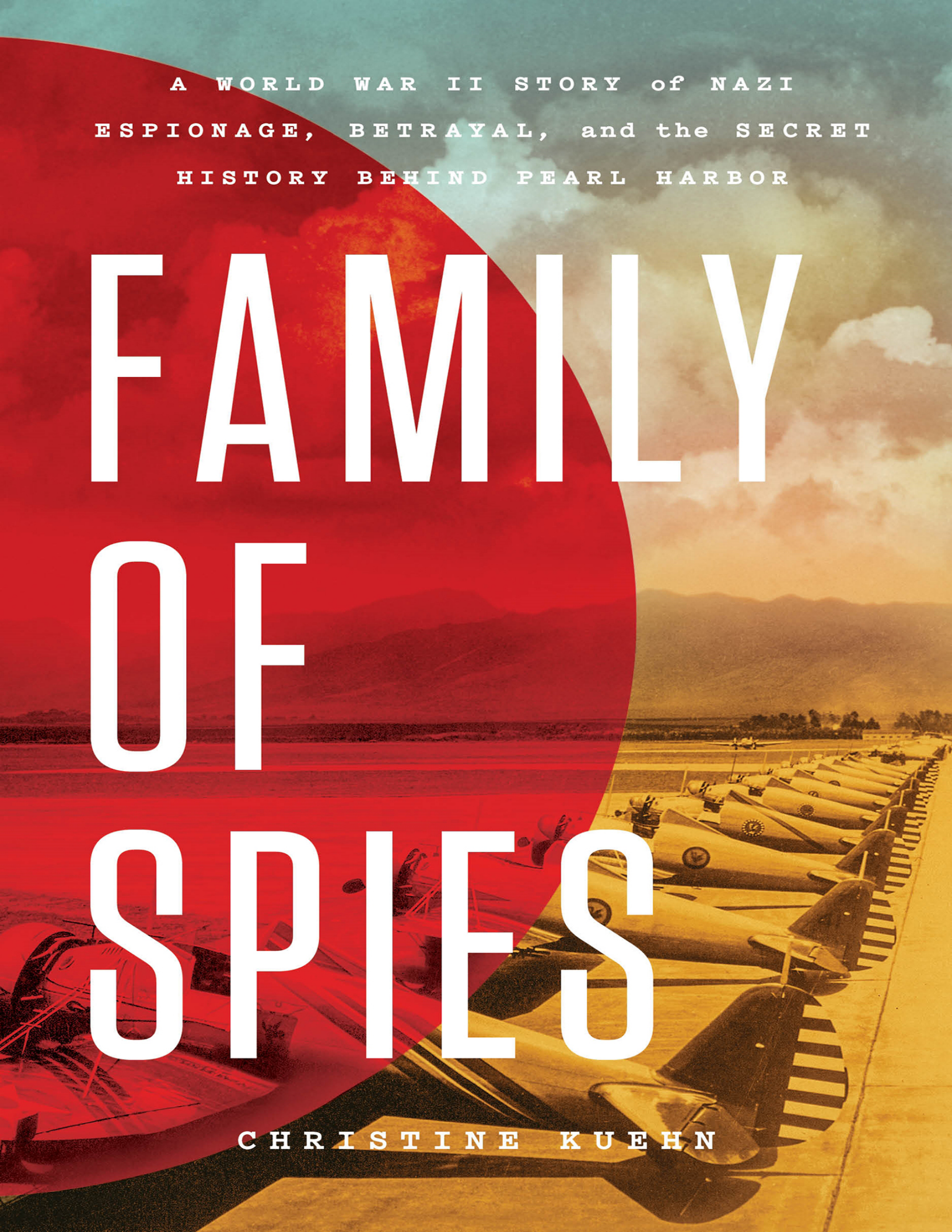
A WORLD WAR II STORY of NAZI ESPIONAGE, BETRAYAL, and the SECRET HISTORY BEHIND PEARL HARBOR

