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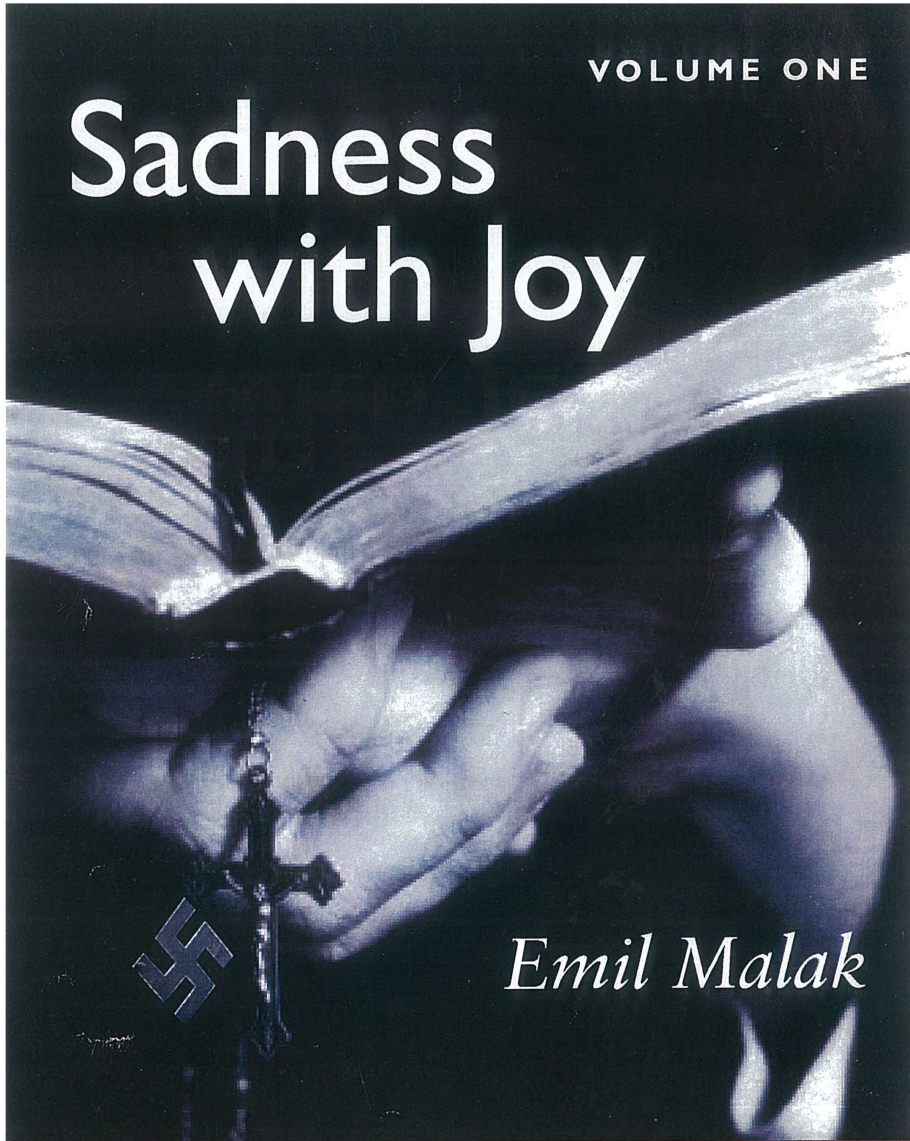
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VOLUME ONE

# Sadness with Joy



*Emil Malak*

*Inside this fiction lies the truth.*

# *Sadness With Joy*

**Emil Malak**

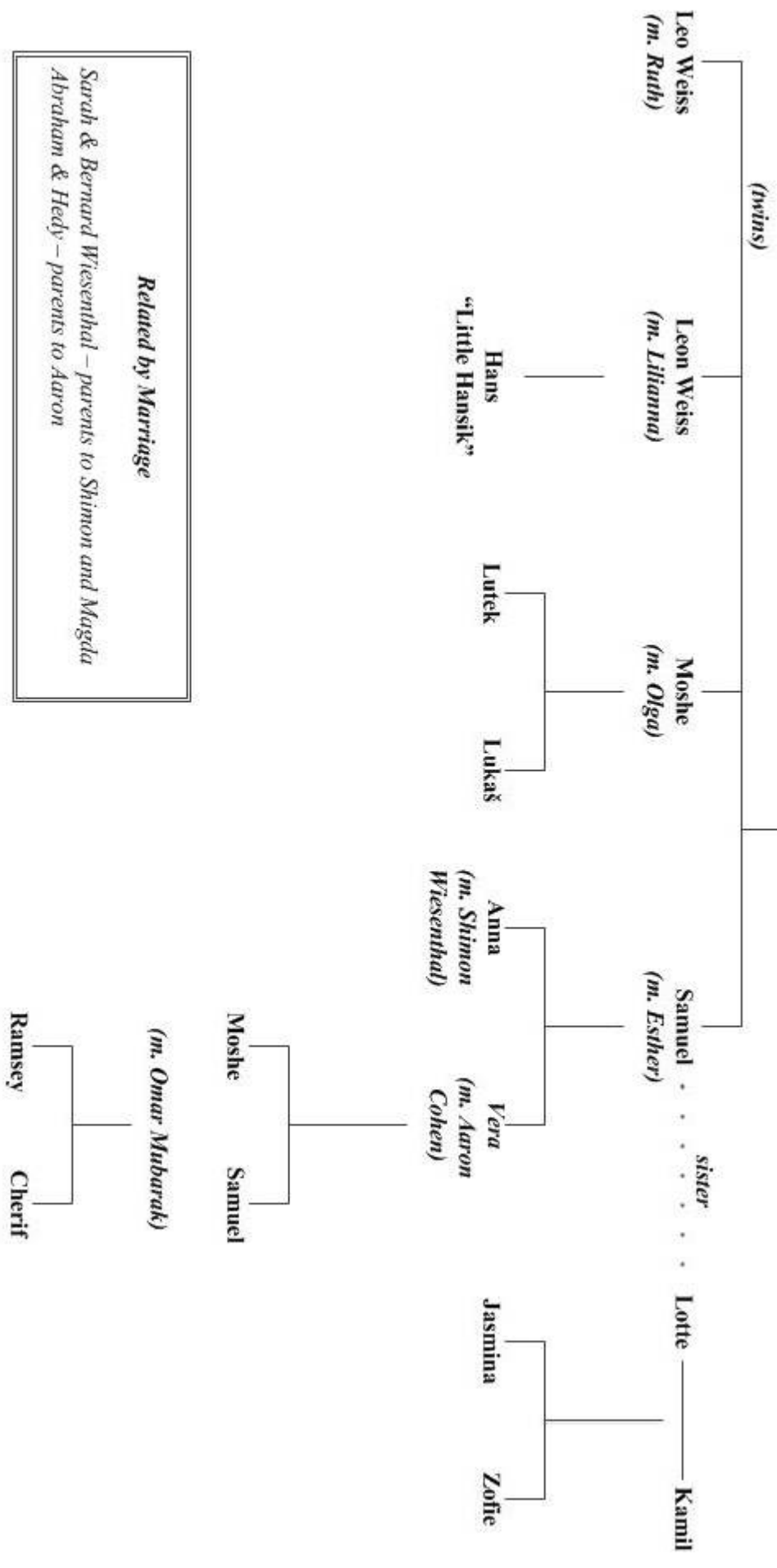
Volume one

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**Grandma Elli Weiss**  
*(m. deceased)*



**Related by Marriage**

*Sarah & Bernard Wiesenthal – parents to Shimon and Magda  
Abraham & Hedy – parents to Aaron*

**Close Friends**

Father Andreas Ramppp  
Sister Maria Teresa  
Karl Becker  
Elsie Becker

**Acquaintances**

Shimon Wiesenthal  
Christopher Borer

**A woman is loved for lifetime by two men.  
She bears their children.  
She gives life to half brothers with milk  
from the bosom.**

**From this one womb are born children  
who choose opposing sides....**

**When they become adults  
they take up arms again each another**

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## Prologue

A tired looking man with piercing black eyes, set in a thin and pallid face, sat reading in bed.

There was a knock on his bedroom door.

"Come in," he shouted.

The door opened briskly. "Good morning Archbishop," said a female voice.

"Good morning sister. What is your name?"

"Sister Pascalina. May I remove these papers?"

The Archbishop examined his visitor carefully. She was a young nun with a radiant smile and beautiful ivory skin.

"Not just now. I have a lot of work to get through."

"I'm sorry. I know you've a lot to do, but you must learn how to relax. You have to help your body recover. You need to have complete rest."

Archbishop Pacelli closed the files reluctantly and passed them over to Sister Pascalina. She put them into a briefcase as he watched her with interest over the rim of his glasses. Outside, falling snowflakes were tapping on the windows.

"The snow is very beautiful," Pacelli said.

"When you're fit in a few weeks' time you'll be able to enjoy skiing on it."

Sister Pascalina was just 23. She'd been born on a small farm in Eberberg near Munich and was currently working at the Stella Maris Retreat House in Rorschach in the Swiss Alps. This was where sick Roman Catholic clergy came to convalesce. Archbishop Pacelli was the most important guest currently staying at the Abbey so all the nuns held him in great awe. He was so influential in Rome that, at the age of 41, he'd been put in charge of the Vatican Foreign Office.

There was extremely fierce competition amongst the nuns as to who was going to get the job of looking after their eminent visitor on a permanent basis. They were vying openly with each other to be given the duty while Mother Superior was still deciding who it would be best to appoint.

Shortly after she'd left Pacelli's room Pascalina received a message to report to the Mother Superior's office straight away.

"Archbishop Pacelli is very ill," Mother Superior explained. "He's been in the thick of international negotiations since the beginning of the war. Three years of constant political pressure has taken its toll. He's on the verge of a breakdown."

"I know, Reverend Mother. If you entrust me with the task of looking after him I'll make sure he gets all the rest he needs to restore him to good health."

"You know he has a reputation of being very stubborn."

"Yes, I've heard that, but you can rely on me. I can assure that he won't get away with anything while he's under my care."

"Don't make the mistake of underestimating the task, sister. He's going to be a most difficult patient."

"Don't worry, Reverend Mother." I've just been in to check on him and I'm pretty sure I've got the measure of him. He's the one who's not well, after all."

"Good. Good. Well then, Sister Pascalina, I've decided. You are to take care of the Archbishop full time. But do a good job, mind you. He's well connected and there are many



things we need here in the Abbey. A good word from him could be very beneficial for us in the future.”

“I understand. Thank you for your trust in me Reverend Mother.”

It was early evening as Sister Pascalina made her way towards her charge’s room. She was carrying a large tray in her hands.

“Good evening, Archbishop.”

There were papers spread all over her patient’s bed and he was sitting up writing. She put the tray on the bed and very politely removed his pen and notepad, collected up all the papers and neatly placed everything in the briefcase. There was short silence as he glared at her in surprise and annoyance. She had just removed a very important political memo he was about to finish. The cheek of it!

“The supper can wait,” he said finally. “I need to finish my work first.”

“I’m sorry. The work will have to wait – until your health is better.”

She closed the briefcase and sat on the chair in front of him.

“I’m not going until you finish your supper!”

Very grudgingly, he drank a couple of spoonful of soup and ate a small piece of banana.

“I’ve had enough,” he said.

“No you haven’t. Come on, you’ve got to finish all the soup, the bread and all of the fruit. Otherwise I’m just going to sit here all night staring at you.”

Her arms were folded squarely across her chest in the manner of a stern head mistress. The Archbishop picked up the spoon, took off his glasses and gave her a weary smile. “Fine, Sister, you win.” Within minutes he’d finished everything.

“Can I have my briefcase back now please?” he asked. “I need to finish my work.”

“Sorry – can’t do that. Your mind needs to rest so that your body can start to heal. I’ll be absolutely delighted to give you this briefcase back once I’ve been able to nurse you back to full health. But for now – it’s time to sleep.”

She went over to his bed, removed the tray and stood over him while he adjusted the pillows. His frail body slid down underneath the covers like that of a little boy. The Sister made sure he was fully covered, turned the light out and left. Pacelli was fast asleep within minutes.

It took two months for Sister Pascalina’s caring but uncompromising regime to show results. Pacelli recovered fully, his frame filled out and he looked much healthier both in body and in spirit.

Pascalina entered his room one morning carrying the Archbishop’s briefcase. They had developed a good rapport by now and Pacelli smiled as she came in.

“Good morning, Sister.”

“Good morning, Archbishop.” She smiled back at him. “I think you’re well enough to have this back now.”

She opened the curtains and he could see a white blanket of snow covering the mountains in the distance.

“I would like to thank you, Sister. I feel so much better.”

“Yes, you look much better.”

“I’m returning to the Vatican this afternoon. But I hope I’ll be able to see you again soon.”

Pascalina looked at Pacelli in surprise and her cheeks began to grow noticeably flushed.

Three months later Pacelli became the Papal Nuncio in Munich. Pacelli arranged for Sister Pascalina to be transferred to his official residence to take charge of his household. The residence was a handsome, large three storied brick building in the classical style and many domestic staff was employed there. Pacelli had increased the number of staff himself, appointing a new aide, a valet, a cook, a butler, a chauffeur and two elderly nuns to do the cleaning. In a few months Pascalina became the respected mistress of the whole household.

By the late summer of 1918, Pacelli had been pushing himself so hard again that he was starting to look frail and tired once more. Sister Pascalina would often sit at his bedside throughout the night to care for him and one such night he had terrible nightmares. He began to talk in his sleep, shouting in a loud voice about the inhumanities of war. The shouting got louder and louder and he started to scream. Sister Pascalina shook him to wake him up from his awful dream and, and as he came to his senses, he became aware of her holding his hands. He fell back to sleep again, feeling slightly embarrassed. But he still clutched onto her hands.

For the weeks that followed, Pascalina and Pacelli worked ceaselessly side by side. They pleaded with the Vatican and the Red Cross to speed up their relief campaigns and distribution of food and medical supplies. People from the civilian populations were dropping in the streets by the thousand. Mass starvation caused many to die. Late one evening they returned to the house and Pacelli flopped limply into his chair. Pascalina brought him a cup of tea and surveyed him anxiously as he sat there looking listless and completely exhausted.

"If you keep working these long hours," she warned, "you're going to be in no fit state to help anybody."

For the next three days Pacelli agreed to stay in bed and rest. During this time Pascalina never left his side. She stayed up all night caring for him and prepared all his meals personally, carefully choosing the most nutritious ingredients. She would bring his food to him and stay there without budging him until he had finished every last morsel.

On the fourth morning he was beginning to look a little brighter. "What are the newspapers saying today?" he asked.

"Well it is not good news. There's some trouble from a bunch of young activists who are trying to take over control in the city. They claim to be anti-bourgeoisie and anti-church."

"Communists!" he spat. "They're making us all fight with each other. Munich is becoming a sea of death. When will it all end?"

"I don't know, but I hate to think what would happen myself if we let these communist hooligans take over the whole of Germany. We've got to stop them!"

"You're absolutely right, Pascalina. I pray for someone strong enough to stand up to them."

"I have heard of someone," she said. "A young man who is a very compelling speaker. His name is Adolf Hitler. I think he was born in Austria but then joined the German army during the First World War. I have it on good authority that he's a rising star. And that if anybody has what it takes to stand up against communism; he has. I'll make some further inquiries about him, shall I?"

It was the October of 1919 in Munich. There was a knocking on the door of Archbishop Eugenio Pacelli's residence.

Sister Pascalina went to open it.

"Good evening," said their visitor. "My name is Adolf Hitler. I've been sent by General Ludendorff."

"Ah, Herr Hitler. Please come in."

Sister Pascalina escorted him into the sitting room and a few moments later Pacelli entered and greeted his guest warmly. Hitler handed him a letter which the Archbishop opened and read carefully.

"Ah," Pacelli said. "General Ludendorff speaks very highly of you here. I see that you served as corporal under his command."

"He is a great General," Hitler replied.

"I believe you have set up a new political party with the aim of halting the spread of communism."

"I hate communism with all my being!" his visitor declared vehemently. "I hate what it's doing to Germany. These damn Communists are all Jews, you know! It is Jewish money that's supporting all of the communist uprisings. It's not enough for them to control our economy; they want to control our politics too now. Jew and Communists, huh! They're all the same. They just hide under different names; that's all. They won't be happy until they've completely and utterly destroy Germany.

"I couldn't agree with you more, Herr Hitler. Communism means atheism. Its self-avowed aim is nothing less than the total annihilation of the Catholic Church."

"The Jews killed Christ and now they're trying to kill Germany. They're backing the Communists so they can gain political power and increase their financial stronghold on the Fatherland."

"But how do you intend to stop the Communists exactly?"

"Through our new party, the National Socialist German Workers party."

"I see..."

"We call ourselves The Nazis for short, so the public will remember who we are. The only way to stop the Communists is for us to gain power and spread our message to the German people. They've lost all sense of pride in Germany since our defeat of the Great War. I will give them back their pride! I will crush the Jews and the Communists!"

Hitler had become almost hysterical. He was waving his hands around manically.

Pacelli took off his glasses. "I'll help you as much as I possibly can to achieve your goal," he declared. "We need to crush these Communists before they destroy all moral values and our belief in Almighty God." He examined his visitor carefully. "You need money to start a political party."

"Yes, many people have been very generous to us, your Grace."

Pacelli went to his desk, opened the drawer and took out a large bundle of money. He handed it to Hitler.

"Go quell the devil's work. Spread the love of Almighty God."

Hitler took the wad of money, opened his briefcase and stuffed it inside.

"For the love of Almighty God," he said to the Archbishop.

"My door will always be open to you," replied Pacelli.

On February 10, 1930, Pacelli was promoted to Cardinal and arrived at the Vatican to take his post as Pope Pius XI's Secretary of State. Sister Pascalina followed him eight months later to cook, wash and clean; chores as menial as those she had when she'd first gone to work for Pacelli 13 years before. All that mattered to Pascalina, however, was that once again, she was close to her master. In any case, she was confident that she would soon work her way up again.

On March 12, 1939, following the predecessor's death, Pacelli succeeded to the Holy See himself. He took the title Pope Pius XII and Pascalina remained resolutely by his side.

## Chapter 1 Anna, Magda and Jaro

### *Spring 1938*

Anna Weiss was standing in the synagogue. It was her wedding day and Shimon was close by. He had just broken the glasses and from all around came the cries of Mazeltov. She turned to receive her father's congratulations, but instead of Samuel, there was a young, untidy looking boy standing next to her. She looked around the synagogue for her parents but there was no sign of them. Not only that, she didn't recognize a single face in the congregation – she was completely surrounded by strangers.

Anna opened her mouth to speak but no sound would come out. As hard as she tried, she could not utter a single word.

"Congratulations, Mother – Mazeltov!" said the young boy, "You have to say something now – come on." She looked at him in disbelief. This boy was calling her 'mother'. How could she have a son when this was her wedding day? She looked at him closely. He was picking his nose. And he too was a complete stranger.

Then suddenly the boy was gone and Shimon was there in his place. He was studying her closely with deep concern showing in his eyes.

It struck her that none of this should be happening anyway. She and Shimon weren't even betrothed, so how could they be getting married? She wanted to speak. She wanted to ask what was going on; to ask for explanations. But no matter how hard she concentrated and how much she tried, she still could not speak. The wedding guests began to advance towards her and soon she was completely surrounded by a sea of unfamiliar faces. They pressed closer and closer to her until she felt unable to breathe. Then to her horror, some of them began to produce weapons from inside their clothing; knives, clubs and even pistols. The only means of escape that seemed possible was to try to fight her way out. She steeled herself for one supreme effort and began to punch and push people aside as she forced her way roughly through the crowd.

"Anna! Anna!" said Shimon and one by one, everyone else joined in, shouting "Anna, Anna, Anna..."

"Anna, Anna," said her father, "Wake up."

She opened her eyes with a start.

"What's the matter, darling? You were shouting in your sleep."

She blinked at Samuel and quite slowly, she regained her senses. He drew back the curtain a fraction and a narrow shaft of light from the bright morning sun struck the far wall and illuminated a small corner of the room.

"Here, I brought you some coffee. And look, today's post has just arrived. There's going to be a wedding!"

Anna rubbed her eyes. "A wedding? A wedding? How odd..." she muttered, raising herself up on one elbow.

"Odd? What's so odd about it?" her father said with amusement. "People do still get married you know, darling, even in these tricky times."

He re-arranged the pillows for her so that she could sit up and rest her back against them. She pulled herself up and took the steaming cup of coffee.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I’ve just had the most awful dream about a wedding, that’s all.”

“So that’s what the shouting was about. Must have been a truly dreadful wedding,” he chuckled.

“It was. It was.” She paused and took a sip of her coffee. “But who’s getting married anyway daddy?”

“Magda, darling.”

“Shimon’s sister?”

“Of course. How many other Magdas do we know? She and Jaro are getting married in Cesky Krumlov and the whole of the Weiss family are going to be invited. Now *that* will be a party to remember.”

Jaro Adler took his beer out onto the terrace. Garden tables were laid out beneath him on the grassy slopes below and the country air was full with the sweet smells of hay and jasmine. From his vantage point, he surveyed Cesky Krumlov nestling in the valley below. This was the first time Jaro had been back in seven years and he felt a strong sense of enchantment at returning home. Every street and every building was as familiar to him as the back of his hand.

His favorite place had always been the Krumlov Castle, perched on the shoulder of a jutting rock high above the Vltava River. Here in Southern Bohemia, the river was fairly modest in size but a hundred miles north it became a wide, majestic waterway as it passed through Prague. Jaro and his school friends had always wanted to sail down it all the way to the capital. And they would have done it too if they’d actually been able to get their hands on a decent boat. But they’d never been able to, so instead they settled season after season for fishing on the river banks.

But by far the most fun he’d had as a child was at the Castle. Hundreds of years ago the Ruzmberks, The Lords of the Rose, owned it and lived there. They were among the most powerful Bohemian nobles of all time and it was said that even kings feared to incur their displeasure. Jaro and his friends used to explore the castle’s three hundred rooms in the school holidays. They’d play in its courtyards and gardens and in their imagination pretended to be knights of old, riding along on horseback in suits of shining armor.

It all seemed suddenly such a very long way from Munich. Munich; where Jaro had met his beloved Magda. Magda Wiesenthal had captivated him with her untamed spirit and irrepressible optimism. He’d immediately fallen in love with her.

Jaro finished his beer and moved over to another seat further along the terrace. A few minutes later his father came out to join him.

Thomas Adler was a widower. He was the town’s Mayor and also the owner of the Dancing Bear Wine Cellar. He was well liked around town and during the day he could be found in his little office at the Dancing Bear helping townspeople settle business matters or giving out advice on how to fill in official documents.

“Where’s Magda?” he asked, pulling up a chair next to Jaro.

“She’s still upstairs unpacking.”

“Why didn’t you say anything sooner...about getting married?”

“To tell you the truth it’s all been very sudden.”

Jaro became aware of his father giving him a startled look over the rim of his spectacles.

“Oh, Dad, don’t worry. It’s nothing like that!” Jaro laughed, “It’s just that with the situation being how it is in Germany, I’ve been applying for jobs in Switzerland. It hasn’t been easy, but in the end...”

“Yes...yes...” said his father, impatient to hear his son’s news.

“Well, I got lucky. I’ve been offered a job in the research department at I.G. Farben!”

“Oh, my, that’s absolutely wonderful! Congratulations, my son!” His father stood up and slapped Jaro on the back. “But so many surprises in one day; you’re certainly a dark horse, Jaro. Why have you kept that such a secret as well?”

“I’m sorry dad; I wasn’t deliberately trying to keep things from you. I just wanted to wait till I could tell you everything face to face. When I got the job, you see, it was then that we decided we’d get married.”

“She’s a lovely girl Jaro. You’ve done well. Very well. Magda is so pretty and so full of spirit. You can tell that the minute you meet her. Just the sort of wife you need. I hope you’ll be every bit as happy with her as I was with your darling mother. God rest her soul.”

He paused for a moment and his tone grew more serious. “And, of course, it’s a very wise move for you to get out of Germany just now.”

There was the sound of footsteps from the other end of the terrace and they turned to see Magda coming out to join them.

“We were just talking about you, my dear,” smiled Thomas.

“Oh?”

“Yes, I was telling Jaro how lucky he is to have found such a lovely girl as you.”

Magda smiled and lowered her gaze to the ground.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to embarrass you. Come, sit down with us. Let’s talk about your wedding plans. What has your friend the Rabbi said?” He pulled up a chair for her.

“Well, he’s very busy, now, of course, since he’s become President of the Jewish Agency, but I’ve got good news. I heard from him two days ago. He said he’ll make special arrangements to travel from London to marry us; as a personal favor!”

“Splendid! Splendid! But how things move forward! Rabbi Leo Weiss, President of the International Jewish Agency; what an important man he’s become.”

“Yes, I know,” agreed Jaro. “But we Jews desperately need someone like the Rabbi to look after our interests. Oh and by the way, the rest of the Weiss family will be coming to the wedding too; including the Rabbi’s niece, Anna. She’s going out with Magda’s brother Shimon, you know. I don’t think it’ll be too long before they tie the knot as well.”

“Well...well. What a small world, eh? Tell you what; I’ll make arrangements for the guests to stay at the Inn in town. Everyone of course; except your parents and your brother, Magda my dear. They must stay here at the house with us. I thought we could have the ceremony here in the garden seeing as we haven’t got a synagogue in town. Then, afterwards, we’ll have the celebrations at the castle; in the Masquerade Hall. Just wait till I show it to you, Magda, you’ll love it, I know you will; it’s absolutely delightful.” he broke off as he noticed Jaro and Magda exchange amused glances.

“What is it? What’s so funny about that?” he asked.

“Nothing. Nothing at all. But you haven’t changed a bit Dad, have you? Always the first in line for a good party.”

“Well of course, why not? Who doesn’t like to have a good time? Now, as I was saying, we’ll have a traditional Czech brass band and I thought I’d invited Nicholae and his musicians to come. You remember Nicholae don’t you?”

“Yes, of course I remember him!”

“Well, I’m sure he’ll come and play for us. He’s married now, you know; lives on the other side of town. He plays the violin at the Dancing Bear with a few other musicians. He’ll be very happy to see you again.”

Jaro thought back to his childhood days with Nicholae. He was a gypsy and the two of them had been in the same class all the way through school. Nicholae’s father had given up the wandering lifestyle so that his children could get a decent education. Because of this, Nicholae was one of the few gypsies who could read and write. Thomas had always offered friendship and support to the local gypsy families and made a point of staying in touch with them all.

“Nicholae,” mused Jaro. “It will be good to see him again.”

The whirlwind of commotion began at the Adler house as friends and family arrived. For the next few days there was non-stop partying. Thomas Adler spent the whole time beaming in unrestrained happiness. There was nothing he liked better in the whole world than entertaining.

Rabbi Weiss arrived on the Friday.

Thomas greeted him warmly. “How good of you to come Leo, when you’re so busy with international affairs.”

“Nonsense, my old friend,” said Weiss. “This is a most joyous task for me to perform and let me tell you, it’s a welcome relief from concerning myself with the troubles of the world. But let’s not talk about such things, this is a happy occasion. Where are Jaro and Madga? I would like to talk to them both.”

The wedding took place on Saturday in the beautiful gardens of the Adler home in the company of their immediate family and close friends. It was a mild spring day and not a single breeze stirred the leaves of the linden trees on the terrace. After the ceremony they climbed into barouches and drove to the Castle. Nearly one hundred other guests were already gathered in the ballroom, waiting impatiently for the happy couple to arrive.

When Madga saw the ballroom she stopped in her tracks and grazed about her in utter delight.

“I told you you’d like it,” Thomas smiled.

The room glittered with a dozen small chandeliers and the walls were painted from ceiling to floor with scenes of an eighteenth century masquerade. It gave the illusion that dozens of other people in fabulous costumes were watching over the celebration, crowded into boxes and balconies above them. There were whimsical figures of comedians, several cavaliers, a colorful harlequin, a sultan and a number of uniformed officers escorting elegant slim-wasted ladies. Some seemed to be flirting with the gentlemen behind their masks while others looked away in affected boredom.

Thomas Adler had invited all his friends from the village. Most of them were also Jaro’s friends and he began to make his way around the tables, greeting everyone as he went.



Almost the whole of the Weiss family were there too. Lukaš and Lutek, the Rabbi's young nephews, sat at a table under a window with their Grandmother.

"Lukaš, your tie?" she reprimanded. "Where is it?"

"In my pocket."

"Then take it out and put it back on. This is a formal occasion."

"But it's too hot."

"No butts. Put it on."

Lukaš pulled a scrunched-up tie from his pocket and reluctantly complied. There were few who dared to disobey a direct command from the lips of Grandma Elli Weiss.

Little Zofie, the boys' cousin suddenly appeared behind Lukaš and pinched his arm. She ran off with Lukaš in hot pursuit and they collided with the dessert table laden with bowls of fruit, glasses of champagne and wedding cake.

"Children, please! A little decorum," shouted his Grandma.

Magda came over to join them. "It's alright," she smiled. "It's only youthful high spirits. I want everyone to enjoy themselves today."

The brass band was already assembled on a raised platform at the front of the hall. Thomas gave a signal and struck up a lively mazurka.

"Come on, Jaro, it's time for the first dance." Mr. Adler pulled his son away from his friends and propelled him back to his new wife.

Jaro took Magda by the hand and they began to dance together in the center of the ballroom. Suddenly, Jaro pulled Magda to him and kissed her full on the lips. Cheering and applause broke out around the room.

Meanwhile, at the large table by the window, the Wiesenthals and the Adlers were getting to know each other.

Magda's father Bernard was the owner of the Herten Chocolate Factory and was a quiet unassuming man. His wife Sarah was petite and pretty and looked like an older version of her daughter. She must have been a stunner in her youth, thought Thomas. Then there was Shimon, Magda's younger brother; the family wit. He was a campaigning journalist, frequently getting into trouble over the outspoken comments in his columns. He was the only confirmed Zionist in the Wiesenthal family and had been trying hard to persuade his reluctant parents to sell all their possessions and move to Palestine. Yet Bernard Wiesenthal was a gentle and easy-going man. He'd been convinced that they'd be fine if they stayed. It was only recently, with the threat of his factory being taken from him through Aryanization, that he was finally making moves to sell up.

"Kiss me again," said Magda wickedly.

"I can't." teased Jaro, "I'm not used to it yet in public, anyway."

"Chicken!" teased Magda.

"Oh, yes? We'll see about that," said Jaro. He seized her, lifted her veil back and kissed her passionately.

There was more cheering and applause and now that the bride and groom had carried out their duty by performing the first dance, the others poured onto the dance floor and joined them.

The Rabbi remained at the table, talking to his brothers Leon and Samuel. They'd travelled from Munich for the wedding but their other brother Moshe had been prevented

from making the trip from Warsaw by pressure of work. Instead he sent his sons to Cesky Krumlov under the watchful eye of their grandmother.

"Have you heard how Moshe and Olga are doing?" asked the Rabbi.

"Mother says they're ok", replied Samuel, glancing over in Elli's direction. "They're very busy of course just now."

"Yes. Yes. I've heard so too. Lutek and Lukaš seemed to be getting on ok don't they? Lutek's becoming quite the young man! And Lukaš is still full of mischief as ever."

The three brothers watched in amusement as their seven-year old nephew performed a wild, expansive solo dance in the middle of the ballroom.

"Well, the happy couple will soon be starting their new life in Switzerland," said Leo. "Leon, weren't you applying to work there too?"

"Yes, I'm still trying. Nothing's come of it yet, though." Leon shrugged.

"Why don't you and Lilianne move to Palestine with us?" asked Samuel.

"I can pull some strings and get you an immigration visa," the Rabbi urged, "Samuel is going. You should go too. At last that way some of the Weisses will stay together."

Samuel's family had been relatively unaffected by the Nazi persecutions to date. He was a banker and so had the advantage of having many influential clients and business associates. Thus far his position had protected him, but he could see only too clearly which way the wind was blowing.

With the help of his brother Leo, he was in the process of realizing his capital and preparing for the move to Palestine.

"Please, Leon," begged the Rabbi. "The whole family is being scattered to the four winds. We're in danger of being split up and separated across the length and breadth of Europe. At least consider it."

"Leo, it's very good of you to offer but what on earth would I do in Palestine?"

"The same thing that Samuel will do and what thousands of others are doing, make a new life for yourself."

"But I'm a *doctor*, Leo! I've looked into it all and they simply don't need professional people there. What they need are farmers!"

"And farmers don't get sick?" asked the Rabbi.

Leon shook his head. "No, Leo. I'm not going. I have to find something in Europe.

"Well, it's your decision, brother. I can't force you."

