

## The Painter's Box

A palette of dark night and ashen flurries of gray discolor the stark wintry scene. Blinding white searchlights highlight the two naked silhouettes; thin, though still shapely and bosomed. Their fine, dark shoulder-length tufts glisten like my prized red sable-haired brushes; their bodies hang long and stiff from the gallows' wooden frame.

The courtyard is full and cast with elongated shadows that appear to multiply the overflowing, standing-room-only gathering. They number in the thousands: shaven-headed, hollow-faced figures sagging beneath dirty striped-pajamas; lined-up row after row to face the scaffold's macabre event. My place: front and center, at their feet; reserved for the famed artist commissioned to repaint history.

It is the second of the day's reprisals... this one, the executions of Alla and Roza. Regina and Estusia were hanged in the late morning; their bruised and tortured bodies struggled defiantly to walk tall and proud towards the twisted nooses awaiting them.

The nightshift workers dragged themselves into prescribed formation after their labored 12-hour detail, trudging through the muddy gray slush of melted snow to watch from the open yard. When the deed was done the girls had been left to hang in the bone-chilling cold... a visual reminder for the next to come.

The famed Auschwitz Orchestra is silent.

**“Zemsta!”...Revenge!”** their final shouts of defiance freeze stiff in the icy air as though hanging with them in solidarity.

I recall their bravery... the thousands of lives spared by their heroism. They lived double-lives these four unlikely saboteurs: the girls of *The Union Kommando Pulverraum*, Powder Room workers by day, charged with making gunpowder for Hitler's war machine... Heroines of the *Kampfgruppe Auschwitz Resistance Movement* by night, painstakingly squirreling away the precious black powder, grain-by-grain, in hollowed-out bread, false-bottomed food containers, smuggling the explosive materials used in the October 7th *Sonderkommando Uprising* that burned *Crematorium IV* to the ground, taking hated *SS* officers and *Kapos* down to hell with it.

None of the four was more than twenty-three... vibrant with rebelliousness; though mere shadows of their once naïve, happy, youthful selves.

For Commandant Höessler today's executions were designed to leave the chillingly indelible mark of terror on others who should think first about the fates of these four young girls before risking a similar end.

But he was a Nazi, after all... who better to understand the power of symbolism to inflame the masses: to wit, four little girls murdered in public executions for smuggling gunpowder that ignited an uprising and destroyed one of his infamous *Final Solution* killing complexes.

In contrast to the millions who marched in obedient, single-file marked time, past Viennese Waltz recitals into crowded gas chambers – where any remnant of their existence vanished up-in-smoke – these executions painted a whole different picture of resistance fighters; all at once they were human beings... with names, faces, and defiant voices that raised goose bumps where tattooed numbers branded us as cattle.

After the uprising, we could sense the fear in the panicked Aryan faces: their sick, stomach-turning reality that these weak, inferior, worthless creatures could, *and would*, rise up in rebellion.

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