage sped away.

Thursday, May 9, 1940, 15.15 hours.

Kersten entered Himmler's office. Himmler rose from his chair and motioned Kersten to sit down.

"Herr Doktor," Himmler said with raised, high voice, "frankly, I am mad at you!"

"I am sorry," Kersten replied, holding his breath. "What is it, Reichsführer?"

"My sources tell me that you have not yet left Holland." Still standing, Himmler placed his fists on the edge of the desk and leaned forward. "Have you an excuse?"

"I...I hadn't thought that it was so important."

Turning his back to Kersten, Himmler said, "All of my *suggestions* are important. I don't make suggestions frivolously."

"Of course. I shall take care of this immediately, Reichsführer," clutching his knees.

"Well, shall we have a session now?"

Kersten followed Himmler into the bedroom next door.

"Herr Doktor," Himmler said to Kersten, "rubbing his hands, "I am not a bad man. So many times, I have had to do something difficult or ordered a difficult decision for the good of the New Germany, the Germany we are all working toward. It is all for the greater Germany and especially for the Führer. You know, on the SS dagger is inscribed, 'My honor is my loyalty.'

"Knowing you these several months, I have come to know how attached you are to your adopted country. But it has become too dangerous now that Holland has become part of the New Germany. On my order, the SS and the Gestapo have tripled in number."

"Your order was a shock, admittedly, Reichsführer," confessed Kersten. "Just as you rely on my treatments, many in Holland rely on me. This has not been a hardship for my family alone but a real hardship for my patients."

"I must stress this point. You must honor my request. Otherwise, you face the consequences. You and your family would surely wind up in a work camp, I assure you. Which is not the most pleasant outcome, believe me.

"You already have your estate, Gut Hartzwalde, which is one less problem to work through. You have your clientele here, perhaps more than you can handle, no?" Himmler laughed.

"Is there not some kind of compromise?"

"The new Germany does not recognize compromises, Herr Doktor." Himmler's voice rose to a high pitch. "In no uncertain terms, I ordered you to relocate! I ordered you to sever all relationships with Holland! I shall be pleased with your cooperation."

"May I," uttered Kersten, "visit some of my patients?"

"No, Herr Doktor," replied Himmler. "It must be a clean break. As for your royal clientele, in case you didn't know, my understanding is that the Dutch royal family have already fled to London."

Kersten bowed his head. "There is nothing more to be said, then."

"Nothing. Except to set up my next treatment with you."

"Are you in any pain?"

"No, not at this time."

“Then, shall we say day after tomorrow?”

“Very good. Until then.”

Kersten rose and, dejected, shuffled out of Himmler’s office.

Kersten arrived at his estate. He looked around, noting xxx the women from the camp working the fields. At least, they would not have to return to their camp without a hearty meal in the late afternoon.

Irmgard welcomed Kersten home and led him, arm in arm, to the large, comfortable living room. Kersten shook off his coat and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Himmler said, ‘relocating was a must since the Nazis took over Holland,’ Our staying there would have been highly suspicious. I can see Heydrich claiming that I was an operative of the English.” Kersten rose from the sofa and paced the floor. “Perhaps over time, I could return to Holland to offer my treatments to my patients again.”

Monday, June 10th, 1940, 11.15 hours.

Kersten started up the stairs of SS headquarters when a strong hand grabbed him by the shoulder. The guard said, “One moment, Herr Doktor. Reinhardt Heydrich would like a word with you.” With gentle prodding by the guard, Kersten entered Heydrich’s office. “Heil Hitler, said the guard and left. Hydrich sat behind his desk.

“Welcome,” he said. “Please, sit down.” They looked over each other in silence. “Herr Doktor, Do you know someone named Bignell, an antiquarian? In Holland.”

“No, I do not,” Kersten lied.

“He has been charged as a traitor. He has been caught in secret contact with London. You do not recognize the name?”

“No.”

“I have it on authority that you have pleaded with Reichsführer Himmler for his release. Is this not so?”

“My activities with Reichsführer Himmler are privileged.”

“Not this time, Herr Doktor!”

Kersten could feel a drop of sweat running down the side of his face.

“I would be able to ignore this, these facts if you can give me the names of your special friends in Finland and Holland. Otherwise—“

Suddenly, the phone rang. Heydrich picked up the receiver.

“Heydrich.” It was Himmler’s voice. “Release Doktor Kersten! I don’t want to say this again. He is scheduled for an appointment with me now.” Himmler slammed down the phone.