"No," said Leon. "You can't. Come on, your glass is getting low. Let me fill it up for you."

Thomas stood up to propose a toast then made a brief speech peppered with humorous tales of Jaro as a boy and young man. He drew hearty laughter from his audience.

"And so, to the happy couple; my new daughter Magda and my son Jaro, who are now embarking on a wonderful life in Switzerland. May God grant them long life and every happiness!" Glasses were raised around the room as everyone drank to Magda and Jaro's health.

It was now Bernard's Wiesenthal's turn to propose a toast. He got to his feet swiftly and offered his congratulations to the newlyweds. More champagne poured. Jaro pulled Magda to him and kissed her tenderly again.

At the other end of the table sat Samuel's wife Esther with her sister Lotte and brother-in-law Kamil. The two sisters were enjoying each other's company after two years of being apart.

"How do you and Kamil like Lezaky, Lotte?" Esther asked.

"Well, it's very different from Munich! It's a small village, but it's a good life. The people are really friendly and they've made us feel so very welcome," said Lotte. But she stopped short of telling her sister the whole truth; that she had not told anyone there that she was a Jew.

"The most important thing," Lotte added, "is that it's good for the girls. They've got the chance now to enjoying a normal life, a normal childhood."

"Yes." Esther agreed sadly.

"And Grandma Weiss is bringing Lukaš and Lutek over to visit us in early July. They'll enjoy it too; they're staying for the whole summer."

Samuel appeared at the table. "Have you seen our daughter Anna in the last half hour?" he asked his wife. "She seemed to have disappeared."

"Yes, and have you noticed who else had disappeared as well?" replied Esther, smiling conspiratorially.

"Ah! Shimon."

"Yes, I saw them slip outside together earlier."

"Well, wife, do you think there's a chance that a little more romance might be in the air tonight?"

"Well, husband, we'll have to wait and see, won't we?"

Their other daughter, Vera arrived at the table carrying a small bouquet of flowers.

"Magda gave them to me as a souvenir," she said. "They're pretty, aren't they?"

"How very fetching," teased Lotte. "A bridal bouquet quite suits you, Vera my dear. When are you going to put your young man Aaron out of his misery and say yes to him? He's such a nice boy."

"Oh, I don't know. I'm still not sure. He's halfway through setting up a business partnership with some Egyptian company. He's talking seriously about going out to live there. That would be a very big step."

Vera was quite different to her younger sister Anna. Where Anna was outgoing and vivacious, Vera kept her personal feelings very much to herself. She sat down and lapsed into silence.

It was past ten o'clock now and the brass band left the stage to make way for the gypsy musicians. Five swarthy men and an olive-skinned woman arrived. The men were dressed in embroidered green waistcoats and wide black trousers tucked into high boots. The woman wore a long, multi-colored dress and an ornate bead necklace.

Nicholae made straight for where the newlywed couple was sitting. With unabashed emotion he embraced his childhood friend. Then he bowed low and kissed Magda's hand before introducing his wife, Ardeleana.

"How long are you staying?" he asked Jaro.

"A month, that's all. Then it's on to Switzerland." Jaro replied. "But first, Magda and I are going on our honeymoon. We're going to the mountains for a week."

"When do you leave?"

"The day after tomorrow."

"Then we still have time for a celebration!" exclaimed Nicholae, "We'll all come over to your father's house tomorrow."

"You haven't changed," laughed Jaro. "You're just like my dad. Any excuse to party."

“Of course!” Ardeleana added enthusiastically, “Life is like a candle. You don’t measure it by the wax, but by the flame!”

“We’ve bought you wedding gifts,” said Nicholae and without further ado pulled a bundle of money from the pocket of his waistcoat.

Jaro was taken aback. It was obviously a large sum.

“Nicholae, I can’t possibly accept this,” he protested.

“Nonsense,” said Nicholae, pushing the money firmly back towards his friend.

Before they had a chance to protest any further, Ardeleana presented Magda with an ornately decorated box. Inside was a bracelet studded with garnets set in a row of flowers. “Ardeleana,” said Magda softly. “I don’t know what to say.”

“There is nothing *to* say,” smiled Ardeleana. “This is your wedding day.”

“Well, we must go play now.” Nicholae announced, “Your guests are waiting. “Until tomorrow.” And with that he and Ardeleana went over to join the other musicians.

“I’m overwhelmed.” Madga said to Jaro, taking her chair again, “I’d no idea that you had gypsy friends.”

Nicholae tossed back his black hair, tucked his violin under his chin and began to play. One by one the rest of the musicians joined in and there was music and boisterous dancing until the early hours of the morning.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Evian**

In the weeks following March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1938, world headlines were filled with the international crisis caused by Germany's invasion of Austria. In Washington, pressure for US intervention was building.

"Mr. President, we have a problem," announced Secretary of State Cordell Hull.

"What is it?" sighed Franklin Roosevelt, tapping his fingers impatiently on the Oval Office desk.

"I've spoken to the British Foreign Office and they want no part in any conference on Jewish settlement."

"What? Damn it! What do you mean?" Roosevelt was still brooding over his argument with his wife Eleanor this morning. She was putting pressure on him to do more to accommodate the Jews. He could not make her see that mass immigration in the current economic climate was not good for America.

"There's too much opposition in the party and on Capitol Hill. It's not that easy, Eleanor," he'd try to explain.

"It'll be one hell of a lot easier if you'd fire Breckinridge Long and all his fascist cronies in the State Department," she retorted.

Roosevelt was tired. It wasn't enough that he had to cope with running the country at work; he had to do it at home as well.

"Mr. President!" Hull interrupted his train of thought and brought him back to the present. "I've explained to the British that we're under pressure; that the number of immigration applications we've been getting lately is overwhelming."

"So, what's the problem?" asked Roosevelt impatiently.

"I think, Mr. President, their real problem is that they're afraid of another Arab uprising if talks about mass Jewish settlement in Palestine come back onto the agenda."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't Palestine belong to them?" muttered Roosevelt.

"Sir?"

"Oh, never mind."

"In their defense, Mr. President, they do seem to have all their hands full in keeping the Arab revolts down. Any more aggravation and the lid might just blow right off. Rumors have it Sir that Britain is drawing up new policies for Palestine even as we speak."

"New policies? What kind of new policies?"

"I'm not sure yet, something about regulating land ownership."

"Do they still intend to partition the country into separate Arab and Jewish territories?"

"No, I think that's out now."

Roosevelt grunted. With Arabs and Jews living side by side in Palestine, it was obvious that the British would not want to rock the boat. They would be most reluctant to allow much more Jewish immigration into Palestine.

"Two more Congressmen have come forward to urge the loosening of US immigration restrictions," added Hull. "Congress will be divided right down the middle over this business if something's not done about it soon."

Roosevelt pushed his wheelchair toward the window and looked out across the broad expanse of green lawn in front of the White House. He couldn't hope to share American's increasing immigration burden with other countries without there being a large international conference on the subject. Britain was the key. Without them, no other country could be persuaded to take part.

He looked out the window again. Maybe there was a way.

"Get back to London, Cordell, and tell them we understand their position. We won't mention Palestine as long as they don't talk about our loosening immigration quotas. And I want a press release to that effect issued on the day of the conference. That should get everyone off my back."

Yes, thought Hull. Make a big show of doing something then sit on the fence some more. "That should do the trick," he said without conviction. "Have you decided on a location for the conference yet, Sir?"

"Switzerland, I think. With so many countries attending, we'll want neutral ground."

But a few days later, the President found himself reading a memorandum from the Swiss ambassador, respectfully declining the request of his country to host the conference. The note expressed the concern that anti-German remarks made at the meeting could compromise Switzerland's neutrality.

A new venue was quickly arranged. The conference would now take place on July 6<sup>th</sup> at Evian Les Bains in the French Alps.

The flower seller gave Rabbi Weiss his change and handed over a spray of carnations.

"I hope Madame will find these to her liking," she said.

"Oh, yes. I'm sure she will. They're quite beautiful."

"Merci bien, Monsieur. Bonjour."

Whistling as he went, the Rabbi made his way back through the grounds of Evian's Hotel Royale where he and his wife had just arrived. He reached the hotel's imposing entrance and passed through the revolving doors into the spacious foyer. Weiss was leading the Jewish delegation at the conference in two days' time and had high hopes of finally reaching a resolution of the Jewish resettlement question.

He called the lift and made his way to their room where he found Ruth sitting down knitting a sweater by the window. He held the flowers out to her.

"For my darling wife," he said.

"Oh, they're beautiful. Thank you." She got up from the window-seat and kissed his forehead. "Now what can we use for a vase?"

"In a moment, darling. I want to talk to you first."

She put the flowers on the bed and sat down again.

"What's on your mind, Leo?" she asked.

"Well, it's the conference of course. I have such expectations of today. I pray that common sense will finally prevail and that the British will allow us to return to our promised land. It will all work out, won't it, Ruthie?"

"I hope so dear. But you know me, I've never trusted politicians. They're the masters of telling people what they think they want to hear but in the end, the only folk they look out for are themselves."

"Oh, you're such a pessimist Ruth. All these foreign ministers haven't come here for nothing. That would just be a waste of everyone's time. Come on, I'm thirsty. Let's go downstairs for some tea."

In the hotel lounge below there were two new arrivals. A well-dressed man in his mid-forties accompanied by a younger woman sat down at a table by the door. She took a large pile of files from a briefcase and placed them on the table. He beckoned over the waiter and ordered tea and cakes for two. The woman began to busy herself sorting through the files and a moment later the Weisses entered the lounge.

The well-dressed man got up as he saw them come in. He went over to the door and greeted them warmly, shaking Leo firmly by the hand.

"Rabbi Weiss! So good to see you Leo my old friend and you too, Ruth. How are you both?"

"Couldn't be better," he said, ushering them over to his table. "You haven't met my secretary Elsie, have you?"

The young woman stood up and gave a smile of greeting. Weiss couldn't help noticing how attractive she was. She was pretty with fine dark eyes and an olive skin. "A pleasure to meet you my dear," he said.

"Please join us," Karl said. "Here..." He moved the briefcase off the chair next to Elsie and pulled it out for Ruth to sit down on.

"Thank you," said Ruth.

"Well, Karl," said Leo, "I'd heard that you were going to be the head of the German delegation."

"Yes. Yes, but we're only here as observers, you know. We have no say in the final decision-making." He beckoned the waiter back over an ordered more tea and cakes.

Ruth and Elsie seemed to take to each other straight away and soon they were chatting on happily about the latest fashions.

Weiss leant over the table to speak confidentially to Becker. "I pray that we can finally get the rest of the world to open their doors to our people."

"Well, speaking as an observer, Leo, I can't see why not. The Reich is making it quite clear that they will do everything they can to make the exit of the whole Jewish populations of Germany and Austria as easy and painless as possible."

"I have to confess," nodded the Rabbi, "to feeling a sense of guarded optimism. It's inconceivable that we should come so close to finding a solution only to fall at the final hurdle. But there is a question I need to ask you Karl. Will the German authorities allow us to take our possessions and our money out with us? This is going to be a crucial factor in persuading host countries to let us in. Nobody's going to want tens of thousands of homeless, destitute refugees landing on their shores."

"My understanding is that the Führer will allow the Jews to take up to 50% of their savings with them, subject to there being an agreement struck to take *all* the Jews out."

"Well, as you know, Karl, I'm a committed Zionist. I sincerely hope that the Americans can persuade Britain to let us all into Palestine. That's where we all really belong."

"Well, it's not up to me, but I can assure you of this; I will do everything I possibly can to facilitate the peaceful exit of your people out of Germany. I personally know Myron Taylor, head of the American delegation. He and I run the largest steel companies in

American and Germany respectively and I've had countless dealings with him in the past. That's why the Führer chose me for this mission."

They finished their tea and cakes and Becker got up to leave.

"I hope you will both forgive us. Elsie and I have to go now to attend a meeting with the other German delegates."

"Of course, of course," said Weiss warmly. "I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your offers of friendship and support to our people."

He noticed that his wife and Elsie appeared to be exchanging room numbers.

"We've arranged to go out shopping together tomorrow," said Ruth after their friends had left. "Elsie is *so* sweet, isn't she?"

The next day at 8pm, on the evening before the opening of the conference, a private meeting took place between the Western representatives and the German delegation. Present were chief US delegate Myron Taylor, Britain's Lord Winterton, two Canadian representatives and Sir Neill Malcolm from The League of Nations. Karl Becker attended as Germany's representative accompanied by his SS aide Lieutenant Schellenberger.

"Let us come straight to the point," Sir Neill said briskly. "How many Jewish refugees are we talking about Herr Becker?"

"Following the recent union with Austria, there are approximately 600,000," Karl replied.

"You must realize, Herr Becker," said Lord Winterton, waving his pipe in the air, "that although we greatly wish to help the Jewish people, the total number of people involved is really quite overwhelming. Perhaps we need to try and research some kind of compromise?"

Karl sat up sharply in his chair.

"Compromise, what do you mean?" The Führer has made his position quite clear. He insists that *all* Jews leave the Reich's territories.

"Ja," Schellenberger added tartly. "The inferior race of Jewry cannot be allowed to sap our country's resources any longer. To rid Germany and her territories of all the Jews is our final and irrevocable goal. A compromise is completely out of the question."

Karl shot an uneasy glance in the SS officer's direction. "You see the difficulty we have gentlemen?" he remarked.

"But you must see that we can't possibly absorb all those people," added Taylor.

"What kind of argument is that?" retorted Schellenberger. "If the whole damn lot of them have been living in our own small country all this time, then it would be perfectly easy for you to spread them out amongst themselves!"

Karl held up a hand to silence his over-zealous subordinate. The SS officer had been wished on Becker for the mission; presumably, Karl supposed, to keep an eye on his conduct and report back on it to SS Chief Himmler. He turned to speak to the American.

"Surely, Mr. Taylor, you could increase your immigration quotas." He turned to address Lord Winterton, "And you, My Lord, could take thousands of them into your colonies. What about Canada, for instance; such a large country, so few people."

"Yes, but I'm afraid our country's not really an option," said one of the Canadian delegates. "We have difficulties of our own at the moment."

"Ja, we know all about that," Schellenberger butted in scornfully. "It's on record that your Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King is an enthusiastic supporter of the Führer's



anti-Jewish policies. I seem to recall that recently he publically referred to the Führer as a 'very sincere and a very good man'."

The Canadian delegate shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"And your Mr. King," the SS man continued, "when he was pressed to say how many Jews he would allow into Canada, we all know what he said, don't we? That was 'none too many'."

"Then what about Palestine?" said Karl, trying valiantly to keep the discussion moving." So many of the Jews are desperate to go there. They regard it as their spiritual homeland! And together maybe we could press South America to take some as well. And what about Britain's African colonies? We'll happily do our share. We'll pay for their transportation and make all the necessary arrangements."

Both the British and American delegates were beginning to look decidedly ill at ease. Lord Winterton puffed feverishly away at this pipe. "Look," he said, "this is a very complicated matter."

"Yes," added Taylor, "and there are other issues too."

"Complicated in what way?" asked Karl. "What are these other issues? Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm starting to get the district impression that not one of you is really prepared to offer the Jews a home at all."

There was an uncomfortable silence as the two principle western delegates now shuffled uncomfortably in their chairs.

"I wouldn't say that, exactly," said Winterton finally.

"Well, then what would you say *exactly*?"

There was another awkward silence.

"Well, well! So we're all actually in agreement after all," mocked Schellenberger. "None of us want the Jews!" He looked triumphantly from Taylor to Winterton. Neither spoke.

The scales were suddenly lifted from Karl's eyes. He realized with horror that he'd been brought here on a total fool's errand. The Western nations had no intention whatsoever of finding a solution to the Jewish problem.

"Gentlemen," he appealed, "thirty two nations have gathered here at Evian to discuss this problem. The Führer's resolve is firm. If you don't manage to come up with a solution, I very much fear that he will find one of his own!"

The next day, on July 6<sup>th</sup>, delegates representing countries from all around the world gathered together in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Royale. Among them was Rabbi Weiss.

But he received a great blow that morning. He was informed that he was not going to be allowed to directly address the conference on behalf of the Jewish People. He was aghast and astounded. All that he could do now was look on in silence as the fate of the Jewish people was decided by gentiles.

Karl had done his best to keep him apprised of developments. He had received a small note from Karl over breakfast hinting that things were not going well and his earlier optimism was fast disappearing, to be replaced by a deepening sense of foreboding. He took his seat at the rear of the ballroom.

The eyes of the whole world were on Evian. Journalists from every country eagerly crowded into the hotel, waiting to hear how the world would respond to the problem of the Jews. The atmosphere was stifling and there was standing room only. Expectations rose to fever pitch.

It fell on Myron Taylor to make the opening address. He began by expressing his most sincere sympathy for 'those unfortunate human beings'. However, there was nothing materially new that he had to offer. The US could not make any changes to its current immigration quotas; consequently it couldn't in fairness expect any other country to either. No single country could bear the financial burden of mass immigration on a huge scale. Rather, he said, while acknowledging that places of refuge must somehow be found for these unfortunate 'political refugees', it was private organizations who should be asked to raise the necessary funds.

Rabbi Weiss listened in horror. The American delegate had spoken for twenty minutes without making any positive proposals at all. Worse than that, he was obviously trying to distance himself as much as possible from the whole issue. Not once was the word 'Jew' mentioned. Before he could recover from this shock, Great Britain delivered the killer blow.

Lord Winterton deliberately avoided any reference to Palestine throughout the whole of his long speech. As Weiss listened to the British delegate's remarks, he suddenly realized that the whole of the vast British empire had been effectively sealed off to Jewish immigration. The British Isles, Australia, South Africa, Canada, Jamaica, Trinidad, Honduras, Kenya, Tanganyika, Rhodesia – all of them denied having any room whatsoever.

Now that the example had been set, delegates from one country after another followed suite in declaring their deep sympathy but saying in loud and unequivocal terms that 'They cannot come here'.

One after another the barriers rose up – Latin America, Brazil, Argentina. The excuses ranged from 'we're too small', through 'we're overcrowded ourselves' to 'we've done enough already'. Only the Dominican Republic stood alone in offering to take 100,000 refugees.

The German journalists there were in their element. They spewed forth a frenzy of gloating articles. *The Der Reichswart Grenzboten* of July 13 had the headline '*Who wants them? Nobody!*' And the lead writer in the *Daziger Verspoten* of July 15 wrote '*No one is ready to fight the cultural shame of Europe, by admitting even a few thousand Jews. The conference has entirely justified our policy against International Jewry!*'

An hour after the conference closed, Karl and Elsie knocked on the door of the Weiss' suite. Ruth came to the door and opened it to reveal her husband throwing things furiously back into his suitcase. She beckoned for her visitors to come in.

"I've just got room service to bring us tea," she said gently. "Please, sit down and have some with us."

"I just *cannot* understand it, Karl," stormed the Rabbi. "Why the hell did President Roosevelt even bother calling this conference when it was perfectly obvious from the start that neither the United State nor the British Empire had any intention at all of offering places to Jewish refugees!"

Becker took a cup of tea from Ruth and sat down wearily in an armchair. "I don't know. I'm really sorry, Leo. It's become sickeningly clear today that the West doesn't care the slightest bit about the plight of the Jews."

The Rabbi slammed his suitcase shut and threw it across the bed. "It was all just a cynically executed propaganda exercise," he snorted, "to make Roosevelt look good without actually having to do anything."

Becker and his secretary exchanged glances. "You do realize, don't you my old friend," said Karl "that you are all on your own now. Your family in Germany need to make plans to secure their own safety before it's too late."

"How could it have come to this?" beseeched the Rabbi.

"I've realized," said his friend sadly, "that it isn't just the Nazi Party of Germany who is intent on the destruction of the Jews. My eyes have finally been opened over these last few days. Most of the Western world is conspiring behind the scenes to assist Hitler in his execution of his promise to destroy the whole of European Jewry. And it's quite apparent that they have the full support of the Catholic Church."

"Well its clear now," said Weiss bitterly. "The hatred for the Jews doesn't just stem from Hitler. Anti-Semitism is firmly entrenched across the whole of Western civilization!"

"Believe me," said Becker. "I did my best for your people. I even suggested that you be allowed to go to Madagascar or one of the other African colonies once I saw which way the tide was turning. But all to no avail."

"But what's wrong with letting us return to the Holy Land? That is where we truly belong."

"Politics, my friend, that's the problem. The British do not wish to risk upsetting their Arab friends by opening up Palestine. It's because of the oil of course. It's all a very sad situation. Take my advice and get your family out of Germany as soon as possible. Palestine won't be an option for you much longer and now the West has given Hitler carte blanche, he'll do whatever he likes to your people and there'll be no one there to stop him.

They finished their tea in silence and after their visitors had left, Ruth sat down next to her husband on the bed and took his hand in hers.

"How can this be happening to us?" she asked.

"You know Ruthie," he replied with great sadness in his voice, "there's an old saying in the Talmud. If a jug falls upon a stone; woe the jug. If a stone falls upon a jug; woe the jug. Looks like we're the jug..."

### Chapter 3 Moving Away

#### *Spring 1938*

“Are we there yet?” sighed Lukaš, looking out of the train window impatiently. Soon, Lukaš, soon. Just another hour or so,” said his Grandmother, gently stroking his black curly hair.

“An hour or so!” whined the seven year old. “I’m bored!”

“Tell you what. Why don’t you boys play a game or something? Here...” she began to fish through her large, shapeless handbag. “Here’s a pack of cards. It’ll make the time pass more quickly.”

His brother Lutek took the cards and began to shuffle them carefully.

“Come on, hurry up!” exclaimed Lukaš. “Why does Lutek have to shuffle the cards? Why can’t I?”

“Because he’s four years older than you. He’s the eldest,” smiled his Grandmother.

It was late in the afternoon but the early summer heat was still oppressive as their train passed through the wheat fields of Central Czechoslovakia. Elli Weiss wiped her brow with a white handkerchief as she watched her grandsons play. They were on their way from Warsaw to spend their summer vacation with Lotte and Kamil’s family on the farm in Leòaky.

She watched the rolling fields and villages pass the window while Lukaš’ constant stream of questions and comments on the card game droned on in her ear.

The train rattled through the Czech countryside for another hour and a half until finally it came to a shuddering halt in the small station of Leòaky.

“Here we are. Put your caps on so you look smart. And make sure you don’t leave anything behind.”

Lukaš pulled a hasty comb through his hair as Elli gathered up their bags and made her way down the corridor.

The doors opened and immediately the sound of hissing steam filled the air. As she stepped down onto the platform, she heard a shout from the other end of the platform, barely audible above the din.

“Grandma, Grandma!”

Elli looked up to see Lotte and Kamil standing on the far side of the platform. Their two young daughters, seven year old Zofie and six year old Jasmina had already broken away from their parents’ hands and were running towards her, the colored ribbons in their hair flapping like butterflies. Elli liked the two little girls to call her Grandma even though, strictly speaking, she wasn’t. But with Lotte being Esther’s sister, Zofie and Jasmina had always felt like grandchildren to her.

“Girls, girl!” smiled Elli, wrapping them in her arms and hugging them closely to her. “My goodness, how pretty you both look.”

Zofie presented her with a large bunch of wild field flowers.

“I picked them myself, just for you,” she announced.

Lotte and Kamil arrived a few moments later and they, too, embraced her.

“How was the trip?” asked Lotte.

“Fine, fine. A bit stuffy on the train, but it was alright.” She turned round to see Lutek and Lukaš standing behind her, shifting from foot to foot. “Well boys, come on, say hello. Don’t be shy. It’s only been four months since you all saw each other at the wedding.”

The boys stepped forward and timidly greeted the two girls. They’d all played together almost every day in Munich since being very small. But seeing the girls now in this strange new environment made Munich seem somehow very distant.

“Don’t you boys look smart? Are those new shoes, Lukaš?” asked Kamil.

Lukaš nodded and proudly raised each foot in turn to show them off.

“And Lutek, I see you’ve bought your violin. You’ll have to give us a recital later,” said Lotte. “But come on now, let’s go home. You’ll all want to rest a little and freshen up, I’m sure.”

Kamil picked up their bags and loaded them one by one onto the back of their horse drawn buggy.

It was only a short ride to the farmhouse where Lotte and Kamil had been living for the last two years. They’d moved to Czechoslovakia following the introduction of the Nuremburg Laws in Germany. Kamil was a Catholic but Lotte was Jewish and when they moved to his small village town, they’d agreed it would be best to conceal Lotte’s Jewishness from the other villagers.

They lived on the same homestead as Kamil’s parents and when they pulled into the courtyard, all the family was waiting outside to welcome the new visitors. The building was typical of many small Czech towns. Its walls were painted white with calcimite and it had a terracotta tiled roof. A white tiled oven range, going all the way from the floor to the ceiling, divided the house into four rooms and provided heat for each other. There was another oven with its own hearth in the kitchen for cooking. The wooden floors were painted and were rubbed with wax each month to give them a glossy luster. There was a pantry with a dirt floor. This was where potatoes, cabbages and other vegetables were kept through the winter. In the summer, dairy products, eggs and meat would be found there.

Plum and pear trees grew outside the bedroom windows and behind these was a vegetable patch. A small outhouse lay to one side, surrounded by a jungle of nettles. They’d defeated all Kamil’s attempts to get rid of them, so he’d settled for preventing their spreading too much by frequent and vigorous trimming. On one side of the courtyard was his parents’ original home and on a second side was a built-in storehouse where he kept the farm equipment. On the third side was the new home where Lotte and Kamil lived. In the center of the courtyard there was a large stone well and next to that a cat lazed on the ground, licking her paw and stroking it over her face, paying no attention at all to the chicken running around her pecking at the ground.

Elli went inside to rest and cool off while the children played outdoors with the farm animals. They played outside until it grew dark and after a simple supper, they finally settled down in bed.

The adults stayed up late into the night talking by the light of oil lamps about everything that happened in the last six months. Lotte was especially anxious to hear news of Esther and Samuel.

“Have they managed to get their visas yet to leave Germany?” she asked.

“No, not yet. But I’m sure it won’t be long now,” Elli assured.

“And Vera?”

“Ah, well, there’s good news there. Your niece has finally become engaged to Aaron.”

Lotte nodded in approval. "Ah, good. Not before time. That boy wouldn't have waited forever."

"I think they're planning to move away to somewhere in Arabia. I can't remember where exactly. My memory's not what it was."

"I'm really pleased for her. When I saw Vera at the wedding, you know, she seemed very doubtful about the prospect of moving so far away."

"Well, it all seems to be settled. We're just waiting for them to announce the date."

"And what about Anna?" asked Lotte.

"No definite news yet. She's still seeing Shimon quite a lot but I don't think they've made any concrete plans."

"With the times being as they are," sighed Lotte, "we all have to make so many difficult decisions."

"Yes, everything's changed so much," Elli lamented. "So many of the family in such far-flung places."

"Yes," said Kamil, "but it's for the best, isn't it? We all know that."

"Yes, you're right, but we're all scattered to the four winds!" said Elli. "I just want the family to be together again."

One yawn led to another and one by one they all went to their beds to the sound of a thousand crickets chirping outside the windows.

## ***Munich***

"Hurry up Aaron, we're going to be late," called Abraham Cohen.

"I'll be there in a minute, dad. I'm just looking for the original purchase receipts just in case," answered Aaron. He stuffed some papers into his briefcase, snapped it shut and grabbed his hat and coat. He hurried out of the house to where his father was already waiting in the car with the engine running.

"I guess you're looking forward to meeting Omar and Uncle Sharron so you can discuss Egypt with them," said Abraham as they sped away from the house.

"Yes. I've a lot to find out still. All I know is what I've read in history books – the pyramids and the Pharaohs and all that stuff. I want to know what Egypt's like *now*."

"Are you sure you won't think again about going to Palestine instead, Aaron?" Abraham asked. He had never been entirely pleased at the prospect of his only son moving so far away from him.

"Dad, we've been over this a hundred times! There's nothing at all in Palestine for me. It might be fine for you and mom to retire to, but I want to start a business. Uncle Sharron's in Egypt and Cairo's very cosmopolitan; so many business opportunities. Sorry, Dad. I've made up my mind."

Abraham knew he was defeated. "Oh, it's alright. I understand really. Your mother and I would just have liked to have you nearby, that's all. I know your Uncle didn't have much trouble settling down with Sarah when they moved there twenty years ago. Goodness me, twenty years! I used to think how brave he was to have gone off to live in such a far-off distant land."

"Do you know this Omar, Dad?"

“Omar?” Err, no, but I met his father the last time he came to Germany. Quite a wheeler dealer, but he’s from the old school; once he shakes hands, the deals done. Their company is using at least half of our textile output now in their Egyptian military caps.”

Cohen Fabrik had been established by Abraham’s father to manufacture military uniforms and caps but in the 1920’s it had diversified to produce durable textiles as well. At first they just used these for making their own caps but they were high quality products and soon they began to export to several other countries as well. One of these was Egypt. Abraham’s older brother Sharron was a textile trader there and introduced the product to one of his clients, Hussein Mubarak. Like Abraham, Mubarak owned a cap manufacturing factory.

It was Omar, Mubarak’s eldest son, who was making the trip to Munich with a view to buying some of the Cohen Fabrik’s machinery.

“Do you think he’ll do the deal?” asked Aaron with obvious worry in his voice.

“I don’t see why he wouldn’t. We’re offering it to him at half the original price and it’s in excellent condition; top of the range stuff and it’s only five years old. That machinery will last another forty years!”

“The best part of all is that the money from the sale can be held for us by Uncle Sharron in Egypt. The way things are going now in Germany we need to take precautions.”

Their eyes met.

“Quite so,” sighed Abraham.

Aaron had everything at his fingertips. All his papers were spread out in neat piles across his desk so he could be ready to answer any questions there might be. It wasn’t long before Omar arrived at the factory office with Sharron. The two brothers embraced and greeted each other enthusiastically.

“And this is Omar Mubarak,” said Sharron.

Abraham and Aaron shook hands with him warmly. He was a handsome man with piercing black eyes and a strong, muscular build. He also had a beguiling charm which had the effect of putting everyone in his presence at ease.

“I hope you had a pleasant trip and that you’re enjoying our country,” said Abraham.

“Yes, thank you. I like Germany very much but it’s quite different from Egypt.”

“How’s your father keeping?”

“Very well, thank you. Still working sixteen hours a day, but he loves it.”

“Please come in. Let’s sit down,” Abraham showed them in. “I’ll never forget the night your father took me to the Sheppard Hotel. It was the first time I’ve ever seen belly dancing. We were right in the front row and he kept handing me money to tuck into the girls’ costume.”

“So, you had a good time...” said Omar winking at Sharron.

“Of course!”

“And did you tell Hedy about it?” asked Sharron laughing.

“Of course I did. Well, sort of...”

“Sort of?” asked Aaron.

“Well, I told her a little white lie, that the girls, to put it politely, were rather plump. I had to think of your mother’s feelings naturally.”

They all laughed.

"Aaron, I hear from your Uncle that you're interested in moving to Egypt," said Omar.

"Yes, that's right."

"And when do you plan to make the move?"

"Oh, that's difficult to say exactly. I've got a few practical things to sort out first, you know; finances, and visa."

"And your wedding," added Abraham.

"Congratulations!" exclaimed Omar.

"Yes, that too, of course."

"Thank you," smiled Aaron.

"Be sure to let me know once you've decided when you're arriving. I'll be happy to show you around and help you feel at home."

"Thanks. That's very kind of you. I'm sure I'll be taking you up on that offer. But now, to business. Why don't I show you around our factory so you can have a look at the machinery and the equipment?"

He led Omar along the corridor towards the production rooms.

Aaron's anxiety over making the sale began to diminish. Omar seemed to be a man he could do business with. They spent an hour inspecting the equipment together and then reviewed the operations and production figures. They returned to the office to rejoin Abraham and his brother.

"I must admit, everything is in excellent condition," said Omar. "Forgive me for asking, but why do you want to sell off the cap manufacturing side of your business and just keep the textile looms? You surely have a fine product of your own here."

"We're cutting back on our operations here and with Aaron leaving for Egypt, my wife and I will be moving to Palestine. So there isn't much point in hanging onto all this." Abraham chose his words carefully. He didn't really want to explain that they had lost their contract with the German Armed Forces or go into all the difficulties they'd had to endure since the National Socialists came to power in 1933.

"I see..." Omar was listening attentively.

"Well, you've seen it all for yourself now. I'm sure you'll agree we're offering it at a very good price," said Aaron.

"If you need some more time to think..." said Abraham.

"No, no. I have a proposal," replied Omar. "I'll take the machinery at your price on two conditions. One, we split the shipping cost between us and two, Aaron comes for a week to oversee their installation and get them into full working order."

Abraham sat back in his chair and breathed a deep sigh of satisfaction and relief.

