

## Prologue

*Der Feind verfolget meine Seele und zerschlägt mein Leben zu Boden*  
For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life  
down to the ground

*Psalmen Davids/Psalm 143:3*

The trumpet-maker placed the little folding stepstool below the votive panel hanging on the whitewashed church wall. It was on the south side of the altar, fairly high up. Sunshine entered from the clerestory above but slanted away, so the panel was in relative gloom. He climbed up gingerly; the stool wobbled and settled, he placed his fingertips briefly against the wall to steady himself, and now he was at eye level.

The Lutheran church in Belitz is a small and ancient building made of red brick, a common building material in that eastern part of Germany, bordered by the Baltic Sea. The church sits in a soft green acre, surrounded by the memory stones of burghers and common folk long gone, and shaded by fine trees, their trunks green-washed by moss on their windward sides. The cobbles of the lane leading to the church hark back to the time of the Democratic Republic; hellish to drive on, costly to maintain, but cheap to install. Quite good enough for the country farmers of the time, the simple people who had seen few cars, and had never dreamed of owning one.

Even in summer the interior of the church was cool, although the sensation on the skin could as much have arisen from the silent peace of the place than from the mere temperature of the air. The atmosphere of the nave was scented with time; a distance compounded of dust and wood, decay and incense, and the cloying aura of long-burnt beeswax and tallow. Not a famous place; not a vast cathedral with riches adorning its walls, or with vaults filled with treasures from devotion, time and long use. A small, rural church in a small, rural backwater, noticed only because it was on the old coach road, one stage shy of Rostock. An obligatory stopping place for people with more important destinations and meetings and deals on their minds.

Years ago, a visiting musician had told the trumpet-maker of an instrument hanging up on the wall. It was probably a military instrument from the First World War, he had reasoned; there were many of those on the market. But here he was at eye level looking directly at a votive panel dated 1677, dedicated to a trumpeter killed in a duel, one Jacob Hintze. And there was his trumpet, still hanging up on one side

of the panel. On the other there used to be a sword, the pastor told him, but that had long since vanished. You'd steal a sword, but a trumpet...?

As his brain told him what his eyes saw, comprehension squeezed the trumpet-maker's heart. He nearly fell off the stepstool. Seventeenth century! No question. And here was an inscription, just where you would expect to find it on a trumpet made in the Imperial City of Nürnberg in the days of the Holy Roman Empire. Around the decorative garland on the bell he read:

MACHT WOLFF BIRCKHOLTZ IN NÜRNBERG 1650

Wolfgang Birckholtz he knew of: a famed maker of the period, one of the closeknit cadre of instrument-makers who produced the lion's share of the fine brass musical and military instruments of Europe.

But who in the world was Jacob Hintze?



*Jacob Hintze's trumpet hanging beside Elisabeth Bauchen's votive plaque*

## Chapter One

In which my oldest son shoves a quill into my hand and as good as dips it in the ink for me

*Sprich wahr, und beschäme den Teufel*  
Tell the truth and shame the devil

*Anonyme Sprichwort/Anonymous Saying*

“How are you feeling father?”

My eldest, Michael, was visiting from Wolfenbüttel; he’s a violinist there with the court ensemble. He sat me down at a table in the *Neuer Krug*, the post inn we own in Neu Heinde near Belitz, and looked me in the eyes.

“Fine. Just fine.”

“Are you sure? Come on, now.”

“Never better. Why do you ask?” I tried to lay on the old sincerity but he could see right through me. Always could. He knew. I’d never told him how my father had died, or his father before him—hadn’t told any of them—but he sensed that not everything about me was well.

“Be honest with me, papa.”

The place was silent; middle of the day with no lingering travellers. The silence stretched. Ticks of the bracket clock, creak of a board upstairs, whinny of a horse out in the back.

“I have a little pain now and again...”

“I know you do. I can see it.”

Silence again while he appraised me. I could see his mind working in his face; I could watch thoughts passing and a decision arriving with the slight nod of confirmation, long before he opened his mouth.

