

GENGHIS KHAN, THE 'SCHIEBER'

A TALE OF BERLIN'S UNDERWORLD

[Berlin harbors a numerous colony of Russian refugees, possessing their own press, theatres, and clubs, one aspect of whose life in exile is here described. Schieber is German war-slang for a profiteering illicit trader.]

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(CONSERVATIVE DAILY, BRITISH OCCUPIED TERRITORY)

A COMBINATION of gnawing envy and subdued anger hovered over the haggard countenance of the younger man, while good-humored contentment with the world radiated from the chubby cheeks of his companion. Max Weisse, a radical young school-teacher recently transferred from the country to Berlin, regarded Trotskiï and Lenin as the polestars of his existence, and a Communist terror as the only salvation of mankind. Anton Behnisch, his friend, was proprietor of a delicatessen shop. He took an ultracomfortable view of life. Pyramids of human skulls had no attraction for him, but pyramids of buns and pastries moved him to ecstasy.

A haze of cigarette smoke filled the café. A murmur of good-humored conversation, broken now and then by peals of jovial laughter, surrounded them. Everybody was chattering and drinking. An orchestra played 'The Village Swallows from Austria,' by Strauss. Life circulated about them tranquilly and comfortably, like the strains of this waltz.

Weisse, at the end of a moment's reverie, snarled scornfully: 'Just see this gang of people swilling and gorging half the night! Over at that table they're drinking their third silver fizz, at twenty marks a glass! And that yellow-haired girl there is swallowing cakes as fast as she can stuff them into her mouth!'

'But Max! The girl may be hungry,' objected the latter's companion, turning uncomfortably half around in his chair and obviously irritated by his friend's mood.

✱ Max Weisse and Behnisch were tried friends; for they had been comrades in Russia many years, having been captured and interned there early in the war, and released at the same time.

But the bilious-tempered teacher grumbled on: 'Genghis Khan! We need a Genghis Khan to cut off the heads of these people! We need a man to set up a bloody tribunal among these swamp flowers of capitalism! Before we can have a new society we must wipe out all this that we see about us — cut it down and plow it under — not leave one stone upon another!'

He was in a mood to dwell on his pet historical parallel, which he had already discussed in a learned monograph. This was that Lenin and Trotskiï were historically reincarnations of Timur and Genghis Khan, entrusted with the mission of pointing out to mankind, with their bloody swords, the way it must pursue.

A few minutes later, when the whole company joined the chorus of the popular dance-song the orchestra had just started, he said impatiently to his friend: 'Come! These folks get on my nerves! They are so utterly oblivious to the great problems of the time, to the

great tasks that are before us. And these women! Br-r-r-r!

'Herrgott! You can't expect these girls to pull a long face like yourself!' Behnisch looked at his watch impatiently. 'If it was n't already twelve o'clock I'd take you over to the *Künstlercafé* on Nürnberger Platz. There you could talk with my friend Sasdenov.'

'Who? What's his name?'

'Sasdenov, Nikolai Sasdenov. An acquaintance of mine, an interesting chap.'

'A Russian?'

'What else? He has a job as a draftsman in an art store over in the western part of the city. But his real interest is in other things. I did him a favor when he first came, before he knew a word of German. He had a dispute with his landlord, and I helped him out with my Russian.'

'What do you mean by "other things"?''

'So, so! Bolshevism, anarchism, who knows? All these Russian emigrants, thick as midsummer flies out there in Charlottenburg, are a book with seven seals for us, you know.'

'You! Could you —?'

'Introduce you to him? Sure! Would you be interested? But it's too late to-night.'

At his first opportunity Max Weisse dropped in of an afternoon at the café on Nürnberger Platz. He found a big table occupied by Russians, with whom his friend frequently associated. His great expectations were completely fulfilled. Even here in Berlin, sunk as the city was in carnal pleasures, this little group had taken root and was burning incense to the Moscow idea of world salvation.