"I'm sure my son is more than willing to travel to Egypt to do that. You and your father are old and valued clients of ours. I hope that we'll continue to do business together for a long time into the future."

They shook hands once again and Omar left the office with an invitation from Abraham to join him at his house for dinner the following evening.

The smell of freshly baked plum butter buns and coffee lured everyone to the breakfast table the next morning. Lukaš and the other children were eager to play outside and ran out of the house as soon as they'd stuffed the food down their throats.



They made straight for the barn where a cat had a litter of kittens and three weeks earlier a goat had given birth to a kid. Zofie and Jasmina played with the ginger colored kitten while Lukaš scampered about after the kid, trying in vain to catch it.

Kamil was out in the field cutting the clover with his scythe when Lukaš came up to him, straining the weight of the young goat. After an hour of chasing it around, he'd finally managed to catch up with it and picked it up.

"Uncle Kamil, can I have him? Can I have this one?"

"What are you going to do with a goat, Lukaš?" smiled Kamil, wiping the sweat from his brow as he leaned against the scythe.

"I'll take him everywhere with me. I'll teach him things and I'll look after him, he's so much fun. Oh, please, Uncle Kamil. He likes me really...*please...please!*" Kamil laughed as he watched the boy strain hard to hold onto the squirming goat which seemed determined to get away.

"Well, ok the. But you'll have to look after him and keep an eye on him so he doesn't get into any trouble. If he gets into the vegetable patch and eats all the cabbages, Grandma will have you both over her knee." He shook a finger at his nephew.

"No, no. He'll never do that," insisted Lukaš.

"Well, alright then. Let's take him back to the barn and put a little collar on him so you can teach him to walk on a lead. It'll be easier than carrying him around like that all day."

Lukaš named his new friend Pepík. He showed his new pet off all over the village, whistling loudly as he walked just to make sure that no one could fail to notice him.

At first they made an awkward pair. Sometimes Pepík would dart ahead, dragging Lukaš after him at the end of the lead. Other times he would stubbornly refused to budge, defying every trick Lukaš could think of to get him moving.

The weeks passed and the days became hot and blustery. Lutek joined the men in the fields, harvesting the clover and the hay. He was at the age where he'd begun to lose interest in children's games and after the long hot days in the fields, he would play his violin in the evening after supper. He was a talented musician and his big ambition was to enter the Conservatory of Music when he is sixteen. Sometimes friends from the village would come to hear him play and there would be singing and dancing until late into the night.

Lotte and Elli busied themselves making jams and preserves from the ripening fruits and vegetables in preparation for the long winter months that lay ahead.

Every morning Elli set out for the nearby woods to pick mushrooms. Every morning Lukaš and his goat accompanied her. When she picked a full basket they would sit down in the clearing and talk for a while before heading back.

"What are you going to do with all those mushrooms, Grandma?"

"Well, I clean them, slice them up thinly, and then dry them in the sun. We'll take some of them back home with us. We'll give some to Lotte and we'll sell the rest on market day. Czech crowns are valuable currency. I can make a tidy sum of money to take back to Poland with us."

"What are you going to do with all the money?"

"Well, I really don't know if it's going to be as much as you think, but I'll tell you, shall I?"

Lukaš drew closer.

“I’m going to buy some wool and knit you boys sweaters and mittens for the winter.”

The children played in the barnyards and the fields. Sometimes they went to the pond to fish for carp or to creek to catch rock lobsters. Zofie and Jasmina were far too squeamish to handle the lobsters themselves, so they allowed their brave male cousins to bring them home in their caps. Everywhere that Lukaš went, Pepík went. The little goat was more and more obedient with every day that passed.

Market day was on the first Sunday in August and the whole family spent the week before working very hard. They harvested more fruit and vegetables, prepared their produce and started to get everything ready.

Lukaš even gave Pepík a bath in the creek, and then dressed him in a little straw hat and an old checkered waistcoat.

They left early on the Saturday morning with their flatbed wagon loaded with fresh produce and dried goods to sell. They all put on their best clothes and Lukaš donned a bow tie and a checkered waistcoat quite like that of his little friend’s. When they arrived in the market square it was already bustling with people from surrounding villages bringing in their produce to sell and to barter. Their wagons were loaded with sacks of potatoes, grains, vegetables, fruit, cheeses and live chickens and ducks. Women picked up the chickens one by one, blowing at their feathers to check if the skin was yellow, indicating that the bird had enough fat on it.

The chickens clucked, the ducks quacked and the bargaining went on.

Lutek and Lukaš helped their Grandmother set up her table of dried mushrooms. Beside them was an old man of about seventy. He was very thin and sinewy and hardly had any teeth left. He wore an old cap and threadbare clothes that he starched and pressed especially for the occasion. He’d come to the market on a bicycle that was looking every bit as old as he was, towering a cart of handmade rakes, brooms and wooden tools behind him as he rode.

“Good morning,” he tipped his cap. “My name is NemeÖek.”

Elli greeted him. She’d seen him a few times cycling along the lands around LeÖaky. He lived in an old farmhouse at the very edge of the village.

Lutek peppered him with questions about how he made his tools and, happy to have someone take an interest, the old man patiently explained his craft.

As the square began to fill with people, Lukaš straightened Pepík’s hat and waistcoat then pulled him over to where his Grandma’s table was. As people passed by, everyone stopped to admire his pet. Lukaš then enticed them into looking at his Grandma’s mushrooms by telling them that Pepík had helped sniff out all the tastiest ones. And so with his help, Elli sold all twelve of her packages by noon. Lukaš had even managed to convince an old lady that she needed to buy a new broom.

“You’re a clever little fellow,” said Mr. NemeÖek. “We could do with you here every market day.”

Lutek showed such an interest in how the wooden tools were made that the old man offered to teach him. Every day after that, the two boys and Pepík would walk over to old man NemeÖek’s farm where he would teach them how to make brooms and rakes.

It was one morning as Lukaš and Pepík were helping his Grandmother to collect mushrooms in the wood that he noticed some of the leaves on a nearby tree were turning crimson orange.

"We're going to have a yummy mushroom sauce on our dumplings all winter," said Elli as she bent down to pluck a choice specimen.

"Grandma?" said Lukaš, rubbing Pepík behind the ears.

"Yes, dear."

"Grandma, I like it here. I don't want to go back to Warsaw," he said with a very serious look on his face.

She stood up and saw he was fighting back big, wet tears.

"I know, Lukaš. I like it better here too; the fresh air, the woods. In Warsaw it's all streets and dust, isn't it? But we have to go back. Lutek has to go back to school and you're going to be starting grade one. Besides, don't you miss Mummy and Daddy?"

"Yes, but why can't they come here? I can go to school here.

"There's no use fretting about it; it's not to be. God willing we'll come back again next summer," said Elli gently.

"Can I take Pepík with me?"

The goat knew his name well by now and raised his head from the shrubs. He looked intently at Lukaš while carrying on chomping the leaves.

"No, we can't take him either," she sighed. "He wouldn't like it in Warsaw very much. He's happier here too."

Lukaš pulled at his rope and Pepík came to his side. With arms clinging tightly around the goat's neck, Lukaš began to sob quietly.

## **Rome**

Samuel Weiss adjusted his tie one last time, slipped on his white linen summer jacket and went to kiss his daughter on the forehead.

She was sitting quietly by the window.

"I'll see you at four o'clock, Anna darling," he said. "Is anything the matter?"

"No. Nothing really. I was just daydreaming. You'd better get off. You've a lot to do today."

"Yes, you're right. I'll meet you at the Campo di Fiorio, near the man with the pigeon. Make sure you're on time!"

He allowed himself a little smile as he made his way down to the hotel lobby. There was something he knew that his daughter didn't. She was about to have a surprise visitor.

Samuel was the first to arrive in the downstairs salon of the Excelsior Hotel. He sipped on a coffee while he waited for the others to arrive and reflected upon the irony of his presence as a Jew at the meeting. Despite the growing threat to his people in Germany, he remained for the moment one of the country's most influential bankers.

Since the beginning of the year, Adolf Hitler had been working on the assumption that France would soon become embroiled in a war with Italy. In fact he counted on it and was preparing to capitalize on the opportunities it presented. Following his successful annexation of Austria, he had his eyes now firmly fixed on Czechoslovakia. The main opposition to this would come from Britain and France. However, the latter was already

entangled with Italy over the Spanish Civil War and Hitler was keeping the fire well stoked by lending support to the Italians in the form of raw materials.

The purpose of the meeting was to make the detailed negotiation for the supply of these of raw material to Italy.

Samuel ordered another coffee and in a short time he heard voices at the entrance to the salon. Into view came Karl Beck, fresh from the Evian Conference. As Germany's most prominent industrialist, he had travelled there to represent his country's business interests. Becker was Managing Director of the United Steel Works which not only had the greatest manufacturing output in the country but also made trucks and tanks for the *Wehrmacht*. Karl Becker, therefore, was a very important man.

Following closely behind him was Christoph Borer, Vice President of the Swiss United Bank and an influential international financier.

Samuel knew both Karl and Christoph quite well on a professional level and the three men greeted each other cordially as they waited for the rest of the delegates to arrive. Altogether there were around ten from Germany and half a dozen Italians including Foreign Minister Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law. One by one, they all arrived. At a quarter to ten, the meeting began.

Karl presented the main points of the German position with Samuel and Christoph providing details of how the transaction would be financed. The Italians would pay for the raw materials in Swiss Francs, which were to be deposited into an account in Switzerland.

The Italians evidently disliked the idea of using a Swiss bank and at first put up strong objections but by midafternoon, and after some hard bargaining, the deal was struck.

After the meeting dispersed, Christoph went over to talk to Karl and Samuel.

"Gentlemen," he said. "Thank you so much for your support today. Please agree to be my guests for lunch tomorrow before I leave for home."

"I'd be delighted," replied Karl.

"Yes, thank you," said Samuel, "although I'm here in Rome with my daughter and we're expecting a family friend to join us later today."

"That's no problem. Bring them both along with you. And Karl, make sure you bring Elsie as well. Until tomorrow then..."

Christoph left, leaving Samuel and Karl to talk alone.

"I'm famished," said Karl. "If you've enough time, maybe we could go somewhere for a bite to eat."

"Sounds good to me, let's go."

The Hotel Excelsior was located near the top of the Spanish Steps and they walked out into the brilliant sunshine towards the famous stairway. For its whole length, the steps were decked with brightly colored flowers planted on both sides. They found a table at a shaded restaurant below near the fashionable shopping district of the Via Condotti and watched the people pass by the street.

"Ah!" Samuel sighed contently as he sipped his Campari and soda. "I'm really enjoying my stay in Rome. It's so, so different from Germany. *Life* here is so different from Germany."

"Yes," agreed Karl. "The people are so much more open, aren't they? Not haughty and reserved like we Germans are. And not a single person seems to talk about politics as

far as I can see. The Italians are much more interested in football than the latest ministerial pronouncements.”

“I suppose it’s the Latin temperament,” said Samuel. “But no, it’s more than that. People are free and happy here.”

“Germany used to be like this, do you remember?”

“Of course, I remember. But everything’s changed, hasn’t it? A dark cloud has come over us all.”

“It’s especially difficult for you,” added Karl.

Samuel looked Karl straight in the eye. His last words made him feel uneasy. Karl after all, friend or not, enjoyed a position in the upper echelons of the new Reich.

Karl noticed Samuel’s discomfort. “Look, Samuel,” he said. “Between you and me, I don’t agree with many of Hitler’s policies myself, despite my position. Especially all this terrible business with the Jews. But what can we do?” he shrugged helplessly.

Reassured that he could let his guard drop a little, Samuel asked, “Yours is a big firm. How many do you employ? Twenty thousand?”

“Thirty thousand,” corrected Karl.

“And do you still employ Jews?”

Karl let out a heavy sigh; clearly it was a difficult subject for him.

“Well, I’ve tried to keep on as many people as I can. As long as the authorities don’t stick their noses in too much, it’s not too bad. But...” he paused for a moment. “The SS are very thorough. I’ve lost some good people already; people who’ve been with the company for twenty years or more. I’ve tried to help them by finding a safe route out of Germany for them. Mainly, I’ve arranged for them to go to Shanghai. They don’t need a visa to go there.”

There was no way that Samuel could imagine moving to Shanghai. It seemed as remote a place to him as the far side of the moon. And what would you do there? Just linger around and wait for another country to allow you in? No, it was better to wait in Europe till the visas come through for Palestine.

“But I’m quite certain,” Karl continued, “that the best thing any Jew can do is to leave Germany right now and start a new life somewhere else. You’ve been lucky so far Samuel, but it won’t last. The conference in Evian that I’ve just come from made that crystal clear. Ask your brother. He was there.”

“I know. He rang me yesterday He was most distressed.” Samuel considered his friend’s advice for a moment. Maybe it was the most sensible course of action but he knew that most of his fellow Jews would be very reluctant to be forced out of their own country at a moment’s notice and travel halfway around the world.

“You’ve made plans, I take?” Karl asked.

“Yes. My wife and I are waiting for visas to go to Palestine. My daughter Anna will go there with us and my other daughter is engaged. She’s planning to move to Egypt with her husband after the wedding. And my brothers are all making their own plans. Moshe is already in Poland with his family.”

“You have a big family!”

“Indeed I do. My other brother Leo, you know all about. He’s going to Palestine too. Then there’s Leon, Leo’s twin. He’s a doctor. I’m not sure what he’s going to do yet. He’s much undecided.”

“You’d better all chase up your visa applications for Palestine quickly,” said Karl. “That door may soon be closed. But it’s good that you’ve all made proper plans. If you need any help, just let me know. I have very good connections.”

“I don’t know what to say. It’s very generous of you to offer, but you’d be taking such a huge risk!”

“Let me worry about that. I’ll take my chances. It’s a matter of principle. Come and see me as soon as we’re back in Germany.”

When her father was in his meeting, Anna explored Rome. In the morning she went to the art gallery and later to the bustling market of Campo di Fiorio.

Café Giardino was aptly named for it was a tiny, cool enclave of vines, hanging baskets and potted citrus trees opening onto the busy square. The air was warm and fragrant and the smells of freshly brewing coffee mingled with the scent of the multitudes of flowers for sale in the market.

Anna ordered a cappuccino and sat back to observe the market crowds. Most of the stalls were cluttered around the central statue of Giordano Bruno and along the shaded walls of the square while on the other side, colorful umbrellas softened the brightness of the afternoon August sun. Every basket of herbs, vegetables, fruit and berries was spilling over, the merchants carefully weighing out their produce on well-worn brass scales. Then there were the flowers, cascades of blooms in an explosion of different colors – yellow and orange lilies, pink gladiolas, magenta asters and deep indigo irises. Anna loved the deep dark red roses with their soft, velvety petals and their heady fragrance. She breathed in deeply.

The waiter brought her a frothy cappuccino with a slice of white chocolate cake and her gaze fell upon the magnificent stone facades of the buildings in the square.

Most were Baroque or from the Renaissance period. Their facades shone in differing shades of sepia and amber and brilliant red geraniums leaned up towards the sun from window boxes. Vines grew upwards from the crumbling plaster at the bases of the walls and sitting on a stone step at the bottom of one of these was an old man in his late sixties, absorbed in his newspaper. On his knee was green folded handkerchief on which perched a white speckled pigeon. Anna smiled at the sight of them. How many times, she wondered had the two of them sat on the same spot together.

It was nearly four o’clock when Anna looked down at her watch. Her father would be there at any moment. She asked the waiter for the bill but he told her it had already been paid.

“It must be some kind of mistake,” she said in surprise. “I’m here alone.”

“No. There’s no mistake, Signorina. That gentleman over there has settled your bill.” The waiter indicated the man with the pigeon. The old man’s face was hidden behind the newspaper.

Anna was puzzled. She couldn’t think of any reason why he should pay her bill. She didn’t know why he should even have noticed her. With just a little trepidation, she went over to thank him.

As she drew closer, she stopped and threw up her arms in laughter and delight.

“It’s you!”

The man put his newspaper down on the ground and the pigeon flew up to the window ledge above her. He slowly got up. Shimon stood in front of her, smiling from under the brim of an old man's cap.

"I don't believe it!" she shrieked. "What on earth are you doing here?" She threw her arms around his neck and Shimon lifted her high into the air and whirled her around, laughing uncontrollably.

"But where's the old man? It wasn't you all along, was it?"

"No, darling. Look..."

A man in his late sixties appeared from the doorway. The pigeon took off from the window ledge and landed on his shoulder. He began to speak and gesticulate enthusiastically in Italian.

"We were in on the trick together," Shimon explained.

"But how did you know I was going to be here?"

"Your father told me."

Anna laughed again. Shimon took off his cap and waistcoat, handed it back to the old man, thanked him and bade him farewell.

"Come on, let's go," he said taking Anna by the hand.

"Where to?"

"I don't know yet. Exploring."

Anna and Shimon wandered the narrow cobbled streets, discovering mosaic crowned gateways and palmed-shaped gardens and fountains. Rome seemed to have a fountain in every square and every park. They came in all shapes and sizes – Roman Gods, dolphins, seashells, horses; all cascading with fresh sparkling water.

As the rays of the sun grew longer they found a small elegant restaurant in the Piazza di Spagnato where they decided to have dinner. It was on the second floor and they chose a table by an open window which overlooked the Piazza below.

"Permit me to look after you personally this evening," said the patron, graciously handing Anna a red rose. "May I suggest a fine red wine from the region? Castelli Romani..."

Shimon took Anna's hand. "I'm so lucky to be with you."

"And I'm so happy you came to Rome!"

"Anna, will you marry me?" Shimon blurted out suddenly.

Anna's eyes filled with tears, "Oh, Shimon! I'd love to!"

He produced a ring from his pocket and placed it on her finger.

"I don't know what to say," said Anna, her eyes still moist. "I feel quite overcome..."

"You don't have to say anything darling," said Shimon softly. "Just hold my hand." He reached over and took her hand again gently in his.

"Oh Shimon, I wish we could stay here in Rome forever," said Anna wistfully.

"Yes, I know."

"There's three thousand years of history in this city!"

"You know what they say, don't you?"

"No. What do they say?" smiled Anna

*"Roma non basta una vita."*

"What does that mean?" she smiled inquisitively.

"In Rome, one lifetime is not enough."

Two musicians began to play folk tunes by the fountain. A shopkeeper who was closing up his shop joined in boisterously as he swept the sidewalk in the arcade below the restaurant.

The candle on the table flickered a soft breeze blew in from the window. Shimon watched the flame for a moment as it danced around with its smoke twirling upwards in lazy spirals.

"You know Anna, people have forgotten the simple pleasures – how to laugh, how to sing, how to be content with a glass of wine and a plate of food."

They finished their meal and lingered for a long time listening to the sound of the music drifting up from below.

When Shimon and Anna returned to the Hotel Excelsior, they wasted no time in telling Samuel the good news.

"My dears," he beamed. "I am *so* happy for you both." He clapped Shimon on the back. "So your mission to Rome has been successful, my boy. You're a very lucky young man to have won the hand of such a fine girl as Anna. Congratulations!"

After lunching with Christoph, they spent the rest of their last day in Rome visiting Vatican City with Karl Becker and his secretary Elsie.

Anna and Elsie had taken an immediate liking to each other and were already chatting away animatedly.

"Don't you just adore Rome?" asked Elsie excitedly.

"Oh, Yes. One can see why they call it the Eternal City."

Soon they were walking past the Swiss Guards and into the great expanse of St. Peter's Square.

"Look at it. It's huge," gasped Karl. "It's even more amazing than I'd imagine.

"And look at that obelisk," Elsie pointed to the needle-like stone monument that stood in the middle of the square. "I wonder how that got here."

"Oh, it dates back to ancient times when the Romans conquered Egypt," said Anna. "The brought home all kinds of treasures, you know, as spoils of war. I think this one came from Heliopolis.

"Ah, the benefits of having a history expert as a daughter," smiled Samuel, squeezing Anna's arm affectionately. After visiting the Basilica and the Vatican Museum, they made their way into the Sistine Chapel. Their footsteps echoed as they entered through the great bronzed doors. They stood and gazed in awe and wonderment at Michelangelo's huge frescoes on the ceilings and above the altar. The works were as great in their scale as they were in their accomplishment.

"It's incredible to imagine that just one man created all of this. Do you know, it quite restores my faith in humanity," whispered Samuel.

"Yes, it just goes to show that a man *can* achieve great things in a lifetime if he puts his mind to it," said Karl.

"It took him four years to complete," whispered Anna.

She looked at the crowded figures in the nine panels depicting events from the Book of Genesis. Energy and vitality seemed to surge through all their bodies. Every attitude of the human body and every emotion the human soul were portrayed so naturally and so



vividly that they almost seemed to breathe. Michelangelo had blended the mind, the spirit and the boy into a single glorious expression of humanity.

He had written once, she remembered, that there was no thought or feeling that could not be conveyed by the human body alone. He had painted the ceiling at a time when Roman citizens enjoyed considerable freedom and stability. It was a time when most political and religious oppressions had been lifted. The whole ceiling reflected the harmony and optimism of this era in Rome's history.

Elsie's eye fell upon the four corner spandrels at the corners of the ceiling which depicted four scenes of the Miraculous Salvation of Israel. The two above Elsie and Anna were of *Judith and Holofernes* and *David and Goliath*.

"What do they mean?" Elsie asked Anna.

"They show how God can triumph over evil. Look, there's Judith. She was a heroine of Israel who delivered her people from the enemies by entering their camp at night and beheading the sleeping General Holofernes. Judith embodies liberty and divine justice. And over there is David. He shows how even the weak can triumph over a stronger enemy if they have courage and skill.

They walked a little way towards the far end.

"And *The Punishment of Haman*?" asked Elsie, still intrigued.

"Haman was a court vizier who issued a decree ordering the slaughter of all Jews. Esther, the wife of the King and herself an Israelite, pleaded with her husband to have mercy on her people and revoke the decree. Well, her pleading proved successful and the King not only lifted the decree but also arrested Haman and had him condemned."

"You see," continued Anna. "The Jews have suffered persecution ever since Biblical Times." She was surprised that of all the scenes depicted by Michelangelo, Elsie had singled out the pendants. She asked her why.

Elsie put a finger on her lips. "Ssh..." she whispered to her friend.

The men, meanwhile, were studying the frescoes of the *Last Judgment* above the altar. They were in striking contrast to the lightness and harmony of the ceiling. These were much darker and much more brooding works.

"Michelangelo painted these a quarter of a century after he'd done the ceiling," commented Shimon. "Rome had been sacked and the turmoil of the Reformation was having a terrible, destructive effect on Roman culture and civilization. You can see. Look, he was in a completely different frame of mind when he did these."

Christ was seated in the center above a number of angels holding trumpets to their lips, calling the dead of judgment. Two other angels carried open books in their hands, from which they read out the records of the earthly life of those called to be judged.

Following the judgment, the righteous rose to Heaven to the left of Christ and the damned descended to Hell on his right.

"How pitiless of God. How fearsome in his vengeance on humanity," murmured Shimon.

"Yes. Michelangelo must have been quite disillusioned by what had become Rome to paint so much darkness and suffering," said Karl.

They lingered a little while longer taking in as many of the scenes from the fresco as they could.

Suddenly, Shimon noticed that his daughter had begun to shiver slightly. She was standing in the middle of chapel with her arms folded tightly around herself.

“Daddy,” she said. “I’m sorry, but I suddenly feel very cold. I really don’t know what it is, but could we go and get a coffee, please?”

“Of course, my dear,” said Shimon.

As they were going through the great doors, Shimon turned back one last time. He caught sight of the prophet Jeremiah sitting with his chin resting in his hand. Shimon remembered the prophet’s words:

*‘Here now this,  
Oh, foolish people without understanding  
With eyes that do not see, and  
With ears that do not hear.’*

## Chapter 4 The Berghof

Karl Becker was taking an early morning ride in the *Tiergarten Park* in Berlin. His demanding position as one of Germany's most important industrial executives put him under constant pressure and these morning rides provided welcome relaxation before the stresses of the day set in.

His mood had not been improved by his recent experiences in Evian and Rome. He was starting to feel a deepening sense of foreboding about the direction in which his country seemed to be inexorably moving.

As he trotted in the dappled shade of the small wood, he saw another rider coming over the hill at a gallop. The turf was being thrown up behind him and the horse's black mane was flying wildly in the wind.

"Looks like General Halder," Karl thought to himself as he squinted into the low sun. Moments later, the general reined in his horse next to Karl's. Halder was flushed with the exertion of his ride.

"Good morning, Karl."

"Out for a morning ride, Franz?"

"Actually, I've come to find you. If you don't mind, I'd like to have a word with you."

"What's on your mind, Franz?" asked Karl, walking his horse slowly beside the General's.

"Beck resigned yesterday."

"What? The Chief of the General Staff? Why?"

"It's been brewing since last November when the Führer first began talking about his designs on Czechoslovakia. The situation's got worse since April. Hitler's asked for specific invasion plans to be drawn up. As you know, Beck's fiercely against it. He's convinced it'll lead to war, and not only a local war, but a very widespread one that could well result in disaster."

Karl liked the Chief of Staff. He'd always believe him to be a man of character and integrity.

Halder continued, "So, just over a week ago, Beck called a meeting of all the senior Generals. He asked them to stand together against the Führer and force him to abandon the attack on Czechoslovakia. If he wouldn't, then they should collectively resign. Beck told them that as officers they had a higher allegiance than that which they had to the Führer. He told them that military officers should not blindly follow orders which showed a complete lack of conscience, morality and responsibility. If the commanding Generals all resigned en masse, then war would be impossible.

"Seeing that Beck resigned, I guess they'd didn't go along with it," said Karl.

"No, they did not."

"But why no, if they're all of the same mind?"

"Well, the only thing they would all agree on is that now is not the right time; that Germany's not yet sufficiently prepared. Only a few think it's wrong in principle. General von Reichenau insisted that it's not for military men to question their orders. Their job is merely to carry them out. Most of the others agreed and they're strictly bound by their oath of obedience to the Führer. You know how it goes," he sighed.

Karl did know. He knew that many of the Generals, like Keitel, Brauchitsch and Jodl were little more than Hitler's yes-men. They would always put their careers before their country. They would rather put their Fatherland at risk, he thought disdainfully, than risk a quarrel with the Führer.

"So, who's going to take his place?" asked Karl.

"I am."

"What? You?" Karl was astonished. "Sorry, old friend, but doesn't the Führer know you're of exactly the same mind as Beck?"

"A small oversight, it would seem," Halder smiled grimly.

"Well, I'm stunned. But I guess congratulations are in order."

Halder shook his head and held up a hand in objection. "Please, no congratulations. Let's talk about why. I came out to see you, Karl. The situation is critical. I called a top secret meeting last night with all those I can trust who also support the toppling of Hitler. We called ourselves the Wednesday Club and we've come up with a plan."

"Good God, you're serious, Franz, aren't you?"

"Entirely serious, my friend. Hitler will drag us all into the slaughterhouse."

Karl knew he was right. "So, what's your plan?"

"We know Hitler is bent on the invasion of Czechoslovakia. As soon as he issues his final orders, we'll arrest him and put him before the People's Court on a charge of trying to hurl Germany into a major European war. We'll prove that he's not competent to govern. Under the Army's protection a new government can be formed, chosen freely by the German people."

It was a simple plan. A good plan. By the time the General had finished explaining it, they'd reach the stables.

"So, is that the whole reason why you raced out to meet me?" asked Karl, sensing he was yet to hear the full story. "You could have told me that over Schnapps without having to come all the way out here."

General Halder smiled. "I can't put much over on you, can I?" There is something else I'd like you to do, if you agree. We need your help in a small matter. But I'd like Admiral Canaris to talk to you about that. I've arranged for us to see him in half an hour. He's expecting us."

Handling their horses over to the grooms, they walked to the clubhouse where Karl made for the cloakroom and began to change out of his riding clothes into his business suit.

He began to contemplate the recent alarming escalation of European tension. He knew of *Case Green*; the code name for Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia. The original directive of 20 May 1938 was to invade the country in a response to extreme 'provocation' on the part of the Czechs. But owing to a leak from high up in the German hierarchy, the planned May operation had been thwarted. A furious Hitler left Berlin for his mountain retreat at Berghof, where he brooded fitfully and waited to set a new date for his offensive. What annoyed Hitler, as much as his plan being foiled, was the unexpected flurry of diplomatic attention the Czechs received from, London, Paris and even Moscow.

There were complicated treaties in place in Europe. France and Czechoslovakia had an agreement dating back to 1925 of mutual military aid in the event of an attack against either country.

Britain was similarly committed to come to France's aid in the event of war.

At the same time, Russia had signed a treaty undertaking to defend the Czechs, providing the French honored the commitments they had made. There was a place, therefore, a theoretical four-way treaty. In the event of an attack on Czechoslovakia, the French and the Russians with a sum total of two hundred divisions were obliged by the treaty to fight. And that wasn't counting the thirty-six divisions Czechoslovakia had herself.

Karl had watched the events with followed the May crisis. European diplomatic tensions grew to a boiling point. German agitators within Czechoslovakia's Sudeten region inflamed the situation by creating unrest, so as to provide a justification for the kind of interference Hitler wanted. This region was the focal point of the whole crisis. It was home to three million German speaking people.

Karl was well informed. He knew that the Government and the Chiefs of Staff in France remained hopelessly divided on whether they should honor their obligation to Czechoslovakia in the event of a German invasion. It was also evident that Britain had no real wish to commit herself either.

Moscow sent seventeen messages offering military support to Britain and France in the months after May. Not once did they receive a reply.

Hitler, in the meantime, continued to fan the flames of unrest and revolt in Sudetenland in preparation for a re-scheduled invasion.

Karl ran a comb through his hair and went through to the clubhouse reception area where Halder was waiting for him.

"We'll go in my staff car shall we," said the General.

The offices of the *Abwehr*, the Military Intelligence Service, were located inside a building on the Tirpitz Embankment. The General ushered Karl in to see service chief Admiral Canaris, then left them to talk alone.

Karl took an instant liking to the small white-haired man sitting in front of him. There was something about him that made him seem more than just another faceless senior officer. They shook hands. "Herr Becker, it's a pleasure to meet you. Please come in and sit down." His voice was quiet but authoritative.

It was a strikingly simple office, thought Karl, for a man of Canaris' status. The floor had no carpet and there were only upright chairs to sit on. Hanging on a plain white wall were detailed maps of Europe, North Africa, South America and the United States. Karl's gaze fell on the three statues of Oriental monkeys on the Admiral's desk.

Canaris noticed him looking at them and said wryly. "They see nothing, hear nothing and say nothing. I keep them here in front of me as a reminder. They're my most reliable operatives."

They both laughed.

"Before we say another word, Herr Becker, I want you to clearly understand that the Military Intelligence Service is not a puppet of the Nazi regime."

"Understood, Herr Admiral. I'm not either."

"So General Halder informs me. Herr Becker, I believe the General has told you of our plan?" He paused for a reply.

"He has. Nothing would make me happier than to see you succeed. We have criminals at the head of the Reich!"

Canaris leaned back in his chair. "Let me ask you a question. You're the owner of the United Steel Works, one of the most important suppliers of material to the *Wehrmacht*.

Without your steel there would be no tanks, no trucks, and no guns – no anything. You’ve much to gain if Germany goes to war. Yet you don’t support the Nazis. Is there a curious paradox in there somewhere?”

“There is indeed. You’re very perceptive, Admiral. I am still considering my position as a German Industrialist.”

“Why don’t you leave the country? You have the means to do it.”

Karl considered the question for a few moments. “Because Admiral, I know that if I left, Field Marshal Goering would put one of his men in to take my place. And the terrible consequences of that happening makes me worrying about my little personal dilemma seems somewhat trivial.

Canaris nodded.

“Tell me Admiral,” asked Karl, “with all the monstrous intrigues of the Nazis, the lies, the bloody murders, the war mongering, why *you* don’t leave?”

Canaris smiled bitterly. “*Touché*. No, I can’t leave because Reinhard Heydrich would take *my* place. We have similar concerns, Herr Becker. Heydrich in this chair would be a catastrophe.”

The two men exchanged meaningful looks. They understood each other perfectly.

“So, you have your plan. What do you want from me?”

“For our coup to be successful, it has to have the support of the British and the French. They have to stand firm against Hitler’s aggression towards Czechoslovakia so we can provide unambiguously in a people’s court that the action *would have* led to war. We want you, Herr Becker, to go to London on our behalf to persuade them to take such a course of action. You speak English. You went to Eton, I understand. I’ve false identity papers and a travel permit ready for you if you agree.

“When do you want me to go?”

“Tonight. I’ve set a meeting for you tomorrow, August 19<sup>th</sup>, with Sir Robert Vansittart. He’s chief diplomatic advisor to Prime Minister Chamberlain and also to Winston Churchill. Churchill’s not in a position of power, but he has considerable influence, and I believe he’d be sympathetic to our plan.”

