

A tale of reincarnation and a love that transcends time

A ghost cannot get over something that happened in eighteenth-century Germany.

DAVID was exhausted, after riding his horse at top speed for miles. When they arrived at the hospital, an old, decrepit structure, he dismounted and took a water-soaked Lisa from the horse. His head swam with turmoil and guilt as he climbed disintegrating wooden steps.

Yet thoughts of Lisa's welfare took priority as he carried her in. Part of the muddy riding cape dragged along the ground as his hands clung to her cold, pale body.

"Please! Someone, help my wife! She fell into the river! Somebody!"

A nurse arrived and took Lisa from David's icy grip. He raced down to tie his horse and took two steps at a time coming up. A chill autumn breeze blew past, dead leaves blowing in circles as the wind whistled through. He shook off the cold as he came back up to the building, scraping river mud from his black boots before entering again.

Not able to sit, David paced around in the waiting area, held his head and mumbled repeatedly: "Oh my God, what have I done...what have I done...oh my God..."

The hospital held the stench of mold and death. A fire crackled, but David had never felt so cold.

After what seemed like hours, the sun dropping closer to the horizon, a doctor came into the room and instructed David to sit on a worn wooden seat. The chair cracked and complained, as David was no small man.

The doctor looked middle-aged, losing his hair and sporting a long, full beard; stroking it often in thought.

The physician sat in another seat holding a parchment and quill. He used an ink bottle he'd placed on a nearby table that also looked to be quite well-used, and wobbled. Each time lifting the quill tip out, the ink pot slid precariously closer to the edge.

The older man wrote something down before questioning David.

"What is your first and last name?"

"David Hauer."

The bearded physician scribbled. "Sir, how did this happen?"

Now David had a new fear, adding to the already terrifying situation, and hadn't thought what to say if asked about it. He needed to choose his words carefully, although it was difficult to control the quaking and stammering.

"My wife and I—"

"Her name?" The doctor dipped his quill once again and shook it before continuing to jot down David's heartfelt words.

The world felt like it was closing in on David, but he answered. "Lisa. We'd ridden to the market earlier today. On the way back home, Lisa's horse bucked her off as we crossed the bridge—"

"Which bridge are we talking about?"

David grew increasingly impatient, his mind twisting and turning as he thought of any story but the one that had occurred several hours before.

"The bridge just outside of Angermunde, on the road leading to Frankfurt." David did not tell the doctor where he lived, and the man didn't ask. David hoped no one would.

The old doctor stroked his beard again. The glow from the fire flickered across his face as it burned the only log left above red embers.

"Mmm hmm...go on."

"Then my wife fell into the water..." David was close to breaking down, choking back tears as he formulated a believable story.

The bearded doctor calmly stood and looked out of a streaked, dirty window behind David. He sat back on braided wood with strands of ripped material stretched over it that was a waiting room chair. David was amazed the man could keep his composure so well.

"I only see one horse out there, Mr. Hauer. Where is your wife's?"

David stood to look out as well, viewing his Hanoverian watering itself and chewing on hay as if nothing unusual had happened. Panicking more than ever, David sat, ad libbing at this point.

"I had to...put her on mine and leave hers there. I wrapped my riding cape around her and galloped all the way here."

"You galloped here?" The doctor raised his eyebrows. "How did you hang onto her, she's unable to stand at the moment."

David's brow furrowed with burning frustration.. "I rode as fast as I possibly could while holding on to my wife."

Their eyes met as the doctor looked above spectacles at the end of his nose and cleared his throat.

“Sir, has your wife been eating? She’s awfully thin.”

David thought back to all of the years between losing Lisa and finding her again that day, with no idea how to answer. Turning away, he dropped his head and spoke. “She was always that way—eating as normally as anyone else.”

Dropping his eyes back to the parchment, the physician wrote something else and handed it and the quill for David to sign. David hoped the doctor did not notice his blistered, bloody hands or the alcohol on his breath.

