The sun was just rising at 6:30 in the town square of Hanover when the bells started ringing. Almost immediately, people began pouring out of homes and into the streets in mild confusion, followed by abundant excitement. The light November breeze and the chilliness that hung in the air were all but forgotten as the soldiers came into view. All the dread that everyone had been feeling was gone, and there was only the joy of reunion left. Everything seemed perfect.

Rosine Brückner opened her eyes slowly. The long and loud sound of bells ringing pierced her brain, and she was awake, suddenly. For a moment she couldn’t think of anything- nothing except what she thought of every day, from the time she awoke to the time she finally closed her eyes: Michael, and his brother, Gunther. And as she did, she tried to push them out of her mind like she did every day. She had gotten used to it, too, and fairly good at going for short periods of time without fretting. But how could she? How could she not worry, when she had stopped receiving letters from them over two years ago? She had always assumed that they were too busy to write, but how could even her fiancé be too busy to send her even a quick note?

Then Rosine realized what seemed out of place- the bells. She hadn’t heard the church bells ringing since the war started, four years ago. Rosine sucked in a deep breath at her realization. The war was over! Rosine dressed quickly, and ran out of the house into a flurry of excitement. There were people all over the square, pushing and shoving, trying to get a view of the returning soldiers. First came the generals and captains on their horses. The others marched proudly but wearily, with a hint of sadness that would never leave their eyes. Rosine swore out loud- something she had learned from Gunther- and turned away, as she couldn’t get through to see.

Then another idea hit her. Rosine turned and raced back along the streets to the stable. She snuck in quietly, as not to be seen, but then again, no one was there to see her. She silently let herself into the stall of one of the horses and put a halter on him. The doors were all locked, so she couldn’t get any tack, but it hardly mattered. Using a bale of hay as a launch pad, Rosine swung herself onto the horse’s back, and they raced off, in a flurry of legs and hair- another thing Gunther had taught her before he left.

Now that she was on horseback, Rosine rode through the crowd easily; people were more than happy to get out of the way of the horse going by. She scanned the rows of soldiers, looking for the two brothers. For every row that went by without them, Rosine’s heart sank a little more. Finally the last few soldiers paraded by, and Gunther and Michael weren’t with them. The joyous music that was playing (perhaps in Rosine’s head, perhaps not) was replaced by a slow sad funeral march as the wagons went by with the dead in them. *No,* Rosine thought. *They’re not dead. They… I must have missed them went I went to the stable! Of course! That’s it!*

But Rosine didn’t move from where she was. Something kept her sitting there, motionless on her horse as the wagons rolled by, one after the other. She peered over the tops into the caskets of dead bodies, but didn’t see them. Finally, in all desperateness, she rode up to an officer standing in the middle of the street. Trying to sound as brave as possible, she said, “Excuse me, sir?”

The officer turned around and stared up at her in surprise. “Um… yes, miss?”

Rosine took a deep breath. “I’m looking for… Gunther and Michael Schröder?”

The officer consulted his sheet. “Miss, Privates Gunther and Michael Schröder died three years ago. I’m sorry. Are you a relative of theirs or something?”

Rosine bit her lip. “Fiancé,” she finally mumbled. The officer began to look uncomfortable. “Um… where would they be?” She asked finally, unable to deny the inevitable.

The officer looked at his sheet once again. He frowned, and then took a breath. “Had… had the Schröders died heroes’ deaths, their bodies would’ve been sent back immediately. However,”

The officer was cut off by a young boy, no more than 14, who came skidding to a halt in front of Rosine. “Rosine Brückner?” he asked uncertainly.

Rosine stared at him. “That’s me,” she replied, just as uncertainly.

The boy shifted his feet nervously. “I have a letter for you from Captain Peter Schönemann.” He drew a thick envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Rosine. He hesitated for a second, and then took off down the street. Rosine slid her finger under the seal and tore the envelope open. She saw that there were in fact two letters inside. She pulled the first one out, and read it aloud:

*“Miss Rosine Brückner,*

*I write to you with a heavy heart, knowing that this letter will not be easy for you to read. I write today to inform you that Michael Schröder was shot and killed along with his brother Gunther Schröder on August 14th, 1914 for desertion of the German Army in France.*

*I understand that you were very close to the two brothers, and as they have no remaining family, I opted to send this letter to you. I have enclosed a final letter written from Private Michael to you, in which he describes in more detail the-“*

Rosine broke off not wanting to read any more of the Captain’s letter out loud, or at all. Instead, she whispered to the officer, who was still standing beside her. “*Where are they? Where can I find their bodies?”* Her voice was tight, and she was almost choking on held-back tears. The officer looked at her sympathetically. He beckoned her to follow him, and set off at a brisk pace down the road to one of the last wagons. She swung off of the horse, and when her legs started to give way from underneath her, the officer reached out and steadied her. She nodded gratefully and stepped over to the wagon, the officer keeping a watchful eye on her.

There were two bodies lying on the floor of the wagon, covered in black cloth. Rosine closed her eyes, and pulled the cloth away. Lying side by side were Gunther and Michael, dressed in their uniforms. Other than the fact that they had dirt on their faces and blood on the foreheads where they had been shot, they could’ve been sleeping. Rosine looked up from them and turned to the officer with a tear-streaked face.

“I want to take them back,” she said to him. “They may not a get a… an official… service for a soldier, but they deserve a nice funeral, because they were *good people*. I don’t know what they did to get themselves shot, or why they deserted, but whatever it was, they didn’t deserve to be killed! They deserve a nice funeral! It’s the least I can do for them, after they did everything for me. They taught me how to live. Let me take them back.” Rosine closed her eyes for a long time, and took a shuddering breath. The officer looked like he wanted to argue. Rosine shook her head. “*Please,”* she said.

The officer hesitated a moment longer, before finally nodding. “I believe that that can be arranged.” Rosine sighed in relief, and looked back down at Michael. “Here’s my address,” he said, handing her a slip of paper with some words scrawled on it. “Write me when you’re ready to do it.” He hesitated a moment. “My name is Klaus Eberhardt. It was good to meet you.” He turned away.

Rosine looked up once more. “Thank you Mr. Eberhardt,” she said softly.

He turned back to her smiling. “You may call me Klaus,” he told her.

Rosine smiled back, “Okay, Klaus. Thank you for everything.” It was only after he had gone that she realized that Michael had said the same thing to her after she had met him the first time.