“Does this mean I’m going to be your secret agent? Admiral Canaris?” asked Karl with a wry smile.

“No, Karl,” said Canaris quietly, adopting a more intimate tone of voice. “I know you wouldn’t want to think of yourself as that. You’re on your own man, I’m quite aware of that. Look at this as a sort of freelance mission, one that’ll be mutually beneficial to both of us. With luck, it’ll help each of us solve our little personal dilemmas.”

Karl arrived in London in the early evening using the assumed name of Ewald Kleist. After checking into the Dorchester Hotel, he went straight to the reception clerk and handed him a letter.

“Could you deliver this to 10 Downing Street, please? Straight away!”

“Of course, Mr. Kleist,” the clerk nodded his head and took the letter.

The next morning, Karl met Vansittart in his office at 10 Downing Street. The Prime Minister’s advisor listened languorously as Karl spoke, watching his German visitor over the rim of his glasses.

“I do not speak on just my own behalf, but on behalf of an important group of individuals in Germany. Amongst their number are Generals, Admirals and high-ranking

politicians, all deeply opposed of Hitler's policies of unprovoked aggression. The people I represent are convinced that he is leading Germany into a needless war. They wish to reach an understanding with the British so that they will be able to frustrate his plans. I am here, on their behalf, to urge Britain to issue the Führer with an unambiguous warning that any aggression on his part will be met by forcible resistance from the British. This will give us the ammunition we need to bring Hitler before a people's court."

Vansittart's expression remained non-committal. "Mr. Kleist, I'm impressed with your sincerity, but it's the belief of the Foreign Office that all Herr Hitler really wants is justice for his fellow countrymen in the Sudetenlands."

"Sir Robert, the issue of the Sudeten Germans is just a diversion to conceal his true intentions. The Führer has already made detailed plans for an all-out invasion of Czechoslovakia. It will be launched no later than October 1."

"I'm sorry, Herr Becker," Vansittart announced. "His Majesty's Government is already applying pressure on the Czechoslovak president to concede to German demands. We feel that this is the more fruitful course of action for the international community. And if Czechoslovakia cannot successfully accommodate her minorities, then it might be the best thing all round if she seceded a small part of her land in exchange for lasting peace and civil order."

Vansittart leaned back in his chair. "So, in the end", he concluded, "I'm afraid to say that I'm inclined to discount a great deal of what you've had to tell me. I can't see any reason why the British government should do as your suggest. And let me assure you that the Prime Minister would be of just the same opinion. Why should Britain support a rebellious group of German military officers? So they can replace Herr Hitler with a military dictatorship" Hmm. We could very well be back to where we started in not time at all. No, Mr. Kleist, I'm afraid the policy of the Foreign Office is quite clear. International interests are best served by our reaching a compromise with your present leader."

Karl thanked Vansittart for his time and took his leave. He was convinced that the Briton was a complete roadblock. Perhaps his meeting the next day with Churchill would go better.

"Despite Vansittart's skepticism, he took Kleist's visit serious enough to report back to the Prime Minister."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Sir Robert," said Chamberlain. "We can't be seen to be pandering to the whims of rebels. But perhaps we ought not to ignore this development entirely. I'll ring our Ambassador in Berlin to have him come to London for a briefing. We need to do something about this blasted Czechoslovakia situation."

"I explained our position to him; that we're in favor of granting independence to the Sudetenland."

"Absolutely, it's what we've been pressing Prague for all this time. Still, something needs to be done to try to solve this annoying situation once and for all. Perhaps a face-to-face meeting between Hitler and myself is called for.

The next morning, Karl made his way to the House of Commons. He repeated his message to Winston Churchill and was relieved to find him a more sympathetic listener.

"But, you understand, Mr. Kleist, that although you have *my* support, I'm not in the government and my word carries little weight nowadays. However, I've never been known to hold back on expressing my opinions, so I promise you that I'll do all that's in my power

to promote your request. I shall continue to press the Prime Minister to stand firm against Hitler's aggressive intentions."

Karl returned to Berlin on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. He was not looking forward to telling Admiral Canaris the disappointing news.

General Halder was already in Canaris' office when Karl arrived.

Vansittart's reaction was unfavorable to all three of them. "They say they don't want war, yet Chamberlain seems to be doing everything he possibly can to cause one," said Canaris.

"We just have to hope that the British don't make a deal with the Führer before he orders the army to march," said Halder.

The Admiral reached into a drawer and produced a letter. "This came for you yesterday, Karl, by diplomatic pouch from London."

Karl took the letter, opened it and read its contents.

"It's from Churchill. He thanks Kleist for paying him the visit, and for his concern for peace between the two countries. He gave us his reassurance that he will do all he can for us."

Canaris sighed, "So, all we can do now is wait."

Shortly after Karl received Churchill's letter a copy of it found its way onto the desk of Reinhard Heydrich, Head of the SS Security Service. Heydrich scrutinized the letter with a cold hard stare, and then placed it on file with a note: *A letter from Winston Churchill to a German collaborator*. His razor-sharp mind already saw many possibilities. There was, of course, the question of who the collaborator was. But much more interesting was the opportunity of which of his enemies he might be able to ensnare with the accusation.

On the dark and windy evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> September 1938, Winston Churchill requested a meeting with Neville Chamberlain.

"Prime Minister," he said in a deep and resonant voice, "I must tell you now strongly I object to your plan to negotiate with Adolf Hitler over the Sudetenland issue, much less travel to his home in Berchtesgaden to do it."

Chamberlain had been half expecting this visit from the Westminster maverick. Churchill's forthright views on the matter were well known.

"I am aware, Mr. Churchill, of your objections," said Chamberlain in a calm and measured voice, "but I can assure you that the cabinet has very carefully considered all the facts before arriving at this decision. At the present time, we have the view that it is better to negotiate with the Germans and try to avoid bloodshed, than to embark upon a long, drawn out and costly war. Surely you know the truth of the matter as well as I do. We are not *prepared* for war. If we can reach any kind of agreement with Herr Hitler, even if it proves to be only a temporary one, then at the very least it will buy us time to rearm."

Chamberlain sat back in his chair and inspected his visitor.

"In any case," he continued, "Intelligence reports have shown over and over again that Germany is nowhere near the large military threat you perceive her to be."

"Let me say that, I don't accept that for a minute, Prime Minister. But even if it were the case, if we wait until we're armed, then we're giving Hitler the time to rearm at the same time."



Chamberlain leant forward over his desk and looked his visitor straight in the eyes. "The British people don't want war, Mr. Churchill," he said.

"I know you will be on our way to meet Hitler tomorrow, so I feel compelled to put it to you one last time. All the facts clearly show that peaceful negotiations with the German leader are not only pointless, but also very dangerous. As you know, I've asked General Inskip to join us in this meeting, to present a current account of the relative military strengths of Germany and the Western Allies."

"Very well. I'll hear what the General has to say. But I must tell you that I've asked Sir Neville to join us as well."

Sir Neville Henderson was Britain's Ambassador to Germany and a trusted advisor to the Prime Minister. Chamberlain picked up the telephone and told his secretary to call the two men in.

Henderson was the first to enter. He was of stout build with a ruddy complexion and was noticeably out of breath. He shot a nervous glance in Chamberlain's direction, anxious that the Prime Minister might have changed his mind about the trip to Germany.

"Ah, Sir Neville. Have a seat while we wait for General Inskip," said Chamberlain, indicating a red leather armchair.

"Inskip? Yes, I saw him in the entrance hall just now," said the Ambassador without enthusiasm. It was well known that Henderson and the General were not the best of friends.

After a long and awkward silence, General Inskip finally came into Chamberlain's office with a thick dossier of papers wedged under his arm.

"Prime Minister," said Churchill, "I believe that the decision you've taken to meet with Hitler is based on an inaccurate analysis of the strength of the German armed forces. As a former First Sea Lord, I have been extremely alarmed during the past eight years at the lack of Britain's rearmament following the Great War. We have totally begged the question, and, as a result, we are today in an appalling state of unreadiness to defend the Empire. Nevertheless, we are not so ill prepared that we need to allow Hitler to commit any further acts of aggression in addition to those he's already committed in the Rhineland and in Austria." Churchill's face was flushed with rising indignation. He gestured with a nod of his head in Inskip's direction.

"General," said Chamberlain.

"Gentlemen," began Inskip, "the German armed forces have, as we speak approximately thirty six divisions deployed at the Czech front. This leaves them with only around ten divisions to defend their border with France. And these are not all made up of regular soldiers. From intelligence reports, we think that at least thirty percent of these German forces are made up of poorly trained reserves and second line divisions.

Henderson interrupted nervously, "But what about the Luftwaffe? I have intelligence reports saying that it has over six thousand aircrafts."

"Rubbish!" retorted Inskip. "The figures are vastly inflated. It's impossible for Germany to have manufactured so many aircrafts. They've got 1500 at the most, probably even fewer than that. And also, my intelligence report suggests that a good one-third of their strength is made up of either training aircraft or planes which are out of commission. All they do is sit harmlessly on their airfields. The actual number fit for battle is closer to a thousand, twelve hundred at most. The reports which you are referring to, Sir Neville have

been compiled by individuals whose main concern is to distort the facts in order to avoid a fight." He looked the Ambassador straight in the eye. Henderson looked away.

"Having visited the Czechoslovakian front myself," Iniskip continued, "I believe that their thirty six divisions are all in an excellent position to defend themselves against the *Wehrmacht*. They're all well-equipped, well trained and securely dug in. The Czechs have formed a strong fortress line along their north-western mountain region that the German army would find extremely difficult and costly to penetrate, if indeed they ever could." The General pulled out a map of Europe. "By deploying the bulk of his army in the South here, Hitler has completely exposed himself in the West." He pointed to the border with France. "As a military strategist, I cannot fathom why he would leave himself so vulnerable. I can only assume that he has gambled on France not fighting him. Anyhow, with his ten divisions against France's one hundred divisions, it would be a walkover for the French. So, if France does fight, then Hitler will essentially have a war on two fronts which he has no hope of winning."

"And that's not all," he pointed to Russia on the map. "If the Franco-Russian agreement causes an eastern front to be opened with the Russians entering the fray..."

"But we can't rely on the Russians," said Henderson disdainfully.

"As I've shown, continued the General, "we don't actually need to reply on them, but they are ready. We know that their war footing is inferior to that of the Germans at present, but they still have over one hundred divisions in readiness. A third front would be a distinct possibility."

"Don't even talk to me about Russian and France!" said Chamberlain contemptuously. "The French are so weak and divided that they can't even think for themselves. As for the Russians, I want no part of Russia. They're a half-Asiatic nation who can't be trusted an inch!"

"Half-Asiatic?" asked Churchill dryly. "Has the Prime Minister perhaps forgotten that four-fifths of the population of the British Empire is either Asiatic or African? And as for the French, they're crying out for us to stop holding them back and give them some support."

Chamberlain leaned back and folded his arms in front of him.

"Let me make it perfectly clear that I have no intention whatsoever of entertaining into any joint action with the Russians," he said emphatically. He turned back to Iniskip. "Carry on, General, if you please."

"The political consequences of Czechoslovakia falling to Hitler are not my concern. It is, however, my business to be concerned about the military consequences, and therefore I urge you, Prime Minister, to back the Czechs. If Hitler conquers Czechoslovakia, this is what will follow:

"Firstly, the Czech fortified frontier will fall into Hitler's hands. It is the most formidable defense line in Europe after the Maginot Line. Beyond this line, the rest of the country is defenseless. If he takes Czechoslovakia, Hitler will, overnight, double the amount of armed forces he has under his command.

"Secondly, Hitler will seize the Skoda Works, the largest manufacturer of munitions, tanks and weapons in Central Europe. Also, into his hands will fall the Czech aircraft industries, which then, in a matter of months, will start producing planes for the Luftwaffe.

"Thirdly, even if we only allow him the Sudetenland, he will gain 66% of the country's coal, 86% of its chemicals, 80% of its cement, 70% of its iron and steel and 70% of its electrical power.

"Hitler has already annexed the entire population of Austria. In the event of this overcoming Czechoslovakia he will rapidly put together somewhere in the region of one hundred divisions, and that will soon grow to even more. At that point, gentlemen, it will *not* be so easy to stop him."

Inskip paused to gauge the Prime Minister's reaction, but Chamberlain said nothing, merely gesturing with a wave of his hand for the general to carry on.

"If we act now," he continued, "we also have one final trump card. There is a conspiracy within Hitler's highest-ranking Generals. A significant number of them have turned against him over the Czech affair. This movement is led by General Ludwig Beck, the former Chief of the Army General Staff, who resigned in opposition of Case Green. Not only has that, his successor, General Halder, also supported Beck. They oppose Hitler for many reasons, but the strongest is that they know Germany is not in a position to take on the Western Powers *at this time*. The conspirators are waiting for only one thing in order to drag Hitler before the People's Courts, and that is for us to commit ourselves to declare war if Germany attacks Czechoslovakia."

"Thank you, General Inskip. Your analysis has been most enlightening," said Chamberlain with a cold smile.

Henderson breathed a sigh of relief. It was clear that the Prime Minister was not going to change his position. Only a few weeks ago, at a private party in Berlin, the British Ambassador had assured the Nazi inner circle that 'Great Britain would not think of risking even one sailor or one airman for Czechoslovakia'.

The General shook hands with the Prime Minister; handed over the dossier to Churchill and left the room.

With the General gone, Henderson mutters his courage again. "May I add, Prime Minister, that from my numerous amicable discussions with German Foreign Minister Herr Ribbentrop and other Party Members, it is quite clear that Herr Hitler has no intention of embarking on a war with Western Europe. His vision is, in fact to work *with* the British to beat Stalin's communist expansion."

"And what of his designs on France, Sir Neville? Does he want to work with them too?" asked Chamberlain sarcastically. "Prime Minister, we have already witnessed Hitler's acts of aggression. We've even been warned of them in advance by our agent within his inner circle." Churchill opened Inskip's dossier and pulled out several pages.

"In 1936 Hitler took his first gamble. He occupied the Rhineland. Agent 999 informed the British Foreign Office of his plans a whole week before the event, telling us that it was largely a bluff, and that Hitler had deployed only three battalions which had orders 'to retreat at the slightest sign of countermeasures by the French.' So, what did we do? We told the French not to fight!" Churchill held the secret communiqué in the air and shook it angrily.

"Three battalions! Three battalions! On that scale, it's more of a police action than a full scale military one! But we decided to look the other way, and in doing so, we allowed Germany to strengthen herself.

"So, having gambled and won the following year Hitler took Austria. The Russians approached us, proposing a conference of powers to consider ways to check further German aggression. As I recall, Prime Minister, you wanted no part of any such conference. It was again our policy to hold back. Two months later, we had the May leak about Hitler's designs on Czechoslovakia. And here is that leaked document from the same Agent 999."

Churchill held the familiar telegram up so that both Henderson and Chamberlain could see it.

“This document, as you know well, reveals clearly that only ten divisions hold Hitler’s Western Front. It also proves that the ‘unrest’ of the German speaking people in the Sudeten region is just a ploy. Hitler’s real aim is to take control of their armed forces, their industries and their raw materials.” He put down the second document. “We have no evidence to show he will be satisfied with just the Sudetenland. He will take all of Czechoslovakia. It’s as plain as the nose on your face. And who will be next, Prime Minister?”

Sir Neville fidgeted in his chair as he listened to Churchill’s increasingly passionate speech. “Gentlemen,” he said, “it is vital that we consider this question as a political issue and not merely as a military one. Just because we might be able to go to war with Germany, it doesn’t, mean that we should.”

Churchill turned to face Henderson. “That may be so. But we don’t have to stop others from defending what is rightfully theirs either. Sir Neville, it has been British policy to allow Germany to rebuild her forces and her economy in order for her to become strong enough to hold back Russian Communist expansion. The West has given her loan after loan and we have done this knowing all the time that Germany has funneled all her resources towards aggressive rearmament rather than establishing an effective peacetime economy.

“It is time to reassess the wisdom of our policy toward Germany. We have gravely erred. If, at our urging, the French renege on their agreement with the Czechs, then we cannot later point an accusing finger at Hitler for doing the same. Hitler cannot take Czechoslovakia if the West intervenes. Besides, it would ultimately be his own Generals who toppled him, not us.” Churchill slapped the dossier shut, satisfied at the strength of his argument.

Chamberlain had been listening quietly to Churchill’s words. He sat forward and looked his visitor directly in the eye. “What makes you believe, Mr. Churchill,” he said, “that I want to see Hitler toppled?”

There was a deadly silence. Churchill started at The Prime Minister, completely speechless.

*“Ich bin vom Himmel gefallen!”* Hitler exclaimed to Ribbentrop as he read the note. “I’m astounded, but this *is* good news. Imagine! The man who presides over a quarter of the world comes pleading to me! I knew he was weak from the start, what did I tell you?” Hitler tossed Chamberlain’s note onto the table.

“Do you want to meet him in Munich?” asked Ribbentrop.

“No, definitely not! He wants to make an offer, otherwise he wouldn’t ask for a meeting in the first place. Let him come here then.”

“At the Berchtesgaden train station, then.”

“No. He’ll have to come right to my doorstep, all the way up the mountain. *My* mountain.”

It was nearly evening on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1938 as the black Mercedes made its way up and around the hairpin turns on the last stretch of road towards Adolf Hitler’s home, the Berghof. Chamberlain and Henderson could see the town of Berchtesgaden down below. The railway station where they’d been met by throngs of enthusiastic Germans was now only a small speck at the bottom of the mountain.

They passed through a guarded gate and came to a gradual stop in front of the house. Chamberlain straightened his hair with one hand then grabbed his top hat. With the other hand, he reached for his umbrella.

"You know Henderson; if it weren't for Germany we would all be having such a wonderful time just now. We could be living in a golden age! Damn Hitler!"

There was the sound of marching boots outside the car as soldiers came towards them down the imposing flight of stone steps. At the bottom of the stairs stood Hitler flanked by his aides. Armed and helmeted SS guards stood to attention on either side of him.

"This is a good sign, Mr. Prime Minister," said Henderson.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm told that the farther down the stairs he comes to welcome his guests, the more respect he has for them. Look, Herr Hitler is at the very bottom."

The car door flew open and Chamberlain stepped out, umbrella in hand. He extended his arm to Hitler.

"Hello, Mr. Chamberlain. It is indeed a great pleasure to meet you." Hitler led the way up the stone stairs and into the Berghof.

Hitler had begun the construction of his imposing residence in 1936. Even at a time when the German Mark was practically worthless, only the most valuable materials were used to build the Berghof; marble from Carrara, stones from Bohemia, and exotic woods that cost the *Wehrmacht* a small fortune in foreign currency.

Hitler led his guests through the gothic style foyer with its imitation medieval wrought iron lamps, and mosaic tables given to him by Mussolini.

"Perhaps you would like to freshen up before we start?" suggested Hitler, speaking through interpreter Paul Schmidt.

"Yes, I would like that very much," replied Chamberlain. He'd been travelling since the crack of dawn to meet the German leader. At the age of sixty-nine, he had just taken his first ever airplane flight to Munich. There he had boarded a train that took him up to the town of Berchtesgaden, where finally a car had taken him along the ten mile serpentine road up the mountain. This journey was an exceptional gesture on his part, especially given his stature in global politics.

"I'll show you to your room myself, Mr. Prime Minister," said Hitler proudly as he indicated the spiral staircase with a smile. "I'm giving you're the room that the Duke and Duchess of Windsor stayed in when they paid me a visit a little while ago. We had such an agreeable time. The Duke and I spoke German together, you know. It's quite an advantage that his mother was a German princess before she married His Majesty King George. His Royal Highness was telling me that whenever the courtiers were not around, he always preferred to converse with her mother in German."

Chamberlain bristled at the mention of the former King of England. The Duke of Windsor's amicable relations with Adolf Hitler still caused so much distress in England. He knew, of course, that Hitler's reference to him was deliberately designed to create as much discomfort as possible. The British Prime Minister kept his gaze fixed on the floor.

"The Duke has done much to extend Britain's hand of friendship towards Germany," Hitler added as he opened the door to a guest bedroom

"The Duke and I spoke of an Anglo-German agreement many times before he abdicated. What a pity. If only he'd stayed on the throne, we could have created a powerful alliance."

Chamberlain remained silent. Both men knew the real reason why Edward was compelled to abdicate. It wasn't because he refused to give up 'the woman he loved'. That was a smokescreen. The real reason was the King's pro-Nazi leanings and his desire for a political and ideological alliance with Germany.

"Poor Mrs. Simpson!" said Hitler

"Yes, poor Mrs. Simpson, indeed," mumbled Chamberlain under his breath. The Führer took his leave.

Half an hour later Chamberlain was escorted into Hitler's study by one of his aides. The spacious room on the second floor had great windows which overlooked the snowcapped Alps. The last rays of sunshine were casting pink and purple light on the white snow.

Two chairs were prepared for them in front of the fireplace and a chessboard was set out on the low table in the middle. Chamberlain settled himself in one of the plush armchairs, grateful for the fire's warmth of this extravagant but still somehow chilly place.

Hitler launched into one of his fierce dramatic monologues. Chamberlain was struck at the German leader's complete change of manner from how he had been only half an hour ago. He had become transformed in an instant from a courteous host into the familiar belligerent orator that Europe had grown to fear. The British Prime Minister listened attentively and politely at first to Hitler's angry tones, but eventually he became weary as Hitler railed to and on about all he had done for the German people, from European peace and for improved Anglo-German relations.

"...I am determined to keep Stalin from expanding his Bolshevism throughout Europe. In this, Germany and Britain *must* cooperate," he pounded his fist on the arm of his chair.

Chamberlain nodded in tacit approval, as Hitler's voice grew even louder and hoarser.

"...but I will no longer tolerate a small, second rate country treating the mighty Reich as it's inferior. One way or another, I *will* solve this problem."

"But certainly not by force!" said Chamberlain, having gathered his resolve.

"If it means German is to become involved in a war over the Czechoslovak question, Mr. Chamberlain, I will be happy to lead my country through this crisis. The rest of the world may do what it likes. *I* will not yield a single step."

The use of the British Prime Minister's name rather than his title was a deliberate affront to diplomatic courtesy. Chamberlain sat up in his chair, knotted his brow, and raised his hand to interpret.

"*Mr. Hitler*, if you are so decided upon this course of action, then why am I here? Obviously, I've wasted my time!"

Surprised at the unexpected power of Chamberlain's response, Hitler calmed himself and with impressive mental agility, changed tack to adopt a more conciliatory tone.

"Mr. Prime Minister, do you agree on the secession of the Sudeten region to Germany or not?" Hitler asked.

"Mr. Chancellor," said Chamberlain, "let us talk plainly. Britain, perhaps better than any other country, understands your desire to obtain colonial territories and to build an empire. It is a natural way for a country to build up its economic strength and obtain raw materials and a secure labor force."

Hitler leant forward in his chair, resting his chin in both palms as he listened attentively to Chamberlain's every word.

"The British have no objection to this in principle. I will accede to the annexation of the Sudeten region, but only to that. I have to consider the question of European equilibrium. Should you have any further designs on any other territories it is vital that Britain and Germany reach an agreement prior to any action being taken?"

"I cannot promise you that I will have no more territorial claims. I have the welfare of the German people to consider," Hitler responded carefully.

Chamberlain nodded, "As long as they do not interfere with British interests."

There was a slight pause. The two men looked at each other for several seconds, trying to weight each other up. The silence was broken by Chamberlain. "Perhaps, Mr. Chancellor," he said, "you should reconsider my offer of a year ago of African territories, perhaps some Portuguese or Belgian colonies, for instance."

Hitler raised an eyebrow at how casually Britain's leader offered the territories of other nations as a bargaining counter.

"They will object strongly, of course," said Chamberlain disdainfully, "but we can buy them off with loans or with offers of other territories elsewhere."

Hitler waved his hand in protest. "Mr. Prime Minister, Africa does not interest me in the slightest. My concern is Europe. What of the French position with respect to the Czechs? It's France, not Britain, who has the treaty with the Czechs. What if the French decide to fight?"

"Don't worry. I'll handle them. They'll follow our lead," said Chamberlain.

"But what of the Czechs?" asked Hitler "They've mobilized all their thirty six divisions. They're ready for war. President Benec has left no one in any doubt that they will fight us alone if they have to.

"I can assure you that it will be made perfectly clear to President Benec that Britain and France will not only desert his country, but will back Germany in the use of their armed forces should he set his face against the proposed surrender of the Sudetenland."

Hitler smiled his most charming smile. "Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister," he said, "I appreciate your understanding. I can see no reason at all why an agreement to this effect could not be signed before the end of the month. We have a common enemy, Prime Minister. Stalin and his Communists."

"I couldn't agree more. Europe cannot allow the further spread of Communism."

"Let me assure you of this, Prime Minister. I will strengthen my army. I will stop our common enemy dead in his tracks once and for all."

"I've been extremely cooperative in your request concerning the Sudetenland, Mr. Chancellor. However, we both know don't we, that once you take over the Sudetenland the rest of Czechoslovakia will no longer be able to defend itself. I know and you know that it will only be a matter of time before you take control of the entire country. But you have to appreciate that I must not be seen to give you the whole Czechoslovakia on a plate."

"But Prime Minister, eventually I will need to gain even more territories than this. If you could feel able to give me a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe, then I will guarantee the integrity of the British Empire."

"I'll consider it."

"You do realize, Prime Minister, that there is only room for two empires in this part of the world. What do you intend to do with the French and their colonies?"

"The French are no threat. They're so weak. They don't want any trouble; they'd rather eat brie and drink wine. Their Prime Minister Bonnet has no stomach for fighting. His government is completely divided. I don't see any future for their empire."

"Well, that's settled then. You and I will just have to tell them what to do. After all, it hasn't escaped my notice that the French are taking instructions from you concerning the Czech question as we speak."

"Once you're through with Central and Eastern Europe, then we'll deal with the French."

"I have always held Britain and its empire in the greatest of respect."

"Thank you, Mr. Chancellor. However, I have to make one thing perfectly clear. I am answerable to a democratically elected Parliament. Even though I might agree with you today, it may be extremely difficult to persuade my colleagues in the House of Commons. However, I am always willing to listen. My greatest desire is to cooperate with a strong Germany under your leadership."

"I agree. It's imperative to have this troublesome situation sorted out as quickly as possible." Chamberlain took out a typed document from his breast pocket and handed it to Hitler, who gave it to his interpreter Schmidt.

"Mr. Chancellor, I would like you to consider this communiqué, which I hope we can both sign, before formalizing what we have just discussed."

Schmidt read the declaration aloud:

*"We the German Chancellor and the British Prime Minister are agreed in recognizing the Anglo-German relations are of prime importance for our two countries and for Europe. We regard this agreement as being symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.*

*We are resolved that mutual consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any question which may concern our two countries and that, by these means, we shall be able to assure the peace of Europe."*

Hitler hesitated for the briefest of moments, and then nodded in agreement. Chamberlain smiled in reply and thanked the Führer warmly.

"This is a historic moment, Mr. Chancellor," he declared.

The next morning Chamberlain and Henderson were enjoying breakfast on the large open terrace. They helped themselves to freshly baked bread, jam and a pot of tea. Hitler, who normally did not rise until noon, was still getting ready in his bedroom.

The Ambassador spotted a pile of newspapers on a side table and went over to inspect them. He returned with the *Times* and *Daily Mail*.

"Well, how about that. Yesterday's British newspapers her in the Alps!" declared Sir Neville.



"Let's have a look at what they have to say," said Chamberlain. Henderson handed him the *Times* and the *Daily Mail*. Chamberlain put on his glasses and began to read the headlines. "Ah! See here, Sir Neville," he asserted smugly. "See how even my severest critics on foreign policy applaud me now."

Hitler appeared in the terrace with the interpreter to join his guest for breakfast. "Good morning." He greeted them.

"Herr Hitler. I see you receive the British news promptly. I didn't realize you were such a fan of the *Times* and *Daily Mail*," said Chamberlain jocularly.

Hitler smiled, "Ja! But I'm not as big a fan of them as they are of me."

They all laughed and Hitler picked up a piece of bread. "I've followed their coverage closely," he continued, "and I see that they have a good understanding of the Nazi Party. I like the way they are able to convey our beliefs to the British people. Both newspapers have always been firm advocates of the improving of relations between or two nations."

With breakfast over, Hitler proposed a stroll around the Berghof before Chamberlain's departure. Both men were in high spirits and on their way round the grounds they passed through the courtyard where several German cars and a Model T Ford were parked.

"That's a fine car," Chamberlain commented. "I didn't know you liked American cars."

"I have a passion for cars, but I have to tell you that German models are the best. This Ford, however, I keep as a tribute to Henry Ford. He's been a source of tremendous support, you know, both to myself and to the Nazi Party, especially in the struggle of our early years. He and I share the same views on many things. I was highly influenced by this book *The International Jew* when I was writing *Mein Kampf* so many years ago."

"Oh! Er, I never realized..." Chamberlain found himself momentarily lost for words.

A short while later the Mercedes in which Chamberlain and Henderson would ride back down to the train station drew into the courtyard. A couple of valets loaded their luggage and slammed the boot shut as the chauffeur stood by the open passenger door. Chamberlain, hat and umbrella in hand, faced the Führer.

"Thank you, Mr. Chancellor, for a most agreeable visit. We shall be in touch directly in order to complete this matter without delay."

Hitler pulled his mouth into a tight smile and extended his hand. "Thank *you*, Mr. Prime Minister. I wish you a safe journey. You must come back again."

With that, Chamberlain and Henderson climbed into the car. The chauffeur closed the doors and the car sped rapidly down the mountain road.

Hitler smiled quickly vanished.

"If that silly old man ever comes interfering here again, I'll kick him down the stairs!" muttered Hitler. He turned and went inside, followed by his aides.

Chamberlain returned to London and brandished the piece of paper that would ensure 'peace in our time' in front of large crowds on Downing Street. Two weeks later, Britain, France and Germany signed the official Munich Pact, based closely on the Berchtesgaden agreement.

However, while the British Prime Minister was celebrating, Hitler pressed ahead with his military plans for the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

## Chapter 5

### Jacob Grynspan

Immediately upon his return from Rome, Samuel made contact with Abraham Cohen and the Wiesenthals and together they arranged to meet with Karl Becker. It was agreed that they should all pay a visit to his house the following week and ask for his help in securing papers to travel to Palestine.

“You’re absolutely certain we can trust him?” asked Bernard.

“With my life,” said Samuel.

But other events unfolded first. It was late on a Tuesday morning during Shimon’s first week back in Munich as he made his way up the stairs to the newsroom of the daily paper where he worked. He’d been following up on a story of a missing Jewish shopkeeper so he was later than usual coming into the office.

He walked into the newsroom and realized straight away that something wasn’t right. A room that usually buzzed and hummed with activity had become as quiet as a morgue. All heads turned silently in his direction as he made his way to his desk.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

At that moment the editor came out of his glass-fronted office and beckoned for Shimon to come inside. He shut the door behind them.

“Shimon, you’ve got to get out now.”

“What...?”

“The SS were here an hour ago. A Lieutenant Schellenberger came with three men. They’ve taken copies of every article you’ve written over the last six months. They’re out there looking for you now. I told them you were out of town for the rest of the day, but that won’t keep them off your tail for long. They’ll be watching your house for sure.”

Shimon sat down in shock and despair.

“Of course,” he said. “I knew the risks I was running but I was hoping that...”

“You can’t go home. You’ve got to leave the country right away. Here’s some money. Go to France. Go now.”

Shimon took the wad of banknotes that his employer was holding out and stuffed them in his jacket pocket. The awful reality of what was happening had begun to sink in.

“Telephone me when you get there and I’ll act as a go-between you and your family so we can get more money to you.”

“But what about my fiancée Anna? We’re planning to get married next month. I can’t go without her!”

“You’ll have to. You have no choice. If you stay you’ll be arrested. I’ll get word to her as well. Maybe her family can arrange for her to join you once you get settled.” The editor allowed himself a half-smile. “After all, what could be more romantic than a Parisian wedding?” His tone became business-like again. “Go! Now! I’ll get word to your family and may God go with you!”

Shimon got up to leave and was halfway out of his editor’s door when he heard himself being called back.

“And Shimon, leave via the back door through the alley, just in case.”

“Will do. Thanks.” Shimon hurried through the fire exit at the back of the building into the high sided alleyway to the rear of the offices. He reached the place where the

alleyway opened up into the street at the end of the block. He looked left, looked right and found himself looking directly into the eyes of a sneering Ulrich Schellenberger.

The Weisses were woken by a piercing ringing of the doorbell. Samuel glanced at the clock. The hands pointed to ten past four.

