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An "unknown" story by Quentin Reynolds, one of the best known and best loved writers of our time . . . Mr. Reynolds — reporter, sports writer in the great tradition, foreign correspondent, editor, roving investigator, lecturer, radio and television commentator, novelist, movie scenarist, and recently a biographer — Quentin Reynolds, man of good will, faces the problems of our confused era and keeps growing; and although the demands on his talent and interests increase, he still manages to find time every once in a while to write in a medium which he deeply respects — the detective story.

BLOOD-BROTHERS

by QUENTIN REYNOLDS

THERE WAS NO USE TRYING TO work. Those church bells kept chiming at minute intervals and, though they weren't loud, they were insistent and their tones crept into the room and hung there, getting between me and any work. It was Friday in Berlin, and why church bells should be ringing on a Friday afternoon I couldn't figure out.

It was a beautiful day, too — Berlin offers a lovely spring in compensation for the many unpleasant features of living in Germany's capital. I had just bought several new records for my phonograph and I thought I'd try them out. I picked one at random — it was the "Liebestod" from *Tristan and Isolde*. I put it on the machine and was about to play it when my servant announced the Baron von Genthner.

"Not interrupting any work, I hope?" he asked me questioningly.

"Not at all. I can't work with those bells making that racket. Come in and have a drink. Have two drinks." I was glad to see the Baron; he was the only German I knew who managed to keep absolutely detached from German political intrigue. He had been a great war hero. When the War ended he had retired from further active participation. Henceforth he would be a spectator. He remained a spectator and not even a very interested spectator. The only thing which really interested him was music — not contemporary music, but the music of the masters. Music, he often said, reached its apotheosis in Wagner. Since then only Brahms had been touched with the divine spark. Since Brahms — nothing.

"Lovely weather for April," von Genthner said. "I was noticing the peonies in the park."

He paused in front of my phono-

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graph and he picked up the record I had been about to play.

"'Liebestod?'" Liebestod?" The love death . . ." he whispered, half to himself. "What chance, what mad quirk of fate made you want to play this record today?"

"I don't know. One record is much like another to me, you know. Why should the 'Liebestod' affect you so?"

He didn't answer for a moment. Then he sat down in a heavy arm-chair. "You know, I would like a drink. Some brandy, perhaps."

"Sure," I laughed. "I'll get a bottle."

I got a bottle and two glasses. I opened the bottle and poured us each a drink. He tossed his down at a gulp without ever murmuring the conventional "Prosit."

"Something's troubling you. Is it those chimes from the church bells?"

Von Genthner looked up. "Twenty years ago today a man asked me to play the 'Liebestod' for him. I didn't play it, but every year on this day the memory of three hours I spent with him comes back. It — it is disturbing."

"What is the silly song all about?" I asked testily. "I know it's from *Tristan and Isolde*, but that's all."

He looked at me pityingly, and sighed. "Whatever do they teach you in your American universities! In the last act of the opera — it was written by Wagner; you've heard of him, I trust?" he asked scathingly.

"Wagner? There was a Honus Wagner who played shortstop for the

Pittsburgh team. He had bow-legs and he could hit like hell."

"Tristan is wounded. As he is dying, Isolde comes to him. He dies comforted by her and she sings the 'Liebestod.' The song tells him that their love is so great there is no need to fear death; it is a song that promises life hereafter, not only in words, but in music. It is a song which would comfort a dying man, for it promises that the end has not come; that beyond there is something greater than life which after all is but an incident."

"You're a philosopher, my friend," I said.

"I'm a musician," he said, too forcefully. "Which is a great deal more important. Philosophy and logic are two tricky sisters who can prove anything. Music is the only great truth, the only great honesty, for it is unanswerable. You recall Browning in 'Abt Vogler' when he says:

*'The rest may reason and welcome,
'Tis we musicians know.'*"

"And you wouldn't play 'Liebestod' twenty years ago for whom, and what about it?"

"Twenty years ago," he mused. "That was right in those first awful two years of the War. . . ."

He paused; then — "You know what day this is, I suppose?"

I was puzzled. "Sure, it's Friday, April 19, isn't it?"