FAMILY OF SPIES



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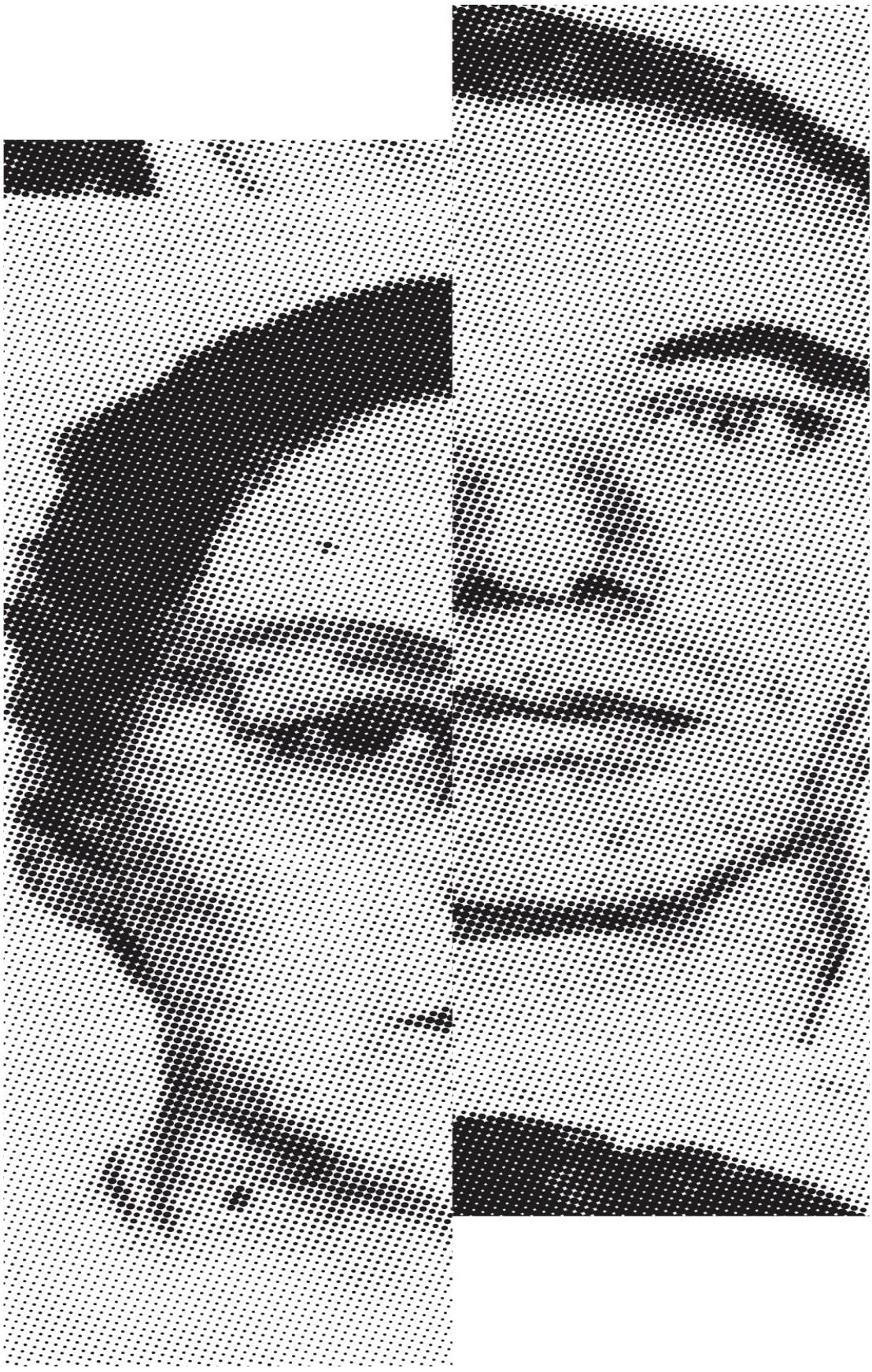