Covered in his long dressing gown, Samuel stumbled barefoot to the front door. Esther stood at the top of the stairs clutching her white robe closely around her body. Her heart was pounding wildly. Only the SS came at night like this.

But it wasn't the SS. It was Bernard Wiesenthal.

"Good God, Bernard," said Samuel. "What on earth's the matter?"

"It's Shimon. They've arrested him." Bernard's face was ashen.

"Oh, My God! When? Come in for God's sake." Samuel's thoughts were racing as he led Bernard into the kitchen. Esther followed close by.

"They came about two hours ago. There were two of them – the SS. They pushed their way into the house and said they'd got him. That he was under arrest and that they'd got a warrant to search my house. They spent a whole hour turning Shimon's bedroom and our living room upside down. They've left the place in such shambles Samuel, and the things they broke..." His voice trailed off a moment. "Oh God, Samuel, I don't know what to do. They're capable of doing anything; you know that." He buried his face in his hands in despair and begun to shake. Esther took a cup of tea over to him and he reached out to grasp it, spilling liquid over the cup's sides in his unsteady grip.

Samuel had to think fast.

"Klaus!" he announced suddenly. "Listen, I'll go and see a friend of mine. His son Klaus used to be a local police officer before he joined the army. I helped the family start their business up twenty years ago. Klaus and Anna went to school together. He's home on leave at the moment. He's bound to have some contacts left inside the force."

Klaus' phone rang at six o'clock in the morning and he picked it up to hear Samuel's voice at the other end. He knew why he was calling.

"Yes, I know Mr. Weiss. I heard Shimon had been arrested as soon as I came in. I took the liberty of making some enquiries.

"Who's the officer in charge?"

"It's Herr Schellenberger, from the SS."

"How is Shimon?"

"I haven't seen him myself, but I expect they've rough him up a little. He's been questioned about alleged communist activities."

"Communists! That's ridiculous," Samuel explained. "When do you think he'll be released, Klaus?"

"I'll be frank with you, Mr. Weiss. The chances of him being released at all are very small. He could be sent to Dachau Labor Camp," he paused "or even worse..."

"What can we do, Klaus?" Shimon's voice was growing desperate.

There was a long silence as Klaus considered the possibilities. Finally he spoke.

"I've heard that Schellenberger can be bought. Maybe you can do a deal with him."

"Can you arrange a meeting?"

"I'll do my best. I'll call you back."

Samuel hung up. He'd heard of Schellenberger. Intelligent, well-spoken but callous and uncompromising. It would take a miracle to turn this one around.

"He's going to call us back to say if we can see the officer in charge," Samuel explained to Bernard. "There's a chance you can slip him something under table, and maybe he'll let Shimon go." Samuel tried hard to sound optimistic.

Bernard sat in silence and thought for a long while.

When he finally spoke, his face was contorted in distress.

"Samuel, I've never been any good at smooth talking or negotiating deals. You've got a way of saying things, you're a good negotiator. I know it's a lot to ask, but can you talk to Schellenberger for me? I'll give anything – all I have, to save Shimon. Will you do it?"

Samuel understood Bernard's dilemma well enough. He knew his friend was not a forceful man even at the best of times. He'd be no match for an ambitious young SS officer intent on proving his mettle.

The silence was broken by the shrill ringing of the telephone.

"Hello. Yes. In two hours? I'll be there."

At seven thirty in the morning, Samuel stood in the waiting room at the police station.

He waited outside Schellenberger's office for what seemed an eternity until finally his door opened.

"Samuel Weiss." Schellenberger articulated the name with theatrical distaste. "What do you want?"

"Herr Schellenberger, I am here to enquire about Shimon Wiesenthal.

"What business is that of yours?" he asked curtly.

"He's my future son-in-law."

"Well then, you should have told your future son-in-law to keep his mouth shut. It's too late now, there's nothing to be done. You're wasting my time, Weiss."

"What crime has he committed, Herr Schellenberger?" Samuel was becoming irritated with Schellenberger's rude and dismissive tone. He's a mere boy, he thought. He's half my age.

"What crime, you say? How dare you attempt to interrogate me in this manner! He was a Bolshevik collaborator and a threat to the Reich!"

"How can he be a Communist if his parents own their own business? He's no more a Communist than you are and what's more, he's leaving Germany any day now so that what he does then will not be of any further consequence to you."

Schellenberger thrust his face forward to within an inch of Samuel's, furious with the comparison between himself and a Jew.

"I am no Jewish Communist! Get out, I have no time to waste on filth like you," he shouted.

Samuel was not going to allow himself to be intimidated. "I want to see your prisoner," he insisted. "You have no grounds for holding him."

"Ask my superior!" The SS man sneered. "My superior is the Führer!" he grabbed Samuel. "And if I hear one more word out of you, you'll never see the light of day again yourself!"

"What's your price, Herr Schellenberger?"

Schellenberger loosened his grip very gradually. A silence descended upon the room.

The telephone rang. Schellenberger released Samuel's arm and answered the call. Samuel listened to the SS man's end of the conversation in amazement. He suddenly seemed to be an entirely different human being. Samuel could scarcely believe the transformation.

Schellenberger hung up the phone.

"What kind of offer are you making me?"

"The Herzen Chocolate Factory. His parents own it. If you release him safely, it will be yours." Samuel spelled out the terms. He knew he had reeled this man in.

Schellenberger was silent as he thought through the logistics of the deal. He couldn't just acquire such a well-known business without attracting the attention of his superior officers. The last thing he wanted was to have a stain on his record. He needed to cover his tracks. Samuel knew exactly what this man was thinking.

"We can have the papers ready for signing almost immediately. It will be all legal and above board. When can you release Shimon?"

"Not in Germany. I'll deliver him to the French border with the necessary travel documents so he doesn't turn up again on our doorstep."

"When?"

"As soon as I see the papers. He can be in France in twenty four hours."

"Herr Schellenberger, I'll see to it that everything is drawn up to our mutual satisfaction.

The next day, Samuel returned to Schellenberger's office with a thick envelope full of documents.

That evening, the telephone rang at the Weiss house. Samuel was waiting.

"Hello, Mr. Weiss? It's Shimon."

"Thank God. Where are you?"

"Mulhouse. A small town on the French-German border. Close to Strasbourg."

"May God go with you, my son..."

A few days later, Samuel, Bernard and Abraham were standing at Karl Becker's doorway. Elsie showed them inside to where Karl was sitting in the living room in conversation with a priest. He got up to greet them. "Welcome, I'm Karl Becker. You've met Elsie and this is Father Rampp. We all work together so if ever you need anything and I'm away on business or I'm unavailable, you can turn to either of them in strictest confidence.

Abraham studied Becker carefully. His professionalism was impressive.

"We have come to you for help, Mr. Becker..." he began.

"Karl, please."

"Yes, Karl. Thank you. Well..." he cleared his throat. "I suppose we should have come to this decision to leave the country much sooner, but, and I think I speak for all of us when I say," he paused and looked around the room, "when I say that we thought our present problems would, in time, pass." He shrugged his shoulders, "You see large scale persecution of the Jews has a habit of coming round every couple of hundred years or so, and it's bad for a while but then things improve. But this time, as we all know only too well my friend, it's very different. We have to leave Germany as a matter of the utmost urgency."

Karl listened attentively as Abraham continued.

"We've given it a lot of thought and we all want to go to Palestine."

Becker smiled. "Don't worry. I can arrange that for you. It'll be expensive doing it back door, you know, but I'm pretty confident I can get you all visas."

"Money is no problem Karl," assured Samuel.

Karl nodded thoughtfully. "So what time scale are we talking about exactly?" he asked.

"We need to get moving as quickly as possible." replied Bernard anxiously. "I think you've met my son Shimon. We only just managed to get him out of the clutches of the SS. He's had to leave for France already. He's waiting in Paris for his papers to come through."

"So, we need to get moving right away, then, do we? Ok. I can get you to Shanghai if you like. A lot of Jews are doing that while they wait for papers to get them to America, Palestine or Canada. There's a large Jewish community in Shanghai and you don't need a visa to travel there."

There was a short silence as the men mulled over what Karl had said.

"If we did that, how long would we have to wait for the Palestine visas come through?" asked Abraham.

"Six to eight weeks on average as long as you're willing to pay. If I can manage to hurry them along, maybe four weeks, but I can't promise that."

The men talked amongst themselves for a few moments before; finally, Samuel announced their decision.

"We've waited a long time already; we can wait another few weeks. Shanghai is a long way away and..."

"I understand," replied Karl, smiling sympathetically.

"May I make a suggestion, gentlemen," said Father Rampp. "The government has already been talking quite openly about deporting Polish Jews from Germany. Who knows what's around the corner. The situation could change very rapidly. Look, I live in an isolated monastery away from the city. Behind the monastery walls you can find shelter from the daily oppressions of the city. I suggest that you and your families make your preparations to leave for the country within the next few days. Come and stay in Baden with me until your visas arrive.

"You're very kind Father Rampp, but I think we'll be alright. We keep ourselves to ourselves, you know, and anyway we don't come up against that much hostility where we live. And anyway, we couldn't impose upon you in such a way," said Samuel.

"It'd be no trouble. It's a big place."

"No, really Father, we'll be fine," echoed Bernard.

"Alright, alright. But at *any* sign of trouble, just come.

With the business of the meeting settled, Elsie brought in a tray of snacks and a jug of wine.

"I've been hearing rumors that Britain and France are likely to join forces and sign a pact to oppose Hitler. Do you think it'll happen?" asked Abraham.

"Anything is possible in politics, I suppose," laughed Karl. "But from what I know of the British and the French, they won't do anything until their own necks are on the block."

"What do you mean?" asked Samuel.

"Well, they're hardly the best of friends, are they? They're never happier than when they're slinging mud at each other..."

"But the British and the French people would surely support a pact against Hitler," said Samuel.

"But it's not about people, Samuel. It's about politics. People aren't told the whole truth. The politicians paint a picture that suits *them*; the one they want the people to see," said Karl.

"And we've seen plenty of them from Hitler!" exclaimed Bernard.

"Hitler says the masses follow their leaders like sheep," mused Samuel.

"Hmm, but it's not true, though, in the end, is it?" observed Rampp. "When it comes down to it, all leaders are more afraid of the masses than they are of anything else. Of the masses finding out the truth..."

"Send someone up to fix the window straight away," said vom Rath, speaking in French with a thick German accent. "It's sticking and it's causing a draught." He put the phone down and returned to his growing mound of paperwork. Ernst vom Rath was the Reich's Ambassador to Paris and looked every inch the typical German with his high forehead and neatly parted hair, slicked back with thick grease.

A youth in the hotel's uniform arrived carrying a small toolbox in hand. Jacob Grynspan had dark hair, a sallow complexion and a small frame that gave him the look of a jockey.

"It's the middle one," vom Rath called out without lifting his head from his work.

"Yes, sir," said the boy obediently, "I'll get right to it."

"And while you're at it, Jacob, you can check the other two as well. Make it quick thought, I've a meeting in ten minutes, so I want it done by then."

The boy nodded.

A quarter of an hour later the sound of footsteps was heard on the staircase, followed by a knock at vom Rath's door.

"Get that, will you," said the Ambassador. Jacob pulled the door to reveal a man whose face he recognized from the newspapers. He was Georges Bonnet, France's Foreign Minister. He passed Jacob without acknowledgement and made his way over to the desk where vom Rath was seated.

Vom Rath greeted the Minister with the sort of overflowing cordiality that Jacob by now had grown to recognize as being highly contrived. He had grown quite familiar with the ways of the German Ambassador in his dealings with people.

"Thank you Jacob, that will be all for now. You can finish off later," said vom Rath, indicating the door with a small sweep of his arm.

After the door closed behind Bonnet, Jacob tiptoed back and pressed his ear tightly against it so that he could eavesdrop on their conversation.

"I must impress upon you, Monsieur Bonnet, that the Führer has no appetite whatsoever for a conflict with France. He is, however, as France is herself, very concerned at the growing communist threat within your country. The unions have been stagnating your economy with their strikes for too many years now."

Jacob could hear a mumbling of agreement from Bonnet as vom Rath continued, "There is a very danger of Britain destroying the peace that we achieved at Munich. We clearly understand her concealed threat of arms. The Führer knows that this is not the case with France and wishes to establish a relationship of greater friendship with your country. And these are not merely words. He is willing to draw up and sign a written pack of friendship."

Vom Rath paused for a moment to allow the full weight of his words to sink in. He knew this man. Bonnet was an even more enthusiastic appeaser of Hitler than Chamberlain was. He knew he'd been working for months to reach such an agreement with Germany.

"Mr. Ambassador," beamed the French Foreign Minister. "This is exactly what I'd hope to hear. It's in everyone's interest for our two nations to return to normal relations again. Perhaps you could relay to Herr Ribbentrop that we will be very happy indeed to sign such a pact.

"I'll do that right away. Now let's talk details. Firstly, Germany desires peaceful and neighborly relations between France and herself," said vom Rath.

"Secondly," said Bonnet "The existing frontier between our two nations should be recognized and fixed as it presently stands..."

Outside the door, Jacob shifted his position and straightened his back as he heard vom Rath scribbling down some notes.

"And finally," continued Bonnet, "our two countries shall resolve to maintain close diplomatic contact and consult with each other on all matters of foreign policy. By this means each of us will avoid any risk of becoming entangled in external conflicts elsewhere."

Jacob listened in astonishment as he heard the chime of glasses as the two men toasted their mutual understanding with some of vom Rath's Napoleon brandy.

"To Napoleon and to the Führer! May the Führer achieve the majesty of vision possessed by the greatest of all French Emperors!" proclaimed vom Rath. Jacob walked home with his head bowed. He couldn't force the events of the afternoon from his mind. The French Foreign Minister had been fawning like a lapdog at the knee of the envoy of the German Reich! The young man was seething with anger.

Jacob had made his escape from Germany two years earlier at this father's urging. The family was in desperate financial straits and, as a Jew; Jacob was unable to find a job. The family had been trying to obtain visas to Palestine but was still waiting. With every year that passes, their chances of success dwindled as the quotas were further and further cut. In 1935, Palestine had accepted nearly fourteen thousand Jewish immigrants. Now in 1938, as Jacob and his family still waited, the numbers had been cut to 3,600. In the interests of his son's safety, Jacob's father worked out a circuitous route out of Germany via Belgium for the boy to take into France. The plan worked well enough but it resulted in the end of Jacob finding himself in Paris as an illegal immigrant.

His first task was to find a roof over his head and then to find a job. He found a small flat in a dilapidated building in the Latin Quarter and a week later got a job as a sort of handyman at the Hotel George V. Jacob had brought his saxophone with him from Germany and between his job at the hotel and busking in the street, he was able to eke out a meager living. Having established a means of survival, Jacob soon began to discover Paris. But the adventure of the city rapidly faded. He spoke little of the language, everything was very expensive and he was alone for the first time in his life. The interminable waiting for travel documents to Palestine weighed heavily upon him. So to keep his spirits up, Jacob played his saxophone in every free moment he had. He played on the streets, in parks, to bus and tram queues and anywhere where people would listen and give him a few francs. Luckily, he was a talented musician so he was able to fare better than most and when he played the blues, his saxophone sang.



Jacob's illegal status, however, continued to haunt him. He had neither papers to stay in France nor ones allowing him to re-enter Germany. Although he'd been born in Germany, he was technically a Polish citizen as his parents had moved from Poland nearly twenty years ago and Germany no longer acknowledged their citizenship. If caught, he would have nowhere to go except Poland. Every time he saw a gendarme, he panicked. Eventually, after several carefully crafted applications, Jacob finally managed to extract a temporary permit from the French authorities to remain in France until January 1938.

All the time he was in Paris, the correspondence from his parents painted the increasingly alarming picture of Jewish life in Germany. The waiting between letters seemed endless as things grew worse and worse. Long gone were the days that Jacob looked forward to the letters from his mother and father. Now he dreaded them. They brought nothing but bad news and more worry.

Then his temporary permit expired and the French authorities ordered him to leave France within four days. Jacob's situation was desperate. Germany wouldn't accept him and he hadn't yet received his papers to go to Palestine. He didn't want to go to Poland and in any case, he didn't think they'd let him in. New laws gave the Polish government the right to revoke citizenship for anyone who lived abroad for more than five years.

Stateless and frantic, Jacob went into hiding. He left his apartment and rented another using an assumed name. Now under pressure from every direction, he grew moody and quarrelsome. Every letter he'd receive from Germany recently seemed only to be prelude to something even worse and the strain was becoming relentless and unbearable.

The conversation between vom Rath and Bonnet was still fresh in his mind. He had counted on France standing up to the Germans, but now even those hopes had been shattered.

Instead of going straight to his flat, he changed his mind and headed towards the *Place de Pigale* at the bottom of the slopes of Mont Martre.

He sat on a bench and slipped the saxophone over his shoulder and onto his lap. It was a cold autumn day and the sun was shining just above the rooftops in a cloudless Paris sky. All the leaves had fallen from the trees and were lying curled up and dry on the ground. He could smell them as they decayed on the wet cobblestones. From where he sat, he could see a woman leaning against a lamppost smoking a cigarette. The woman's eyes stared into the distance as she let out a slow but steady stream of smoke. He noticed her gold anklet and his eyes moved up her beautiful shaped legs clad in fishnet stockings, then up to the high slit in her black skirt. He felt desire growing within him as he slowly undressed her in his mind.

He was broken from his fantasy by the bells of Mont Martre ringing five o'clock. In Berlin he'd be going to the synagogue at this time on a Saturday. How could everything be so totally different now? At home he only ate kosher food, went to a rabbinical seminary and knew only 'modest' women who dedicated their lives to their families. His mother wore a wig to cover her hair and never exposed her arms above the elbow. In Paris, he ate anything he could get, had scarcely prayed once in two years and found himself surrounded by scores of women of easy virtue every day. This new world into which he was now thrust made him feel strangely uneasy, as if he had lost all sense of bearing.

He took a biscuit from his pocket and wondered if he could ever fully adapt to this alien and lonely life.

He took off his yarmulke, tossed it to the ground then took the sax's mouthpiece to his lips and began to play. All his stifled emotions began to pour out. It was only through his music that he could get anywhere near to letting go.

Within minutes a small crowd surrounded Jacob, mesmerized by the melancholy but strangely beautiful music; even some of the prostitutes drew nearer, leaving their business behind to enjoy a few stolen moments of pleasure. Jacob held them all spellbound and silent, as if somehow everyone was frozen in time, and when he finished playing, the audience stayed still for a moment before surging forward to throw coins into his cap.

Thanking everyone, Jacob collected up his cash and swung his sax back over his shoulder. He headed back towards his little apartment in the Latin Quarter.

After paying the landlord he counted up his remaining money. Once the rent was taken out, he was left with about only forty to forty five francs per week from his wage at the George V. This was not a large sum at all and so the extra money he was able to earn from busking was crucial. It enabled him to go to the odd dance, eat at a café or go to the cinema; to feel a little like a genuine *boulevardier*.

The next day was Saturday and Jacob went to Belleville, the largest of the Jewish neighborhoods in Paris. It was the only place in the city that he felt at home; the smells and sounds were familiar and everyone spoke either Yiddish or German.

He made his way to the *Café Tout va Bien* in Belleville, found a small table and ordered a hot meal. While waiting for his food, he stared gloomily out of the window. Outside the Café, he could see a bunch of youngsters, mostly his own age, congregated on the pavement outside. Not having enough money to come inside and buy anything, they were doing the next best thing by hanging around the outside to socialize.

The young man sitting across the table from Jacob was scrutinizing him as if he were an artist studying a subject. This mournful youth seemed to him to exude a complete detachment from the world around.

"You speak German?" the stranger asked.

Jacob tore himself away from his thoughts.

"Yes."

"Nice instrument you have there. Are you in a band?"

"No. I play alone; for a little extra money on the side."

"Where in Germany are you from?"

"From Berlin."

"Ah, Berlin. I'm from Munich. My name's Shimon. Shimon Wiesenthal."

"I'm Jacob. Shimon Wiesenthal, you say? You wouldn't happen to be a journalist, would you?"

"I am."

"Are you the one who wrote those articles? My parents used to talk about you. My mother always said if you carried on writing those articles you'd just disappear and one day no one would ever hear from you again. The Nazis would see to it."

"Well, she was almost right. The Nazis did come after me, but I was lucky. I managed to get out just in time. I'm just waiting here for the rest of my family to join me. We're going to Palestine."

Jacob took a sip of coffee. He couldn't believe his good luck in running into such a well-known Jewish celebrity.

"I plan to go to Palestine too. My parents are in Berlin waiting for visas. But we've been waiting for almost two years now. It's driving me crazy! How long have you been in Paris?"

"Not long, only a few weeks. You're here by yourself?"

Jacob nodded. "But I'm, really worried about my parents. They came to Germany from Poland a long time ago but now the Nazis say that Jews are no longer to be considered German citizens. Only last month I got a letter from my parents saying that the government wants to deport them to Poland.

"How is it that you're here and they're still in Berlin?" asked Shimon.

"I escaped. I had to. The SS took me in a few times for questioning and roughed me up pretty badly."

"Took you in for questioning? You're only a kid. Why?"

"They accused me of being a communist agitator."

Shimon laughed. "Sorry, Jacob, but that's so ridiculous."

"I know. At the time, I didn't even know what a 'communist agitator' was. When I asked the guy who interrogated me what he meant, he blew his top. He said I was being stupid on purpose so he took a whip and lashed me across my face with it."

"How long did they hold you for?"

"A couple of days. When I got out, I found out they'd taken in a couple of my friends too. A week later, they were both found dumped on the street with bullets in their heads. That's when my parents made me get out of Germany."

After they finished their meals, Shimon set off with Jacob to walk to the Louvre so he could watch him play for the tourists who flocked there on weekends. The two walked leisurely along the banks of the Seine sharing their experiences and talking of their plans for their future. It was almost noon. The sun was breaking through the clouds and was beginning to shine brightly.

When they got to the Louvre, Jacob went to his usual spot at the bottom of the stairs and Shimon sat down nearby to listen and to watch.

Soon Jacob's sad notes filled the square. His music grew louder and louder as he played and became more and more compelling. Shimon began to drift off into his own melancholy reverie.

It was an hour before Jacob stopped to take a break and count his change. A tramp came up to them, pulled a wobbly cart behind him piled high with old clothing and junky treasures.

"I was listening to you play, young man. That was well done. You're a fine musician. Where did you learn to play like that?"

Shimon looked at the tramp in curiosity. He looked like he was probably in his early forties but his disheveled and grizzled appearance made him seem at first glance to be much older. He also had a strangely sophisticated air for one so down at heel.

"Permit me to offer you some wine." He dug into his heap of possessions on the cart and pulled out a bottle.

"Here, have a drink. Just got it this morning."

Jacob and Shimon smiled.

"Sure," said Jacob. "Take a seat and join us."

They exchanged introductions and Jacob took a couple of sips from the bottle before passing it to Shimon.

"Hmm! That's good," he said.

The tramp laughed. "My friend Alfredo is a wine waiter in one of those *chic* restaurants off the Boulevard and pours all the leftovers together for me. Not a bad cocktail, wouldn't you say?"

The three men laughed.

"I'll tell you an amusing story about a rich fellow at my friend's restaurant who fancied himself as being something of a wine connoisseur. One night, Alfredo was serving a table of around seven or eight people. The man in charge of the party was loud and outspoken, a real know-it-all, you know the type. He kept snapping his fingers at Alfredo and barking out orders. 'Get me your best wine' he commanded. 'I don't care what it costs'. Alfredo suggested a very nice vintage Beaujolais. When he went to the cellar he got one of the bottles he had 'blended' for me and served it to Mr. Know-it-all. Everyone put it to their noses and carried on about the rich bouquet, the fine color and so on. So do you know what happened then?"

"Go on," smiled Shimon.

"He commended Alfredo on the excellence of his suggestion and ordered two more bottles of the same for the table. I remembered the occasion very well. I got short changed that week as a result of it!"

They laughed again.

"You seem a happy man," said Shimon.

"Yes, I am happy. I drink the best wines and eat the best food in Paris." He winked and whispered, "I know a couple of chefs as well..."

"But you weren't always as carefree as you are now. You had another life before," said Shimon, his curiosity aroused.

"Hmm," grunted the tramp. "I did indeed. I used to be a lawyer. I gave it up five years ago."

"A lawyer!" What kind of lawyer?" asked Shimon.

"I specialized in International Law."

"What happened?" asked Jacob.

"Well, I was always at the office, busy with meetings, preparing documents, cross-examinations, court appearances, you know how it is. Sure, I made lots of money. I was married then too but it was my wife who enjoyed the material comforts from all my hard work, not me. I was too busy. Then one day I wasn't feeling very well so I went home early and found my wife in bed with another man."

He shook his head and took a large gulp of wine, holding the neck of the bottle tightly in his fist as he put it back down on this knee.

"So what did you do?"

"There wasn't much *to* do was there?"

"Didn't you punch the guy?" asked Jacob. Shimon elbowed him in admonition.

"No, it's ok. It doesn't bother me anymore," he took another gulp of wine. "No, I just showed him the door and off he went in a great hurry. You see, I didn't care about *him* so much. I was angrier with *her*. Then later, of course, with myself."

"How do you mean?" asked Shimon.

"I'd been played for a fool. A blind fool! I was in love with her and up until that moment, I thought she felt the same for me. I was working day and night to earn money and build a reputation. And the more successful I was; the blinder I became. I gave her

everything she could possibly want – money, clothes, a fine house, an expensive car, wonderful holidays... All I asked in return was that she loved me. But then it turned out that she only really cared about my money all along; not me. It hit me hard, I can tell you. Very hard.”

He paused for a moment; then continued. “You know what bothered me about it most, afterward? I could tease out the complexities of the most intricate legal matters at international tribunals without any problem. I could move juries and persuade judges. How was it then that I couldn’t see what was going on right under my nose at home?”

And I still see everyone else carrying on doing it. All the businessmen and the politicians chasing after success, thinking the more they achieve, the more they’d be loved. But it doesn’t work, does it? In the end, you can’t buy love, no one can. So, since that day, I’ve decided, to hell with all the success and glamor. And here I am...!”

The next day was Sunday and the city was quiet so Jacob decided to go to the Globe Cinema. *Morocco* was showing, starring Gary Cooper and Marlene Dietrich.

Afterwards, he wandered to the *Place de Pigale* with his saxophone on his back. He looked around, hoping that he might see the American youth again, but he was nowhere to be seen. Probably gone back to England by now, mused Jacob. Instead, he turned his attention to the prostitutes, some standing alone, others in groups of two or three chatting on the street corners. Over by the lamppost he saw the same blonde in the black fishnets that he had seen last time. She was definitely the best looking one of them.

He’d been sitting on the bench for ten minutes before she noticed him. She dropped her cigarette on the ground, stepped on it with a high-heeled shoe to put it out and walked over to Jacob, who was watching her approach with growing trepidation.

“Hello. You’re the musician, aren’t you? You don’t feel like playing tonight?” asked the girl.

“Um...well, I haven’t...”

“Why don’t I play for *you* tonight?” she purred.

Jacob fidgeted and blushed, not knowing how to answer.

“We’re both artists, you and I, in our own way, aren’t we? So how about I give you a discount, say, twenty francs, as a kid of professional courtesy?”

Jacob was still stammering as she grabbed his hand and dragged him into a shabby looking doorway and up a narrow creaky flight of stairs. She took him into a small, garishly decorated room with threadbare crimson curtains and a worn, strained carpet on the floor. The only furniture was one small table, two chairs and a bed.

“You can call me Monique, if you like,” she said as she began to take off her coat and unbutton her blouse.

Jacob still stood by the door gripping his saxophone tightly.

Monique tilted back her head and pouted her lips coquettishly.

“You can give the saxophone a bit of a rest now and play me for a while. It could get a bit uncomfortable, the three of us...”

She had slipped off her blouse by now and Jacob’s eyes were fixed on the swell of her breasts inside her brassiere. His heart was pounding, his whole body was trembling and he could feel the desire growing inside him.

“Shall I pour you a glass of wine to help you unwind” she lowered her eyes coyly, filled two glasses and handed one of them to him. In her free hand, Jacob noticed she was

holding out a condom. He drank the wine down nervously in one gulp and Monique began to undress slowly in front of him, unzipping her skirt and unfastening her stockings from their garters. Jacob put his saxophone down clumsily, sat on a chair and hastily tore open the package containing the condom.

"Don't you think you ought to take your pants off first?" she asked with a broad smile.

"Oh, yes. Right."

He put the condom down on the table and knocked the wineglass over in his haste. Monique turned her face away to hide her amusement while Jacob quickly undid his trousers and crumpled to the color. Instantly embarrassed at the tell-tale bulge in his underpants, he sat back down in the chair and returned to wrestling with the condom. But it was all tightly rolled up. What a stupid inconvenience, he thought, to have to fuss around so at a time like this. He carried on trying clumsily to unroll the rubber.

Monique unhooked her brassiere and let it fall to the floor revealing large, firm breasts.

Just at that moment, with his eyes distracted by the presence of her bosom just inches away from him, he accidentally ripped the condom and it tore it into two pieces.

Jacob started at the two shreds of rubber in disbelief.

Monique, the goddess of seduction, instantly transformed herself back into a mortal.

"Well, with that problem behind us," she said, maybe we should have another glass of wine." She reached for her robe and slipped it on.

A few days later, Jacob met Shimon as arranged in the *Café Tout va Bien*.

"I've just received a letter from Anna," he said. They're all still trying to get visas for Palestine. It shouldn't be long now."

"Who's Anna?"

"My fiancée."

"Oh." The memory of Monique flashed before his eyes. He still felt mortified as if it had happened only an hour ago. He hadn't set foot near the *Place de Pigale* since then.

"Are you alright, Jacob?" asked Shimon.

"Yeah. Fine. I'm still waiting too. For my parents and the visas, I mean."

"You know that vom Rath you were telling me about? The one staying at the George V?" asked Shimon.

"Yeah. What about him?"

"I wrote an article about him years ago. He's an old school chum of Hitler's from Austria. I bet he's here to make sure the French are nicely softened up for when Germany decides to walk in. He's an important man to Hitler is vom Rath."

Jacob nodded his head. What Shimon was saying made sense. He had heard it with his own ears, after all. A prominent member of the French government had just fallen over himself in his eagerness to indulge the Nazis.

Shimon pulled out an article from the *Pariser Haint* from his breast pocket and handed it to his friend.

"Someone from the news desk gave this to me in the office today. You read Yiddish?"

"Yes."

"I thought you would want to know," said Shimon gently.

Jacob read.

Saturday, October 29, 1938

***“Mama run! If you don’t they’ll kill you.”***

*The situation is critical for some 12,000 Polish Jews being deported from Germany including more than 2,000 children who have been made stateless overnight. They were rounded up on the night of October 27<sup>th</sup> and shipped off without being allowed to pack even essential items. It is reported that Orthodox women were dragged out into the streets and forced to wash the sidewalks on their knees with buckets of hot acid water using their wigs as rags.*

*The deportees were taken to a place about two or three kilometers from the border and then driven on foot through fields, forests and along the road for the rest of the way. There was heavy rain and some people collapsed from their effort. Some had heart attacks. The SS beat anyone who was lagging behind or who fell down with their whips until the road was wet with their blood.*

*For their part, the Polish border guards had no idea why all these people were running towards them and why there was so many of them. They began to open fire. A brutal standoff developed with the German SS pushing the stampeding Jews across the open ground with their rifle butts and the Polish border guards standing on the other side with fixed bayonets. The refugees are now stranded in no man’s land, crowded together in the most terrible conditions, but refusing to budge.*

*Poland continues to refuse to take them. Their living conditions are totally miserable and many of them have no shelter at all. Twelve hundred have fallen ill and there is the risk of epidemic. Red Cross doctors, with the help of a children’s charity, have distributed typhus vaccinations and 10,000 aspirin tablets. A number of cases of insanity and suicide have been reported.*

The paper fell from Jacob’s hands. “Oh, Shimon...I hope to God my parents aren’t among those poor lost souls...” his voice trailed off.

## Chapter 6 Dancing Bear

Karl Beck started this day much like any other working day, studying the newspaper in the conservatory where he enjoyed taking his breakfast. As he read, he cursed himself for having supported the National Socialists in their fledging days a decade ago. Now, a day didn't go by when there wasn't something in the news to infuriate him.

He skimmed briefly over the articles on the front page then slammed the paper down on the table, nearly breaking his plate in the process.

The same thing blazed across the headlines of every newspaper around the world. Yesterday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, Chamberlain returned to London from Munich with the scandalous accord with Hitler in his hand. The general mobilization of Czechoslovak armed forces had all come to nothing now. The plan to depose the Führer was shattered. How could they prove that Hitler was leading Germany to war when everything had been settled so neatly with British consent? The Sudetenland was fated to be handed over in order to preserve peace in Europe. A fait accompli.

