The Russian offensive had stopped for the winter; they were encamped on the eastern side of the Oder River. Oddly enough, it never occurred to the Germans that Berlin would ever be taken, so there were no real fortifications around the city. Except for the building of those which had started the previous year; they too had stopped for the winter.

On April 16, the Russians launched a massive attack from the eastern side of the Oder River. The people in the eastern part of Berlin could hear the heavy thuds of the artillery in the distance. There was no doubt as to what it was, the expected was finally occurring. About eight o'clock that morning calls started coming in from the East that the battle had begun. The radio had an announcement that there was an attack, but it was mute about the intensity; word spread throughout the streets quickly. Military support was lacking, other than top echelons there were few troops in the city. At this point there were insufficient supplies to build any additional, worthwhile fortifications. Old trucks, buses, anything that could be used, was being piled up in the streets to resist the oncoming Russians. It was like building a wall of toothpicks to hold back the oncoming deluge.

Hannah and Ellabo had not even heard the news, they were so busy caring for patients; the city's other inhabitants just went about their business as usual.
Hannah had arrived at the hospital at 7 o'clock that morning. The Führer's Order of the day, held back until the certainty of the Russian invasion, had stipulated that all must fight to defend the city. It stated that those who did not would be considered traitors and killed.

Goebbels had the population convinced that they would be either annihilated by the Russians or transported to the east as their slaves. The population of Berlin was traumatized at the thought of these Barbarians occupying their city. Many of the people, like so many of the Jews before them, had cyanide capsules at the ready. They would commit suicide before they would succumb to Russian atrocities.

It was Saturday, April 21, the day after the Führer's birthday. Hannah and Ellabo were working in the hospital. At 9:25 that morning the 363rd air raid on the city took place. There was, as after every air raid, an additional influx of patients into the hospital. At this point, Hannah had to sit down. She was light-headed from lack of food, tired from lack of sleep, and generally demoralized. She prayed, as she always did, for renewed strength in order to do the job for which the Lord had chosen her. Hannah's spiritual strength overcame her physical weakness; she rallied and returned to her work renewed. At 11:30 that morning Russian artillery shells started to pound Berlin with a relentless intensity. The battle to take the city had now begun in earnest. The artillery shelling was more devastating than the air raids. The shelling was so intense that it was difficult to venture outside without being killed or wounded. People spent all of their time in shelters with either a minimum or no supply of food and water. The U-Bahn stations were overfilled and the smell of feces and urine permeated the very walls; infants and
children died in their parents' arms, older people would just die. Disposal of the bodies was difficult and the smell of death was everywhere.

On May 1, Berlin was completely surrounded by Russian and Ukrainian troops. Most of Charlottenburg, all of Moabit and Schoenberg were now in Russian hands. Many Volkssturm units (those composed of men who had been considered too old for military service) were dispatched towards the east to help defend the city. They along with the Hitler Youth were fighting feverishly, often to the death. The hospitals were filled with the wounded. Hannah would be tending a fourteen year old boy in one bed and a seventy year old man in another. She knew the end was near.

Mass desertions of the city's defenders had been taking place. Those who were caught were executed on the spot by the Nazis; those who fought were annihilated by the Russians. Hannah and Ellabo worked feverishly; they could not leave the hospital confines. They and their colleagues worked frantically, forcing themselves to contain their emotions in a state of limbo. They were now working out of the lower floors or the basements. Hundreds of patients had died or had been killed by the shelling. Life went on in slow motion. Amidst all of this devastation word had leaked out that the Gestapo was making a systematic sweep to destroy all those with even a drop of Jewish blood. Hannah had heard Ellabo mentioning this, and even though rumors always circulated throughout the city, this news shocked Hannah. She did not have her lebensborn papers, and the location of the lebensborn home was now occupied by Allied troops. Hannah knew the ruthlessness of the Gestapo, and even with what was going on they might well trace her true identity.
“Dr. Ellabo,” said Hannah a few hours later. “I am concerned with the Gestapo sweep to destroy the Jews.”