“Remember when we rode to Wolfenbüttel for my audition?” I nodded. God, that was years ago. He was fourteen then, and now he was... what... twenty-three. “Every day on that journey you would tell me the most amazing stories. Remember?”

“Oh, rubbish all of it. Lies. Keeping you amused over long stretches of track, that’s all.”

“Oh, right! Just like those yarns you tell around the tables in here of an evening. Rubbish as well, eh?”

“Well, what of it?” I answered defensively. I had a hint of what he was driving at, but I wasn’t sure I liked where he was going. “No harm in sharing a few memories with fellow travellers.”

“Memories? Not lies then?”

“Memories, damn you!”

He sighed. “Listen: you have a wonderful story locked up in you, papa.”

“Oh, come on! I’m nothing special.”

“What? Fighting in the war, sailing in ships, marching over ice, carrying secrets?”

Now he had me worried. I suppose over the years since I had retired from the Duke’s service I must have spilt a lot of yarns, kind of loose-lipped, but there are other things that should never be told. Or so I thought then.

“Am I really any more interesting than any other soldier who’s served his time? Survived as long as I have? Nothing makes me special.”

“Horseshit! A man who has spoken with princes, bandied words with kings. And if even half of it’s true, you owe it to us to tell it.”

“But I do tell it, in my own way.”

“*Write it down!* Write it down so we can all read it.”

“*Write?* No, no. I’m not a bookish sort of man.”

“Rubbish! The house is full of books...”

“...mostly your mother’s...”

“...and you read and write all the time. You know it.”

“Even so, I don’t have the time for such nonsense.” He was edging me into a corner, getting me on the defensive. No swordsman likes that. “Anyway, it’s far too busy around here.”

“I’ve already raised the idea with mama and the kids. They’re all for it.”

“Oh, have you now? You cheeky bastard!” I got all prepared to dig my toes in, blast his impudence. Ganging up on me, were they? I folded my arms over my chest. “So, now I won’t.”

“Oh? It is all lies and rubbish then? Just as you said. Everyone will know it’s all invention. I wouldn’t be surprised if they stopped listening to you...”

What a corner to be squeezed into, the clever little bugger. I sat there for a while realizing this weasel had me beaten. I was a bit angry at first—I hate to be beaten—but then I thought, why not? “Tell the truth and shame the devil”, as the saying goes.

“I’ll think about it,” was all I said to him. Damned if I’d surrender that quickly.

“Think quickly, Papa. You’re not as healthy as you...” I started to rise out of my chair. “No, stop! No protests. Don’t fool yourself, because you can’t fool me. Sit down, *please*. Write it now, or it won’t get written.”

“I’ve *told you* I’ll think about it. Now piss off!”

“I have to return to Wolfenbüttel in three days. Why don’t I see what you’ve done before I leave?”

“I said *piss off!*”

He was right, of course. So, here we go. I may be an innkeeper now, but I will always be a trumpeter. My name is Jacob Hintze. Sure, you see an innkeeper, but what about these fine cavalry whiskers and the goatee? A little grey now, I’ll admit, but my blue eyes are as sharp as ever. And I’ve still got a cavalry swagger about me, damn you. A trumpeter is not just a common soldier, and this host of yours is not a common innkeeper, as I will soon tell you. Sure, I was brought up on a farm and learned a lot about the ways of crops and cattle, but I was from a patrician family with our own coat of arms. You had to be well-born or you’d never get an education and work all your life in a duke’s service, as I did. So, don’t judge me by what you see now. It’s not what I like to do, truth to tell, but I’m too damned old and beaten up to do much else and, frankly, I’m not long for this world. Michael was right, blast him; when you’re under a sentence of death, as I am, it makes you want to tell your story, and I just hope I can get it done before it’s too late.