The old Doctor stood up.

“Thank you very much Mr. Hauer, we’ll do everything we can for your wife. You were correct to bring her to us. We’ll talk soon.”

LISA was led to a room at the end of a cluttered, candle lit corridor. She drifted in and out of consciousness, but noticed a crucifix on one of the otherwise bare, beige-colored walls. The nurse changed Lisa’s wet clothes into dry hospital dress, then helped her onto a bed. The woman started a fire and drew the goose-feathered bed toward it. The scraping sound on the wooden floor was loud enough to temporarily wake Lisa to the reality that was her existence in this unfamiliar place.

She phased into and out of a surreal world. Although in dry clothing and close to the fireplace, she could not stop shivering.

“Peggy, I’m so cold. Help me...”

“Shhh, you’re in the hospital, sweetheart. We’ll take care of you. Try to get some rest.”

She left and brought back a distraught David, who tried everything he could to keep her warm. He lay blankets across the bed, warmed by the fire, rubbed Lisa’s small, tender hands together and blew on them, patting her face and damp hair with linens.

“I’m so sorry, Lisa, I don’t know what I was thinking. Please be alright, please...” He lay his head on her stomach, his silvery ash-blond locks now completely free of their ribbon enclosure and spread over her body.

“Peggy, I’m so cold. Help me...”

David raised his head and tried to comfort her.

“I’m here Lisa, it’s David. I’ll keep you safe.”

“David, I’m so cold...”

NARRATOR

Since childhood, I've had numerous dreams of a very handsome man in eighteenth-century clothing, expressing deep sorrow and calling me by a different name. The spirit gave his name as "David." I put pieces of the dreams together and wrote this story.

During these dreams, a location and date comes up: Angermunde, Germany, 1754. I'd never heard of it, but studied a German map and found it, very near Frankfurt an der Oder, which means "Frankfurt on the River Oder." There are actually two Frankfurts; Frankfurt am Main, to the West, and Frankfurt an der Oder to the East, the latter of where this story takes place.

The tale began in what is now Germany in the year 1729. The area was then a part of the Holy Roman Empire.

The man in my dreams is what we would call a "ghost" or spirit, and he walks the Earth following mine. Because I am the woman he loves and has always loved, ever since we met over two and a half centuries ago.

We've had several lives together since, and he lost me in every one. Today, he has refused the usual incarnate, lest he might lose me again. And the tragedy he caused so many centuries ago has become too much to bear.

STORY

Twenty-five years earlier

There were many people attending a public horse sale in Frankfurt an der Oder. Wealthy men in their best attire, ladies in their finest all coming out that day.

DAVID HAUER was an ambitious young stable boy. He was tall, handsome and well-built, with long, ash-blond hair and bright green eyes. Although quite poor, he'd learned how to get places with his good looks and charm.

Today he had on his best coat—his only coat—but he could not hide the fact that the rest of his clothes were quite worn. Nevertheless, he was quick to smile when spoken to and knew horses, using that knowledge to open doors and converse with the rich

. It was at this horse sale that he saw her for the first time: the girl he would love for centuries. With a green satin dress and white lace stole, her wispy, fawn-colored curls piled on her head. Diamonds and emeralds further added to the glamour. She sat in a fancy, open white carriage with a younger girl next to her. As David got closer, he noticed the lovely brown-haired girl's eyes matched her dress.

There was a slight breeze that blew the stole up from time to time. Dainty hands pressed it back into place. She held a green parasol, opened up to shield her face from the sun.

She was the most beautiful girl David had ever seen, and from that moment, on that warm spring day in 1729, whenever he saw her he was a madman, as were all other men around her.

All feelings of loneliness, sorrow and ill-treatment melted away as he gazed at her. There were finer things in life, and his heart felt them. She was the only girl he needed. He made a secret vow to himself that he would somehow, in some way have her.

I'll make her love me, and never want anyone else but me.