He smiled. "It doesn't matter. Now I'll tell you the story. Every opera must have an overture, my

friend. Why, Beethoven wrote three for *Fidelio*. Now our overture is over and we are in the midst of the War. We're back in 1915 on the Western Front not far from that city of Armentières — just a couple of miles east of it over toward Ypres. I was a major then, commanding three companies, part of the German Fourth Army. In May of that year we sustained horrible losses.

"The French and English, who were stationed opposite us, were thoroughly spent. We knew that they would have to wait for reinforcements before they could attack. We ourselves were tired, getting our breath after those minor, but horribly wearying engagements. Then there came orders from the General Staff which shook us considerably. Six thousand men in our sector were detailed to duty on the Russian front. They were to be withdrawn immediately, that night in fact, but would be replaced within a week by fresh troops which were finishing their training in the rear. I was frankly nervous. If the French and English knew of this withdrawal they would undoubtedly attack and, undermanned as we would be, there would be nothing we could do about it. But the withdrawal of the troops had been accomplished with the greatest secrecy, and we were fairly confident that there were no leaks.

"Two hours after the last of the 6,000 men had left, the French and English attacked. It was a swift, sudden foray that caught us ab-

solutely off guard. They almost literally destroyed us.

"The Sixth Bavarian and the Fourth Ersatz hurried to our aid, and once they arrived the English retreated. Their work was done. They hadn't attempted any major offensive — it was merely one of those sharp thrusts intended to harry us. Well, they harried us all right and in the process of harrying us they killed 2,500 of our men.

"I was present at the meeting of the General Staff when the attack was discussed. The loss of the men was bad enough, but what really worried us, of course, was the fact that the enemy knew of our plans so quickly. Until then we hadn't known the excellence of their Intelligence Department.

"Oh, we knew there were plenty of spies in our midst. We had caught many of them and our custom was to send them back to the rear lines to a prison camp where regular court-martials were held. But the General Staff decided that sterner measures were needed. The general who presided issued his orders. Henceforth, if a spy was found he should be brought to the nearest officer with the rank of major. The major was to select two captains and hold an immediate court-martial on the spot. If found guilty, the man should be executed within three hours.

"'It isn't pleasant to have to condemn a man to death,' the general said through tight lips, 'nor is it pleasant to have to direct such an

execution. But remember — one spy knew that we were withdrawing 6,000 men. This one man knew, communicated his knowledge to the enemy — and 2,500 Germans have paid with their lives.'

"There was a lull for three days after that attack. We sat licking our wounds and they dug in, waiting for the attack they knew we had planned against Ypres. Then came Friday. Two of my captains came to me with a story of a German who had escaped from the English prison camp in back of their lines and had managed to get through to us.

"His name is Johann Gluck,' one of them said. 'He was a captain in the Sixth Division who was captured more than a month ago.'

"That is one of the divisions that was withdrawn, isn't it?' I asked.

"Yes,' the Captain said, 'But this Captain Gluck, nice chap by the way, knows so much about the present English position that we wanted to suggest to you that instead of sending him to rejoin his division you keep him here. After that attack the other night we can use another captain.'

"These two captains of mine were named Hermann Kreutzer and Franz Marschner, fine officers both of them. Strictly officers, typical officers to whom war was that for which they had spent a lifetime of training. I told them to bring in this new find.

"A few moments later they brought Captain Johann Gluck in to me. I had a very fine dug-out, really palatial. It was a single, square, sand-bag-

and-stone-enforced room. In addition to my cot and a table I had also managed to snare a portable phonograph. I had sent to the rear for records, and although during heavy bombardment the mortality among the records was high, most of my Wagnerian operas had managed to survive, and some Beethoven. If a man has Wagner and Beethoven he really doesn't need much more.

"Captain Johann Gluck walked into the dug-out. He was slightly built, and he had a scar across his cheek. He had a firm mouth and very blue eyes. Very blond, he was the true Germanic type, except for his size. He had a boyish look about him, and when I looked at him something clutched at my throat. Because as I looked at him, I knew that within three hours he would be dead.

"I have heard a great deal about the Major von Genthner,' he said in his soft Bavarian voice. 'It is nice to see you. . . .'