“Yes, it is regrettable, Sister,” he replied in a non-committal fashion. “I don't think the city can hold out much longer.” Then, he cupped his hands and whispered in Hannah's ear, “I’m planning to leave to head west as soon as possible. I suggest you do similarly.”

“Well, it might be the best course of action for you, but I’m concerned because I’m considered part Jewish,” Hannah continued. “I think, Dr. Ellabo that I might be one of their victims. I cannot take any action until I consult with Mother Superior. I’m a servant of God and the church. I don’t believe I have the right to make these decisions without some consultations”

“How is it possible that you're Jewish, Sister?” he asked incredulously.

“My mother, although reared as a non-Jew was classified as being Jewish.”

“I never would have believed it Sister, but then you must leave here immediately.” Ellabo counseled. “Why should you die at the hands of murderers who want your death because you are half Jewish?”

“Leave here? But where will I go? Who will take care of the patients?”
“Sister, your dedication is misplaced. I don't think there's much hope for any of us. The Russians will be here soon, we'll probably all be killed. I think our best course of action is to leave the area and head to the west. We'll be safe if we can make it to the American lines.”

Hannah laughed.

“Dr. Ellabo, do you think we're just going to walk over the front into the arms of the Americans?”

“I don't know Sister, but I think we'll gain nothing by remaining here to be fodder for the Russians. And you Sister, have less of a chance if the Gestapo gets to you.”

“Dr. Ellabo, I’m not afraid of death if I don’t leave.”

“That's your option sister, but time is of the essence. I suggest you do leave the hospital immediately, because you may be unable to return here. If I don't hear from you in a few hours I’ll take off on my own towards Spandau.”

Hannah paused and thought for a moment.

“Yes, Dr. Ellabo, you make good sense. I'll do as you suggest.”

“Good luck, Sister.”
“God bless you doctor.”

Hannah turned around and left the hospital with him. The sky was a red blaze; the streets deserted. There was a brief lull in the artillery attacks and they were able to walk for almost a mile; then the shelling resumed, with even greater intensity. Hannah ducked into a U-Bahn station entrance. There was no additional room in the station, and by now people had crowded onto the tracks.

“Dr. Ellabo, Dr. Ellabo, where are you?” Hannah shouted, as she choked on the human stench, but he was not to be seen.

She remained in the station for two days, emerging on April 26, after having traveled less than one mile. Fires burned unimpededly since fire trucks had been ordered out of the city lest they fall into Russian hands; those police remaining were called to battle the Russians and looting had begun. Hannah, decided to make her way towards the Dahlem Convent. Twelve hours later Hannah knocked at the doors. She requested an immediate audience with Mother Superior Cunegundes. Mother was in the wards helping screaming infants and pregnant women; the sounds of the attack and the intensity of the vibrations were unceasing. Hannah explained her situation to Mother Superior.

“My child,” mother intoned, “you must follow your own dictates at this time, but I am concerned for your safety.”
“Thank you mother,” Hannah replied, “but I do not think I’m any safer in the convent than I’d be outside.”

Mother smiled, knowing Hannah was quite correct.

“I shall go to the chapel and pray before I depart, Mother.”

“May God be with you, Sister,” Mother replied and turned to continue her work.

Hannah prayed in the chapel and left the convent. A volley of shelling started and Hannah began to feel heat on her back; her trailing habit was aflame. She fought against terror as she methodically removed the robes; fortunately she was unscathed, but she was more upset in being clad only in her undergarments than with the possibility of having been burned. She decided to return to Haus Dahlem for more clothes. The bombardment continued and Hannah moved forward, as if doing a ballet between the hail of the shelling. Bodies were scattered everywhere; it was a gruesome sight. Hannah, looked around her at the horrible scene, and as she began to flee she tripped over the body of a young, well-dressed woman.