Karl knew only too well how different the truth of the matter was. Hitler would be secretly pressing ahead with the invasion of the whole of Czechoslovakia. He's been planning it all along.

His butler, prompted by Karl's outburst appeared a moment later with a silver coffee pot.

"The British had the chance to make a choice between shame and war," said Karl angrily, pointing at the paper. "And do you know what they've done, Theo? They've chosen shame! And the worst of it is they'll still have war!"

"Would you like anything, sir? Perhaps more coffee?"

"No, thanks. I'd better get off to the office," Karl said, standing and pushing the chair back.

"Will you ask Annie to pack me a suitcase? I have a feeling I might have to go away for a few days soon."

"Yes, sir. What sort of clothing shall I tell her to pack, sir?"

"Nothing special. Just the usual business suits."

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks, Theo. I'll be on my way now. See you tonight." Karl strode out of the conservatory.

On his way to the office, Karl decided to make a stop at the *Abwehr* headquarters. General Halder was in Admiral Canaris' office when Karl entered. The mood of pessimism within the room was all too clear. "When will the troops move in?" he asked.

"Right away," answered Halder. "The Führer has already given written instructions to General von Brauchitsch. He's to immediately occupy the areas that Czechoslovakia is required evacuate."

Only a few days earlier, they'd been on the verge of success, but now they know it was all hopeless.

General Halder was seldom known to display any emotion, but now his face was twisted into an expression of clear contempt.



"Hitler's got such unbelievable luck!" he blurted out angrily. "He gets everything he wants with that spoiled child act of his." He paused for a moment. "But I suppose you have to admit," He sighed, "he knows how to win wars without fighting battles."

Canaris hadn't spoken at all this far. He was just sitting at his desk with his head in his hands. "What a bunch of idiots they are in London!" he said at last. "We've warned them but they refused to take the slightest bit of notice. Chamberlain chooses to believe the word of a known scoundrel. Can you believe that, gentlemen? He really thinks that Hitler will be satisfied with just the Sudetenland. All the British Prime Minister has done is make war absolutely inevitable. He's a fool. A complete fool! Either that or he's a madman.

"Look, the battle's not completely over yet," said the General. "Maybe we can still do something. We shouldn't just give up. We should at least give it another try." But his tone was not convincing. Canaris shook his head wearily.

"What do the rest of our friends have to say?" asked Karl. "Are they still with us?"

"They're all very shocked of course," replied Halder, "but I think they'd still be prepared to back a *coup* if the circumstances were right. But we'd have to proceed very cautiously."

"We have to look for another opportunity," declared Karl. "We have to stay on course. This is a pivotal point in our destiny. There is everything to gain and everything to lose."

Karl arrived at work in the outskirts of Berlin still preoccupied with the morning's events. His private office, high up in the red brick central building of the United Steel Works had been designed personally by himself. It was austere, modern and discrete. The high-ceilinged room was furnished in Art Deco style and contained a large Elmwood desk and an even larger Elmwood conference table. Around this stood six streamlined leather-covered chairs. Lighting was provided by two modern brass chandeliers. There was no clutter or ostentation.

"This came for you about an hour ago." Elsie handed him a letter marked '*by special courier from the Reich's Chancellery*'.

Karl took it. "It didn't take them long," he said ripping the envelope open.

"Long?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," he said skimming over its contents on his way into his office. She looked at him and shook her head affectionately.

The letter was dated that morning, October 1<sup>st</sup>. It was a request from the Reich's Military Economics Office for him to make a short inspection of the Sudeten regions prior to their occupation by the *Wehrmacht*. An evaluation of their industrial potential for the Reich was necessary.

A request, thought Karl. Hardly. 'Request' was just a euphemism for the word 'order'.

Inside the envelope was the agenda for his visit. He was to depart the next evening and meet up with a high-ranking military inspection team including the Führer himself. There was a list of specific factories and mines to be visited, hotel reservations and an invitation to a meeting with the Führer at the Berghof in a weeks' time. There they would discuss how best to utilize their newly 'acquired' wealth. Two red Berghof guest passes were enclosed.

He was about to ring Elsie to tell her of his impending trip when his deputy, Kurt Reinhard, walked in.

Karl looked up from his desk. "Oh, hello, Kurt, I didn't know you were working today."

"Actually, I'm not. I'm on my way to see Heinrich Himmler. I'm up for an important assignment I think, but there's something very urgent I must talk to you about first."

"Sure. Have a seat. What's on your mind?"

"I'm afraid it's a very sensitive matter, Karl." He hesitated for a moment and cleared his throat. "The SS has a file on Elsie."

"On Elsie? Why?" Karl was shocked.

"Because she's Jewish."

"That's impossible, Kurt. She went to a convent school for God's sake!" Karl was becoming annoyed.

"Yes, I know that," said Kurt, "but it doesn't alter the facts. Both her parents were Jews. They converted twenty years ago to improve their prospects and Elsie was baptized into the Catholic faith. But you know as well as I do that all that makes no difference. It's her birth origin that counts."

Unlike Karl, Kurt Reinhard was an enthusiastic member of the Nazi Party. Karl had always thought of him as a dedicated opportunist. He could see Kurt siding just as easily with the Communists or the Democrats if it meant getting ahead.

Karl rose from his desk. He was a tall man and towered over his subordinate as he stood facing him.

"Look, Karl, I know she's more than just a secretary to you, but under the circumstances, something has to be done!" Kurt was obviously worried about the repercussions he might have to face as a Party member if it came out that he had neglected to expose a Jew who was employed right under his nose.

Karl remained silent as he hovered over his deputy.

"Don't tell me you didn't know!" exclaimed Kurt.

"No, I didn't know," Karl answered. He sat down again, still regarding Kurt defiantly. Karl's physical presence alone was forceful and he had a personality to match.

"What are you going to do about it Kurt? He asked. His deputy did not reply.

Since 1934, Kurt had become more and more involved in the Nazi Party to such an extent that he now scarcely spent any time at the United Steel Works at all. In spite of this, Karl kept him on with full salary. This was not because he was foolishly lenient but because he understood the nature of Karl's unswerving loyalty. In return for being kept on the payroll, Kurt kept his employer up to date with the latest news from Nazi headquarters, as well as giving him crucial tip offs about large up and coming contracts.

"You know, if you pursue this matter, I could always expose some of the 'rumors' you've passed on to me," Karl threatened mildly. "It wouldn't put you in a very good light with your Nazi friends, would it?"

Kurt did some rapid thinking and his tone became quite conciliatory, "I admit that not many people would have done all the things for me that you have. We both know that I am indebted to you. Leave it to me. I know the SS officer who has her file. He's a close friend of mine. I'll take care of it."

Karl felt a huge sense of relief but knew better than to let his deputy see this. He gave a nod of thanks.

"I owe you anyway, Karl. But a word of warning," Kurt added as he rose to leave. "I've seen the way you look at each other in the office. Forget any thoughts you might have had about asking her to marry you. That would only reopen investigations into her origins."

Kurt gave his customary '*Sieg Heil!*' saluted and left the room.

Karl returned to his desk and fell into his chair. It was turning out to be a very bad day. He picked up the telephone.

"Elsie, cancel my morning appointments, please. I have to go out."

"But..." she paused. "Ok. Shall I reschedule?"

He sighed, "No, I have to go away for quite a few days. I'll be back next Thursday." He hung up before she could say anything else.

Elsie put down the receiver. It was obvious that something had upset Karl, but what? She was puzzled. He always confide in her.

It was a balmy day for October and the sun felt warm on Karl's back as he walked down the sloping lawn behind this house towards the water's edge.

Now it all made sense. He knew that Elsie's parents had left for Hungary three years ago. It was because of the Nuremberg Laws, he realized how. Why else would successful Germans drop everything and leave Berlin for Budapest? Round about the same time Himmler had ordered the USW to dismiss all of its Jewish employees; all two thousand and eighty three, in one go. It made sense to him now why Elsie was so eager to stay on after work and help to arrange the exit papers and pension allocations for them all. 'It's so good of you, Karl, you really don't have to do all this,' she said. She'd seem amazed that he was prepared to help where so many others did nothing. It was during that time, two years ago, that they'd started seeing each other more and more outside the office.

Karl lost his wife in a car accident in 1928. This shattering blow had driven him to immerse himself completely in his work. The United Steel Works dominated all his thoughts from the moment he woke to the moment he fell asleep. It was the only way he could forget. It had taken him a long time before he'd begun to notice Elsie.

He thought of their first meeting as he turned to walk back to the house. His longtime secretary had retired and Elsie was one of the candidates for the job. She turned up for the interview in his office in a cream suite, a stylish hat and kid gloves.

"Do you know how to take shorthand?" Karl asked.

"Yes, I do. But you know what I could never figure out? Why it took me so *long* to learn *shorthand*," she answered with a sparkle in her eye. Karl found himself sitting back in this car in amusement.

It wasn't long before Karl discovered how much he enjoyed working with Elsie. She was bright, vivacious and always professional. She adapted well to his rapid and sometimes erratic pace of work. Although he was not by nature an anxious man himself, he was the kind likely to cause ulcers in others. Elsie was able to soften his driving edge with her sense of humor.

When the problem of the Jewish employees came up, they worked late into the night together. Their relationship gradually became closer. Elsie brought light and laughter into his otherwise dark and somber world. Although Karl tried very hard initially not to compromise their professional relationship, she continued to intrigue him. The fact, too, that she was quite beautiful made it all more difficult to remain indifferent.

Then Karl caught a bad case of flu and was forced to stay at home for a week. Elsie went to visit him after work every day to see how he was doing and from that time onwards, their relationship began to blossom. But in all the time since, Elsie had never once mentioned her Jewish ancestry. But then again, why would she? As far as she was concerned, he reasoned, she wasn't.

With Kurt it would only stay a secret as long as it remained to his own advantage. Of that, Karl had no illusions. He was deeply concerned about Elsie's safety but he wasn't really sure how to broach the subject to her. In any case, he has several days to think about it while he was away.

The next morning, Karl flew from Berlin to Dresden, where he was met by a chauffeur who was to drive him across the border to tour the Sudeten region. Germany had taken the entire border area of Bohemia-Moravia like a giant rat nibbling at a loaf of bread. Karl spent the next few days zigzagging his way across Northern-Western Bohemia inspecting mines, factories and smelting plants.

His last night in the northwestern territories was spent in Karlovy Vary. From there he was to fly back to the Lignz in Austria to meet with Hitler and discuss the Führer's findings while touring Southern Bohemia. No sooner had he checked into the Park Hotel than he heard a loud, drunken voice roaring out to him from the lounge.

"Karl! Hey, Karl, my friend. Good to see you!" The voice belonged to General von Reichenau. He was sprawled out on a large sofa with an open bottle of champagne in his hand. Obviously not his first, thought Karl. After sending his suitcase upstairs, he joined von Reichenau in the lounge.

"How long have you been here?"

"I've only just arrived," replied Karl. I've been doing a tour of the Sudeten industries.

"Well, let me tell you what a mess it's been for the army," slurred von Reichenau. "None of our signals work and the armored columns are stuck for hours waiting for those idiots from maintenance to catch up."

Karl listened without responding. He had always disliked von Reichenau. The General emptied his glass and smacked his lips.

"Aahh! And as for those clods who drafted this operation, they couldn't have botched the supply chain up any more if they'd tried."

"Wasn't that all set by von Brauchitsch and Keitel?" Karl remarked pointedly. But the reference to the General's superiors, his 'clods', was lost on the drunken von Reichenau.

"Ha!" he laughed, ignoring Karl. "If the Czechs only knew what a stew we're in! Benes is stupid to let himself be pushed around like he is doing. Any Czech peasant with a pitchfork could have held us up. Just imagine...!"

As the Chief of the Central Army Group, it was incredible that he was blurting all this out in public. Evidently, the champagne had washed away all of von Reichenau's inhibitions. *In vino veritas*, they say, and Karl wondered what Hitler would think of von Reichenau shooting his mouth off in this fashion. Karl looked around the lounge to see if anyone had overheard. In this town where German tourists were common, nearly everyone working in the hotels spoke fluent German. But apart from the bartender behind the bar polishing some glasses, they were all alone.

In fact, Karl was just as upset at the state of things as von Reichenau was, but for very different reasons. He was not concerned at all about the disorganized state of the

Army. But he was totally scandalized by the behavior of Heydrich's SS Commandos which were operating in the rear of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division.

Von Reichenau got to his feet and stumbled toward Karl as if to say something in confidence.

"Just think, ha!" he chuckled, his words slurring as he spoke. "They have an army of 750,000 men; that's 36 Divisions and an air force numbering almost fifteen hundred planes! Top of the line machines too. Goering will enjoy getting his hands on those." He jabbed a finger at Karl. "And they let themselves be pushed around like this. All the Generals agreed you know, including your friend, General Halder, that if we had to fight the Czechs we would have lost. And in short order too. We lacked the means of attack; couldn't break through their fortifications. We knew it then and we know it now." He took another large swig from his bottle and steadied himself. "But the stakes are a lot higher, you know. A lot higher than just the Sudetenland. Shall I tell you a little secret? The game has only just begun. Soon the Führer will settle the *whole* Czech business. Wait and see. And after that, BIG things, and I mean REALLY BIG things..." General von Reichenau screwed his monocle hard into his right eye and stared at Karl to make sure that his words were sinking in.

Karl had no trouble playing cat and mouse with a drunk. "But General, the Führer has just signed an agreement with the British and the French. The Sudetenland is his only claim. What's more, the British have guaranteed the safety of the remainder of Czechoslovakia."

Von Reichenau threw back his head and laughed till he was red in the face.

Karl had spent long enough in von Reichenau's company. He bid him good night and went upstairs, leaving the General still muttering to himself in the lounge. When Karl entered his room, he switched on the light above the desk, pulled out pen and paper and began to write.

*Dear Admiral Canaris,*

*I have just spent several days in the occupied Sudeten region. You need to know what's going on here.*

*Heydrich's SS Commando entered the country behind the Army's 4<sup>th</sup> Division. They have pillaged and killed, without reason or provocation. I saw a girl gang raped countless times. Her father was murdered; her mother locked in a shack and left to her miserable fate. Their farm was burned as were so many others.*

*The Gestapo is turning Czechs out of their homes to make room for Reich Germans. They are not allowed to take their furniture or possessions. Those who resist are arrested.*

*Czech refugees now number hundreds of thousands. As many as 800,000 Czechs from the Sudeten region might ultimately become refugees. And what about the rest of the country? We know well enough that Hitler's not content with just Sudetenland.*

*We must return urgently to our original plan. We have to stop him!*

He folded the letter up and placed it in an envelope and sealed it. He would send it to Admiral Canaris tomorrow by *Abwehr* courier.

Karl awoke with a start. He glanced at his watch and saw that he'd been asleep for less than half an hour. But he was fully awake. He sat on the side of the bed and frowned as he recalled the depressing events of the night.

The pile of paperwork he'd brought with him lay on the floor beside his armchair. He signed, bent down and gathered it all up. He checked his watch again. An hour and a half before his plane for Linz was due to take off. It was barely worth going back to bed. He was not looking forward at all to another prolonged encounter with the Führer, who would be gloating over his latest conquest. He sighed again, rubbed the sleep from his eyes and went into the shower.

By the terms of the Munich Agreement, the International Commission was to meet in order to rule on the finer details of the German occupation. Representing British interests was Ambassador Sir Neville Henderson. On the German side was Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. Rough, stupid and often vulgar, he was fond of throwing pencils at his secretaries and describing his aides as 'oxen'. He was disliked abroad and loathed at home, even among the Nazis. But Hitler liked him because he was radical. Hitler never had to waste any time persuading him to go along with any of his schemes, no matter how wild they were. Ribbentrop was stupid enough to go along with anything. In fact, he was capable of exceeding even the Führer in zeal. Ribbentrop often came to Hitler with his own fanciful suggestions.

The British and French representatives soon discovered that issues were not to be decided by compromise, by mutual give and take. In fact, there was no give and a whole lot of take. The Germans claimed every settlement, factory and railway line that were anywhere near Sudetenland.

Henderson pointed to a map showing an industrial area largely unhabitated by Germans. "That belongs to the Czechs!" he insisted. "That goes beyond the terms of the agreement. You should agree to spare it..."

"You might spare it," said Ribbentrop, "but it isn't in your power. The German High Command has already decided that it is to be annexed."

"And what of this place?" Henderson pointed to another spot on the map. "Only Czechs live there."

"Impossible. The Führer has plans for it.

All matters of disagreement were decided in much the same fashion. There was no real great deal of resistance put up by either the British or the French representative.

The last few morning stars still glimmered in the ash grey sky. A light autumn breeze blew pure and clear and a slight mist rose high over the Vltava, flattening itself against the banks before seeping down the hollows around the town of Tesky Krumlov. The great open green of the riverbank, the bulrush thickets and the dew drenched trees were all ablaze in the crisp autumn sunrise.

The gypsy camp was still. Everyone was asleep in their wagons, huddled together under their huge feather quilts. Ardeleana was the first to wake. The wagon door screeched open as she emerged wrapped in her tasseled shawl. The noise startled a black raven which was perching in a nearby poplar and it began to caw loudly, an awful grating sound that tore at the silence of the morning. The bird flapped its wings, took to the air and circled around the camp once before flying off.

Ardeleana was momentarily frightened by the unexpected noise and activity. She watched the raven fly away and angry curses escaped her lips as she went about rekindling the previous night's fire. She poked the ashes with a stick until a few glowing embers surfaces and then brought some dry twigs from a woodpile beneath the wagon. Soon she had a new fire crackling. She filled the cauldron over the flames with water and set about making breakfast.

Rosa was woken up by the screeching and came outside. She stood upright next to her daughter in voluminous dark skirts, the light of the dawn glowing palely on her burnished cheeks. Ardeleana saw her mother searching the trees with her eyes. "It's flown away already," she said.

Rosa touched the deep furrow between her eyebrows. She was a very superstitious woman and everything was either a sign of luck or of disaster to her. This was definitely a bad sign of ill luck and sorrow. "Maybe we shouldn't go into town today. It's a bad omen."

Ardeleana bit her lip. "But I need to buy some thread," she protested.

Rosa picked up an axe and started to split some wood. "It's a bad omen, believe me," she repeated. She gave the axe a swing and it came down with a dull thud, halving the log in one blow. Ardeleana tried hard to push the specter of the tomb-black bird from her own mind. She grabbed a few handfuls of coffee beans and threw them in a tin to roast over the fire.

The camp slowly came to life as the other families emerged and lit their fires. The rich smells of roasting coffee, wood-smoke and food permeated the air. The horses ate oats from sacks hung around their heads or drank water from buckets while the young boys rubbed them down with currycombs until they were glossy. Young women nursed their babies and fed their children.

Ardeleana watched with envy as her friend Gracia peeled an apple for her youngest child. It had been six years since Ardeleana's daughter Sherina had been born and everyone in the *Kumpania* was beginning to wonder whether she would produce another child. It was talked about throughout the camp. For her part, Rosa had been concocting fertility potions and tinctures of ever increasing strength and foulness for some time, but with no success. Barrenness was the greatest misfortune that could befall a gypsy woman.

After breakfast Ardeleana went out into the meadow beyond the camp with a pail of water in one hand and a small knife in the other. Sherina followed her, fascinated as always by the wildlife all around her. It seemed to the rest of the encampment that Sherina could entice rabbits from out of their holes and birds from the trees. She was particularly fond of her horse Jako. She tended him as if he were royalty, plaiting his mane with ribbons and brushing his tail for hour after hour.

The dew moistened the calves of Ardeleana's bare legs as she made her way to the patch of violet asters that grew by the dark green pines just beyond the camp. She cut a dozen blooms with long stems and placed them in the pail. She returned to the camp to find Nicholae harnessing one of their dappled grey horses to a high-wheeled buggy.

"Are you ready?" he asked

"I'm ready," she answered, lifted the pail of wild asters onto the buggy, "but Mother is still upset about the raven this morning. I don't think she wants to go."

Nicholae finished securing the harness and went into his mother-in-law's *vardo*. It took some persuasion before he finally talked her into going to town. It wasn't a long journey, after all, he said. Very reluctantly, she took up the two sacks of dried herbs she'd

collected to sell to the pharmacist, and climbed into the back of the horse cart. "It's a bad omen," she muttered again as she settled herself for the ride.

Nicholae climbed up onto the driving board, gave the reins a shake and the horse moved up the path and out of the camp. Its hooves clip-clopped on the dirt path for a minute or so before it turned automatically on the gravel road that led into town. The horse had made this trip so many times before. Ardeleana curled up with Sherina in the straw and with her face upwards to the warm noon sun, she began to sing. It was a wistful Romany song and Nicholae whistled along as he bumped and swayed on his seat. But Rosa sat resolutely stern-faced at the rear of the wagon, her legs dangling down from the back. She stared fixedly down the road behind them, waiting, hoping for a new sign of good luck to wipe out the bad luck from before. She saw none. This truly was a cursed day.

The motorcade of ten black Mercedes left Linz and set out along the main road. They moved at a customary leisurely pace because of Hitler's fear of speed. The Führer explained this by maintaining that his death through a motoring accident would deprive poor Germany of its beloved leader. He rode in the first of the ten identical black automobiles accompanied by Karl Becker, and his current favorite General von Kaunitz. Hitler favored von Kaunitz by inviting him and his wife to dinners in Berlin and to his box at the Kroll Opera House. Von Kaunitz was no fool. He knew that Hitler's motives were firmly those of pragmatic self-interest. The Führer liked von Kaunitz's unorthodox approach to the art of soldering.

The General was astute enough to take these social opportunities to discuss his own problems and promote his ideas. More often than not, he got what he wanted. Lately Hitler was it he habit of giving von Kaunitz a leading part in military operations. For the occupation of the Sudetenland, he was given the command of the XX Panzer Corps with its three divisions.

Hitler also enjoyed the company of Karl Becker. Becker was neither a soldier, courtier nor politician; but simply a master of his trade. Hitler respected his ability, but more importantly, he knew that he represented no threat to him. Karl Becker was held in the highest personal esteem by the Führer.

In the cars that followed, travelling in strict hierarchical order, were Commander-in-Chief General von Brauchitsch, Chief of Staff General Halder, General von Leeb who'd been recalled from retirement and Joint Commanders of the Linz area Generals von Bruckner and von Schobert. Junior officers made up the cars to the rear, including, in the last car of all, SS Lieutenant Ulrich Schellenberger.

None of the Generals were Nazis. Most were titled, from the upper classes, heirs of the old aristocratic military hierarchy of the Prussian Kings and German Emperors. They were a group which had always held themselves aloof from everyday politics and the government of the day. So much so that it was a point of pride. Men serving in the military, from the rank-and-file all the way up to Field Marshall, were barred from voting. The Officer Corps had appreciated Nazi largesse and the funds that were heaped on them for rebuilding that many were now coming to regret. For all but a few in Army High Command, considered the Nazi chief to be nothing more than an upstart Bohemian corporal. They knew he had no real understanding of strategy and how whole armies operated. But absurdly, he considered himself an expert in precisely those fields. It was clear to see that the patrician generals had very low personal regard for their Führer.



Hitler, with a whole wood-yard of chips on his shoulder, disliked the General Staff even more than they disliked him. Their long traditions and their prestige in society unnerved him. He kept them all at arm's length.

A mere one year ago, Hitler had told his highest ranking generals that Germany must expand. He named Austria and Czechoslovakia as targets. The generals were not enthusiastic and objected strenuously. Within three months the Commander-in-Chief and War Minister were conveniently brought down by scandals, courtesy of Reinhard Heydrich. Hitler appointed the pliable von Brauchitsch in the position of Commander-in-Chief and took the opportunity to appoint as War Minister the most radical person he could think of – himself.

The motorcade wound through the heavily forested mountains until they crossed the border into Southern Bohemia. Hitler asked Karl for a brief report of his tour of the Northern and Western Sudeten territories. Karl outlined the data from the coal and iron ore mines, but soon they landed on the topic of weapons, and more specifically, tanks.

"I'm not entirely happy with the latest designs," said von Brauchitsch.

"What's wrong?" asked Karl.

"The top speed is too slow. I need a road speed of 50km/hour, heavier armor than the Mar II, and a gun caliber of 150mm".

Karl laughed, "You want too much. That's impossible!" He stated the obvious that with a heavier tank the top speed would inevitably be lower.

"And the heavier the tank, of course," he added, "the greater the cost, so you're looking at fewer models coming off the production line."

Von Kaunitz frowned. "I need plenty of them."

"Yes, we must have as many tanks as we can," said Hitler, who had a fixation with numbers. "Next year, we will double military spending from our present 17% of national expenditure to 30 or 35%. We must have tanks. Yes!" He raised his voice, "TANKS!"

Karl listened uneasily. At 17%, Germany was already spending double the amount of Britain and France. "But that will cut into the production of consumer goods. There'll be no pots, pans, knives or forks," he protested.

"No!" Hitler was almost shrieking. "At all costs, we must not affect the production of consumer goods." He understood very well how domestic hardships could erode his popularity.

"Then how shall it be done?" asked von Kaunitz.

"That's why we took Austria and that's why we're all here. Soon we'll take all of Czechoslovakia," he waved his hand contemptuously. "The Skoda Works and the whole of the Czech Army will be ours."

Karl and the General glanced at each other in disbelief. They had barely scraped through one crisis and Hitler was talking of getting into another. "Herr General," the Führer continued, "when the Skoda Works is ours, you'll have all the heavy caliber guns you need to put on your tanks. Yes, the Czechs will work for The Reich! Even oafs like the Slavs can accomplish something, given good leadership."

The first stop on their itinerary was an inspection of the Czech border fortifications. Hitler's chauffeur drew up by the first concrete pillbox overlooking the mountain pass on the border between Czechoslovakia and Austria. Through that valley ran the single railway line to Linz.

Von Kaunitz was the first out of the car and he hurried ahead impatiently to inspect the bunker. There it was, with all its steel, concrete, cannons, mines, stockpiles of shells and grenades. Amazing and massive, it was laid out with extraordinary skill. The fortification was just one part of a whole 1300 mile long network that had cost over 70 million dollars. Karl was amazed. Hitler was amazed. The Generals were relieved.

Von Kaunitz stood at the top of the hill looking down into the pass while the Führer rambled on to anyone who would listen calling the invasion of Austria a stroke of genius which made taking Czechoslovakia a complete foregone conclusion.

"Let's see what it's made of," Hitler said suddenly to von Leeb. "Put some shells into it."

Von Leeb dispatched one of the junior officers. In a short time a German tank was drawn around the concrete bunker and ordered to open fire on it. There was a thunderous blast, dense smoke, but not a hint of damage.

"Again! Lower!" ordered the General. His men fired again with the cool precision of a practical squad. The cannon muzzle blasted then recoiled as the spectators stood gingerly behind it.

The concrete bunker took two direct hits without damage. The Generals eyed each other uneasily. "Again!" the Führer ordered.

It took several direct hits at close range before the bunker began to crumble. General von Leeb strode forward to inspect the damage. He was the *Wehrmacht's* foremost expert to defensive warfare and had gained an international reputation following the publication of this book, *Defense*, which had been hailed as a masterpiece. He was clearly highly impressed with the repeated pounding that the bunker had withstood. "Our weapons," he observed, "would not have prevailed so easily under combat conditions. If a solid defense had been offered by the Czech Army, taking this fortified border would have been very difficult. It would have cost us a great many lives.

Hitler wasn't listening. He was euphoric. They were *his* fortifications now. He cheered like a schoolboy. He laughed and slapped the ascetic von Leeb on the back. "What does it matter how strong their concrete is," he exclaimed, "When their will is so weak!" He laughed with his lips drawn tightly over his teeth. "When I was younger, I thought it was necessary to tackle problems with dynamite. I've since realized that you can get a lot further with guile and cunning."

Hitler got back into his car and the entourage continued northwards into the mountains. Forests soon gave way to valleys nestling below steep hilltops topped here with an ancient castle and there by a monastery.

Peasants carted rye and oats home from the fields. They dug potatoes, cut bluish cabbages and packed them in storage for winter. Around the cottages they piled up logs to the height of the windows.

As homesteads and villages passed by, Karl couldn't help but see that there was none of the adulation that the Führer enjoyed when he entered Austria. There were no German-speaking people in these parts. The men in the fields with their rakes did not take off their caps to wave. The women in their kerchiefs and bell shaped skirts did not smile when they saw red, white and black swastika flags fluttering from the hoods of the ten black Mercedes. They leaned on their implements and stared sullenly and dourly.

Occasionally, the motorcade came across groups of refugees, though far less than Karl had seen in the North. Exhausted and frightened by their deepening awareness of

what it would mean to be in the hands of the Germans they trudged along with suitcases in hands and sacks on their backs. Everything they could not carry had been left behind. They'd had to leave their homes, their furniture and their livestock intact and in good order for new German families to move in and claim as their own.

Hitler observed the spectacle without saying a word. At the town of Vylsi Brod he noticed some German soldiers handing a family of refugees some of their food.

"Why do they waste good German bread on those pigs?" he growled.

They came to a sign at the side of the road that said *Cesky Krumlov 5 km*. Hitler glanced at this watch. "Let's stop here for lunch," he announced. The chauffeur obediently turned off the main road and headed into town. The tires rumbled loudly on the single lane gravel road and clouds of dust swirled behind each of the ten black shiny cars. As they came upon a bend in the road, the chauffeur honked his horn and swerved abruptly to pass a horse and buggy. In the back of the car, the three passengers swayed first right and then left. Hitler looked contemptuously out of his window to see a tall dark gypsy standing by this horse, holding the bridle, and two women and a child in the buggy behind.

Hitler glowered and screwed up his face, "*Diese blatige Zigeuner, Immer Kummer!* Bloody gypsies always causing trouble! We'll deal with them yet, the lazy thieves. We'll show them what a day's work is. That scum!" His voice was coarse, vulgar and it made Karl wince. "*Das ganze tschechische Vollre ist eine Sumulantenbande*. The whole Czech nation is a gang of malingerers. I'll show them!" he hissed venomously. He paused and took a deep breath to calm himself. "But all in its time. Yes, all in its time."

Rosa was the first to see the approaching cloud of dust. She sat up straight and peered into the distance. There was a flicker of light as the sun reflected off the cars' windscreens. Ardeleana stopped singing.

"What is that?" Sherina asked.

Then Nicholae fell silent too. The rumbling grew louder as the black cars came closer. A single car was a very unusual sight in these parts, let alone a convoy.

"It's the omen!" Rosa turned to the others with wild frightened eyes. "It's a bad omen. I knew it!"

Nicholae knew there was not enough room on the road for the cars to pass by him so he slid off the bench quickly and pulled the horse and cart as far as he could on the side of the road.

One after another the huge cars with the fluttering flags swerved around them, throwing up stones in a choking fog of dust. The horse neighed and jerked his head, frightened at the honking of the horns. Nicholae put his hand over the horse's nose to reassure the animal and stop it from rearing.

"We can't go into town!" shrieked Rosa. "There's bad luck there. Terrible things will happen!"

Nicholae smiled through his moustache. "Mother, he said; gently, "we've almost in town already, so why don't we just go in, do our business and get out. Why should we be afraid?"

Rosa carried on arguing for a while, but in the end, Nicholae had his way. He climbed back onto the bench, and with a lurch forward they set off towards town again.

Even before they got into the square there was a distant buzz in the streets and a small crowd was gathered at the corner of the baker's, whispering and peeping curiously around the corner.

"I wouldn't go that way," lisped a toothless old woman. "The Germans are in the Square. Go round the other way." Nicholae nodded to the old woman in thanks.

"I'll drop you off at the back door of the pharmacy." Nicholae said to Rosa as he pulled on the left rein and took a side road. Clipping down the cobbled lane, they came to the pharmacist's and Rosa got out with her two burlap sacks. One was full with dried juniper berries, the other dried horsetail. The pharmacist used them to make medicinal teas and tinctures.

Ardeleana picked up the pail of lowers. "I'll get off here too," she said, taking Sherina by the hand. "You stay with your Grandmother. I'll see you later."

Nicholae's next call was to go and see his friend Thomas Adler. They agreed to meet at the same spot in a short while and Nicholae continued on down the lane.

The cars were already lined up in front of The Dancing Bear. The Führer and his military luminaries stood around in clusters in the full pomp and ceremony of their military attire. For the people of Lezsky Krumlov they made a dazzling spectacle; an array of gleaming automobiles, high peaked hats, gold braids, shining medals and striped trousers. The only person to cut a somewhat nondescript figure was the Führer himself, plain brown uniform and a single Iron Cross on his chest.