“Well, your protector is calling for his *magic Buddha*,” declared Heydrich sarcastically. He put the phone down slowly, deliberately. “You are free to go. For now.”

Without a sound, Kersten exited the office, paused, wiped his hands with a handkerchief and walked over to Himmler’s office door.

Two months later.

Kersten quickly sold the estate in Holland and took care of odds and ends: what furniture to sell and what to move to the farm in Berlin, auctioning works of art and other valuable items or carefully packing them for transit. It was time to relocate; Kersten, Irmgard and their three sons boarded a small plane and sat back for the journey to Berlin.

They arrived mid-morning on Thursday in inclement weather. Umbrellas open, they climbed into a waiting car and sped away to Gut Hartzwalde. After installing themselves in the estate, they relaxed, sank back into the comfortable wing-backed chairs, the boys playing with toy soldiers on the carpet.

“Well,” said Kersten, “that’s that.” He moved to the window and shifted the drape aside. An SS guard stood watch by a black Mercedes. Himmler ordered a guard for Kersten’s *protection*.

“I already miss our home in Holland,” Irmgard said.

“It’s not forever, dear. This war will not last,” said Kersten. “Already there are rumors that Germany is going to lose the war.”

“But the Nazis seem invincible, Felix.”

“Today. But many of the officers are grumbling. I have heard them.” He let the drape slip from his fingers. “Some are disappointed; some of them are angry.” Kersten checked the time with his pocket watch. “I need to go now, dear.”

“You don’t have a session with Himmler, do you?”

“No, I must make contact with the Finnish government,” explained Kersten.

“This seems dangerous, Felix.”

“Frankly,” said Kersten, “it is. A little. There won’t be a better time. But I’ll be careful. The big challenge is to lose the guard for ‘our protection.’”

Kersten pulled on his topcoat and placed his hat on his head. Irmgard moved to him by the entrance. Kersten held her face in his big hands and kissed her forehead, then left. He ignored the guard, slipped into his car and drove off. The guard seemed torn between following Kersten or continuing to watch over the house. He climbed into the Mercedes and sped off. He was following Kersten several meters away. Kersten sped up his car; the black Mercedes locked onto Kersten. Kersten made a sharp right, kicking up a cloud of dust and leaves. The Mercedes followed suit. Kersten kicked the car into low gear and sped up to 75 mph. A stop sign. Kersten clenched his teeth and tore past the intersection. A white car slammed on the brakes. The Mercedes crossed, as well, swirving to avoid the white car half way into the intersection. But suddenly, a siren blaired and a police car slowed the Mercedes to a standstill. Kersten let out a lung full of air and wiped his forehead. He shifted to fourth gear and slowed his car.

Kersten arrived in Berlin. He drove to the Finnish embassy and parked. Entering, he moved to a pleasant looking young man behind a desk.

“Yes, sir,” the young man said.

“I would like to see Ambassador Kivimaeki.”

“Have you an appointment?”

“No,” replied Kersten, “but I think he would like to see me.”

“And the name?”

“Kersten. Felix Kersten.”

“One moment, please.”

The young man walked over to a partially open door. Kersten overheard the murmur of voices, then the young man returned.

“Follow me, please.”

Kersten was led to the door and ushered in.

“Gentlemen, we’ll continue this later today.” They left and the young man closed the door as a thin bespeckled man rose from his chair and walked up to Kersten with an

outstretched hand. They shook hands as the man said, "Herr Kersten! So good to see you, again," gesturing Kersten to take a seat. How are you?"

"Well, I just arrived with my family. According to Himmler, from now on I am not permitted to visit Holland, let alone live there."

"And this was Himmler's desire?"

"Yes, he was most adamant about it."

"I'm afraid I am not surprised," remarked Kivimaeki. "It was wise of you to leave."

"I had no choice, Ambassador," said Kersten. "It was either move or be taken to a work camp or worse."

"I see," Kivimaeki said. "you understand that your relationship with Himmler puts you into a special position. You are relieving Himmler's pain. You have special access to him. In short, he relies on you; he is comfortable with you. He will let up his guard. He will pass on interesting information to you. Information vital to our cause."

"So you want me to 'spy' on Himmler?" asked Kersten. "This is all very dangerous. I keep thinking of my family."

"Remember," said Kivimaeki. "your country, all the Lowlands, needs you. You can be of immense help to us."