Nikolai Sasdenov was a man of demonic temperament. You could see it by his hair and by the way that he rolled cigarettes in his pocket. His hair was brushed far back from his fore-

head, and a heavy black moustache covered his upper lip. His pale countenance was never at rest, on account of the nervous contraction that mirrored the perpetual struggle within his soul. Always very reserved at first, he would stare silently at his glass for half an hour, or follow up his beer with six or seven cognacs. After that the spirit began to move him. He never revealed his plans or intentions; but after eight o'clock at night his eloquence was inexhaustible. Then he let loose with all his wealth of fiery satire and sparkling invective against the sordid bourgeoisie, against Entente capitalism, against the enslavement of Russia. Listening to him you became convinced that any man with a bank account ought to be hung by a curtain cord. All the misfortunes of the world were due to private capital. According to his own account, Sasdenov had been secretary to one of the great Cadet leaders in Russia, and forced to leave the country during the early days of the Revolution. Since then he had been marooned in Germany.

Behnisch cautioned his friend privately, before he introduced Sasdenov to him: 'The fellow is lying. The truth is he is something very different.'

Weisse looked up inquiringly.

'A Bolshevik spy, one of the army of them here in Berlin. His business is to listen to what others say and to let Moscow know who are the weaklings, the backsliders, and the traitors. His fashion of talking is merely to draw them out and get them to contradict him. If any of them disputes what he says — unlucky for him!' And Behnisch concluded his enlightening remarks with a significant gesture.

Weisse, who felt goose flesh creeping up his back, stammered: 'Mighty interesting! What a mysterious world is hidden in our foreign colony here at Berlin!'

Sasdenov had one peculiarity that all his acquaintances knew and rather respected him for; wherever he was, he would spring up suddenly, shortly before eleven o'clock in the evening, and vanish. If anyone unfamiliar with this habit tried to detain him, he had but a single answer and excuse: 'I still have work on hand!' He never explained what the work was, nor where he went. Even Behnisch, who had lodgings in the same house with Sasdenov, shrugged his shoulders and declared he had not the slightest suspicion.

Weisse imagined he had discovered the solution. 'It's then he goes away and in the privacy of the night writes reports to his revolutionary committee! Possibly condemns someone to death! Or else he prints a Communist paper, which is secretly distributed by propagandists. He's laying mines under this rotten world. Genghis Khan no longer uses the sword, but the printing press.' Thus Weisse summed up his opinion of Sasdenov's mysterious night labors. Sasdenov was a man of remarkable energy and industry. You could see it in his eyes, his hair, and his flaming revolutionary eloquence.

Gradually Weisse became more or less intimate with the strange Russian world that had nested in the western section of Berlin. He grew familiar with the inviting armchairs, black sofas, and snug corners of the numerous little bars between Kurfürstendamm and the old West Quarter. In these places the emigrants would sit and discuss their plans, in which only they had faith. He visited a little theatre where the actors sang Russian songs on a stage fairly shrieking with the sharp contrast of its brightly colored decorations; where peasant girls in red and white costumes and headcloths danced and recited; and where the refugees cheered and sobbed out their homesickness on each other's shoulders.

He visited the restaurants on the second floor of these bars and of the theatre, where one could obtain every conceivable Russian delicacy, appetizing *Sakuska*, fresh Russian pastry, and candied fruits; where beneath the table one saw iced bottles with gold around the cork, and upon the table hundred-mark notes carelessly left about. For some of these Russians always had money; most of them had it now and then; and whenever there was money they entertained each other. Then there was a high time with whiskey, wine, philosophy, and plans to mend the cursed situation in Russia. But no one knew precisely how to accomplish the last all-important object. Meanwhile they drank schnapps. They were all partisans of schnapps, whether idealists or reactionaries, Communists or spies, braves or comedians; the whole mad crowd that had poured out of the East and halted on the humdrum banks of the Spree, with their Slavic passions and enthusiasm, their Slavic intensity of life, their Slavic megalomania, was all for schnapps.

Olga, Sasdenov's lady friend, would shake her black locks in the Pelican Café, after drinking her fifth *allasch*, and lament: 'Oh, it would be beautiful in Germany if the Germans were only different! They are so incredulous! They will not believe what we Russians tell them, and very often are surly!' Olga was a great partisan of *allasch*. Ten glasses of *allasch* in an evening were nothing for her. After her tenth she would quote Wundt's *Outlines of Psychology*.