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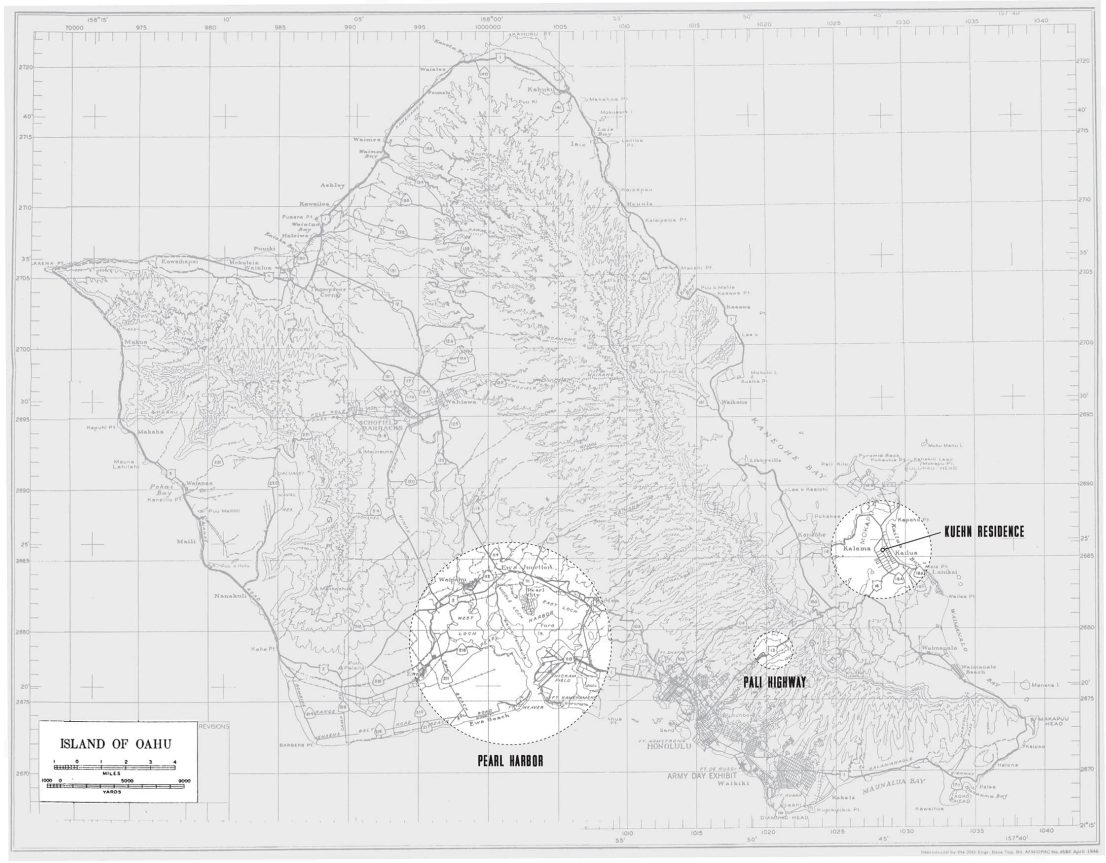
BEHIND PEARL HARBOR