He stepped whimsically closer to her carriage with a plan to get her to speak to him. There was an older man nearby looking over an Spanish jennet mare. David thought he might be the girl's father.

"Excuse me, sir, are you interested in that horse?" David asked, walking up in his best professional manner, or as good as he could muster up.

"Yes, where is your superior? I'd like to negotiate a price."

"You can barter with me, I'm the best to ask."

The well-dressed man looked David up and down. He'd been working in the stables all that day. But the older man's face changed as David began to speak with expertise, pointing out the horse's qualities.

"So you know a little about horses, do you, son?" I'm Mr. Joelysteen."

He extended his hand. David wiped his on the back of his coat first and shook it.

Mr. Joelysteen looked to be possibly in his mid-forties with long, salt-and-pepper hair under a black tricorne hat, which he lifted from time to time to smooth down his scalp. His hair was kept back neatly in a black ribbon. He held a black walking stick with a golden eagle on the top.

"David."

Mr. Joelysteen then invited him to look over the two horses tethered to the white coach. David could tell the older man might not have known anyone with more equine experience than he. And he missed nothing.

"This one is beginning to have a lame front leg. I can tell because part of its shoe is ground down on one side, as it tries to stay off of the other."

"Hmm, I've not noticed this before." Mr. Joelysteen scratched his beardless chin. "I'm surprised our stable man hasn't brought this to my attention."

The stableman, the driver of the carriage, said nothing and quietly puffed on a small clay pipe. He'd taken his coat off and was wiping sweat accumulating on his face with a handkerchief.

LISA was seated in the white carriage with her younger sister Ilia, both giggling as potential suitors gathered round

Among the young and wealthy was a boy named Johann. Tall with long blonde hair and blue eyes, Lisa thought him to be quite sure he was going to marry her someday. She'd noticed his futile attempts to capture her attention in the past, asking her to ride.

"You'll have to dress more appropriately for riding, Lisa," Johann stated as he stood by the carriage.

Lisa thought this hilarious, and after much laughter between the sisters, Lisa answered him. "I don't remember accepting your invitations to ride, Johann."

Ilia nudged Lisa. There was a spectacle nearby.

"Lisa, look at that boy talking to Father."

Lisa turned to view who her sister was referring to, and drew in her breath.

"Why, that's the most handsome young man I've ever seen," she whispered.

"But poor, look at his clothing," noted Ilia.

Yet all Lisa saw was that resplendent face. Those bright, green eyes, the muscular build. His facial hair was groomed into a mustache and goatee. Some of his ash-blonde hair had fallen out of the string he was using to tie it back, landing onto and off of his dimpled cheeks and side burns in the wind.

Lisa did not think a boy his age would converse with a girl as young as she, but caught him glancing at her several times.

Their older sister Maria, high-strung and quick-witted, was eying a chestnut-colored Haflinger. She saddled up and mounted it.

Their father bought both horses. He thanked David and arranged for him to deliver the mare, which had to be re-shod first. Then he climbed into the carriage and signaled the driver to leave. Maria rode her new horse home.

Lisa looked back once more as the carriage moved off. The boy was watching them, and might have been gazing right at her. She couldn't be sure, but she felt a twinge of excitement.

"What are you looking at, Lisa?" Maria queried, trailing the coach. She looked behind also.

“Nothing,” answered Lisa, but she knew Maria had seen what she did, the striking young stable boy leaning against the speckled mare, watching the family as they left for home.

DAVID watched as the carriage left the grounds of the breeder's stables, the back wheels stirring up dust as it began down the road. He leaned on the side of their newly-bought Spanish Jennet, his arms crossed as he viewed the send-off. His heart skipped a beat as he noticed the girl in green briefly looking back, maybe right at him. He couldn't be sure.

The girl on the Haflinger turned also, with a less friendly face. David turned and led the speckled mare into the stables for the readying.

Mr. Joelysteen had given directions to their estate. Great, he mused, now I know where she lives. It was just outside of town, in the countryside.