Me and my wife Elisabeth have kept the *Neuer Krug* for the past seventeen years, with the help of two of our sons and both daughters. The other two boys are out in the world, Michael in Wolfenbüttel and Jürgen far east somewhere. The *Neuer Krug* was willed to me in 1658 for good service in the old Duke’s army; that’s Adolf Friedrich, Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, may God bless his memory.<sup>i</sup> So, our family runs the inn, giving beds to you people going on your high and mighty ways to grand places, watering your horses, serving you a not-bad ale.

There’s more to our living than just running the inn, though. Once the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648 the House of Thurn und Taxis established the postal service in Mecklenburg, although the bickering over routes and jurisdiction would sicken you.<sup>ii</sup> Still, that was when places like ours became regular stopping spots. Once you’ve got a reliable service for the mail, you’re going to need changes of horses, beds, meals, all the facilities. We don’t hurt for a *Thaler* or two, that’s certain. So I serve you, I beat the bugs out of your bed sheets, I keep the fire going, and I send you on your way, so maybe you won’t think too badly of me, if you think of me at all.

But I’ll always be a trumpeter. That was my profession for a good portion of my fifty-two years. Fifty-two isn’t a bad age to get to, when you think of the total shit storm of the Thirty Years War, especially if you were right in the middle of it as I was, and watching your comrades being blown to blood foam and gristle in front of your eyes. I’ve peed myself like a baby a few times, filled my hose on occasion, and galloped

away screaming. I can bet you've never had some fellow's guts shot in your face like a bowl of tripes, nor still have a scar above your right eye from the piece of his ribcage that came with it. Or broken your arm so badly the bone was sticking out, all white and frightening, until the sawbones shoved it back in, slapped on the wood splints, and bound it up with linen.

*Feldtrompeter*, that's what I was during the war; a field trumpeter. It was my duty to pass battle orders from the officers to the cavalry by trumpet signals; no easy job for two reasons. Firstly, you ever try playing *anything* while on horseback in the middle of a battle? Your mount shying under you, the blasts of arquebuses, the yelling and screaming, horses neighing and everybody wound up like clock weights. Of course you haven't. That for a start; then add the whole range of signals you had to know by heart: orders to saddle-up, trot forward, wheel, charge... and, yes, withdraw as well. Can you imagine for an eye-blink what would happen if you messed it up? That's why a field trumpeter isn't just anybody; it's critical that he's intelligent, educated, cool under pressure and capable of both taking orders and relaying them. Not just by signals either; there are written notes and then there's the spoken word. Messages have to go at the gallop between divisions, and quite often once they've read the written note they'll turn and you ask for 'the word'. Your *Feldtrompeter* is privy to the highest level of planning and strategy; he stands in the tent when the higher-ups are discussing their operations, so he follows the ebb and flow of battle and war. What's written in haste on the notes you shove into your scrip is the shorthand for the discussions that have gone back and forth.

But all that is not even the half of what some trumpeters do, as I will tell in due course.

So, if you hobnob with the high and mighty, you had better be one of them. Either you're noble born or you carry your humble roots very well. Still, I wonder: If they had known just how 'noble born' I really wasn't, maybe they wouldn't have been quite so friendly. My father was a patrician, and that may mean a lot in some societies, but in the German lands of my day, the title could be quite... flexible. He owned the land we farmed, a decent enough house and all the home comforts, but still we were close to the earth as it were. Not above getting our hands dirty if we had to, especially those times of year when farming takes on a new frantic tempo. Water under the bridge when you think of what happened to the farm, the house, the family, the livelihood...

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Thirty Years War; that's what it's come to be called.<sup>iii</sup> I've heard it called the Eighty Years War and that's more realistic. It was eighty

years since Spain and France and the German-speaking countries first started having at each other over the stupidity of the body of Jesus Christ. Well, it wasn't really a fight over Christ's body at all, was it? Of course not! Whether some conjuring trick over a bit of stale bread and a sip of cheap rotgut signifies anything at all, is not the point. The point is that greedy, brutal bastards in positions of power will take any cause and dirty it to their advantage. Sure, it began with the great schism between the Holy Roman Church and the fire that Martin Luther lit in Wittenburg, but it was soon taken over by the dynasts: Habsburgs, Bourbons, Dutch, Swedes, English, all the little German states, the whole of God-damned Christianity tearing at each other's throats. I shouldn't criticize, though; I was in it from my teens, played my part in it all, and profited mightily from it.