Max Weisse became acquainted with Olga at the café in Nürnberger Platz. She made a deep impression upon him. Tall, slender, with almond-shaped black eyes and jet-black hair, her heart beat as ardently for the revolutionary liberation of mankind as his own, and she professed the same principles as

Sasdenov. But she confessed frankly that she had tired of her long exile and that her heart yearned for dear old Russia. During the daytime she was compelled to perform the menial duty of a copyist in a foreign consulate. Evenings, she said, she studied philosophy and the modern languages. That seemed very likely; for she always left early and no one except Sasdenov had ever called at her place of residence.

Weisse confided to his friend Behnisch: 'What I admire so much in these Russians is their idealism! What aspirations, what longing, what yearning for culture! Work hard every day and then study evenings! That girl there is highly gifted!'

'Yes, yes — they are gifted,' said Behnisch, in an ambiguous voice. Then he suddenly added: 'See here, you're not paying her café checks, are you?'

Weisse blushed. 'What? How? What do you mean? Oh, no — just a few times when she had n't any money; and Sasdenov did n't have any either! On these occasions I paid for both.'

'Well — if that's all!'

'That girl has so much serious purpose, she's so genuine!' said Max, diverging from the main subject.

One evening something really serious happened. Olga appeared, with tears in her eyes, and drawing Weisse into a retired corner of the Pelican Café, said: 'I'm tired of this life. I'm going to end it all! I can't endure this life with Nikolai!'

'For God's sake, don't make a scene! Don't do anything rash! You've been out of sorts lately. What's the trouble with him?'

'He abuses me, he beats me, and calls me an office owl, a lazy *studentin*. And all that because I can't give him the money he needs so badly. I have none of my own!'

'What does he need money for?'

Olga's voice sank. Nikolai had received an order from the society he was representing in Russia to return home and to render an account of certain money entrusted to him. He no longer had the money. He had used it in the service of the Cause. He did not even have traveling money. But he must get away at once. If he hesitated it would arouse suspicion. Suspicion among his people meant peril to his life. 'Oh, if I had only left him long ago! He's a hard, unfeeling man; but he's fearfully energetic and violent. I'm afraid of him. I need someone who has a soul to look after me!' She wrung her white hands. 'You have an understanding heart! I trust you!'

Weisse's blood ran cold. 'How much money does Nikolai need?'

After a moment's hesitation Olga said: 'About eighteen hundred marks. And he must have a passport; his old one has expired. Yes, if I could get away from him, I would never fall into his clutches again! Some day he'll murder me, that's sure!'

'I'll get you the eighteen hundred marks!'

'You are a noble soul! My savior! I knew it! I'll get free from him yet! And when I'm free —' and her eyes spoke volumes to ardent, trusting Max.

Two days later she received the eighteen hundred marks. Max Weisse borrowed it for her from a friend. He also got her a passport. He would do anything for Olga. She had aroused all the passion, emotional and political, of which his heart was capable. Was it not his duty to rescue her? Genghis Khan might find his life-mission back in Russia; that was, after all, the best place for him.

Olga wrote Max a tender note upon receiving the money. She would wait until Sasdenov left before thanking him personally. She now knew that she and Max were soul affinities.

This letter upset him completely. He hunted up Behnisch in order to pour his passion for Olga and everything Russian into the latter's commonplace bourgeois ears. Seated in a wine shop on Kurfürstendamm they drank to cordial friendship with the Slavs. Weisse accompanied Behnisch late that evening to the latter's residence, in a palatial apartment on one of the broad avenues of Wilmersdorf.

'Look! For Heaven's sake, what's going on?' It was after 3 A.M., but a great crowd had collected in front of the house. Before the door stood a huge truck with shabby leather seats and the insignia of the Berlin Police Department. Security Police in green uniforms and caps and gray cloaks stood on guard. A crowd of people was coming out of the house — gentlemen in good coats, and ladies in white wraps and furs. Most of them hung back; a few laughed and put a good face on the matter.

'Get in there, get in there, gentlemen and ladies! You will all have to go to police headquarters! The fare costs nothing!' said a big officer, standing at the truck. His companions grinned.

Behnisch elbowed his way into the crowd to inquire of a policeman: 'What's the trouble?'

'We've just raided a night den here. Champagne at four hundred marks the bottle, and a lot of men and women playing the devil.'

'Where was it?'