“Forgive me Lord,” she murmured loudly.

She crossed herself, said a quick prayer over the body of the dead woman, and with the difficulty of moving a heavy, stationary object she took the clothes from the dead woman's body and quickly pulled them over her undergarments.
Hannah was quite near Grunewald at this point; she decided to go to the villa. I must see it, maybe for the last time, she thought. She arrived there about an hour later, to find the house in ruins. She looked at what remained of her former home. The top floor was no longer, but the rest was still standing. She approached the front door, still intact. It was locked; and the key to the small door had long since disappeared in the confusion. How silly she thought, there's no glass on the windows, I'll just slip in. It was getting dark, but even in Grunewald the fires from the city illuminated the area. Hannah flicked on the light switch, but there was no electricity; there had been none for days. She went to the basement cupboard that produced a few tins of tuna fish. Hannah searched for the opener, found it readily. She offered a prayer to the Lord for the tuna, which she ate with a silver fork on a porcelain plate of Rosenthal china. She then curled up near the cellar wall and, spent with exhaustion, fell into a deep sleep.

The Russians had now reached the heart of Berlin. At 1:30 that afternoon, on April 30, 1945, the Russian flag was raised over the Reichstag. The shelling continued over a city that lay replete with desolation, with little left to destroy.

Hannah was so exhausted that she slept for two nights. When she awoke, on the morning of May 2, she stretched her body; she felt a renewed energy that she had not had for a long time. She could still hear the gunfire as it continued relentlessly. The smell of smoke was acrid and pervasive, but yet Hannah could detect a bit of sunlight burning through the fog. As Hannah turned around to stand up she gasped. There in front of her was a Russian officer standing silently and staring at her.
“Good morning,” he said in passable German. “Do you have any guns or military equipment which you are hiding in the house?”

“Sir,” she replied, “we do not keep fire arms; this was my mother's house.”

“And where is your mother?” the officer asked.

“I don't know. She was deported because she was a Jew.”

“Oh, I see,” he replied with a degree of skepticism. And what do you do?”

“I am a nun; a sister of the Jesuit order.”

“A nun, and your mother is Jewish? What kind of fool do you take me for?” he replied with a great deal of anger in his voice.

“It's quite true, sir. My name is Sister Ursula,” she said displaying the crucifix which was under her clothing. My mother's name was or is, if as I hope she is still alive, Lilly Mendelssohn, the pianist.”

“I've heard Lilly Mendelssohn perform before. She is, indeed, a gifted woman. How do I know that what you're telling me is the true?”

“I guess you don't, but I wouldn't lie to you.”
“I don't know that either,” he retorted

“Sir, I don't know what to say to you, but it is true.”

The officer started rummaging through drawers and closets in the cellar looking for incriminating material. He pulled a piece of paper out of some rubble. It was the lebensborn identification.

“What is this?” he said, attempting to decipher the wording.

Lord, Hannah thought, I doubt that the man will believe this story. I don't think that I would either, it's so farfetched. Fortunately for Hannah, the lebensborn project was kept as secret as it could be, and it was doubtful that the officer would have any knowledge of it.

“What does this mean?” he inquired.

“I am a nurse, sir, and I worked at that facility,” Hannah replied.

“No, you say you’re a nurse? Before you said you were a nun,” the officer continued. What am I to believe? I will keep these papers and have them checked,” he replied.

The Russian continued his search and came upon a large, floor to ceiling closet that looked as if it might have held rifles. He opened it and pulled out some items.
“What is this uniform?” he asked pulling trousers and a jacket from a closet shelf. “I've never seen this type of German uniform before.”

“I haven't seen it before either.” Hannah said nervously.

The situation looked grim; she was expecting to be shot at any moment. Suddenly she remembered seeing a picture of her father dressed in the uniform.

“It must have been my father's,” she replied.

“I don't believe any of this nonsense. I've had enough of this. You are probably a Nazi spy.”