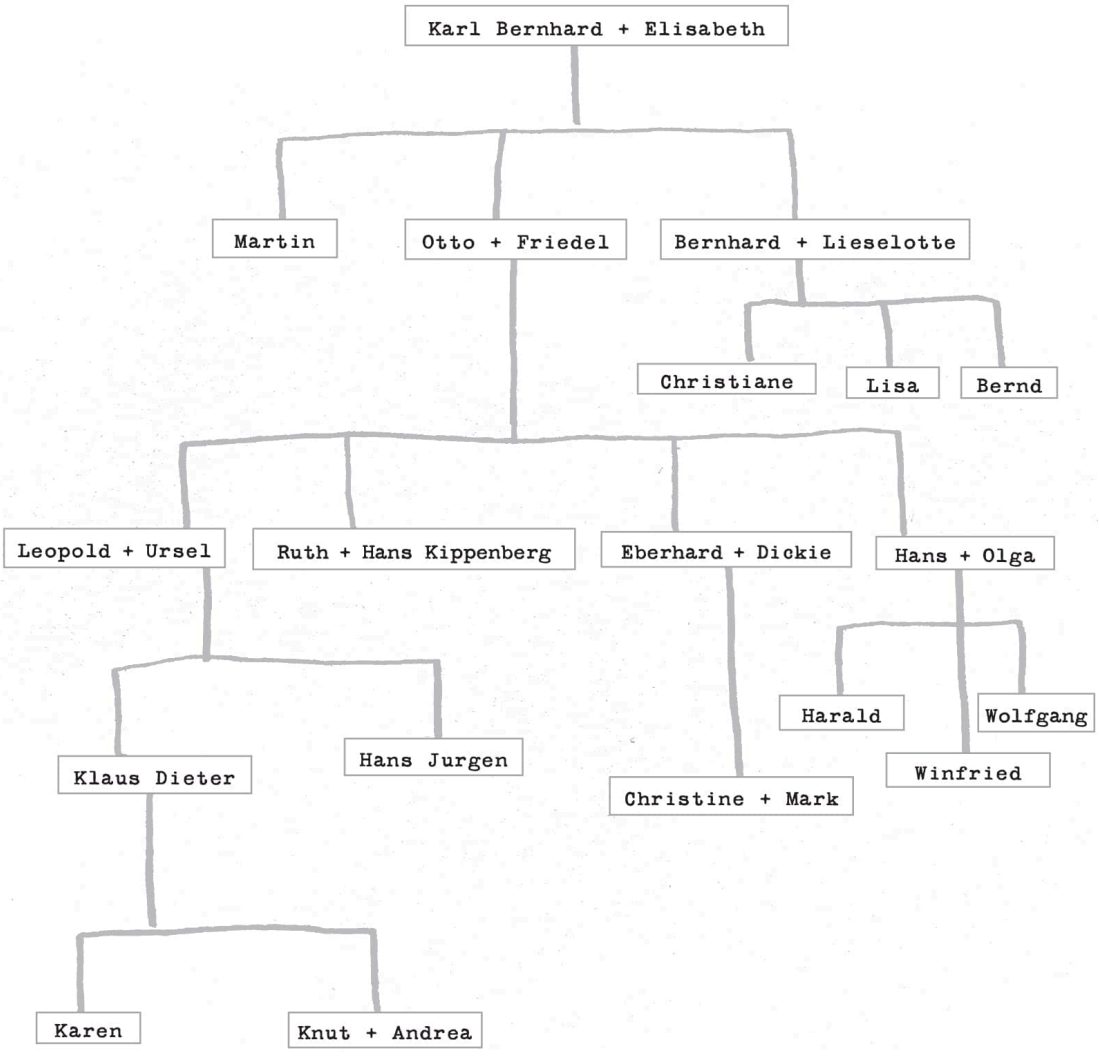
CHRISTINE KUEHN

CELADON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

For my children—you can't choose your family, but you can choose the kind of person you want to be and what footprint you want to leave on this world. Start with love, the rest falls into place.


KUEHN RESIDENCE
PALI HIGHWAY
PEARL HARBOR
ISLAND OF OAHU
MILES
YARDS
HONOLULU
ARMY DAY EXHIBIT
MAUNALUA BAY
KANEOHE BAY

KUEHN FAMILY TREE



Description

PROLOGUE

A heavy thud jarred the passengers as the wheels of the Lufthansa Boeing 707 touched the runway at Munich Airport in the winter of 1964. Most had been nodding in and out of consciousness during the nine-hour flight from New York. The roar of the reverse thrusters snapped them out of their slumber.

When the jet finally pulled to a halt on the tarmac, a handsome, middle-aged woman got up from her seat and grabbed a bag from the overhead. She uncrumpled her jacket and shuffled along with the other passengers to the front of the plane. A cold February wind was all that greeted her as she stepped carefully down the metal stairs and then over glassy pavement to the gate. She made her way to the rental car counter, picked up the keys, and found a German automobile waiting for her.