'Oh, on the courtyard side, in the apartment of a Russian!'

'The apartment of a Russian?' Weisse stammered weakly. He had an evil foreboding.

'Yes, the Russian is running the place; the others are taken merely as witnesses. The fellow proves to be an important *Schieber*. In the back room we found a lot of rugs and forbidden

goods, with forged invoices and all the other apparatus.'

Behnisch exclaimed with astonishment: 'Sasdenov! It must be! Can it be Sasdenov?'

Weisse felt as though the ground were sinking under him. For just then there appeared in the doorway, accompanied by two policemen who were to escort him to Alexanderplatz, his wild revolutionist, his Genghis Khan; but this time in an elegant walking-coat, the proprietor of the disorderly house where champagne was sold at four hundred marks the bottle and there was illegal dancing. And the dancer — his head fairly swam, for she appeared in a long brown mantle. It was his Olga, the philosopher! That is why the two disappeared so promptly at a fixed hour every evening!

As soon as the two got a glimpse of Max they burst out laughing. Nikolai shouted: 'Brother, I have been exterminating the bourgeoisie by robbing them of their wealth. Your eighteen hundred marks unfortunately came too late. I was going to get another lot of goods across the border. But it does n't matter! It all reaches the great coöperative treasury!'

Olga threw a kiss to her admirer, and shouted: '*Auf Wiedersehen*, golden dream! I'll call again when I'm free! You're a dear!'

A gruff policeman promptly silenced them. 'Step lively there! None of your nonsense! Get in!' And the police truck with its passengers rumbled into the darkness.

Behnisch said musingly: 'Better come up and have a cup of coffee. We need it.'

Weisse nodded silently. In Behnisch's apartment he sank into an easy-chair without speaking a word. His money was gone, and so were his illusions. There were no longer such things as ideals. Genghis Khan was a *Schieber*.

The inspiring girl who quoted Wundt's Psychology was a muscle-dancer.

'So you see,' said Behnisch, thoughtfully, as the coffee pot began to boil with a comfortable murmur, 'that's what you find among these foreign emigrants. Some resist temptation and

stick it out honestly, doing penance for their own past faults and the faults of others. And many who were honest at home go to the devil here, because they must. We hit upon a couple of the latter. But these Russians are gifted — they are a highly gifted race!'

HOW THE OTHER HALF OF TOKYO LIVES

[Japanese students have a slang term, Mokuchin Hotel, an absurd Chinafied pronunciation of kichin, — meaning a cheap wooden building, — to designate a city lodging-house. This account of a night in such an institution appears in Jisseikatsu (Real Life) in the form of a letter from one student to another.]

From the *Japan Advertiser*, March 12
(TOKYO AMERICAN DAILY)

DEAR U—,

I have been there at last. You will laugh at me for my eccentric adventure to a Mokuchin Hotel in these cold days. But I wanted a fresh experience to break the tedium. Anyhow, my visit was full of interest. You should have shared the adventure. K—— went with me, disguised as a laborer out of work. I dressed myself in my oldest and worst clothes. I darkened my face with toilet cream mixed with ashes. Thus our disguises were made and we went out.

The landlady of my lodging-house was surprised to see me in such strange get-up and said humorously, 'Don't bring back bedbugs.' We got in a street car. Nobody took notice of us. I thought, Tokyo is Tokyo after all. Even the policeman was indifferent to the two poorly dressed laborers. It was rather disappointing to us.

At the Oiwake stop we got out. Now we needed to screw up our courage before going further, so we looked for

a low-class drinking-place. Shinjuku prostitute quarters were very desolate at this hour — about eight in the evening — after the great fire. We walked through the place before we found a hotchpotch stall. Glasses of Osaka whiskey and bottles of sake were arrayed before us.

'Not so good. But I get 12 or 13 yen every evening these days,' the old man of the stall replied to my question as to how business went on with him.

'Thirteen' yen? That's excellent, is n't it?'

'But the profits are small. To sell much I must sell very cheap.'

'Is that so? By the way, we are out of a job at present and are thinking to start an eating-stall. Can you advise us?'

'You have only to bring your things and ask the taskmaker. He will notify the police for you. You pay 2 sen for the street sweeper and 7 sen for a lamp of five candle power each night. That's all.' His advice to a novice was