The officer raised his pistol, and the entire house shook as a nearby artillery shell landed in the area. The vibrations dislodged the closet, and as the officer turned around the entire closet fell towards him. He side-stepped it quickly as it landed next to him with a sharp crack. A worn photograph, pushed by the air contracting between the closet and basement floor rose upwards, and like a gentle feather floated towards the floor. It landed next to a large, sheathed knife, which had been part of the uniform. The officer, gun still held in hand, gaze affixed towards Hannah, picked up the photo and examined it. It was an old photograph of Lilly and her husband, Hans. The officer handed it to Hannah. She looked at it with sad, tender feeling, kissed the picture and placed it in a pocket.
The officer had recognized the picture of Lilly. He placed his gun in its holster.

“You must have been a pretty child, Fräulein. You look just like your father. I am honored to meet you.”

The Russian officer walked towards Hannah bowed, kissed her hand and left immediately. Hannah stood there for a few moments collecting her wits. She picked up the knife, and placed it in her pocket next to her parents’ picture. Suddenly the telephone started to ring. Somewhat surprised to hear this unexpected intrusion, Hannah following the sound of the relentless ringing, located the intact telephone under some rubble. My parents and the Lord have saved me from being shot to death, she thought, now what next?

“Hello?” she said.

“Is this Sister Ursula?” asked the voice at the other end of the wire.

“Yes,” Hannah replied with a voice whose timbre sank and rose again.

“Sister Ursula, this is Frau Merth.”

“Frau Merth? How did you know I was here?”
“I really didn't. I took a guess. I telephoned the hospital, but I couldn't get through. I just took a chance that you might be there. Trains are still running here.”

“Here, where are you?”

“I'm at the very southeastern edge of Spandau, almost in Staaken. I have a small cottage. Try to come if you can. I can give you shelter, as long as the cottage is standing. I just hope the Americans get here first, then we'll be okay. Go to the town center and you’ll be directed towards my cottage.”

“Well,” Hannah replied. “I've already met a Russian officer. He came into the house.”

“Oh God,” Frau Merth replied. They're at Grunewald already? We're doomed.”

“I'll try to get to you.” Hannah responded. “Thank you and God bless you.”

Hannah wanted to distance herself from the Grunewald villa before the arrival of any more Russian soldiers. She said a prayer, left the villa and just started walking towards the west.

As Hannah approached there were other people by the thousands walking in the same direction. She felt that she was looking at a movie, for it was such a strange sight. Some people were well dressed, trying to cart everything of value along with them; others had nothing.
nothing save the clothes on their backs, others had hardly that. The infants’ screams were barely heard against the sound of the guns; retreating German soldiers, many hobbling on crutches, others bandaged, were barely inching along. They were all headed for the bridges spanning the Havel River—to Spandau, the westernmost district of Berlin.

Shortly before 1:00 that afternoon, General Karl Weidling’s request for a cease fire was honored by the Russians, whose guns fell silent two hours later. Colonel General Vasili Ivanovich Chuikov met with Colonel von Dufving, Weidling’s Chief of Staff. The battle for Berlin had ended.

As the sound of gunfire diminished, the refugees, making their way towards Spandau, kept on trudging westward. Hannah finally reached the Havel River and crossed at the Pichelsdorf Frey.

Spandau seemed relatively untouched by the war, even though there were many factories in the area. Hannah came upon a church and she entered the building. It was quiet except for the snoring of people who had sought refuge within its confines. Hannah prayed, and she exited from the chapel, going into a small chamber in the front. She had hoped to see a priest, but there was none. She continued towards the exit passing a room with an intact piano that was located against the western wall of the church. Hannah went into the room, sat on the piano bench, and, for the longest time she just looked at the keyboard. Ultimately her fingers touched the ivory keys; she started to play a Mozart piece that her mother had taught her when she was a child. It was quite elegant in its simplicity and again the rush of her childhood memories filled her mind with a simultaneous happiness and feeling of *weltschmerz*. She continued to play, lost in the
oblivion of her mind and her past; her thoughts haunting her into a more intense sadness. The music wafted out of the church, into the heretofore silent streets filling them with melody and beauty. It was so appropriate. Spring was in the air and flowers had started to bloom. Hannah finished the piece, let her head hang down and placed her hands over her weary eyes.