"... again,' I finished for him, trying to fight down something within me which was crying: 'You fool, rush to him, throw your arms around him. That is Eric, Eric Rhodes, your friend. That is the boy you grew up with, the boy you went to Heidelberg with, who attended you in a dozen duels, who argued philosophy and music with you. That is Eric Rhodes, your blood-brother!'

"You two have met before?' Kreutzer asked. 'How delightful. That calls for a celebration.'

"Yes, at Heidelberg,' I said. 'We

met at Heidelberg. No, it was before Heidelberg . . . Captain, there's a bottle of brandy under my cot. Open it, will you?"

"Captain Gluck laughed and there was a mocking light in his eyes as he looked at me. 'Fine, we'll have a celebration. We are going to celebrate one of the three most momentous occasions in a man's life.'

"'Come, now,' Kreutzer laughed. 'The three most important occasions in a man's life are his birth, his marriage, and his death. No one is being born here, certainly no one is going to be married, and, judging by the quiet outside, no one is going to die.'

"'When one meets a very old friend, that too is a very important occasion — no matter under what circumstances the meeting occurs.' If my face was white, no one, I think, noticed it.

"'Fill mine to the brim,' Gluck laughed, and the beads of the brandy sparkled on a level with the top of the glass. He lifted it without a drop spilling over and drained it.

"'A steady hand for a man who has been in a prison camp for a month,' Kreutzer laughed.

"'Well, friend, the next move is up to you. Why not tell your captains who I am.' Gluck spoke in English and Kreutzer and Marschner looked their surprise. 'The Major and I learned English at Heidelberg together,' Gluck said in German. 'Go on with your drinks. We want to talk over old times. And we want to see

if we remember our English. *Nicht wahr, Major?*'

"'Bestimmt! Bestimmt! Of course. Let's sit down.' And we sat down, Kreutzer and Marschner soon being absorbed in discussing their own ideas for our anticipated offensive against Ypres. Gluck, or Eric Rhodes, and I sat there and —"

"Von Genthner," I broke in, just a bit puzzled. "Who was Gluck? Who was Eric Rhodes? They were the same man evidently, but who?"

"Eric Rhodes was an English officer," Von Genthner explained. "To put it more bluntly, he was a spy who had come into our lines confident that his perfect German and the fact that the regiment to which he said he had been attached was too far away for any immediate check-up would allay any suspicion. But Eric Rhodes was more than that.

"Eric," Von Genthner said slowly, "was brought up in Mallsdorf, a small town in Bavaria, where I came from. He came there with his parents, who were English, when he was a child. Eric grew up as any Bavarian child would grow up. He and I played together as youngsters. We went to the same schools. Eric always went back to England once a year for a month or two, and this kept him thoroughly British in mind and in spirit. Outwardly he was as German as I. We dreamed dreams as youngsters do and always in our dreams we shared each other's success. I would be a great musician, he a great writer. Then came Heidelberg. I specialized

in music, he in philosophy. That," Von Genthner added, wryly, "was the only thing we ever disagreed upon."

"But, Von Genthner," I asked, "you said that you and he were blood-brothers. What did you mean?"

"In America I believe you have college fraternities," he said. "At Heidelberg we have corps which roughly correspond to your fraternities. The corps which Eric and I joined had a very impressive ritual of initiation. We were initiated in pairs and we were made — literally — blood-brothers. The symbolic part of it was that in being made a blood-brother to one corps member you become symbolically a blood-brother to all.

"I'll never forget that ceremony. Eric and I, of course, were paired. Our right wrists were slashed and then my wrist was bound to his. The cuts were placed together and then our wrists were fastened tightly so that actually my blood flowed into his open cut and his blood flowed into mine. The wrists were bound until the blood clotted and then indeed were we brothers. 'Now we are one' — I remember the words of the initiation — 'and if I do injury to you I am injuring myself. If you injure me, you injure yourself.'

"Sounds silly, doesn't it?" Von Genthner laughed. "But it isn't silly to a twenty-year-old boy. Eric and I remained friends until we finished Heidelberg; then he went back to London to live and I wandered here and there, coming home just in time

to meet the War. But during those years I had often thought of Eric. He had been the closest friend I had ever had."

"And now you were a German officer. Now you had to court-martial and condemn him to death."