David had been born poor, and forced to leave home at twelve years of age. This happened to many boys in those times, whose families had too many mouths to feed. Most went to the workhouses, as did David.

Life was lonely, but he never returned to his family nor knew what became of them.

He'd been through several workhouses before finally stumbling into a tailoring house. He enjoyed the work, and being a bright child, he did well.

Yet over the years he thought of something better. He observed the wealthy in their fine dress. But much more the women. He longed to be part of their society. But in eighteenth-century Europe it was extremely difficult to break out of your class, if at all.

As he grew, his interests included horses. He took care of several in the yards of the workhouses. People said he had a way with them.

He applied at many public stables, before being hired at his present location. He started out cleaning and sweeping out stalls. But the stable man there taught him everything he knew, before passing away from a bad case of barrel fever.

Again, there was the loss, and loneliness.

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The days were getting longer, giving David time to prepare the speckled horse for the move to the new stables. He gave it a little extra grooming, considering the beautiful girl who would be riding the steed.

What a life that must be, to wear such finery, to ride beautiful horses with reckless abandon, to kiss a girl like her.

Just then, in the middle of this wonderful fantasy, someone called out to him. It was Jana, the young maid from the main house. Only she spent so much time “cleaning” it was a wonder she wasn’t considered a part-time stable maid.

“Hello, David.” She grabbed a broom.

“Hello, Jana,” he answered, not looking up from his work.

“Are you making that horse up special or something?”

“Mr. Joelysteen wants this mare prepared for delivery tomorrow morning.”

Jana was quiet for a moment. At length, she spoke.

“I’ll bet that rich man is buying it for his daughter, the brown-haired girl.”

“So what if he is?”

“I saw you looking at her.”

“No, you didn’t, mind your own business anyway.”

He meticulously braided the spotted horse’s mane and tail. He then stood up and inspected the mare as it swished its tail to deter persistent flies.

Fit for a king. Or a princess.

David’s tone softened, as Jana stood looking on.

“If you want to help, go into the supply shed and bring four horseshoes. Please, I mean.”

Neither of them enjoyed going into the old, rundown shed. It reeked of mold and rats and mice were abundant. Their feces were everywhere. Jana’s facial expression turned to a look of disgust, but David saw her leave for the shoes.

The stables themselves were in almost the same condition, with cracks in the walls and ceiling. David and Jana often had to cover the horses when it rained.

Jana was back with the shoes, brushing off dirt and dust before stacking them next to the stall. She sat close by with her arms around her knees, drawing in her soft, blue maid dress with soiled hands.

Jana was not a homely girl; she had fiery brown eyes and long, black hair, with a slight rough edge. He’d known her since she was a child, and now she was old enough to wear a corset, which fit her quite nicely. But he’d never thought of her as anything other than a friend. She was more of a sister to him.

David had taken off his brown coat, and muscles peeked out of holes in his threadbare, ruffled white shirt. He glanced at Jana, noticing the look on her pleasing face, laying her head sideways across her knees. Her dark eyes looked deeply into his whenever he looked at her. She did amuse him, sometimes.

“Stand back a minute, Jana,” David warned. He placed a tuft of hair behind his ear and took a cast iron shoe off the stack. The sound of the hammer reverberated throughout the crumbling building, causing both to raise their heads and examine the roof above them.

The shoes on the mare, Jana commented, “Why don't you put a feathery plume on its head?”

There were laughs and a feeling of friendship between the two.

David stood. His hand crossed his brow; sweat eliminated.

He stepped outside to sit on a rocky cliff where he could see downtown Frankfurt well, candles flickering in the windows of the dwellings nearer to him.

The evening was clear, the full moon shown, the stars bright and pulsating. They reminded him of her eyes, which were green gems that sent fire into his heart.

David puffed on an old clay pipe, imagining what he would say to her if they met, by chance. He devised a plan in his mind. Deliver the horse, look for the beauty that was the girl in green. Then, ask her to ride.