“Fräulein, I felt as if I had died and become resurrected,” whispered a voice with a grateful solemnity.”

Several people had gathered to hear the music, an old man approached the piano.

“My dear girl,” he said, “What you have done has lifted my spirits from despair to hopefulness. I don't know what's to become of us, but I have hope for the future. There are things to live for no matter how bad our situation. I remember the days when I would go to hear Lilly Mendelssohn play the piano. She was such a gift to the people of Germany. Lord knows where she is now. I hope she is alive and will come back to us to perform again.”

Hannah smiled at the gentleman.

“Dear sir, the very fact that she is remembered by you will always make her alive. May God bless you.”

Hannah left the church and continued walking. There was no food or water available and she was tired. People were sleeping everywhere, but she continued trudging onwards,
praying silently as she went. As her energy lagged, her spirits soared, for God had protected her and had kept her alive to continue to serve Him and help others. Finally she could go no further. There was one partially damaged house adjacent to the street on which Hannah was walking, she decided to go there to rest. She went inside and heard a rustling, maybe a dog or cat was running away. All was quiet. She sat down on the floor, her back to the wall, and as her eyes closed she heard someone say:

“Hannah, I mean Ursula, I'm so glad to see you.”

Hannah knew the voice immediately and with joy looked up to see Paul standing against the opposite wall. He was an imitation of the person whom she once knew. He was thin, battered, and he limped across the room towards her.

“Oh Paul,” she sputtered, “I thought that you were dead. It’s so unreal seeing you here.”

Paul caressed her tenderly and kissed her on the cheek.

“I’m still a nun, Paul.” I’ve been exonerated for what I’ve done with you.”

“Hannah,” he said, “I love you. I’ve always loved you.”

“And I, you, Paul,” she replied with the intimation of a platonic love.
“No Hannah,” that's not what I mean. I love you as a woman; I’ve always wanted you as my wife and to bear my children.”

Hannah's body stiffened and she stepped back slightly.

“Paul,” she replied, “I did bear your child in order to save my mother; not out of a sexual desire for you as a man. I felt that I was martyring myself for my mother, sacrificing my virginity, so that God, to whom I am betrothed, would spare her.”

“Hannah, God cannot lie with you and love you physically as I have.”

“Paul,” she said, distraught, “The love I have for God is on a much higher plane than the physical. It's spiritual, and I serve Him by also serving others. I saved my mother, and I don’t begrudge you any pleasure that you might have received in the process, but that was not my reason for sleeping with you. You must understand that. And, Paul, speaking of my mother, did you ever find out what happened to her?

“She was sent to the East, Hannah, I know of no other details.”

Hannah's body froze. She said nothing and exhibited no reaction.

“Paul, she may be dead.”

“I don't know Hannah.”
Hannah started to weep and large tears rolled down her cheeks. Paul embraced her and held her close to his body. Hannah appreciated the consolation, but then Paul said:

“I love you Hannah. I want you. I need you. I will take care of you, my darling.”

Hannah, upon hearing this pronouncement, momentarily forgot her concern for her mother, attempting to extricate herself from Paul's embrace, and said:

“But Paul, you must understand that I didn’t want to do what I did. I don’t want to hurt your ego, but I did this for my mother not for you. Now please, we must stop this.”

She pushed him away gently.

“Hannah, why do you think I’ve survived this war? To find you, to come back to you, to be with you.” Paul's compassion was starting to turn to anger. “I’ve loved you since we were children. All I ever wanted was you. I felt that once we were together you’d realize that you could have a life with me.”