The Treaty of Westphalia was supposed to end it all. I was at the Battle of Jankau a couple of years before that, and by then everybody had had enough; just too impoverished and exhausted to continue if the truth be known. But kings and emperors and bishops signing parchments cannot make hatreds evaporate just like that. People will carry on hating other people until the end of the world. So, with all the horror and violence that's happened to me since I signed up to fight with Swedes and Scots and God knows what other mercenary garbage against the Emperor and his Holy Roman God-damned church, it's probably been better than the pigs and cows and bloodshed that would have been my whole, and quite short, life on what used to be our farm.

Well, enough of that. You'll hear more before my story's done.

I was born in April of 1624. My family lived in a fine house in the Duchy of Mecklenburg, not far from Belitz. It was larger than most with the exception of the places owned by the really rich and influential, but like them we had glass windows, which cost a great deal but were so much better than stretched cow skin or wooden shutters. There was a necessary cupboard indoors as well, something you didn't find in many farmhouses. Even though built on the old-fashioned style, the house was roomy, and had a first floor.<sup>iv</sup> We didn't have to share it with the livestock like our tenants did. We kept cows and pigs, so there was a lot of butchery and dairy to take to market. And we had horses, which we mostly rented out to the postal service. Thurn and Taxis didn't operate in the north in those days, of course, but our own less efficient service took up the slack. Changing horses was a good source of extra income, and for me it was an early introduction to riding, and the care and upkeep of horseflesh. I was around horses a lot whilst growing up, and it stood me in good stead later.

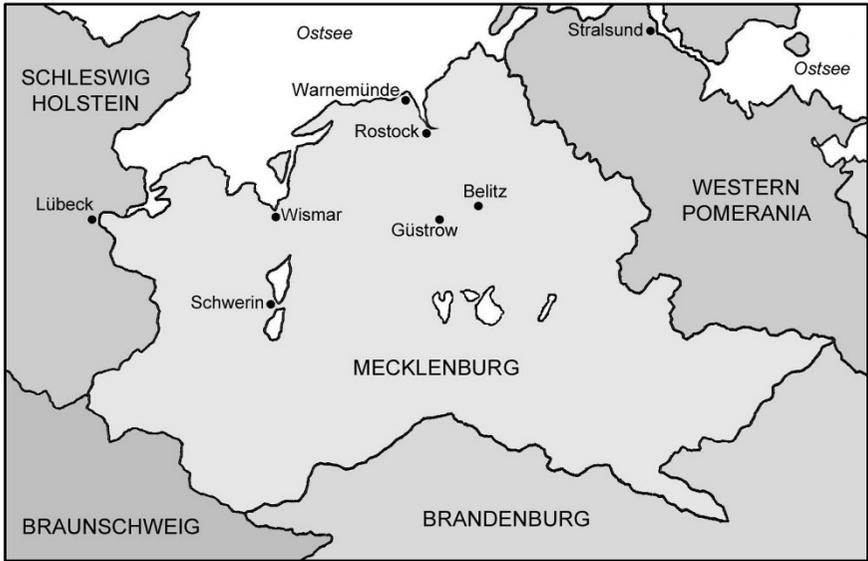
Although Güstrow was closer, our favoured market town was

Rostock on the Warne, a little way inland from the Ostsee. It's the bigger town and the wares are better and more varied. Being a patrician and landowner, my father had a lot of business in Rostock. The men he met were mostly in the trades—wool, grain, general merchandise and so on—and most had a hand in shipping, because Rostock was a Hanseatic Port, even though the League, as such, had fallen to bits through greed and selfishness. The Sound Dues that the Danish had imposed on any ship passing through the Øresund—the best and most direct way into the Ostsee from the west—were an extra cost burden, and especially irksome to the Swedes. But there was still some pride in saying Hansa Rostock if someone asked where you were from.

