

Trouble in Teutonia

Chapter One: Full Moon

Cold. It gripped his every bone and muscle as he pushed onwards. A confusion of smells hung in his way. Cinnamon. Garlic. Aniseed. Then puffs of steam from the carousel whooshed through the freezing evening air and obscured his way forward. A waft from the cauldron of spicy alcohol pounced on him. After the hot steam, cold frosty air penetrated his clothes. He clenched his fists and quickened his pace as the girl disappeared into the crowd.

Gone.

Now he saw her again. She darted around a stall that danced with wooden puppets. Her hair flew, red and defiant, from under her distinctive fur hat: a fox escaping from a wolf. He brushed past a row of Christmas trees, their needles pricking his unprotected cheek like the swords of an army of tin soldiers.

The girl did not know he was following her. He doubted she could see him at all. She dived into the dark between two stalls. He followed, but found only the sad smile of the barrel organ man who'd planted himself near the warmth of a wood- fire grill. The gnome-faced character turned the organ handle and music wheezed forth. A shake of the old head seemed to say, *there's nothing you can do. It's fate.*

But he wasn't going to give up. He didn't know why it was so crucial – it just was. He had to find her. If he didn't... He shuddered. With new determination, he squeezed his way between the two stalls with their splintered pine timbers. He left the glow of light from the wood fires, the fairy lights, and the twinkling lanterns behind. The warmth and the jolly cacophony faded into a dark, silent chill. There she was! Running ahead, a figure silhouetted against the pine-green night sky. The frozen silence was broken by her footsteps, light and urgent. He sensed her breathing, strong but full of fear.

'Grrrrrrrauuuuu...'. The sound came from back there. Something inhuman. Something crazed.

The girl turned her head. Her features lit up, edged in silver as the moon emerged from a blue-black cloud. She stared in his direction. He saw the look of horror on her face.

Her scream shot through the night sky like a silver bullet. She was staring at someone – or something – right behind him.