“Even as a nun, Paul, even as a nun?”

“Nun, what does that mean to me? It's something that you have chosen, but in my mind it is far from irrevocable.”
“Yes, Paul, but your mind does not coincide with mine or my desires for the life I’ve been leading. I emphatically do not wish to be your wife, and I continue to pursue my desire to serve my God.”

“Your God? What God? Is this the work of God? To destroy our country and to bring us to the state in which we’re now? Look at yourself. Look at me? Do we deserve this?”

“Paul, stop feeling sorry for yourself. Look at all the harm and tragedy that our country has inflicted upon others. Look at all the innocents that have perished because the Führer has felt that we’re better than they. We’re not, Paul. They’re human beings like we. They have the right to live like we do. I heard that the Gestapo would hunt down every person with a drop of Jewish blood and kill them. Paul, if my mother died because she was Jewish, where do I stand in this situation? I am a mischling and I would be killed for this. How do you feel about that Paul?

“Hannah, I loved your mother and I love you. I would never have wanted any harm to come to either of you.”

“But yet you serve in the SS, an organization that annihilates people because they are Jewish.”

“Hannah, I never had anything against Jews. I was young, impressed by the uniform, the esprit de corps of the group and the joy of belonging to a cause.”
“What cause? The cause of killing every person who doesn't agree with you? Blindly following a man who has brought this nation, to utter destruction and defeat? Who gave him the right?”

“The people, Hannah, the people. They elected him and his victories were wonderful for our people and our nation.”

“And his defeats, Paul. Are they so wonderful? And then you have the nerve to say, our people, our nation? No, Paul, I realized that these cannot be my people, those who kill my mother and want to kill me. And look at the cost of those victories in human lives. The Russians who were so ruthlessly slaughtered and who will now do the same thing to us.

You say the people elected the Führer? Well, then they supported him. I cannot say I’d want this destruction to happen to Germany, but who's to blame? Surely you can’t blame God for something that Germany has brought upon herself.

Look at you Paul, in the uniform you once wore so proudly. Are you as glorious in defeat as you were in victory? How did you feel about those who were defeated before you? Paul, you personify everything that I do not want in my life. My father fought in the Great War that killed him, and we lost, and now you fight in this war. Look what it's done to you. I think it's best that we don’t see each other again. I'm going to leave you now. I suggest you remove that uniform of yours before the Russians get here.”
“What do you mean, you're not going to see me again,” shot back Paul. “I'm not going to let you go just like that. I love you too much”

Paul's eyes seethed with anger as he glared at Hannah; it was a crazed, irrational expression. He approached, as if to grab her. He seemed to be someone whom she had never known, but, in a way, always knew. She was frightened. Paul grabbed her by the shoulders and said:

“Hannah, please, please don’t say you’ll leave me. I have no country, no family, and I may be killed by the Russians soon. I'm proud of my country, and I've worn my uniform proudly during my life; I intend to wear it proudly in death.”

“Proudly in death?” Hannah snarled with a sardonic laugh, “you fool, such false pride is an egotistic aberration under such circumstances. All who die in this life pass into the next; their lot will be determined by a power far greater than their transcending, or descending soul. What will yours be?”

Paul seemed to hear nothing that Hannah was saying, he glared at her lustfully.

“Hannah, I want to hold you, to kiss you. I need you,” he pleaded.

He grabbed her body and held it.

“Paul, let go of me.” Hannah struggled trying to push him away.
They were both tired and weak, but Paul was the stronger. He started to put his lips on hers. She gave him a shove that broke his embrace.

“Get away from me idiot, you’re despicable. I would rather grovel with swine than be in the same room with you,” Hannah shrieked.

“You bitch,” he countered, as he slapped her face and pushed her away, “Go rot with the swine. I don’t see why I ever bothered with you, why I even made up that story about your mother, so you would sleep with me.”