Von Genthner nodded and his face was grave. He went on: "Eric said in English: 'I understand that the General Staff has issued orders that the nearest major conduct a court-martial in the case of a spy's being captured and that, if guilty, the spy be shot within three hours.'

"Your intelligence is well informed," I said a bit stiffly.

"Oh, yes," he said carelessly. "Well, friend, there's no sense in holding a court-martial. Of course I plead guilty. We wanted to know just when you were going to attack Ypres. Rather thought I'd get away with it, you know. After all, I speak better German than most of your officers." He laughed. "Now let's face this silly business, Von Genthner. We have three hours. Then I die. Let's make the best of those three hours. We have lots to make up for — do you know it's eight years since I saw you? And so — another drink. Thank God it's French brandy. I never could stand German brandy, you remember?"

"And I always preferred it to French," I reminded him.

"Because it was milder," he said softly. "Just as you preferred music to philosophy. Philosophy is strong stuff — it is truth untarnished, truth without any sugar coating of senti-

mentality. Music? Music is a soporific. That's why they have music at weddings and funerals.'

"There is nothing sentimental about music at a funeral, Eric,' I said. 'God knows, death is ugly at best. Handel's "Death March" from *Saul* detracts a bit from the ugliness. It is at least a reminder that though one poor devil has passed on there are yet beautiful things left in the world.'

"Is there a life hereafter?" Eric asked. 'I don't know. I hope and rather think so. However, I want more consolation when I go than Chopin's — what is that funeral march of his called? The B-Flat Minor Sonata, isn't it?' He reached for the brandy bottle. This time he didn't fill his glass to the brim, yet a few drops spilled over the side of the glass. 'Rotten taste we're showing, Von Genthner, talking of funerals. But then you and I were never sticklers for good taste, were we? Remember that fat professor who tried to teach us mathematics?' —

"He launched forth into one of our more florid adolescent escapades. For a time the ugly walls of the dug-out faded and the voices of Kreutzer and Marschner died away. Now we were swimming across the rapidly-moving Neckar after an all-night session at the Rote Ochsen or one of the other *bierstubes*; we were tramping stern-faced up the winding hill across the river to the Hirschgasse, tipping our caps reverently as we passed the statue of St. Nepomuk, patron of duclists —

"Eric,' I said abruptly — and what made me say it I don't know — 'have you still that scar on your wrist?'

"He pushed back his sleeve. He held it out and there was that thin, jagged, white mark. He turned his wrist over and I noticed his watch. We had twenty minutes left.

"That was a long time ago, Eric. We swore to be blood-brothers.'

"Well,' Eric laughed, and for the first time I noticed a slightly uneven note in his voice, 'Edmund Burke once said: "War suspends the rule of moral obligation." If we are both fools enough to fight in a war, we must abide by its rules. But let's forget the war — I mean for the next twenty minutes. We can at least kill and be killed like gentlemen. I am always amused,' he sneered, 'when officers talk about fighting and dying like gentlemen. I was almost thrown out of my officers' training camp when I asked in all innocence: "How do you stick a bayonet into a man's stomach in a gentlemanly manner?"'

"I am afraid, Eric, I am losing my taste for war a little, too. On paper it is fascinating and glamorous — but actually it's dirty, unpleasant, a horrible thing.'

"Poor Von Genthner,' he mocked. 'You talk like a pacifist. I don't mind war so much — I mind the sickening bait which is held by those who send us to war.

"You know, Von Genthner,' he went on, seriously, 'I think there may

be something in pacifism at that. What are you fighting for? Who will gain if Germany wins the war?"

"We were both talking against time and we both knew it. I saw beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead. I was clenching my hands and the nails were drawing blood.

" 'I don't know what posterity will say of this war, Eric,' I said.

" 'Posterity will never say that the *Lusitania* sank a submarine,' he mocked. 'But to get back for a moment. You are not fighting for Germany, my friend, you are fighting for Krupp. The French are fighting for the glory and further dividends of Schneider-Creusot. The Czechoslovakians are fighting for the glory of Skoda. And, of course, the Japs are fighting for Mitsui. This is a war of munition manufacturers.'

" 'For God's sake, Eric, stop this talk,' I cut in — so sharply that Kreutzer and Marschner looked up and exchanged winks. Their major was a little drunk, they thought. 'Stop it, Eric,' I whispered.

