

**The Men with the  
Pink  
Triangle**

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It was on a Friday, about 1 p.m., almost a year to the day since Austria had become simply the 'Ostmark', that I heard two rings at the door. Short, but somehow commanding. When I opened I was surprised to see a man with a slouch hat and leather coat. With the curt word 'Gestapo', he handed me a card with the printed summons to appear for questioning at 2 p.m. at the Gestapo headquarters in the Hotel Metropol.

My mother and I were very upset, but I could only think it was to do with something at the university, possibly a political student association.

'It can't be anything serious', I told my mother, 'otherwise the Gestapo would have taken me off right away'.

My mother was still not satisfied, and showed great concern. I, too, had a nervous feeling in my stomach, but then doesn't anyone in a time of dictatorship if they are called in by the secret police?

I happened to glance out of the window and saw the Gestapo man a few doors further along, standing in front of a shop. It seemed he still had his eye on our door, rather than the items on display. Presumably his job was to prevent any attempt by me to escape. He was undoubtedly going to follow me to the hotel. This was extremely unpleasant to contemplate, and I could already feel the threatening danger.

My mother must have felt the same, for when I said goodbye to her she embraced me very warmly and repeated: 'Be careful,

child, be careful!'

Neither of us thought, however, that we would not meet again for six years, myself a human wreck, she a broken woman, tormented as to the fate of her son, and having had to face the contempt of neighbours and fellow-citizens ever since it was known her son was homosexual and had been sent to concentration camp.

I never saw my father again. It was only after my liberation in 1945 that I learned from my mother how he had tried time and again to secure my release, applying to the interior ministry, the Vienna *Gauleitung*, and the Central Security Department in Berlin. Despite his many connections as a high civil servant, he was continuously refused.

Because of these requests, but above all because his son was imprisoned for homosexuality, and this was incompatible with his official position under the Nazi regime, he was forced to retire on reduced pension in December 1940. He could no longer put up with the abuse he received, and in 1942 took his own life - filled with bitterness and grief for an age he could not fit into, filled with disappointment over all those friends who either couldn't or wouldn't help him. He wrote a farewell letter to my mother, asking her forgiveness for having to leave her alone. My mother still has the letter today, and the last lines read: 'and so I can no longer tolerate the scorn of my acquaintances and colleagues, and of our neighbours. It's just too much for me! Please forgive me again. God protect our son!'

At five to two I reached the Gestapo HQ. It was a hive of activity, SS men coming and going, men in Nazi uniforms or with the gold party badge hurried through the corridors and up the stairs. Some men in civilian clothes passed me just as I came through the front door. You could see from their faces that they were very glad to have got out of the building.

I showed my summons, and an SS man took me to department IIc. We stopped outside a room with a large sign indicating the official within, until a secretary sitting in the antechamber, also in SS uniform, showed us in. 'Your appointment, *Herr Doktor*?' The SS man handed in my card, clicked his heels and vanished.

The 'doctor', in civilian clothes, but with the short, angular

hair-cut and smooth-shaven face that immediately gave him away as a senior officer, sat behind an imposing desk piled up with files, all neatly arranged. He neither greeted me nor even looked at me, but just carried on writing.

I stood and waited. Still nothing happened, for several minutes. The room was quite silent and I scarcely dared breathe, while he steadily wrote on. The only sound was the scratch of his pen. I became more and more nervous, though I recognised the 'softening up' tactic. Quite suddenly he laid down his pen and stared at me with cold grey eyes: 'You are a queer, a homosexual, do you admit it?'

'No, no, it's not true', I stammered, almost stunned by his accusation, which was the last thing I expected. I had only thought of some political affair, perhaps to do with the university; now I suddenly found my well-kept secret was out.

'Don't you lie, you dirty queer!', he shouted angrily. 'I have clear proof, look at this.'

He took a postcard-sized photo from his drawer.

'Do you know him?'

His long hairy finger pointed at the picture. Of course I knew the photo. It was a snap someone had taken showing Fred and me with our arms in friendly fashion round each other's shoulders.

'Yes, that's my student friend Fred X.'

