Doctor of Chemistry

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Abstract

“LOU should have seen the way she was dressed! I could -”- have screamed, she looked so funny, girls. If Dr. Glazer is an example of accepted German grooming—then I prefer my teachers from New York.” Marie Johnson laid her chemistry laboratory manual on the black-topped desk...
of evil instincts—of murder, perhaps; of blood, of lifeless forms.

Oh, doubt not. Allow no doubts as to right of purpose, or the intent of those who have chained you to lie naked. Clothe them quickly with some sort of makeshift garment! Breathe, exist, but forget.

Damn your thoughts, and be not idle. For one nice sharp moment of idle time breaks loose the dam of your regimented thoughts, and lets run, unchecked, and rampant, the raging flood of past memories—memories of life and the sacred, even inviolate, past.

Blow, you savage Tunisian sands, blow. And hell, open wider your fiery mouth; you do but mock when man's at war.

Bestir yourself to action, soldier. You are neither Horatio nor Lancelot, but a soldier in khaki. Confidence is again yours. You may face death without emotion, without fear. Your messiah has come. Onward, soldier, on to Bergundi.

Doctor of Chemistry

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"YOU should have seen the way she was dressed! I could have screamed, she looked so funny, girls. If Dr. Glazer is an example of accepted German grooming—then I prefer my teachers from New York." Marie Johnson laid her chemistry laboratory manual on the black-topped desk. She shrugged out of her gray Chesterfield and hung it on a wall peg. Rapidly, the pegs were being used until only the few farthest from the door were left to be filled.

In the distance the boats throbbed steadily as they pulled into New York harbor, dumping their cargoes of wide-eyed refugees on the shores of this strange new land. If, by chance, one of the immigrants happened to gaze at the college, a disinterested official would offer, "Those buildings? Oh! Miss Hanson's school." Perhaps, he would add, "Of exclusive education."

"And what did you say then?" Helen Black arched a penciled eyebrow. The girls gathered closer.

"Well—," Marie snapped open a leather compact and propped
it against a bottle marked HCl. She ran a comb through her sunset hair and dabbed powder on her piquant nose. "I said, 'But, doctor, surely you don't expect me—.'"

"Ssh! here she comes."

Dr. Glazer started toward her desk, running the gauntlet of their hostile gazes, in silence. She had learned to be silent in Munich where a carelessly spoken word may mean the bombing of a city. Her stride was deliberate, the studied deliberateness of a woman who had many times gone to her work at night lest she betray what she was doing. Tiny wisps of curls encircled her expectant ears, the ears which heard nothing save those things allowing her to remain alive. She wore horn-rimmed glasses and knew that they could not hide the frightened look in her soft gray eyes, eyes which had watched a lifetime of endeavor sacrificed beneath the ruthlessness of Hitler's sweep. "I ran then," she said to herself, "but I will not run now." The doctor laid her book on her desk.

"Today's experiment will be on the determination of protein in cereal." Her guttural German accent made the words scarcely intelligible. Someone snickered. The doctor ignored the tribute—it had come each time she began class.

"You will proceed as the manual directs until you reach the part outlining the digestion of the protein. I will demonstrate the technique for the digestion. Improper handling at this stage may cause an unfortunate accident."

"Don't think of the unfortunate accidents in Berlin that year," the doctor said to herself. "Don't think of the sister who lay trampled by the mob or the horrible enjoyment in the voice which said, "She was a Jew. Jews, the dogs, must die."

"Check out the Kjeldahl flasks at my desk."

The girls slowly filed past the desk. As they claimed the flasks, Dr. Glazer checked off each of their names with methodical precision.

"Henry, Mead, Balster, Jolson—." "You mustn't remember those hours of waiting while they checked you off. You must try to forget the blue-eyed inquisitor as he sucked in your name and leered."

"Johnson—."

"Miss Johnson, if you please, doctor."

"Miss Johnson, Miss Blakesly, Miss Hood." The doctor placed the cards back into the file and began walking about the desks.
"Doctor Glazer," the girl speaking glanced up impishly, "I don't see why I have to take chemistry."

"Miss Dallas, when I see you in a laboratory, I don't see why you must, either." The girl laughed gaily. A flicker of hope for the confidence of her students almost came into the doctor's eyes. Marie Johnson did not smile. The doctor knew that she should not have spoken—here in America, the land of the free, she must not speak. She turned away.

"If everyone will please come into this other room, I will set up a sample apparatus for the protein digestion." The doctor preceded the girls to the adjoining room. "We will leave the door open at all times—there should be a student in the room during the entire procedure."

"Don't recall those months when you locked the doors after you went into the room. Stop hearing the four short knocks and a long which meant that a friend wished entrance."

"Set your prepared flask at a forty-five degree angle on the rack. Swing the neck around so that the fumes which escape may go up the chimney."

Marie Johnson leafed through her copy of Vogue. "Marie, Marie, please listen," the doctor pleaded to herself. "It was such a student as you that filled our laboratory with gas at Berlin and sent us gasping into the night when the Germans were hot on our trail."

"Turn the Bunsen burner down low, strike a match and then turn on the gas. Light the burner quickly and allow the digestion to proceed slowly until the liquid inside of the flask is clear. Then raise the flame and allow it to digest for about 20 to 30 minutes."

"Any kid could do that." Marie muttered the sentence audibly as she left the room.

The doctor checked each burner. "Nothing must happen this afternoon. Everything must go off smoothly, so that I may go to my room and close my eyes against all of this. They hate me! They're not being fair to me! They're binding me with the thongs of their own ignorance. Liberty and justice for all! Maybe when I am an American I'll know the meaning of the words." The doctor returned to her desk and began to correct papers.

The girls drifted toward the digestion room. Marie tossed the magazine which she had been reading into her desk drawer. The doctor winced as she heard the fragile glassware crumble. "Send
me the bill tomorrow, doctor." Marie flung the words over her shoulder as she disappeared into the other room.

"I cannot go to them. They do not need me—these Americans are confident, they do not know the meaning of fear. They have never lain by the side of a crumbling church, listening to the cries of help from the interior. They have not slept beneath the covers of rotting bodies and blood soaked mud. They have had no need to pray that they might reach another land before the morning dawns."

A gust of wind cycloned through the room. The door leading to the digestion room closed with a foreboding slam. Girls screamed. Without looking, the doctor knew what had happened. The wind had whipped the Bunsen burner flames into the air. Escaped gas from a carelessly turned on burner had caught fire. The air was rapidly being filled with flames. Gas—she must get to the gas.

To the door—stuck! The doctor glanced about the room. If she would run! The door gave way under the impact of the doctor's weight.

Paris! Munich! Berlin! London!—great raging furnaces of heat from which people fled. But this was America where all men have a right to stand up and fight. She must get to the gas. The girls were stumbling toward the other room.

Through the flames—over here it was—it had to be. "Cut off the gas, cut off the gas," she said to herself. The gas guage went slowly downward.

"I must face them now. I will not notice the hate in their eyes. I will say that it was my fault and maybe then, they will let me go home and sleep."

"Why, Dr. Glazer," Marie Johnson's voice was strangely gentle, "there's blood on your shoulder."

"Blood! I thought that I had spilled it all on Hitler's swords. In America one has a mixture of icy impersonalness coursing through the veins—not blood! Keep talking, Marie, don't give me time to think."

"Here, put on my coat and we'll take you to the infirmary."

The doctor walked to the window and gazed over the city toward the Atlantic. Boats!—drifting toward the promised land!

"There's the Statue of Liberty, girls. Strange—I didn't know you could see it from here." Marie's trim gray Chesterfield coat proudly hugged the crimson shoulder.