A moment of silence.

"I do have an advantage, Ambassador. Thanks to his assistant, Rudolf Brandt, I am allowed to use his personal phone line, one of only two, that allows international calls without being checked on by the Gestapo."

"That is wonderful, Herr Kersten. Very much to our cause."

"Also, I have been able to send and receive letters without inspection using Military Postal Sector number 355360, Himmler's own postal box. I have used this method a couple of times, already. Outgoing mail is safe. And incoming mail is not checked. I have already received a couple of pleas for assistance. As part of the ruse, I have given the impression that I am in communication with several mistresses in Holland. Himmler seemed to enjoy this."

"Ah, very good!" declared Kivimaeki, "very clever. To complete the illusion, perfume some of them. So, we should not have any trouble staying in touch. And of course, when it is safe, you will always be welcomed here. One moment..."

Kivimaeki reached down and into a drawer, then tossed a manila folder on the desk. "Here is something for you," said Kivimaeki, spreading open the folder. Kersten slid closer to the desktop. "a Mister Boedtke, the Finnish consul general, has been arrested for possible pro-English sentiment. Your Himmler believes that he is in the pay of England for being a spy. A very serious charge."

"And his punishment?"

"He has been condemned to a work camp, although according to our intelligence he is still in detention at home; in other words, his fate is a death camp where he'll either starve to death or simply be shot for the entertainment of a guard."

"I'll see what I can do, Ambassador. I can't make any promises. But Himmler has moments when he seems more human."

Kivimaeki offered his hand. "Be careful, Herr Kersten. And keep in touch."

They shook hands and Kersten exited the office.

Three days later.

Himmler was stripped to the waist, lying down on his back. Kersten applied his massage to Himmler's stomach area. Push, stroke, slide. Down to Himmler's navel. Repeat, repeat again. Kersten applied pressure to the liver. Then he paused.

"Reichsführer, there is a man, a Mister Boedtke. The Finnish consul general."

"Yes?"

"From what I understand, he has been arrested and faces a death sentence."

"And what have you to do with this criminal?"

"Reichsführer, he is a desent man. I know he is no more a danger to the Reich than I am."

"So?"

"As a personal favor, I ask you to release him."

"No, I think not," replied Himmler, coldly.

"Reichsführer," Kirsten implored, "you have this man's life in your hands."

"No, we must punish all who betray the Reich!"

"I beg of you, let this person go," Kersten pleaded.

"He is an enemy of the people, Kersten," Himmler replied. "I cannot let criminals go unpunished. The SS has a sworn duty to the Fatherland. We are routing out all enemies of the Greater Germany, including spies, homosexuals, *intellectuals*, Bolsheviks, Jews. Especially Jews; they are subhuman, they multiply like roaches, they are a scourge to every facet of German life, a threat to our women!"

Kersten continued his ministering of Himmler in silence. The time ticked by. The hour passed and Kersten stopped his massage.

"Very good," Himmler said. "Tomorrow again, same time?"

"If you like," replied Kersten.

Kersten snapped his doctor's bag shut and exited the bedroom.

How can I touch him? How can I reach him? wondered Kersten as he headed home.

Three Weeks Later

Kersten ministered to Himmler. He kneaded the left side of Himmler's stomach when he said, "Herr Reichsführer, I have heard that Mister Boedtke is still in Finland being interrogated."

"More rumors?"

"No, I assure you, no rumor. You still have the power to right a wrong, Reichsführer. This man is good; I know him. He is no threat to anyone. Restore him to his family. I beg of you, set him free," declared Kersten.

"I think not," Himmler replied, shaking his head. "What is your interest in this insignificant man?"

"Ah, that is just the point, Herr Reichsführer," said Kersten, pausing the massage. "That is just the point. He *is* insignificant. Freeing him would have no effect on your efforts for a Greater Germany. What is one insignificant life or so?"

A moment of silence. Himmler sighed loudly. Yes, he thought to himself, It is true. I have the power of life and death, of life *over* death. That is part of my power.

"Very well...I shall transfer him to a fortress, a comfortable place," said Himmler, "for an indefinite span of time, till the war's end."

Kersten sucked in a great gulp of air; he wanted to smile a broad, beaming smile, but controlled himself. "Thank you, Reichsführer. Thank you." Kersten returned to his massage.

"What is one man's life, more or less?" mumbled Himmler to himself.