The ancient town had never witnessed such a sight. The people stopped and stared. The dressmaker and her six year old son hung out of his second floor window. The baker in his white apron and cap stood in his doorway, a dusting of white flour over his brow and forearms. The thin, bespectacled face on the bookseller peered through the storefront window. A child's blue ball was left to bounce, roll and come to a standstill as its owner stood transfixed. The German villains had finally arrived.

A tall officer detached himself from the party and went into The Dancing Bear to make arrangements. Thomas Adler had been too busy in his kitchen supervising the cooking to notice what had arrived at his doorstep and was still in a state of blissful ignorance.

The inn was crowded with customers when the officer stepped inside. As if on command, the hubbub of talk and laughter hushed instantly. The barmaid stopped wiping the countertop and slipped quietly into the kitchen. A moment later, a visibly flustered Adler appeared before the officer. He struggled hard to remember the little German he had learned serving in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army more than twenty years before. He sized up the officer's uniform.

"Luncheon, Herr General Major?" he promoted the junior officer, just to be on the safe side.

With a courteous smile the tall man informed the innkeeper that he would like lunch for forty people and that waiting outside was the Führer of the Great German Reich and officers from the Army High Command.

It took Thomas Adler a few moments to recover from the shock of this horrific honor being bestowed upon him. He blinked, swallowed, and stammered, "But of course, if you'll give me a few moments. As you can see, we are full," he indicated nervously at the crowd. "I will make some space available...perhaps on the veranda? If you could just give me a few moments to set things up..." he brushed a finger across his brow.

"Ja. The veranda will be quite acceptable," said the tall officer. "We shall wait outside until the tables are ready. It has been a long journey and we don't mind stretching our legs."

"Thank you, *Herr General Major*. Yes, of course. So kind of you to wait. It will only be a moment, I promise."

The officer stepped outside. As soon as he was out of sight, Adler turned to the barmaid, who was shrinking down behind the counter.

"Eliska, do something!"

"What do you want *me* to do?" she declared, cupping her cheeks with her hands.

"I don't know! We have to do *something*. We have to make way for those...those...ah! Never mind. Just come and help me."

Thomas went out onto the veranda, clasped his hands and announced in a loud voice, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I apologize for having to ask you this, but The German Chancellor has appeared on my doorstep and wishes to have lunch here." He asked them to vacate their tables and chairs, offering to squeeze them in as best he could inside, all the while apologizing profusely.

The local notary stood up and took his fedora hat in hand. "No need to explain, Mr. Adler," he said calmly. "We understand. Under the circumstances, that won't be necessary. I've lost my appetite."

"Thank you, Sir."

"And if you don't mind, would you show me your back door. I don't want to look those bastards in the face."

One by one, the patrons left the Dancing Bear, including those who were seated in the main dining room.

"Eliska, come quick and help me. Hurry, child." He scurried about, tidying the tables while the barmaid swept the floor and put out fresh gingham tablecloths.

"Gentlemen, *Wilkommen*, please come in," he showed his guests onto the veranda. They were polite enough, if slightly arrogant but he could not bring himself to look at Adolf Hitler. He studiously kept his gaze averted.

It was not long before a dazzling array of platters poured from the kitchen. Smoking sausages, sweet and sour cabbages, hams, mounds of boiled potatoes, stacks of fresh bread and tankards of frothy beer. Maruska the cook was in such a frenzy preparing it all; that she burned herself twice.

The officers ate heartily, taking the beer in moderation as Hitler himself drank only lemonade. After inspecting the potatoes and cabbages, he opted for some stewed apples and cake instead.

The door of the Dancing Beer stood open and the townspeople crowded outside straining their ears. Their eyes were fastened on Hitler. They were fascinated by the rough, garrulous voice which they had only read about before. Thomas stood by the bar with Eliska, closed enough to see his guests were being looked after but far enough away to avoid getting too involved.

"Do you understand what they are saying?" asked Eliska.

"Not every word. Here and there, some things. It's been a long time since my soldering days, and even then, I was breaking my tongue on the German language."

Nicholae slipped into the main dining room through the back door and went up to Thomas. "I saw all the cars out front. Is everything alright?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I was worried they might have come back to take your place over."

"I don't think they want anything but lunch. Let's hope so."

Nicholae leaned over to catch a glimpse of the German leader.

Hitler was in a curious mood. He sat on the veranda looking down at the valley below which was glowing with shades of yellow and orange. He hummed musical phrases from Wagner's *Gotterdammerung*. He seemed to be in good spirits yet somewhat preoccupied.

"I believe I went about this whole Czech business with a great deal of consideration," he began. "I don't know what everyone is complaining about. I haven't threatened the French or British still less the Americans. All I asked for was a free hand in a place far away from their concern. Do I protest at the British presence in the West Indies, half a world away from England? And whose troops presently occupy Palestine? Or do I make a fuss about French rule in Indochina or Syria or the United States' dominance in South America? No! Our interests lie here in the East. So, what's their worry?"

He sipped his lemonade and suddenly, as if the taste of lemon had soured his mood, his tone changed. Karl noticed how the mention of England never failed to trigger a reaction of some kind from the Führer, though he could never predict quite what it would be. By turns it was admiration, envy and hatred.

"How is it that such a small number of people can build such an empire?" Hitler pointed upwards with his index finger. "And how do they keep it, once it's conquered? All revolution depends for its success on the capture of power by an elite. National Socialism, of course is such an elite; we will be the elite of Europe. Look at England, another purely Germanic nation. A few thousand Englishmen conquered and now govern 400 million Indians. This is the origin of that maddening English arrogance. What India is to England, the wide spaces of the East will be to Germany."

"But can we hold it all, once we've conquered it?" asked Schellenberger.

"Of course, of course." Hitler replied confidently. "Modern science, modern power, modern propaganda makes it all entirely possible. Revolts of a subjected people against a confident master race are now out of the question. The first principle we must recognize is that the subjects have no rights. As for education, let them learn German so they cannot pretend not to understand the orders of their masters."

Karl looked over his shoulder at the townsfolk. When he met their gaze, they smiled meekly, uncomprehending. He came to the conclusion that it was better at the moment that these 'subjects' didn't speak German, for if they'd understood what was being said, a few well-placed pitchforks might well reestablish their rights.

"Let them learn enough geography to know that Berlin is the capital of the world. Practice contraception to reduce their birthrate, and close down hospitals to increase their death rate. And so, we never need fear a rising of these Helots. Such is the Iron Rule of Imperialism." But scarcely anyone was still listening. Most of the Führer's companions were busy eating and drinking.

Hitler gazed out over the golden countryside. "I was cheated at Munich!" he exclaimed. "They played on my sensibility and sentimentality, and they succeeded. They lulled me into a feeble, humanitarian mood. Now I see things more clearly. I was stupid to let them cheat me!" he banged his fist on the table, almost upsetting his lemonade glass. "It was a moment of weakness. Chamberlain was pleading with me, the German people were so afraid, my generals doubted me," he grunted and straightened his head. "I gave way. Yes.

But that won't happen again. I am returning to my original plan. All of Czechoslovakia will be incorporated into the Reich and without delay. And it won't need mobilization. It will all be done by politics."

He bit into his *Streuselkuchen*. Munching happily on the sweets he liked so much he turned to Halder and von Brauchitsch. "All you have to do is believe in your Führer. This action will not end in war. No one will go to war for 'Czechia'. The Czechs may cry out, but we will smother their cries."

The Generals looked uncomfortable that he was speaking so candidly within earshot of the locals but Hitler didn't seem to mind. "One thing you must always remember," he continued. "The Reich shall never be great unless it has a nucleus of might as its center as hard and firm as steel. And the nucleus will consist of ten million colonized Germans. This is my first task. With Austria and Sudetenland, I have brought that number of Germans back into the Reich already! This will make our task all the easier."

"But, my friends, there will be war." The Generals stopped chewing. In the ecstasy of this conquest, the Führer was being his most candid. "We cannot expect repetition of Czechia!" The Generals went on chewing.

There was plenty of land to go around, their Führer told them. The only trouble was that it was in their hands of owners who sat like misers on their resources, wallowing in their riches without bothering to be productive.

"We need space!" he shouted. Nobody chose to mention that, in spite of the much trumpeted Nazi grievances about Germany's lack of living space, the Führer was actually aggravating the alleged problem by doing everything he could to push up the birthrate. Magda Goebbels herself was the proud owner of the Honor Cross of the German Mother for having produced more than four children.

"We must expand our living space in the East." Hitler went on to describe expansively how newly conquered fertile areas would be more productive under superior German management. The East would be a source of labor for Germany. "And, it will be strategically valuable in the event of conflict."

It wasn't exactly clear to the Generals what Hitler meant by *The East*, but still von Kaunitz ventured to ask; "Wouldn't it entail a conflict, however, to obtain these 'Eastern' territories?"

Hitler screwed up his face and flicked his hand in a slight show of irritation. "A small but necessary sacrifice," he opined. He continued to expand upon this theme. "The Bohemia-Moravian Basin will be colonized with German peasants." Hitler was warming to this theme and began to speak in the wildest of terms. "The Czechs will be transplanted to Siberia or the Volynian regions. The Czechs must get out of Central Europe. As long as they remain, they will always be at the center of the Hussite-Bolshevik disintegration."

His audience was baffled, for not only was Siberia not theirs to transport anyone into or out of, but they did not see either how the Hussite Protestant Russia would not be so unhappy to see it wiped from the map. He doubted whether a peaceful settlement with England was possible. The allusion to England enraged him once more.

"The greatest enemies of my plans are always the English. Decadent! Led by degenerate aristocrats with small chins and big ears. They've no energy. Led by old idiots like Chamberlain! I will not have it. I will attack them. I will destroy them. The French too. Latin dogs! Parasites!" Well into his stride now, he went on to abuse the Hungarians. "Cowards, pigs, effeminate Slavs!"

Someone could have pointed out the Hungarians were not in fact Slavs, but no one could be bothered. Hitler raved on, telling his audience that he would have something to show the Hungarians if they didn't have the good fortune to be under the protection of Mussolini, 'my good friend'.

He returned to the subject which always set his imagination ablaze. War. The next war would be different to the last one. The Generals stopped chewing again.

"Infantry attacks are obsolete. Whole armies locked into struggles lasting for years on petrified fronts will not happen again, I guarantee *that*. This is a degenerate form of war." Hitler glazed fixedly over the veranda railing, towards the precipice below. "In future whole nations will stand against each other, not merely their armies, as happened in the Great War. We shall never capitulate, not ever. We may be destroyed but if we are, then we shall drag the world with us into the flames."

Schellenberger was the only one to make a reply. "It was the superior armament of the United States that brought our downfall in 1918."

"Ha!" Hitler laughed scornfully. "The United States is permanently on the brink of Revolution. Anyway, it's not arms that decide war, but the men behind them – always. It's the side who makes the fewest mistakes that wins the war."

"But surely new and superior weapons can be decisive?" queried von Kaunitz.

Hitler shook his head. "Strategy doesn't change with new inventions. The inventions of gunpowder didn't change *strategy*."

Karl knew only too well that the Führer was skeptical about new technological advances. He'd been battling against this attitude for years. Against his advice, Hitler had shelved projects on jet airplanes atomic energy, heat seeking rockets, sound seeking torpedoes, ground to air missiles and radar. Hitler did not embrace new technology in any way at all.

"So how shall we escape being bogged down like we were in 1914?" Karl asked.

"I'm not going to start a war like those fools in 1914. Be entirely assured of that." Hitler face twisted into a sneer as he leaned toward Karl. "Most people have no imagination," he waved a finger contemptuously in the direction of the Generals. They are blind to the new thinking. They are trapped in their own little world of machines and military assets." He smiled and beat his fist vigorously on his breasts.

"Creative genius," he boasted, "stands apart from the little closed circle of so-called experts. I have the gift of reducing all problems to their most elementary parts. The experts try to convert warfare into a mysterious science, surrounded with an almost religious solemnity, so as to make themselves more important. But war is the most natural, everyday matter. War is eternal, war is universal. There is no beginning and no end and no real peace. War is life. Any struggle is in a sense a war. War is the origin of all things. From primitive times, people have killed when they could not achieve their aims in other ways. I am the only one who is honest and brave enough to wipe away all the taboos and tell it like it is."

His entourage was growing restless and began to shift in their seats. Karl noticed Ulrich Schellenberger slip from his chair and go outside to have a cigarette. The Führer was well known not to tolerate smoking in his presence. Karl eyed the lieutenant enviously and looked for a convenient moment to make his own exit. But it was difficult. He was sitting right next to the Führer and was receiving the full blast of his wisdom.



Hitler appeared spellbound by his own sense of vision. "When I wage war," he declared, "in the midst of peace, troops will suddenly appear. Let us say...in Paris. They will walk into General headquarters, occupy all the Ministries and within minutes the country will be at our feet. The general sense of confusion will be beyond belief."

The Generals stole a glance or two at each other. This was exactly the king of naïve amateurism which had won him the title of 'bohemian corporal'. Yet curiously, Karl detected that for once he appeared to be speaking directly from his heart. The customary theatricality and diatribe which defined his orations seemed for a moment to be absent.

"Whatever others consider to be impossible is always the thing which is the most successful," he said. "The most unlikely plan is always the surest. Let me tell you! I have learned the lessons of the last war only too well. This time there will be no wholesome slaughter."

Von Kaunitz was growing impatient at this palpable drivel. "But Mein Führer, in war, how is victory possible *except* by wholesale slaughter?"

Hitler explained how it would be all done psychologically, through the use of a highly efficient propaganda machine. But this was all too much for the member of the Army High Command. They fidgeted in their seats as Hitler began to contradict himself. In the air, he declared, Germany would reign supreme. The Luftwaffe would gloriously represent the Germanic art of battle. He would build the largest air force ever seen. His hand pounded excitedly on the table. "Gentlemen, I do not *play* at war! We must rule Europe or fall apart as a nation – fall back into the chaos we used to have as a vague conglomeration of small states. Now do you understand why I cannot allow myself to consider being limited in my vision in any way at all, either in the East or in the West?"

The Army High Command looked on in total bafflement and consternation.

By now Karl had had more than he could take. He glanced discretely at this wristwatch. The Führer had been taking at them for an hour and a half. And he had made his ambition chillingly apparent. Karl could see Hadler's face that he too had had enough. Karl excused himself, rose to his feet and slipped outside the Dancing Bear into the town square.

Ardeleana had gone off on her own to well her flowers and had seen the parked black cars from the flower shop window. She could see the people huddled at the doorway of the Dancing Bear looking inside. A handful of locals hovered at a respectful distance around the German cars, inspecting the tires, the radiator grills and the dashboard arrays while black uniform men guarded the vehicles. Ardeleana supposed them to be chauffeurs, not recognizing the SS uniform or understand what it meant. The atmosphere in the Town Square was clearly not good for business today. She turned down the lane to the next street corner and set her flowers down there next to the post office.

"Six for a heller! Six for a heller!" she cried, holding out a few blooms in her hand.

A large man in the same black uniform was leaning against a stone column a few yards away from her. She was aware of him watching her intently. She averted her gaze.

"Six for a heller! Six for a heller!" she shouted. She could see him ogling her with his cold blue eyes out of the corner of her eyes as he drew at the cigarette between his thumb and index finger. Men leering at her was nothing new, but there was something about the way this man stared at her that made her flesh crawl. It was arrogant, defiant, and almost brutal. He threw the butt of his cigarette to the ground and stepped on it heavily with a

polish black boot. Instinctively, Ardeleana bent down as if to gather up more flowers and deftly picked up a sharp stone from the ground. She wedged it in the palm of her hand so that it was hidden from view.

The man approached. As he came nearer she could make out the death's head symbol on his black peaked cap. What kind of chauffeurs do these Germans have; she thought to herself. She could see his ice blue eyes clearly now. He was moving inexorably towards her, those cold eyes fixed expressionlessly upon her. She fought back the urge to run. Never run from a mad dog, she said to herself. Her own black eyes locked with his. Her heart was pounding.

He raised his hand to fondle her breast. She swung her hand at his head and there was the sound of a hard crack as the stone struck his left ear. The sudden sharp pain startled him and he swayed backwards for a moment before regaining himself.

"You bitch!" he swore. He pulled out his pistol.

"Schellenberger!" Karl appeared around the corner. Ardeleana was standing perfectly still as if frozen to the spot. She was still holding the flowers in her hand. She took a brief look at Karl, then turned and fled.

"What's going on?" Karl demanded. "What's happening?"

Schellenberger put his pistol back in its holster. "Nothing," he said. He looked down the lane after Ardeleana as she slipped out of sight onto the alleyway. Karl was still looking at him, expecting an explanation. But what was he to say? That he, an SS officer, was consorting with a gypsy woman?

"It's nothing," he said, rubbing his ear. "Let's go back."

"Sure, we don't want any incidents, do we? Let's go." Karl turned back towards the Square. Schellenberger followed slowly, inspecting the smudge of blood on his fingers.

## Chapter 7 The Photo Album

It was the morning after Karl's return from Czechoslovakia. He had a quick bath and a shave and set off for the office where he found Elsie at her desk sorting through the day's mail.

"Hello, stranger," she laughed. She bent forward and placed an affectionate kiss on his forehead.

"Hello darling," he replied. "It's good to be back." He fell silent for a moment and Elsie noticed that he was looking at her quizzically.

"There's something very important that I need to ask you," he said finally.

"What's that, Karl?"

"Sit down, Elsie. Please." He indicated to the chair in front of the desk.

"Well, well...", she teased as she sat down. "What's this all about darling? Are you about to make an honest woman of me at last?"

But Karl was not in the mood for joking.

"This is serious, Elsie," he said.

"Go on then."

He hesitated for a moment. "Why did you never tell me you were a Jew?"

The smile faded rapidly from Elsie's face and she sank deeply onto the chair. He went over to kneel down next to her and took her hand gently in his. "Elsie," he asked. "After all that you've seen me do to help the Jews, why have you never told me?"

Elsie's gaze remained lowered. "I kept putting it off. I was afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Well, at first we didn't know each other that well. I didn't know exactly how far I could trust you, you know. I couldn't be sure exactly how you'd react. I thought I'd eventually have to run away, to Shanghai or Cuba or God knows where. What would I do in a place like that alone Karl, I was *afraid*." She looked into Karl's face and was reassured to see nothing but tenderness there. "How did you find out? Was it Kurt? Is that why he came in last week?"

Karl nodded and squeezed Elsie's hand tighter still.

"I suppose I'll have to leave Germany now," she said quietly, turning her face away.

"No, Elsie. You know I love you. If it ever comes to you being forced out, then we'll leave together. But I don't think it will come to that. I talked to Kurt and he's agreed to fix your file.

"My file?"

"Believe me; I was as surprised about that as you are. They had a file on you with all the details of your life in it. But from now on, you're a blue blooded Aryan. Well, for as long as we can trust Kurt to keep his mouth shut, that is. To be honest, Elsie, we'll still probably have to leave Germany sooner or later, but meanwhile, I have things to do here."

Elsie looked puzzled. "Things? What things?"

"We'll talk about that later. But in the meantime, there's something else..."

"Not more bad news?" Elsie was growing anxious again.

"No, nothing like that but, er there's something I want to ask you and I don't know what you'll think about it."

"Go on."

"Well, the Führer's invited me to the Berghof for a meeting."

"It'll involve staying overnight and..." he paused and produced the two red guest passes, "you're invited to go too, as my secretary."

"Oh my goodness, Karl!" What other surprises did today have in store for her, Elsie wondered.

"It's true. You're invited and I really want you to come. We've been apart for a whole week while I've been away and I've missed you!"

Elsie kissed Karl gently on the lips. "You big softy," she murmured.

"Do you think you could handle it, Elsie?"

She thought about it. "I'm not sure to be honest. What do you think? And is it really a good idea to take such a chance, especially after what you've just told me?"

"You'll be fine. I told you, I fixed it with Kurt."

"Alright then, why not."

Early on Sunday morning, Karl and Elsie started the long journey through the countryside toward the Austrian Alps. They arrived at Berchtesgaden around noon and just past the town, at the base of the mountain, they came to a heavily guarded gate and a barbed wire barricade. To gain access to the region around the mountain, Karl had to produce the red passes for inspection. They were waved through and several kilometers later they came to a second barricade and gate. This time, the barbed wire was electrified and the guards were towering SS officers with dogs. In the inner compound were more SS soldiers, each armed with a machine gun and with orders to shoot first and ask questions later.

Having negotiated the second gate, they now drove up the ten mile winding road to Hitler's private residence. Near the top, a large white Bavarian chalet emerged from the trees. It had a red roof, stonework around the base and a wide balcony along this second storey.

"It looks like a giant cottage!"

"So it does. Look, there's Kurt waiting for us at the bottom of the stairs. Now, Elsie, don't worry. Just relax." Karl squeezed her hand.

The car pulled up at the entrance and two valets approached to take their suitcases upstairs.

"Come, I'll take you inside," said Kurt who was acting as one of Hitler's aides for the occasion.

Elsie followed closely behind Karl, her stomach in knots. The sheer lunacy of her being in the Führer's house suddenly overwhelmed her. Why on earth had she agreed to come here? They climbed the ornate staircase and went through the stone arcade which led to the front door. Kurt took them thorough a Gothic foyer and into the immense lounge.

"If you wait here a moment," he said. "I'll bring you some documents you may want to look at before his afternoon meeting. Then I'll take you upstairs." Kurt disappeared.

"This is the room that's on all the postcards," whispered Elsie as she went over to the gigantic picture window overlooking the majestic snowcapped peak of Unterberg

Karl came to stand next to her at the window. "It's breathtaking," he said softly.

Kurt returned. "I'll take you to your room now. Follow me." He led the way up the spiral staircase. On the second floor was a huge corridor, every bit as imposing as the great

hall downstairs but instead of windows and tapestries on the walls, it was hung with enormous paintings.

There was an oppressive, tomb-like silence in the corridor as they entered it. "It's best if you take your shoes off," said Kurt as they passed Hitler's room. Two black Scottish terriers slept in front of the doors. They raised their heads at the sound of the strangers, gave out a few half-hearted barks, and then went back to sleep.

"That's Stasi and Negus. They're quite harmless, really."

He showed Karl and Elsie to adjoining rooms in an area on the far side of the house which had been designated for the guests.

"Everyone's already had lunch, but if you're hungry, the kitchen can fix you up with something," said Kurt.

"No, that's alright. Thanks. We've been up since early morning, so I think we'll take a short rest then go downstairs."

"That's fine. You'll find everyone in the drawing room. See you later." And with that, Kurt turned briskly on his heel and walked back along the corridor toward the stairs.

Elsie went to her room and closed the door behind her, letting out a deep breath as she did so. Could Kurt be trusted to keep quiet?

She lay down on her bed starting up at the ceiling. This was such a strange place. It filled her with apprehension it was like being in a mausoleum. Such a big house. But one entirely devoid of warmth.

At a quarter to three, there was a knock on her door which startled Elsie from her sleep. To her relief it was only Karl. She decided to keep her anxieties to herself, and while Karl waited for her, she quickly combed her hair, powdered her nose and changed her clothes. They went downstairs together into the drawing room.

"Well, hello there Karl!" called a voice. Karl turned around. It was Field Marshall Herman Goering.

"Good afternoon, Herr Reichs Marshall," said Karl and went to shake his hand.

Karl introduced Elsie to the small gathering in the drawing room. With Goering and his wife Emmy were Joseph and Madga Goebbels together with Heinrich Himmler, Chief of the SS and his wife Elsa.

A young woman sitting alone by the window observed them from a distance. She had one of the Scotties on her lap and the other one sitting at her feet. She waited until the introductions had been completed, then came forward, her eyes fixed on Elsie. When Elsie saw her, she froze.

"And I'm Eva Braun. Welcome!" She held out her hand and gave both Karl and Elsie a warm smile. She was in her early twenties, of slender build and average height. She was wearing the pastoral Bavarian dirndl-style dress of red vest and blue skirt covered by a white apron.

Eva and Elsie looked at each other closely. Elsie could feel a cold sweat on her forehead as Eva carried on examining her intently. Her head pounded. This could prove disastrous.

"Elsie...Elsie..." repeated Eva. "You were at my convent school, weren't you, the English Sisters?" Her voice became more and more excited as she spoke. All eyes were turned towards Elsie.

"We were on the same gymnastics team!" said Eva.

Elsie could hardly believe she was seeing her old friend here, in this place. What more surprises did this visit hold in store for her? She finally forced a smile.

"Oh, my goodness, Eva, what a surprise!"

At that moment, Hitler entered the room. Everyone's attention now turned towards him.

Hitler greeted everyone with great courtesy, stopping at each of the three wives in turn to pay them compliments and kiss their hands. Eva glowered as she watched him move down the line of guests. She hated the way he was always so ready to bestow compliments on other women. Then Hitler came to Elsie. In a soft voice that Elsie had never expected to hear from this man, he said, "Herr Becker, I'm so glad you've come because you've brought with you this lovely lady." Hitler bowed, smiled graciously at Elsie and waited to be introduced.

"This is Fraulein Elsie Fischer, Mein Führer," said Karl smiling at her supportively.

Elsie's gaze was fixed upon the man who had lived in her imagination as a loathsome, feared, grotesque boor. Here, he was completely different. He was smaller than she had imagined, soft-spoken and charming. He had a pale, almost sickly complexion, which made him appear to have something of a delicate constitution. He had a small moustache, a lock of hair plastered on his forehead and an intense, piercing gaze which unsettled and unnerved her.

Elsie extended her hand to him. He took it limply into his own and pressed it to his lips.

"*Gnädishes Fräulein*," said Hitler in a melodic Austrian accent. "How lovely you look in that dress. Your smile lights up this whole room."

"Elsie and I were friends at the convent school," Eva said excitedly, taking Elsie's arm. I'm so happy to have a friend here," She glared in the direction of the three wives. "We have so much to talk about."

After chatting a little more to his guests Hitler suggested a walk to the Teahouse. This was a small pavilion on the hill opposite the Berghof. The reticent Himmler and overweight Goering declined the invitation but everyone else was quite eager to go, particularly Magda Goebbels.

Hitler put on his grey lumber jacket, a rather battered looking felt hat, and picked up his carved walking cane. His dog Blondie, a German shepherd bitch, was brought in and they greeted each other exuberantly.

"Shall we go?" *Meinen Herren und Damen?*" said Hitler. He set off across the terrace with the dog on her leash.

Karl followed with the Goebbels and their five children while Eva waited anxiously for Elsie in the courtyard with a camera slung over one shoulder.

Elsie changed into her walking clothes and come back downstairs. The two young women let the others walk ahead while they stayed together, far behind everyone else. The air was fresh and full of autumnal smells, but the sunlight was still warm on the meadows.

"Eva how is it that you've ended up here?" asked Elsie. "I'm absolutely amazed!"

"Are you? Well, after I left school, I found work as a secretary at Hoffmann's photography place. I didn't enjoy the work that much but it got me out of the house and I was grateful for that. My parents are nice people you know, but they have very old fashioned ideas, especially my father. He was incredibly strict with us, you remember? We used to talk about it a lot."

Elsie nodded. She did remember.

"Well, nothing changed when my elder sister Ilse and I finished our schooling. We were both working, but my father was still checking up on us all the time, insisting on knowing where we were going in the evening, listening in on our phone calls, opening our mail. He even cut off the electricity in our room after ten o'clock." Eva laughed and shook her head. "So, if we wanted to read we had to hide under the blankets with a torch! Oh, I can laugh about it now, but it wasn't so funny at that time. I can tell you!"

"Anyway, Hoffmann was Adolf's official photographer. I met him at the office. One night I'd stayed on late to finish off the filing and there I was, halfway up a ladder, reaching high above my head when he walked in. I remember thinking how peculiar he looked with his small moustache. English style overcoat and a big felt hat. He kept staring at my legs."

"Did he talk to you?" asked Elsie.

"No, not really. Herr Hoffmann came in and sent me out to fetch them some beer and sausages from the local tavern. When I got back, they invited me to join them. Adolf barely touched his food; he's a vegetarian, you know, and he doesn't drink. Well, me, I was starving, so I gobbled up my food and hardly said a word. The same couldn't be said for Adolf, though. He never stopped talking, and he was paying me all these compliments. Ah," she sighed, "he's always so charming."

"But what did you find to talk about?"

"About music, the theatre, but the whole time he never took his eyes off me," Eva grinned.

"You must have been very flattered."

"To be honest, Elsie, I didn't even know who he was at the time. I never really cared about politics. I still don't. That night though, when I got home, I asked my father who this Adolf Hitler was. He curled his lip and he said he was 'an upstart and was a scoundrel who thinks he knows everything and wants to change the world'. She smiled ruefully. "Oh, look Elsie! We're here already and I haven't let you get a word in edgeways!"

The Goebbels' many children were already chasing one another around on the neatly cut grass in front of the house, calling out "Uncle Adolf", "Uncle Adolf". Elsie watched as Hitler sat smiling amongst them. Every so often he would pick up a child and sit it on his knee.

The Teahouse had three rooms, and from the windows there was a magnificent, panoramic view. Far below, a river roared between the tiny specks of houses, and the baroque towers of Salzburg could be seen on the far horizon.

Servants brought chairs out for everyone but the sun was warm so most preferred to find a comfortable spot on the grass to stretch out on. Hitler left the ring of children and went over to sit in a comfortable chair. "Oh! What a pleasant day. I do so love children. Little creatures who have no knowledge yet of good or evil. For them, laughter and tears are as close as sunshine and rain the springtime." He patted the dog's head.

"Yoo-hoo!" called Eva, as she stood perched on a rock with her camera. Everyone turned their head and Eva pressed the shutter switch. Eva's passion for photography had begun at Hoffmann's. Still she developed all her own pictures, and liked to give them out to her friends as small mementoes.

The staff brought out trays of coffee, cakes and liqueurs. Hitler drank apple peel tea and munched on plain biscuits as Eva circulated, talking snapshots. Every so often she

would ask Hitler to take off his hat or sit in a different position. Sometimes he complied, sometimes he didn't.

After a while, the Führer got up and announced that he was heading back for a scheduled meeting with Goering. A Volkswagen which had been waiting for him at the side of the Teahouse suddenly drove into view and he and Blondie climbed into it. The dog's head stuck out of the car window as they drove off down the road. The rest of the party lingered for a little while longer, then, one by one, set off on the long walk back.

"Elsie, tell me about you. I've been going on and on about myself and haven't given you a chance! What have you been doing with yourself?" asked Eva, as; once again, they let the others go on ahead.

"Well, like you, when I returned home, I found work as a secretary; in my case in a factory, the United Steel Works. For a few years, I was in the Production Department, then Karl's, uh, Mr. Becker's secretary retired and I got promoted."

Eva smiled a conspiratorial smile.

"It's alright, Elsie. We're friends. I know what's going on. Officially I'm Adolf's secretary as well. I don't like it and we've quarreled about it lots of times, but I know I have to keep up the pretense. Adolf wants me always to call him Mein Führer, even when we're alone, so I don't slip up in front of people. Believe me Elsie, I know how it feels."

Elsie smiled. She felt truly sorry for Eva, but knew much better than to let it show.

"Anyhow, one thing led to another. You know how it goes," said Elsie.

"Yes, I most certainly do. Are you going to get married then?" asked Eva wistfully.

Elsie didn't answer straight away. How could she tell the Führer's mistress that the Third Reich would not allow it? "Well, I don't know. Maybe. How about you, Eva."

Eva's earlier good spirits had disappeared and a dark expression came over her features. "After the war. One day. I don't know," she said, with just the hint of a tremor in her voice.

Elsie decided to change the subject. "If you began seeing the Führer soon after the convent school, then you two must have been together for quite a few years now. So I suppose you must have lived at home when you first started seeing him, but then what?" she said in a more cheerful tone.

"The first few years were very difficult. Our relationship, I mean. I didn't see him very much, and it was just very difficult – *difficult*, you know."

"What was difficult, exactly?"

"He was so busy. There were so many problems."

Elsie saw the troubled look return to Eva's eyes. "What do you like about him so much, Eva?"

"Oh, it's just when I'm with him. I just melt. He's so wonderful. I feel that I'm the most important thing in the world to him, that he'd do anything to please me, you know."

Elsie was not at all convinced that Eva was the most important thing in Hitler's life, but she had experienced at firsthand how charming he could be if he wished.

"In the beginning, towards the end of 1930, he'd invite me to the opera, to the movies, to dinner, to picnics."

"The opera! But you hate the opera, Eva," Elsie exclaimed.

"I know. I know. I can't stand it. But he likes it."

"So why does he take you to the opera when you don't like it?"



“Oh, I’ve never told him. I just say it’s wonderful. It makes him happy. In the early day, whenever we went somewhere, he always sent a beautiful Mercedes with a chauffeur to pick me up and take me home afterwards. Oh, I know that was really so on one would see us arriving or leaving together, but I felt important, like ‘look who’s little Eva Braun’s dating,’” she pointed to herself. “I suppose that, as a young girl, I liked the fact that he had power. He was *somebody*, Elsie! Eva Braun was a nobody but with him, she became somebody too.”