A three-hour ride followed, the road weaving through steep mountain valleys, the slopes covered with gigantic spruce, maple, and fir trees. Toward the end, she found herself near the southeastern border of West Germany, on the outskirts of the ancient Bavarian Forest. She pulled up to her destination, a small two-story structure that housed several apartments. Darkness had blanketed the area hours earlier, leaving only a murky glow from the moon to light the sidewalk as she headed to the door. Even through

the shadows the building looked run-down, white paint peeling from the gutters and trim.

The key was under the mat as promised. The family had arranged everything in good German order. She slid it into the deadbolt.

The small flat was pitch-black, a stale odor of cigarette smoke enveloping her as she stepped through the door. Wasting no time, she walked to the bookshelf leaning against the far wall and began pulling the contents off the wooden planks. She leafed through a manila folder filled with old newspaper clippings, then dropped them into a box at her feet. More followed. Dust wafted into the air as she took several thick, hardback reports down from their place, untouched for years, and let them fall into a second box. Photo albums, bundles of letters, family papers—all were tossed into the containers with hardly a second look. By the time she was finished, there were five cardboard boxes packed with items from the now empty shelves. She bent down, lifted one, and brought it outside.

Headlights suddenly cut through the darkness as a car pulled into the quiet lot and parked next to her. A man, slow-moving and slightly built, pulled himself out of the vehicle. It was her younger brother. They hugged for a long time, the man sobbing as the woman consoled him.

The remaining boxes were loaded into her car and the two of them drove together to a nearby field. There, they reversed the process, carrying the boxes out to the grass and piling them on top of each other. When they were done, the woman sprayed the pile with lighter fluid, pulled out a book of matches, struck one, then tossed it on top of one of the boxes.

The fire started slowly at first, spreading methodically from one side of the box toward the top, then engulfing the next one, until the blaze had overtaken everything. The flames pierced the quiet with a hypnotic, licking sound as they flickered over the cardboard and found the documents inside. Brother and sister watched, their faces illuminated in pale yellow, saying nothing as the history of their family went up in a bonfire. She grabbed his hand and held it until everything was reduced to ash.

The woman's name was Ruth, and she was my aunt. Her brother was my uncle Hans. That night, the two burned our family records in an abandoned field in the Bavarian Forest in hopes of ridding themselves and their relatives of a tragedy that had followed them for much of their lives. Thirty years before, in 1930s Berlin, Ruth and Hans's parents, my grandparents, had set off on a reckless pursuit of wealth and power that helped shape the path of World War II and shattered our family forever.

Ruth had always known this day was coming. She dreaded it, I'm sure, but part of her must have looked forward to it, too. Perhaps she thought then, *I am free. We are all finally free.*

She was wrong.

1

“DON’T SAY ANYTHING”

When you’re young, you believe the stories your father tells you. And my father—lovable but imposing, a strapping six feet three inches tall with a thick, bristly mustache and a rumbling Sergeant Schultz accent that frightened my friends half to death—loved to tell stories. His family had moved to Hawaii from Germany when he was a child, but his strange way of pronouncing words never quite disappeared. Our family dogs, Nase and Scheu, were anointed with German names, a nod to his heritage, but there wasn’t much else he divulged that would give us a feel for his formative years.

Instead, he delighted in spooling out fantastic, almost unbelievable tales of alligators appearing out of the weeds in the back of our yard in Jacksonville, Florida, and attempting to snatch our dog before my father wrestled him away. Or the one that involved a small boy wandering alone on the side of the highway and rescued by a brave tall man (my father, of course). And because I loved him, I nodded along. My father would sit next to me on the couch or shake his head as we drove to the supermarket.

“Crissie, you’ll never guess what happened to me today,” he’d begin. I would stop whatever I was doing and settle in. The stories, I knew from experience, took time.

“I was heading down the highway, and I saw a small figure up ahead in the median,” he continued. “It looked weird, you know? So I pulled over. Crissie, do you know what was in the median?”