“What?” replied Hannah incredulously. “You made up that story? What do you mean?”

“Just what I said,” replied Paul. “I knew that Heydrich had plans for your mother’s deportation; there was nothing I could do about that, although I would have done anything I could to protect her. As far as sleeping with you—I figured you would be noble and righteous enough to fall for the story of your mother being in danger—and you did; and you went to sleep with me without too much prodding.”

“Without too much prodding? Paul, I loved you as a brother, I did what I did with good heart and spirit. I can’t believe you would stoop to such depths of sin and depravity. I can’t believe it, it seems inconceivable. You’re sick, Paul, sick. I
can't forgive you for what you've done, that's in God's hands now. As far as I'm concerned you can rot in hell.”

“Rot in hell? Don't play that pious, innocent role with me, you whore. It gave you the reason you needed to go to bed with me. And don't say you didn't enjoy it. It's probably the best thing that ever happened to you in your entire life.”

Hannah was livid and shaking. This couldn't be happening. It couldn't be happening. Paul rushed up to her, threw his body on hers, slapping her face wildly. As he felt her body struggling beneath him he kissed her again, and her struggling intensified. She felt that he was suffocating her. What did he have to lose? she thought. He could rape and kill me with ease, and who would know the difference?

He pushed her dress up and started to force himself inside of her. She felt him enter her body and she screamed both from pain and the emotional trauma.

“God help me,” she murmured.

Each of Paul's thrusts increased with rhythm and intensity, each one tortured her unmercifully. She felt her mother's picture in her pocket, the knife from her father's uniform pressing against her body. She pushed her hand into the pocket, pulled out the knife and the picture came along with it. She adroitly unsheathed the knife and as Paul's body lifted to thrust himself into her again she held the knife above her body, holding it with all of her diminishing strength. As Paul began to exhale a sound of orgiastic pleasure, the knife went through the picture and through Paul's stomach. The sound of
Paul's release became a deep-throated gasp as his body fell upon Hannah's, for as his blood spilled from his body, his sperm entered hers.

She felt oddly ambivalent. Hannah was a servant of God, but she was still a woman—a woman who had been deceived and defiled by a person whom she had trusted. Hannah thought of Paul's comment about being a nun. Did that mean she could have no anger? Did that mean she could not protect herself? Yet she still wanted to save him. A renewed strength came over her. As Paul lay moaning, his life eking away, she pushed his body from hers and stood up. I cannot leave him to die like this, she thought. She rolled him over as he lay there moaning. The knife had pierced her father's face on the photograph and she gasped as the aged paper started to absorb Paul's blood. Hannah watched as Hans von Wallenstadt's face became obliterated before her.

“Paul,” she said, in a concerned, but professional tone. “I'll do my best to save you. I'll see if I can get someone to help.”

Hannah had dealt with many injured people in the hospital, many who had horrible deaths, she was not unduly fazed by the sight in front of her. She raised Paul's head and placed it on a piece of ripped floorboard. As Hannah left the house she turned around to see Paul lying there, he was barely alive and oblivious to his surroundings. Hannah went outside to try to get help. She saw a telephone two blocks away and ran to it. It worked, she made a call to the police station. She was told that there was no one available to assist at the moment, help would be difficult to obtain, but somebody would be there eventually.
Hannah returned to Paul and said disdainfully:

“How weak the strong can be in defeat; the strength of a women is not to be taken lightly Paul, you will not deceive me again. But Paul, you are a human being, and I have more respect for the individual than you or your kind could ever imagine. Don't despair, help will be here as soon as possible. Can you hear me? Can you understand what I’ve said?”