"Eric's face was white, but his voice was level. 'You have to do something within ten minutes which is repellent to you. But you have to do it. In all fairness, Von Genthner, I ask you which of us is bearing up the better? What of your Wagner now? What of your Beethoven? What of your other masters? They aren't helping you. Why cannot you believe as — oh, as Buddha believed, for instance? Buddha, dreaming of the blessed peace of Nirvana, rested under the Botree

— and he discovered that all living was painful. Death was a beautiful release from pain. So, Von Genthner, I do not fear death. And now, friend, my time is up.'

"He looked at his watch. 'We have talked for three hours. Do you recall what day this is, Von Genthner? It is the same day on which another and greater man spent three hours of agony in a garden called Gethsemane. Von Genthner, will you give the orders? Or shall I? Suppose I do it. Kreutzer! Marschner!'

"He spoke sharply in German now: 'The Major's orders are that you immediately assemble a firing squad of six men. Have them ready in three minutes. The Major has discovered a spy who shall be shot according to the orders of the General Staff.'

"Kreutzer and Marschner looked at me. I was numb. 'They are the Major's orders,' Eric said crisply, and they left the dug-out.

" 'One final drink, Von Genthner.' Eric filled and raised his glass. 'What shall we toast? Life? It's been fun, but it hasn't lasted long enough to warrant the dignity of a toast. Death? We don't know enough about it to waste good brandy on it. Oh, I know, my friend. Do you know those lines of Du Maurier's:

*"La Vie est brève:
Un peu d'espoir,
Un peu de rêve,
Et puis — Bonsoir."*

"Eric smiled. 'A good epitaph: 'Life is brief, a little hope, a little

dream, and then — good night.”

“I stood up. At least I would try to match his courage. I had to do this thing. ‘Goodbye, Eric,’ I said, grasping his hand. I don’t know if he saw the tears in my eyes.

“‘Goodbye.’ He wheeled and turned toward the door. He turned once and glanced back. His eyes fell on my phonograph. Then his eyes wavered. And now he wasn’t the mocking-eyed Eric I had always known. Suddenly some inner support which had been holding him up collapsed. He was beaten. Not afraid, God knows. He had no physical fear. But suddenly he realized that his sense of values had toppled like a house of cards. That to which he had always clung had fallen.

“‘Von Genthner,’ he asked, and his voice cracked, ‘would you play “Liebestod” for me? Play it loudly so that I can shut my eyes and hear it even outside. Play “Liebestod” for me, Von Genthner.’

“I sprang forward, then stopped. ‘No, Eric,’ I said sharply, ‘I won’t play “Liebestod” for you.’”

Von Genthner pulled himself out of his chair and walked to the window. Those chimes had stopped and now my room was empty of the sound, but full of something else.

“Twenty years ago today that was,” he mused, “at just about this time.” He turned from the window.

“Finish it, finish your story, Von Genthner. What happened?”

“Why” — he looked surprised —

“I did finish it. He asked me to play ‘Liebestod’ — the song of death — and I refused, that’s all.”

“Well, you might have played it for him. After all, you were going to have him killed.”

“Killed? Killed?” the Baron said testily. “Do you think I could kill a man who asked me to play the ‘Liebestod’? Of course I didn’t have him killed. I told Kreutzer and Marschner that our friend had been drinking too much and that his ordering a firing squad had been a joke. I told them to get hold of an English officer’s uniform and give it to Captain Gluck. I said that we were sending him over into the British lines to see what he could find out. His English was so good, I said, that it would certainly fool the enemy. He could say that he had just escaped from a German prison camp. My captains thought it a great idea.

“‘You are a very brave man to take such a risk,’ Kreutzer said to Eric.

“Eric looked at me and said: ‘If you have music in your heart and in your mind and in your soul you do not need to be brave.’”

Von Genthner stood up.

“Is the story finished to your satisfaction now?” he asked. “I think I have omitted nothing. . . . Oh, about those church bells which bothered you. It is the custom in Germany to ring the church bells from 2 o’clock until 4 — one day a year. It is to remind us of the three hours of agony which Our Lord spent in the Garden of Gethsemane.”