



# Immerwahr

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I'm cold. Strangely, it doesn't hurt at all. I lie flat on my back in the garden, and look right through the top of the old oak tree. A warm May breeze makes its leaves rustle. I have one hand on my chest, where the bullet entered my body, and I can feel the warm flow of blood over my fingers. I must have missed the heart, because I'm still here. I can feel, however, how it gets more and more difficult to breathe as my lungs fill with fluid. And with every breath a little more of my life force is leaving my body. Not long now.

How could it be, that I ended up here, in the damp grass of my back yard, bleeding to death? Is it me, or is it Fritz' fault?

It was me, who chose to marry him after all. It was me, who gave up her life for him. Little did I know 15 years ago that I married the devil. Not that he didn't treat me with respect, no. At least to the standards of society, he was a good husband. He was kind and caring, and never did he raise his hand against

me. I know a lot of women, who cannot say to be this lucky.

But he did keep me at home. After our marriage I never saw the inside of a laboratory again. How I longed to get back to my research! But he always knew a reason why I could not return.

And today was the day I had feared for the past ten months. Fritz had been successful. Horribly, gruesomely successful. Today he took the one thing I loved with all my heart, and turned it into something monstrous. My science.

The monstrosity that crawled from the glass womb in his laboratory into the world is called chlorine gas. Not that we didn't know of it before, but he found a way to produce it in industrial quantities. To make it a weapon in this god awful war, he is so proud of.

“During peace time a scientist belongs to the World, but during war time he belongs to his country.” That's what he said when I confronted him with his plans last fall. He repeated these words in public and got highly credited for them. What a pile of horse shit! We're scientists, and the first and noblest task of science is to serve for the better of humanity. I became a chemist, because I wanted to understand the world, because I wanted to use the power of our art to make this world a better place. What potential! New ways of healing the sick. New materials to lessen the burden of life's daily toil. Artificial fertilizers to end the hunger in the world.

Fritz himself had been working so hard on the process of making ammonia for the latter! I remember many nights when

we sat around the table and discussed details of it. He would show me his ideas and ask my opinion as a fellow chemist. Those were the few moments in my marriage when I felt like the girl who had fallen in love with him.

And then the war came. A stupid and unnecessary war that could have easily been avoided. But nobody wanted to prevent it. Not the French, who sought revenge for '71, nor the British, and least of all, the Emperor. Young men were going to war by the ten thousands, eager to face the adventure of a lifetime. What they found was destruction, mutilation and an early grave.

Fritz had embraced the war from the first moment on. I cannot say that I was happy in my marriage before the war, but the way the war effort had changed Fritz had put onto the strain that was already on our relationship. I remember him coming on that fateful morning in August.

“Finally!” He shouted, when he slammed the newspaper on the kitchen table. “We have an obligation to Austria.”

The headline consisted of only two words. Two words that send an ice cold chill through my spine.

### WAR! MOBILIZE!

I looked into Fritz' face. He tried to look calm, but his eyes were gleaming with excitement.

“I knew it!” He cried. “The Kaiser is not as weak as some of these hacks were writing in the papers! We're about to teach the French another lesson!”

I was surprised that he didn't jump up and down like a little child clapping his hands, while he said those words. His mood was a little dampened when he noticed my scowling.

"Clara, my dear, what's wrong? Aren't you at least relieved?"

I took a deep breath. "No Fritz, I am not! We're talking about going to war here! A lot of young men will die, and the consequences are unforeseeable. War is not a game, but something to avoid at all costs!"

He snorted. "This is why they don't let women into the government. You're too sensible to make the right decisions."

That hurt. Fritz knew I was an committed suffragette, and women's rights had always been my obsession. Yet, I had given up my own career as a scientist to marry him. Still, he disapproved of my opinions and actions. But usually, he held himself back. Today he didn't seem to care much about my feelings. Maybe he was disappointed by my lack of enthusiasm for the war effort.

"Don't worry. A couple of weeks, and we'll be in Paris. The French will come crawling on their knees."

"And how do you think they'll get an army into France?" I asked.

He shrugged. "From what I heard, they're gonna take Belgium. King Albert will keep his head down, and hope that we don't burn down his country."

I folded my arms across my chest. "And the British will just stand by? I don't think so." I said. "Mark my words: This is gonna get ugly pretty soon."

He waved his hand dismissively. “What does a woman know of politics?” And with that, he left me alone with my anger and frustration. “Fritz!” I called after him, but he had closed the door to the drawing room behind him.

It was the first of a long line of rows we had this year. While I committed myself to a group of women called *Mothers For Peace*, who tried to bring the boys and young men back home, he entered the royal service as an advisor. He co-signed a declaration, which would later be dubbed *Manifesto of the Ninety-Three* by the press, in which he expressly supported the war effort and called it a patriotic duty to support the Kaiser no matter what.

In the days after writing the declaration, he started working on his *special project*. We didn’t see much of each other in the following months. Fritz was made the leader of the new *Fighting Division Gas*, and spent a lot of his time in the *Kaiser-Willhelm-Society* in Berlin or even at the front lines.