A toddler, I thought. There always seemed to be a toddler, though the stories were never quite the same, details appearing and disappearing throughout the years, the toddler’s age and appearance fluctuating. But a few things did stay the same. The child was always a boy, alone, abandoned, crawling along the highway or dumped by the side of some lonely road. And my father was always the hero, there to rescue the lost soul.

At first I thought the stories were true. And then I began to understand they were something else: fantasies, lovingly embroidered by my father’s considerable imagination. But why? Why these stories and not memories of Berlin, or funny things that my siblings and I did when we were growing up? What added to the confusion was that my father never smiled when recounting his adventures, or laughed at the end, or gave a single hint that they were absurd. He treated the tales as though they were as real as the headlines in the *Florida Times-Union* the paperboy brought every day, landing in the driveway with a thud.

That these stories were being told in the place of other, more painful ones was only hinted at. Once, at Christmas, his granddaughter had learned to sing “O Tannenbaum” in her kindergarten music class. As she stood in front of the twinkling lights of the freshly decorated tree and sang to us all, the lyrics to the ancient folk song flowed from her high-pitched, cherubic voice, in German. I glanced at my father. There were tears rolling down his face. I felt my breath catch in my throat. It was so unlike him. When she finished the song, he walked to his young granddaughter, crouched down, took her in his arms, and wept some more. My siblings and I looked on, not knowing what to say.

When talking about his past, my dad described his parents—his whole childhood, really—in vague, whitewashed snippets, offering little detail. The stories, as they came down to me, reminded me of old-timey telegrams: *I lived on Oahu, in Hawaii, until I graduated from Punahou High School in 1944*. Stop. *I joined the army and fought in World War II*. Stop. *I was sent to Okinawa and earned a Bronze Star*. Stop. It was the same when describing his family: *My father served as a naval officer before dying in a car crash*. Stop. End of discussion.

Occasionally, tiny details slipped out, but they were mostly about other people or the larger historical forces that sent him to war. "I went to the South Pacific," my father told me once. "Because if American soldiers with German names were captured by the Nazis, they suffered mightily for betraying the homeland. They told me if a U.S. soldier with German blood was captured by the Reich," he said, his face blank, "they were badly tortured."

But then it was back to his telegrams. *I served again in Korea, then moved to New Jersey and married my first wife*. Stop. *We had two sons, but eventually divorced*. Stop. *I married your mom and we settled in Jacksonville*. Stop. *She had three children from an earlier marriage*. Stop. *You were born in 1963*. Stop.

It had all led him to a quiet, normal life. My mom was a teacher where I attended elementary school, a Girl Scout leader for my sisters, and the center of our home. Dad worked for an insurance company, played golf every Saturday, and coached my softball team. My sisters and brother from my mom's first marriage were much older and out of the house by the time I started middle school. For much of my time growing up it was just the three of us, Mom, Dad, and me. We were close.

I spent hours alone with both my parents, especially my mom. We talked about everything, her childhood, her work, her family. She grew up in a small town in South Carolina, with an enormous extended family. When we visited, it felt like everyone was some distant cousin. Looking back, I realized my mom's family filled the void of my dad's nonexistent one.

My father kept us away from his first family. He spoke very little about his wife and kids from the earlier marriage, and they had no contact. A picture of his two sons, framed in his office, was all we knew of them.

Life tumbled forward. In our family we rarely spoke about my dad's past. But on a sultry and dull June evening in the summer of 1976, his past arrived at our door. I was eating dinner with my mom and dad when the doorbell rang.

I jumped up to answer it, hoping, I'm sure, it was a friend from the neighborhood wanting to hang out. Instead, it was a man, tall and wiry, much like my dad.

"Can I help you?" I asked, a little sheepishly.

"Is your dad home?" he responded.

I had no idea who this tall stranger with a bristly mustache was, so I ran back to the kitchen.

"Hey, Dad, there's a man at the front door, he's looking for you. Says you know him."

Dad got up quickly and disappeared down the hallway. When he got to the door, he recognized the man immediately. It was almost like looking in a mirror.