'Indeed', he said calmly, yet unexpectedly quick: 'You've done filthy things together, don't you admit?' His voice was contemptuous, cold and cutting.

I just shook my head. I couldn't get a word out, it was as if a cord was tied round my neck. A whole world came tumbling down inside me, the world of friendship and love for Fred. Our plans for the future, to stay faithful together, and never to reveal our friendship to outsiders, all this seemed betrayed. I was trembling with agitation, not only because of the 'doctor's' examination, but also because our friendship was now revealed. The 'doctor' took the picture and turned it over. On it read: 'To my friend Fred in eternal love and deepest affection!' I knew as soon as he showed me the photo that it had my vow of love on the other side. I had given it to Fred for Christmas 1938. It must have got into the wrong hands, I immediately thought. Perhaps his

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father had found it, though that seemed quite improbable, as he didn't bother much about his son, or at least that was how it seemed. But now the photo was here on the table, before me and the Gestapo man.

'Is that your writing and your signature?'

I nodded, tears rising to my eyes.

'That's all, then', he said jovially and content, 'sign here.'

He handed me a half-written sheet, which I signed with trembling hand. The letters swam in front of my eyes, my tears now flowing openly. The SS man who had brought me here was now back in the room again.

'Take him away', said the 'doctor', giving the SS man a slip of paper and bending over his files again, not deeming me worthy of further attention.

I was taken the same day to the police prison on Rossauerlände street, which we Viennese know as the 'Liesl', as the street used to be called the Elisabethpromenade.

My pressing request to telephone my mother to tell her where I'd been taken, was met with the words: 'She'll soon know you're not coming home again.'

I was then examined bodily, which was very distressing, as I had to undress completely so that the policeman could make sure I was not hiding any forbidden object, even having to bend over. Then I could get dressed again, though my belt and shoe-laces were taken away. I was locked in a cell designed for one person, though it already had two other occupants. My fellow-prisoners were criminals, one under investigation for housebreaking, the other for swindling widows on the look-out for a new husband. They immediately wanted to know what I was in for, which I refused to tell them. I simply said that I didn't know myself. From what they told me, they were both married, and between 30 and 35 years old.

When they found out that I was 'queer', as one of the policemen gleefully told them, they immediately made open advances to me, which I angrily rejected. Firstly I was in no mood for amorous adventures, and in any case, as I told them in no uncertain terms, I wasn't the kind of person who gave himself to anyone.

### *Imprisoned as a 'Degenerate'*

They then started to insult me and 'the whole brood of queers', who ought to be exterminated. It was an unheard-of insult that the authorities should have put a sub-human such as this in the same cell as two relatively decent people. Even if they had come into conflict with the law, they were at least normal men and not moral degenerates. They were on a quite different level from homos, who should be classed as animals. They went on with such insults for quite a while, stressing all the time how they were decent men in comparison with the filthy queers. You'd have thought from their language that it was me who had propositioned them, not the other way round.

As it happened, I found out the very first night that they had sex together, not even caring whether I saw or heard. But in their view - the view of 'normal' people - this was only an emergency outlet, with nothing queer about it.

As if you could divide homosexuality into normal and abnormal. I later had the misfortune to discover that it wasn't only these two gangsters who had that opinion, but almost all 'normal' men. I still wonder today how this division between normal and abnormal is made. Is there a normal hunger and an abnormal one? A normal thirst and an abnormal one? Isn't hunger always hunger, and thirst thirst? What a hypocritical and illogical way of thinking!

Two weeks later, my trial already came up, justice showing an unusual haste in my case. Under paragraph 175 of the German criminal code, I was condemned by an Austrian court for homosexual behaviour, and sentenced to six months' penal servitude with the added provision of one fast day a month.

Proceedings against the second accused, my friend Fred, were dropped on the grounds of 'mental confusion'. No exact explanation was given as to what this involved, and it was clear enough from the judge's face that he was less than happy with this formula. Never mind, in Hitler's Third Reich even the judges, supposedly so independent, had to adapt to Nazi reasons of state.

Some 'higher power' had put in a finger and influenced the court proceedings. Presumably Fred's father had used his weight as a Nazi high-up, and managed to get his son out of trouble.