There was a lot father had to deal with, what with loans, payments for produce, the setting of tariffs and the never-ending debate over the detested 'soldier tax', where the occupying Swedish forces imposed payments from their 'hosts'. All the town men were continually fearful that the fighting would swing their way again, and that the fragile kind of peace that held in the towns, at least, would be thrown into the fire. It had happened some years back when that Papist bastard von Wallenstein kicked out the princes of Mecklenburg-Güstrow and Mecklenburg-Schwerin because they had sided with Denmark, and then confiscated Wismar. Their father had divided Mecklenburg between them some years back.

Von Wallenstein's hold only lasted a few years; there was the fiasco of a raid on Stralsund and the pathetic incompetence of the Spanish fleet in the Ostsee to be praised for that. The Swedes soon saw to it that Protestant rule was returned to the region; Swedish rule, in essence. The Swedes were all-powerful. If anything like that happened again you might as well kiss goodbye to any of the agricultural and mercantile agreements the aldermen might make. And they all knew a mighty girth strap was tightening around the leaner and leaner flanks of the northern German lands, and what little stability we had was in the past, and the days of what little was left were numbered.

*Jacob the Trumpeter*



*Jacob Hintze's Mecklenburg*

## Chapter Two

In which my oldest son checks on progress and then leaves  
me to get on with it

*Da ich ein Kind war, da redete ich wie ein Kind und war klug wie ein Kind  
und hatte kindische Anschläge; da ich aber ein Mann ward, tat ich ab, was  
kindisch war*

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I  
thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish  
things

*Korinther/Corinthians 13:11*

“Oh yes, this is good.” Michael sat down opposite my desk in the office of the inn, and read quickly through what I had written so far. “Lot of historical detail. Political stuff. Could get boring.”

“You need to know what was going on. It’s not just about me!”

“But politics...”

“It’s what I saw. I won’t vouch for the accuracy of any it, but if you want me to tell you my story, you’ll have to see it the way I saw it.”

“Exactly. Just writing down the truth for the family.”

“Truth? If you want truth you’d better get a scholar. I only know what I saw and heard as a lowly servant to the high and mighty. Truth!”

“Well, the truth as you saw it, naturally. Nobody else is going to read it, are they?”

“Hope not. Give me shit for getting stuff all wrong...” I was a bit defensive, having never written much of anything like this before, even though I’d had the schooling and could do it in several languages if I had to. “Do you want me to write this or not? Damned if I’ll throw what I’ve already written into the fire.”

“Yes, yes, of course. It’s just that I’m keen for you to cut to the chase.”

“Well, I will. From here on it’ll be all about me. That make you happy?”

“Papa, just reading what you have written so far makes me happy. You know that.” He paused and then smiled. “So, are you going to write about the bone now?”

“Oh, you and that stinking bone! Of course I will.”

“Good. And now I’m saddled and packed and ready to leave for Wolfenbüttel.”

“God speed my son,” I said as I put the papers back in their folder and walked him to the door. “Come home again soon.”

The whole family was out there in the yard, waiting to hug him and wave him goodbye. We saw him into the distance, and then I went in again, sat down, picked up the quill and dipped it.

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<sup>i</sup> Adolf Friedrich, *Hertzog* of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (1588-1658) ruled from 1592 until 1628 and again from 1631 until his death. In this translation, the title Duke has been used throughout.

<sup>ii</sup> Thurn und Taxis was a noble German house with Italian roots that ran the postal service throughout the Holy Roman Empire, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>iii</sup> This editor has no intention of being caught in the crossfire of the apostrophe wars. In this edition, the Thirty Years War does quite well without one.

<sup>iv</sup> The first floor was accessible by stairs or a ladder from the ground floor, which was often composed of rammed dirt sometimes skimmed over with tiles or cement.