He suggested blowing chlorine gas into the trenches. As it was heavier than air, it would sink down, and suffocate the enemy. I had seen what gruesome injuries chlorine has causes with my own eyes.

I spoke at a public rally, calling his plans “a perversion of the scientific idea”. That little speech made headline news, so my next meeting with Fritz was not very pleasant. He was furious. I tried to play it cool, make it sound like a scientific disagreement. But he wouldn’t listen to arguments, he was just shouting at me.

“How could you do this to me? Do you have any idea how that looks?” He shouted.

“It looks, like we are on opposite sites of the debate.” I said calmly.

“That’s what this is to you?” He screamed. “A debate? Because the rest of the world thinks I cannot control my own wife!”

That made me angry. “That’s because you can’t. I am your wife, but I am not your personal property, and I do whatever the hell I want!”

“So you resort to treason to show your so-called independence?”

I was baffled. “What?”

“You’re undermining morale, you stand against the Kaiser’s wishes. What else would you call that?”

I took a step towards him. “Don’t you dare, Fritz Haber, calling me a traitor! Don’t you dare tell me I wouldn’t love my country. But I love the people in it, not the Kaiser’s guns and tanks!”

“You’re a disgrace. You’re undermining my work, the war effort, the Kaiser himself!”

That was when he hit me. It wasn’t even hard, but I think it was the moment he realised he’d gone too far. He stopped shouting and looked to the ground, as if he was ashamed. Maybe, at that moment, I might have had a chance to get through to him, save my marriage, and get him away from this madness. But I was too upset and too proud, so I turned my back on him, and walked away. Maybe I could have stopped all this, if I had

swallowed my pride for just one minute. Pride, I guess, is the sin, I am guilty of. A pride that cost so many innocent lives.

Two days later, he headed for the front line. And I admit, it was the first time, I was not worried for him. I was more worried about what he would do there.

On 23rd April, the news read “Allied forces driven back by Ypern!” and I instantly knew that it was Fritz’ work. News spoke of a new kind of weapon that would end the war in an instant. A lie I had heard too many times, to be still believing it.

Now, a week later, it had led to this. Fritz had returned this morning, and it was the first time, I was not relieved to see him. We didn’t speak much, I think he knows I haven’t forgiven him for raising his hand against me. He tried to avoid to speak to me, but I could see he was gloating over the victory in Belgium. I think he was sorry for his actions against me, but he never apologised. Proud was not my vice alone.

Instead he asked me, if I could manage to be hostess to a little celebration of our troops in our house tonight. Knowing that picking another fight would be useless, I agreed to play the happy housewife.

His guests were people from the military, but also scientists I knew. Professor Hartelt, whom I had held very dear, for he always spoke in my favour of my scientific work, and the idea of women in science in general. We had a festive dinner, and after

that, the men withdrew to the drawing room, to celebrate with champagne and those stinking cigars.

“Come with us, my dear” Fritz said, “This victory is also yours!”

So I stood with the men, and Magda, our dear housekeeper, handed me a glass of champagne as well.

Fritz raised his glass: “To victory! To the emperor!”

“To victory! To the emperor!” The crowd agreed.

“And,” Fritz continued, “to my dear wife Clara, without her groundbreaking work as a chemist, this victory would not have been possible!”

I swallowed hard. I did not want anything to do with the war and those weapons. Maybe Fritz thought he’d be making things better by giving me the honours, but I was terrified.

The guests applauded me, and Professor Hartelt smiled encouragingly. “Clara, ” he said, “you’ve always been exceptional!”

“Thank you”, I said, hardly able to control the shaking in my voice.

Fritz now handed photographs to his guests. They here handed around from one to another, and with every new picture they cheered and patted each other on the back.

I got handed one of the pictures. I showed an allied trench. In it were the contorted, tortured remains of British soldiers. Their limbs were twisted in unnatural angles, their mouths and chins black from the blood when they had coughed up pieces their burned lungs. Their faces were frozen in an expression of total agony.

Tears blinded my sight and the feeling of guilt was overwhelming. This was my work! Fritz would never have succeeded without my work, Hartelt was right about that. I wanted to end famine, and helped bringing a much greater evil into the world.

I dropped the photo and turned to go. I couldn't stand their laughs and cheers. Blindly, I walked into the hall. On the side table was Fritz' gun. I picked it up. It was loaded. I knew what I had to do.

I feel someone is coming. Did they find me? Someone is at my side. I try to focus, but I cannot see.

"Mother!" It's the panicked voice of my son Hermann. My lovely little Hermann.

"Somebody help, please!" He shouts. I feel around, and find his arm. I squeeze it.

"Forgive me, my son!"

I hear him cry. I want to hold him, like when he was a baby, but I am too weak.

"Mother, don't leave me." He whispers in my ear. "I love you."

"I love you too." I whisper. "And I hope you can forgive my sins one day."

Then the peace of eternal darkness mercifully enshrouds me.