On the other side of the screen door was a man in his twenties, fair-skinned, tall like my father, his face obscured by the cross-hatching of the metal.

"Don't say anything about my family—they don't know!" were the first words out of my dad's mouth as he stepped outside and closed the door behind him. He was talking about his parents, brothers, and sister. Then he hugged the man he hadn't seen in more than ten years. It was his eldest son, my half brother, who years later would tell me the details of their reunion.

I didn't piece it together at the time, but in retrospect, that moment was the first glimpse that my dad had secrets.

I later learned he hadn't always been so guarded and cryptic about his past. He had married relatively young, at age twenty-three. He told his new

bride everything—his tragic upbringing, the sins of the family. He was young and in love. There was nothing to hide.

They had two sons and led a quiet, happy life in the suburbs, the tragedies of his past finally vanquished to a place in the recesses of his memory. But as the years rolled by, things began to slowly unravel. By the time the boys were out of diapers the screaming fights between my dad and his first wife were becoming commonplace.

The arguments were ugly and heated, both sides hurling insults like bombs. Toward the end, when they'd burned through whatever love they had left for each other, his wife took to hitting him where it hurt most, invoking the past.

"Nazi!" she would yell at him. "Go back to Germany, where you belong!"

It had to be a crushing insult. A painful legacy he confided to a person he loved had been turned against him, dredging up the agonizing memories of his past. He wouldn't make that mistake again.

As my mom battled cancer when I was in high school in the late 1970s, we spent our time together talking about her hopes and dreams for me. I could tell she was determined to pass along a lifetime of advice in the short time she had left. Our talks never revealed anything nefarious about my father's past or his family. If she had known something, she would have told me. She lost her battle with cancer in 1982, when I was only eighteen.

★ ★ ★

KENSINGTON, MARYLAND

Eighteen years after that unexpected visit from my estranged half brother, on a Friday afternoon in the summer of 1994, I stood up from the desk in my office at the children's radio station in suburban Maryland where I worked and headed to the parking garage. I found my minivan and headed home. Two car seats were visible as I glanced in the rearview mirror. Behind me on the floor somewhere was undoubtedly some mess of long-forgotten Rice

Krispies Treats, candy, and fur, hidden away in some impossible-to-reach nook.

The years had quickly come and gone. A decade before, I'd been a sorority girl at the University of South Carolina, already contemplating my dream job as a journalist, in which I'd chase down the bad guys and expose their misdeeds. Uncover mysteries.

I kept a picture hanging in my office from that time: my dad and I posing at a Greek formal during parents' weekend. He was sporting a jacket and tie, highball in one hand, pipe in the other. I had my arm around him, dressed in my favorite bright red dress, my blond hair coiffed to impossibly big heights as was protocol for girls in the 1980s. In the photo I'm beaming. I was quite proud to be the daughter of Eberhard Kuehn.

My first job out of college was as a reporter at a CBS affiliate in South Carolina. Marriage to my boyfriend, Mark (a Yankee, much to the dismay of my southern-rooted family), followed a few years later. Two boys arrived, and after that a daughter, along with an office job and a move to the land of white picket fences, finely trimmed lawns, and preschool carpools.

I pulled into the driveway of our modest home and walked up the steps. "Mommy!" the boys shouted as they ran down the hall to greet me, leaping into my arms and clinging as if I'd been gone for months. It was a routine I never grew tired of. This evening they were particularly excited. It was pizza night. Every Friday the neighbors gathered at the home of one of our friends on Grant Avenue, ordered plain and pepperoni pies, sipped a few cocktails, and watched the kids run around the yard shrieking at some villainous enemy imperceptible to adults. We talked about world events, but with a light touch. The wars and disasters and controversies seldom pierced our suburban bubble in this unnoticed corner of the world.

After sundown, the darkness began to spark with fireflies. We said our goodbyes and walked home under the streetlights. Our boys, aged two and three, sprinted ahead of us. As we headed inside I snagged a handful of mail and sifted through it as I made my way toward the kitchen. Mostly junk and a couple of bills. One letter, though, looked different. It was addressed to