Hannah had little feeling for what had occurred, but she stayed next to Paul to help him, more out of duty than from true concern. At one point she arose and went to the door. She looked through the door and listened, hoping to hear the sound of an ambulance or an automobile, but all was quite still. As she turned around to return to Paul she saw him remove his revolver from its holster. He turned his head to look at Hannah; raised his revolver, pointed it at Hannah who stood transfixed, without thought, without fear. Paul than turned the revolver around, pointed it against his head and, with the last remaining bit of strength in his dying body he pulled the trigger. Hannah watched. She crossed herself and hoped God would be merciful to Paul's soul. There was just numbness, not from this incident alone, but from all the war's intrusiveness into her life. She moved lifelessly, a casualty as much as those soldiers wounded in battle. Hannah said a prayer over the corpse and left the building. He didn't even ask me about our child, she thought.

At the point where she turned towards the south, she saw the bombed ruins of another church with its roof open to the sky above, its walls almost non-existent. Upon the walls' remnant, just above a still-standing table, was a hanging cross with the dying Jesus, ready to fall. Hannah entered the sacred area with the devoutness that she had always
possessed. Genuflecting before the symbol of Lord Jesus, she entered what was left of a pew to kneel and then to pray. She prayed to the Lord, her husband in life and in death, to accept her humble prayers. She prayed for her mother; she prayed for the infant son whom she had barely seen. She prayed for the father whom she had never known. She prayed for all of those whom she helped to nurse and who lived or died in front of her in Charité Hospital. She prayed for Paul, whose dried blood coated her body. She prayed for Germany, that it might find recourse in the time to come. She prayed for all the souls of those whom Hitler had unjustly annihilated. She had a special prayer for Mother Superior who, in attempting to do what she thought right by helping Jews, found herself condemned by the very society in which she lived and had sought to help.

Hannah's prayers returned again to her mother. She raised her head with tear-filled eyes to gaze at the cross of the ever-beneficent Christ. As she did she watched as the cross on which he lay dying fell to the ground and settle ignominiously in the dirt that surrounded the table. Hannah rose from the pew to resurrect the Christ, her beloved husband, from the ashes of the bombed church. She tenderly lifted the cross from the earth, placed it near her lips as she kissed it and held it there.

Suddenly, she felt something snap within her, against the background of her cognition, against all the prayers she had just offered. Hannah felt her mind and body become consumed with an anger heretofore unknown. She threw the cross vehemently across the church. It sliced through the beams of the slowly descending sun. And, as the cross settled in the dirt below, it glinted in the sun's last gleam, lying broken on the ground, enveloped by the twilight that followed.
“What blasphemy,” Hannah cried. There is no Jesus. Nietzsche was right. There is no God. It's all a myth...a myth to make people believe, and believe in what? In what is there to believe? All this nonsense about God? Would God permit these tragedies to take place against His children? No parent or husband would stand by to witness that. Why was nothing done? Why?

I divorce you God. I renounce you as an entity. You do not exist for me anymore, and I wonder if you ever existed at all. Damn you, damn you, go to the hell that has been prescribed for the blasphemous sinners. And your people? Why did you create them if they were ultimately intended to destroy each other? It makes no sense, no sense.”

During all this time, while the moral fabric of the world outside her had been steadily disintegrating, Hannah’s faith had been a carefully maintained wall--between herself and despair. And now it had been broken. She had broken it. She was overwhelmed emotionally and physically, but now past the breaking point. Sleep came quickly.

Hannah awoke the next morning to the chirping of birds. She left the church and, for the first time, noticed that Spring had come. Hannah looked at the flowers, still wet with a dark, buttery dew. How odd, she thought, but upon further examination it was moist soot, the residue of the still smoking guns that lay miles to the east. Would historians ever reference this in their writings? It's we, the people, who live through this, who shall remember these small things and add this to memories that we would probably prefer to forget.
Hannah laughed to herself. She felt free, the yoke of oppression had been removed from her shoulders. She and the land in which she lived had passed the point of distraction and was going through a re-birth; a re-birth that was to have a tortuous delivery. Hannah placed her hand on her stomach and rubbed it as it growled for attention, and the pangs of hunger manifested themselves with ever-increasing frequency.