“But what did your parents think?”

“For the first couple of years, my parents didn’t know anything about it. If my father had known I was seeing a man more than twenty years older than me, he’d have locked me away in the convent for good. Nobody knew. Adolf didn’t want anyone to know,” Eva sighed, then frowned. She and Elsie carried on down the path for a while in silence.

Eva thought back to when she’d first begun to see Adolf Hitler. She was still a virgin; not the type of girl to give herself easily to a man. So when it finally happened on the red plush sofa in his apartment two years after they’d first met, it was Eva’s desperate hope that it would finally secure their relationship.

But to her great dismay, it had done nothing of the sort. Her lover remained as fickle and remote as ever. Her mind wrestled day and night with whether he was being deliberately neglected, or simply didn’t care. But she clung to the hope that, some day, he would marry her.

For the past year and a half, Eva had been obliged to make do with a trickle of phone calls and the odd note or two. If Adolf were to end it, that would be terrible, but at least then she’d know where she stood. But he gave her just enough encouragement and attention to keep her dangling. The endless roller coaster of great expectation followed by huge disappointment was punishing and exhausting.

Finally, emotionally drained and utterly weary of waiting, Eva had decided she couldn’t bear Adolf’s neglect a moment longer. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1932 as the Führer’s previous mistress Geli had a year before, Eva turned a pistol on herself. Unlike Geli, however, Eva survived.

They arrived at the Berghof and Elsie set off towards her room.

“Oh, Elsie, stay with me and have some tea on the terrace or we can watch a movie; anything you like. It’s so rare that I have a friend to talk to.”

Elsie turned back in surprise. Eva’s voice sounded desperate. “Alright. The terrace does sound nice. It’s got such a beautiful view.”

Eva picked up some fashion magazines for them to look at and they went outside. Elsie stretched out on a lounge chair while Eva went to put a record on the gramophone. As she dropped the needle on the edge of the record, the lively, soaring sound of the trumpet filled the air.

“Do you like American jazz? Adolf hates it, but I love it,” she said as if she were sneaking a secret treat for herself.

Eva and Elsie sunned themselves on the terrace for a while, looking at the largest fashions from Berlin and Paris. Then Eva brought out some photo albums. They shared stories of their past lives, in words and pictures, until the sun fell behind the last of the western mountain peaks.

At eight o'clock in the evening, Karl knocked on Elsie's door. "Come in," she shouted.

"Are you ready?" asked Karl as he walked in. "My God, you look lovely tonight." Elsie had put on a beautiful French designer gown that Eva had given to her. She'd been absolutely amazed at the sheer number of fine clothes that Eva had in her closet. "Here, Elsie, I want you to have this dress," she'd said. "I've never worn it, but I know it'll look better on you than it ever would on me." Elsie had protested but Eva insisted.

Karl and Elsie went downstairs to the drawing room where everyone had gathered to wait for the Führer. Eva herself was elegantly dressed in a long black silk gown with a full skirt and high neck, emulating Wallace Simpson's simple elegance. She wore a matching tourmaline bracelet, necklace and ring set. Although the pieces were not hugely extravagant, they were Eva's favorites because they had been birthday presents from Adolf.

Compared to Eva and Elsie, the three wives looked uncoordinated and uncomfortable in their *nouveau-riche* trappings as they circulated amongst the other guests. Hitler's valet approached Elsie and whispered in her ear that the Führer would be offering her arm to the dinner table that evening.

Hitler arrived last, as was custom. He wore an off-white dinner jacket. He spent the best part of a quarter of an hour paying more extravagant compliments to the ladies and kissing their hands after he slipped into the dining room to make a final inspection of the table. He was a perfectionist in matters of table setting and service, having even sent his butler to study table etiquette at court in England. He returned to the drawing room and offered his arm to Elsie. He took her slowly towards the dining room door. This was the cue for everyone else to take their places.

Hitler guided Elsie to her seat and, as his guest of honor; she was opposite him, with Eva on his right. Everyone else found their places by finding the correct name card.

Elsie noted the beautiful hand painted Rosenthal china and solid gold flatware bearing the initials *AH* as she eased herself into her chair. As soon as all the guests were settled in their seats, the servants brought in the first course.

Dinner conversation was a little strained and awkward, as very few of the people at the table were actually on speaking terms. Goebbels and Goering hated each other with a passion and Himmler distrusted absolutely everyone. Magda flirted outrageously with Hitler, which upset Emmy, who was vying with her for the role of First Lady on the Reich. Eva was as jealous as a tigress of both of them. For their part they, held her in undisguised scorn.

Hitler was clearly enjoying himself enormously. Rivalry among his entourage always amused him and he even encouraged it. As usual, the bulk of his conversation was a series of monologues, which tonight he directed at Elsie. Her stunning Aryan looks had captivated him, and throughout the dinner he paid her every possible attention, to the visible frustration of Emmy and Magda. Eva looked on, taking great pleasure in their annoyance.

The conversation was innocuous, even trivial, with Hitler telling the ladies endless anecdotes from his youth and of his encounters with beautiful women. He told Eva that the Duchess of Windsor wore only light makeup (he detested makeup), that she wore simple jewelry and elegant dresses. Eva never paid much heed to his views on makeup, and always wore lots of lipstick and face powder. She was used to his jibes on the subject. Pretty women continued to be the main focus on his conversation until the food was served. Most of the guests had chosen to have the meat main course but Hitler had a real obsession with not eating meat. He began to deliver a lecture about how cows were massacred in

slaughterhouses, how cows howled, how blood flowed and so on until hardly anyone had much appetite left at all.

“Eating carrion had made human beings cruel and pitiless,” he concluded.

Goering, who enjoyed all food, especially meat, attempted to change the subject. He was still a little put out from his meeting with the Führer in the afternoon, but he decided on a tactful approach and complimented Hitler on his review of the army the week before.

“It meant everything to them, Mein Führer, knowing you support them,” he said. “They will march into Czechoslovakia with a strengthened sense of purpose.”

Goebbels was always irritated at any remark made by Goering. He considered him stupid and vain and was fearful of Goering’s position in the military. It challenged his own position in the Reich’s hierarchy.

He decided it was time that his voice was heard at the table. “The undeniably brilliant Voltaire said, ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’. What good is the army to you if the people do not support victory, if the whole nation doesn’t stand behind the cause? The power of influence...”

“Gentlemen. Gentlemen! Please. No politics at the table.” Hitler then proceeded to go into raptures about the qualities of various female celebrities. Eva did her best to steer the conversation towards films of the theatre.

She had some success as after they’d finished eating. Hitler suggested that they should all go and watch a film.

“Oh, yes. We’ve just received ‘Gone with the Wind’. Clark Gable is *so* handsome,” said Eva.

“Isn’t that some decadent romantic rubbish?” asked Hitler feigning disdain. “Wouldn’t it be much better toward an adventure or a Western?”

“No. No. All of American’s taken with it, it’s a real sensation,” she insisted.

“Alright, alright then. ‘Gone with the Wind’ it is.” Hitler rose.

They moved into the lounge. A servant rolled up a large tapestry and pulled down a screen that was hiding behind it.

The party took their seats as the projector was set up. Hitler and Eva sat in the front row. The servants, including all the kitchen staff, arranged themselves at the back. Whenever American films, which were often banned in German cinemas, were shown, they all packed into the lounge. If it was German propaganda films then pressing chores were usually found. Tonight, the film which had caused such a stir throughout the whole world fascinated everyone. The entire company watched spellbound for three whole hours as the film unfolded its gripping story of passion, intrigue and struggle.

Once it had finished there was a moment of silence followed by an eruption of excited chatter as everyone began to discuss what they’d just seen. Hitler moved into the great hall to sit near the large fireplace. He was followed a short while later by Eva and her guests. By the time all the lights had been turned off and a few candles and the open fire lit up in darkness. Outside the autumn mountain air was frosty and the moonlight, reflecting blue from the snow-topped mountains, cast ghostly shadows inside.

The party broke up into small groups and conversations carried on quietly. Eva and Elsie sat closet to the fire and the two black Scotties. They were remembering their days together in the convent and every now and then they would burst into laughter, recalling some schoolgirl prank other.

Hitler started to whistle the 'Emperor's Waltz'. Eva listened carefully for a moment then made a funny face at him. "That's how it goes."

"No. I'm right," he insisted.

Finally, to prove the point, Eva got up and put the record on the gramophone.

"You see, you *are* wrong!" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"No, I'm not! It's the composer who's wrong."

Everyone burst into laughter. Everyone, that is, except Hitler.

The night turned into early morning and people began to yawn. Hitler rose from his armchair, bid everyone good night and retired upstairs. Everyone eventually followed, all except Eva and Elsie, who remained talking by the fire until the first ray of light appeared over the eastern mountains.

"I've had such a wonderful time with you," said Eva with tears in her eyes.

"Yes, me too," replied Elsie softly. "But look at the time. We'll be going in an hour. I really must go upstairs and change." They hugged each other tightly. Eva didn't seem to want to let go.

Elsie went to her room to change into her travelling clothes and found Karl in the corridor, already dressed and ready to go.

"Good Lord," he said. "Have you two been up all night?" Elsie yawned, nodded and smiled at this man who she knew would risk everything for her. She felt a very lucky woman indeed.

Karl sat behind the wheel of his car with the motor running while the two friends said their goodbyes.

"I've enjoyed myself more than I could possibly have imagined and it's all been because of you. Thank you, Eva. Thank you for everything."

They embraced, and then Elsie broke away, climbed into the car and drove off with Karl down the mountain road. Eva stood at the top of the steps, waving until the car was out of sight, tears rolling down her face.

Two weeks later a package arrived at Elsie's home. She opened it. It was a photo album from Eva, containing all the pictures she had taken during Elsie's stay.

## Chapter 8 George V

It was just after midnight on November 3<sup>rd</sup> that Jacob reached his apartment after playing for the busy late night crowds on the *Champs Elysées*. The stone staircase leading to his door seemed to smell mustier than ever and as he shut the door behind him, the emptiness of his existence seemed to echo throughout the room. He put his saxophone down on the chair and sat on his bed with a deep yawn. He suddenly noticed a letter lying under his door. He went over to fetch it, tore it open and read it.

*Sunday, October 30, 1938*

*Dearest Jacob,*

*Last Thursday night the Gestapo came and took us to police headquarters. When we got there they told us we were going to be deported immediately to Poland. I begged the officials to let us home and pack a few necessities but they refused. We were sent off early the next morning from the station.*

*I'm writing to you now from Zbaszyn at the Polish border. We have had a terrible few days. They won't let us into Poland, so until everything is sorted out, we have to wait out here in the open.*

*We are not dressed for the freezing rain and the mud and there is no shelter anywhere. I'm dreadfully worried that Papa has caught pneumonia, he is coughing so badly. I burned my hands accidentally yesterday and need bandages badly. We were not allowed to keep more than ten Reich marks by those Nazi thugs.*

*Your father didn't want me to write to you, he is so proud. But Jacob, I beg you, we need money desperately. Even only a little would help us get some medicine. Our situation is desperate and we are totally destitute.*

*Love, Mama*

Jacob lay awake all night. He tossed and turned for many lonely hours tormented by visions of what his parents must be going through. If only he'd been there with them, if only he hadn't left Germany, if only he'd been able to get them all proper travel papers. If, if...

Finally, just before dawn, he got out of bed and went for an early walk to try to clear his head.

He reached the River Seine and descended the stone stairs which led to the pathway along the water's edge. He'd been walking for a quarter of an hour or so when he heard someone call out his name.

It was Shimon, sitting next to the tramp, Pascal. They were watching the sunrise.

"Hello Jacob, what brings you out at this hour?" asked Shimon cheerfully.

Jacob made a grunt but said nothing.

"What's the matter? You look awful, like you haven't slept all night," said Pascal.

Jacob couldn't answer. Seeing his two friends only brought all the emotions back to the surface again. His eyes filled with tears and his throat tightened as he pulled his mother's letter out of a pocket and shoved it into Shimon's hand.

Shimon read the letter to himself then briefly translated the contents for Pascal.

Jacob sat down next to them on the bench and put his head in his hands.

"What am I going to do? I hardly any money myself. I could send them maybe two hundred francs, but that's all..."

"Well, I could always lend you some, but there's a bigger problem," said Shimon. "They don't have a proper address so even if you did send some money; it'd never get to them. Your mother was quite obvious in a state of terrible distress when she wrote the letter; otherwise she'd have realized that."

"So there's nothing any of us can do then?" cried Jacob in desperation. "I should have been *there* to help them." He shook his head in frustration.

"Being there wouldn't have made that much difference anyway, Jacob," said the tramp. "It would have happened just the same."

"Why doesn't someone do something? We're being chased around Europe like rapid animals!" he shouted. His voice echoed backwards and forwards between the stone embankments on either side of the river.

"Look Jacob," said Shimon. "I know myself how hard the waiting is, but there's nothing else we can do. All any of us can do is wait and just hope that it all turns out for the best."

"Yes, and while I'm waiting they could kick me out of France at any moment" Jacob retorted bitterly. "I'd be deported tomorrow if a gendarme got a hold of me. Listen Shimon, I'm going crazy with all this blasted waiting. Things are going from bad to worse with our people and all *we're* doing is sitting on our backsides! It's been two years already. I can't take it anymore! Why are we still waiting for our visas for Palestine? Why can't they just let us all in?"

"It's to do with politics," explained Pascal. "The British don't want to upset the Arabs because they need their oil."

"Wonderful! So in the meantime, we Jews are expected to live in limbo, are we?"

"Look Jacob, we must have faith and carry on working towards forging our own state in Palestine."

"It'll never happen!"

Without a word the tramp went to his cart and began to pull out three colored serviettes and some pieces of mismatched silverware which he laid out on the bench. Individually, all the pieces were quite handsome, but every one obviously came from a different set.

Jacob and Shimon watched in astonishment.

"This is my art collection," said Pascal as he picked up a fork and inspected it. "I've collected these from all the best places in the city. Famous people used them once but now we do. He took out some baguettes, a thermos of hot coffee, cheeses, jams and other delicacies.

"This is quite a spread. You're a man of constant surprises!" commented Shimon appreciatively.

"This morning I've been lucky. Leftovers courtesy of 'The Bonaparte' so it's a bit fancier than usual. I've some fresh fruit and even a touch of brandy for your coffee. Not exactly vintage, but nice enough."

They sat and ate until it was time for Jacob to leave for work. Shimon and Pascal stayed by the side of the river.

"It takes a cool head and steady nerves to cope with the extreme pressure that Jacob has to endure," commented the tramp as he warmed his hands round his coffee cup. "Unfortunately, I don't think he has either. I'm worried about him, Shimon. I'm worried he's going to do something stupid."

"I know, my friend. Under that quiet, sullen exterior is very hot-headed young man."

Jacob arrived at the George V at exactly nine o'clock. He quickly changed into his uniform and went off to polish the brass. He rubbed the gold colored banisters furiously until they gleamed. It was just after noon when he was finished with the brass work so he took his small lunch into the garden behind the hotel with his saxophone. The place was deserted but it didn't matter to him. He took up his saxophone and began to play one of his favorite pieces. George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue drifted up into the early afternoon air.

Listening at a window above was Marlana, vom Rath's young new wife. She was sitting idly by the windowsill, sipping a glass for French red wine.

When he finished, she called out to him from the window to play some more. Something jazzy, she said. He played a little while longer then shouted up that he had to go back to work. She remained at the window waiting for her husband to return.

"That boy who plays the saxophone at the hotel, he's very good. German you know; well, Jewish German that is."

"Oh? He was out in the black garden at lunchtime. I thought we could give him a little something."

"Whatever you like my dear." Vom Rath was already busy at this desk and not really listening to what she was saying.

"Well, I'll not disturb you now. Don't forget about the dinner at the Embassy tonight."

"No, I won't," he muttered.

Marlana left her husband's office to go out for the afternoon. On her way through the lobby, she stopped to have a word with the concierge.

"I'd like to send a bottle of wine to that young man who plays the saxophone. I was listening to him today and I think he's very talented."

"*Oui, Madame.* I'll see to it right away. Any particular wine?"

"A fine vintage, naturally. Just charge it to our room, will you."

"Of course, and have a nice afternoon, *Madame.*" The concierge smiled deferentially as Marlana left.

Towards five o'clock, Jacob was finishing his work for the day when vom Rath emerged from his suite. Jacob glanced over him.

"You're the one who plays the saxophone, aren't you?" said vom Rath.

"Yes, sir," Jacob was about to thank him for the bottle of wine, but then changed his mind and bit his lip.

"You're quite good. I've heard you play a few times, so has my wife. What part of Germany are you from?"

“Berlin.”

Vom Rath jingled his keys and rocked backwards and forwards on his heels for a few moments as he, towered over Jacob.

“You really could have made it as a musician. It’s just too bad you’re a Jew,” he said haughtily. “Anyway, see you later,” He walked away.

Jacob glared after him in silent fury.

He rose early the next day. It was November 5<sup>th</sup> – his birthday. He looked at himself grimly in the mirror and said emptily, ‘Happy Birthday, Jacob’. He had a simple breakfast of bread, cheese and black coffee in his apartment and left a short time later with a pocket full of cash. He walked directly to 61 rue du Faubourg just as the owner was opening up the store’s large iron gates.

“What can I do for you so early in the morning?” asked Mr. Rosenthal taking Jacob inside his gun shop.

“I want to buy a pistol.”

Rosenthal looked at Jacob inquisitively over his spectacles. “And what would *you* need a gun for, young man?”

“I have to deposit a large sum of money in the bank from my family’s business,” Jacob answered calmly. “I need it for protection.”

The storekeeper inspected Jacob’s slim frame and saw how he could easily be attacked and robbed.

“What model are you interested in?”

“I...I’m not really sure. I don’t know very much about guns.”

Mr. Rosenthal showed him a few different types and explained their various features.

Jacob looked at four or five but in the end took the storekeeper’s advice and bought a small caliber revolver for 215 francs. He paid another 30 francs for a box of ammunition.

Rosenthal wrapped the revolver in brown paper and handed it to Jacob. He slipped it into his pocket.

“All you must do now is to make the declaration of ownership at the police station. Here’s the form.”

Jacob folded the paper and put it in his other pocket. He thanked the storekeeper then left in the direction of the police station but a few blocks later he turned around and walked in the opposite direction. That would be very funny, thought Jacob, to walk into the police station and say something like ‘Hey guys! I’m an illegal immigrant and guess what? I’ve just bought a pistol!’

After work, Jacob got changed and went out to the *Bar Centrale* near the *Folies Bergères*. It was Saturday night and the Club was full. Jacob sat at the end of the bar, put his saxophone down and ordered a brandy. Ten minutes later, he ordered another. Soon his head was spinning and he could barely see anything through the thick cloud of smoke that was hanging in the room.

Then, without even knowing how it happened, he found himself playing with the quartet on the small stage. Whenever he stopped, people would shout out for more so in the end he carried on playing for almost an hour.

When he returned to his stool at the end of the bar, a pretty girl with long brown hair was sitting there. She seemed to be about Jacob’s age.



"Oh, did I take your place?" she asked, getting up apologetically.

"No, please stay."

"You play very well."

"Thank you."

"My name is Mona."

Jacob's head was still spinning. He'd been drinking on an empty stomach and was starting to feel very hungry.

"I was about to have some dinner. Would you like to join me?" he asked.

"I'd love to," she replied with a smile.

They took a seat in a booth furnished in plush red velvet. A single candle glowed in the middle of the table and Jacob studied Mona's face. He thought she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She had long dark curly hair, black almond shaped eyes and a smile which seemed to light up the dark corner they were sitting in.

"Where are you from?" he asked. "You don't look Parisian."

"I'm from Morocco."

"What brings you to here?"

"I have family here in Paris – cousins, aunts, uncles. I came to visit then I decided to stay awhile. There's more excitement here than there is at home. I'm a cigarette girl at the Folies Bergères."

"Cigarette girl?"

"Yes. I walk around with a tray and sell cigarettes, matches and bonbons. Sometimes even corsages and small bottles of perfume," she explained. Her manner seemed very sophisticated to Jacob. "And what do you do?"

Jacob was holding an enormous cigar that one of the customers had given him after his performance. He's lit it, but he wasn't smoking it. He'd never smoked before in his life.

He couldn't tell Mona he was a handyman after she'd just told him she was a Cigarette Girl. No, he has to embellish it somehow. In a grand gesture, he leaned back in his seat and put one arm over the backrest while with the other hand he brought the cigar to his lips.

The pungent smoke filled his lungs like hot lead and he began to cough in violent convulsions. When he'd finally recovered, he wiped the tears from his eyes and drank a whole glass of water down in one gulp. "I'm a VIP valet at the George V Hotel," he answered with as much aplomb as he could muster following this embarrassing display.

"VIP valet?"

"Yes, I personally look after all the most distinguished guests, important politicians mostly, you know."

Mona looked at him wide-eyed. She was clearly impressed.

"Just last week we had Georges Bonnet. And there'll be lots of ambassadors coming in the next few weeks. I believe I'll be attending to Prime Minister Chamberlain the next time he comes to Paris."

"Well, I met quite a few stars at the Folies Bergères. Edith Piaf, Maurice Chevalier, even Marlene Dietrich," said Mona.

Jacob whistled. "Wow, Marlene Dietrich! She's a big star!"

"Yes, and I've talked to them all, as well. Even Miss Dietrich, and she hardly talks to anyone." She lowered her voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

They had dinner, drank some wine and watched the stage show together. The time passed by quickly.

"You know Mona; I've had one of the best times of my life tonight. I'm so glad I met you. Today's my birthday."

"It is? Well then, Happy Birthday, Jacob!" she exclaimed.

"Thank you, Mona."

Just then a few people gathered round his booth and urged him to play again. After a few moments of cajoling, he was persuaded to get up and join the band once more. There was enthusiastic applause from the audience and Mona smiled at him as he caught her eye.

He played for another half hour or so before returning to the table.

"I'll call a taxi and see you home," he offered.

It was pouring with rain outside so they ran from the doorway of the Club into a waiting yellow taxi cab. The cab door slammed shut and they pulled away from the curb. Mona found Jacob's hand and pulled him close to her until he could feel her breath on his cheeks.

They kissed hungrily as the taxi careered through the downpour. Jacob was still lightheaded, still intoxicated from the wine and from the cheers of the crowd in the Club. But especially he was lightheaded from being with Mona. He lost all sense of time and after what only seemed to be a moment, they'd pulled up in front of her apartment.

"Come up with me," she whispered.

He paid the driver and they raced up the three flights of stairs to her apartment, stifling their laughter so not to disturb her neighbors.

As soon as the door closed behind them, they fell into a passionate and hungry embrace.

Jacob woke up in Mona's arms late the following morning. The night before was a wonderful blur but seemed almost unreal now, as if it had happened to someone else. He looked out the window. The rain had stopped.

She made him breakfast and they ate it at her little table.

"You're very quiet this morning. You've barely touched your food," she said. "Is there something wrong?"

"No. I'm sorry. I'm just worried, Mona. I've got so much on my mind. We had such a wonderful time last night. Coming back to reality this morning only makes everything worse."

"What is it that's worrying you, Jacob?"

"It's my family. They're in trouble, you see. I'm trying to help them out."

"Oh..." Mona understood immediately what sort of 'trouble' he meant. She reached forward to hold his hand.

That one gesture of comfort meant more than a thousand words to Jacob. He smiled weakly back at her. The irony of the situation was inescapable. Here for the first time in his life he'd found a girl who liked him, who really seemed to care about him. And yet, the whole of his world was still turned upside down. And he had yet to fulfill his destiny; he must not be deflected from his purpose. Why did he have to meet her now, of all times!

"Let's get together tomorrow, and maybe you can tell me about it. If you'd like to," she said.

"Sure," he said.

It was noon by the time he left Mona's apartment. He walked around in a daze for several hours thinking about the magical time they'd had together.

Last night had been the first time in his life that he had really felt like somebody; like someone who mattered. It was the first time that a girl had liked him, and she was such a pretty girl too. He wanted so much to be with her. He could hardly wait for tomorrow. He wanted to talk to her, touch her, kiss her, and make love to her.

But as he rounded the corner to the *Café Tout va Bien*, the reality of his situation came crashing down on him again. 'Don't be so bloody stupid!' he said to himself. 'You're living in France illegally and why can kick you out any day. And where to? Who knows?'

The frustration and the anger set in again. There was no point in seeing Monday again. Ever again. He would only want her that much more; then it would be snatched away from him like everything else in his life had been. He couldn't take that sort of devastation again.

Shimon was reading the paper at their usual table. He looked up as Jacob walked in.

"How are you Jacob? I didn't see you yesterday. I've been worried. You left in quite a state the other day."

"Yeah, I know, but I went to a club last night, to clear my head."

"Which club?"

"*Bar Centrale*."

"And did you have a good time?"

"The best. I met a really nice girl too. She's called Mona."

"Are you going to see her again?"

"No." His expression soured.

"I thought you said she was nice?"

"She is, but what's the point?"

"Don't be such a pessimist, Jacob! I talked to my parents last night. They've just made contact with someone who can get us all visas to Palestine within about three weeks; a guy named Becker. Look, why don't you come with us. I'll find a way and when things improve for your parents, they can join you there too."

Jacob listened to what Shimon was saying but he didn't answer. He looked out of the window at the youths chatting outside and his mind drifted back to the night before. He could feel Mona's lips, he could see her eyes, smell her skin, hear her voice. He remembered her reaching for his hand. Would she be prepared to go to Palestine with him?

Shimon noticed the same look of detachment and remoteness creep back into Jacob's expression that he'd seen on the day they'd first met.

After a long and thoughtful silence, Jacob turned back to Shimon and said with an eerie, uncharacteristic calm, "The Jewish people have as much of a right to live as anyone else does. I mean *really live*. As things are now, we can have nothing. We're all trapped. And for what reason?"

There was another silence as Shimon mulled over what his friend has said.

"We have as much right to live as everybody else does," repeated Jacob emphatically.

It was an unusually warm autumn day in Munich.

"What do you think," asked Vera, holding up the dark blue dress against her.

"Perfect," said Anna. "It's just your color. Go on then."

"How do you mean?"

"Go and try it on. Let's see how it fits."

A few minutes later Vera reappeared from the changing room wearing the new dress. Its hem rested just below the knee and it had a full skirt with a gathered waist, a round neckline and padded shoulders.

"Well?" she asked.

"Oh, you look lovely. It fits you so well."

"Well it should do. We've paid enough to have it made to measure."

"Aaron will absolutely adore it. When are you going to wear it for him?"

"Oh, I don't know. I haven't given it much thought," she said dismissively. "Let's see yours then. Aren't you going to try yours on?"

"Alright then. What time is it?"

"It's ten to one. Why?"

"Dad will be here soon. We'd better get a move on."

"So which special occasions are you planning to wear your dress for then, Anna?"

"I'm going to save it until I'm reunited with Shimon." She sighed and looked suddenly thoughtful. "I hate being separated from him so much, you know."

"But you talk to him on the telephone almost every day."

"Yes, but it's not the same as being with him, is it Vera? And who knows when we're actually going to see each other again."

"No." Vera looked mournfully out the dress shop window. "Things are changing fast, aren't they Anna. Nothing's ever going to be the same again, for any of us."

"Yes. God knows what any of us will be doing in a year's time. You and Aaron are going to Egypt. I'll be in Palestine with Mum and Dad and Shimon. Uncle Moshe and Grandma are in Poland, Uncle Leo's in England. The whole family's going to be spread out across half the world.

"I try not to think about it. It just depresses me too much."

"I know, and none of us has got a crystal ball, have we?"

"No. We can't predict the future," said Vera firmly. "All we can be certain of is the present. So we have to do the best that we can in the here and now."

"Well in that case," said Anna, forcing a smile, "I suppose I'd better try this dress on without any more delay." She went into the changing room and pulled the door after her.

An assistant bustled over to the mirror where Vera was standing. "Is everything alright Madam?" she asked.

"Yes, everything's fine, thank you," she lied.

Anna came out wearing her new dress. It was deep lilac in color and was made of a beautifully soft, flowing fabric.

"How do I look?"

"It's very nice Anna," said her sister.

"Stunning, Madam," enthused the assistant.

"I couldn't agree more," said a male voice behind her.

She turned round to see the beaming face of her father.

"Well, you two girls are looking lovely. What a lucky man I am to have two such beautiful daughters."

Well thank you, kind sir," said Anna, curtsying playfully.

"So you really like our dresses, Dad," said Vera.

“Of course I do. You both look absolutely wonderful. I’d better attend to my fatherly duty and go and pay for them. And while I’m doing that, you girls had better decide where you’d like me to take you for lunch.”

They decided on a café up the street from the dress shop. Samuel often liked to treat his daughters to lunch when he could spare the time from the office and today was a fairly quiet day for him. But today he noticed that his youngest daughter seemed to have lost her appetite. She was aimlessly pushing a piece of cold beef around her plate with her fork and looking vacantly out of the café window.

“Come on Anna. You’ve hardly touched your food.”

“I know, Daddy. I’m sorry.”

“Yes, I know I should be stronger, but I just can’t stop thinking about him, so far away. And I still worry dreadfully about what the future holds in store for all of us.”

“You know I’m doing everything I can. Soon and Vera and Aaron will have their papers for Egypt and we’ll have ours for Palestine. And then we’ll have all the excitement of creating a whole new life for ourselves. A whole new future awaits us all.” He squeezed his daughter’s hand. “Try not to worry, darling. You and Shimon will be together soon. I promise you.” He turned to his other daughter. “Of course Vera, you’re lucky. You have your fiancée safely by your side.”

Vera cleared her throat as a piece of food seemed to go down the wrong way. “Everything will be alright Anna!”

Anna forced a weak smile. Yes, Daddy. Thank you.”

“And things will be fine for you too Vera.”

Vera nodded and carried on eating in silence.

“Vera, are you alright?”

“I’m fine Dad, honestly. Pour me another glass of wine would you.”

It was also unseasonably warm in Paris as Jacob walked to the Strasbourg St. Denis metro station on his way to the George V. A short trip on the metro and he would be only a block away.

The hotel had been a palace before the turn of the century and the trappings of its past glory were still plain to see. He walked through the main door, past the restaurant ‘Les Princes’ with all its tall windows overlooking the patio and made his way to the staff changing area where a freshly laundered uniform hung waiting for him. He changed into it and went up the grand staircase. The hands of the Regency clock on the landing showed 9:42 in the morning as Jacob looked up at the glittering chandelier. How many times had he polished each one of its crystals? He began to breathe deeply now, his chest tightening more with every step he took. He walked briskly down the second floor hallway to the door at his far end and listened outside for a moment before knocking.

“Come in.”

Jacob opened the large wooden doors, entered the room and closed the doors again behind him. Vom Rath was seated at this desk, engrossed in this paperwork. He had his back to him.

Vom Rath turned his head briefly in Jacob’s direction, and then carried on working.

“What can I do for you today, Jacob?”

Jacob's nostrils flared and his whole body trembled as he forced himself to speak. "It's just too bad you're a Nazi," growled Jacob looking directly down at vom Rath. As he spoke he pulled the pistol out from his breast pocket and fired five shots at vom Rath from point blank range.

The first bullet struck vom Rath in the stomach and he slumped sideways onto his desk. The second shot hit him in the ribcage slightly above the first. The last three shots all missed him and lodged into the wall behind.

Vom Rath stared at Jacob with bulging eyes as he put his hands to his bloody torso. He opened his mouth and tried to speak but no sound came out."

Jacob lowered his arm, let the pistol fall to the floor and dropped his shoulders as if in tremendous relief. But his whole body was trembling violently.

Vom Rath crawled to the doorway where he collapsed in a spreading pool of blood.

The doors to vom Rath's office flew open and the concierge burst in with a number of other hotel staff just behind her. They immediately went over to the prostate vom Rath to find that he was still alive. Then the Head Porter seized Jacob by the arms. He made no resistance.

"Don't worry, I won't do anything else," he assured them. "I won't try to escape." A surreal calm had come over him now.

In the furor of activity that followed, the French police took Jacob into custody. Medical staff arrived to attend to vom Rath and witnesses were gathered and questioned.

Early in the morning of November 8<sup>th</sup>, Pascal hurried over to the *Café Tout va Bien* where he hoped he might find Shimon.

The news of the shooting had been broadcast on every radio station and even at the early hour a crowd of people had gathered. They gesticulated and lamented in a cacophonous din of German, Yiddish, French and a host of other languages.

Pascal went inside but Shimon was nowhere to be seen so he took a seat and reached for a pile of newspapers.

The British and American press was speculating about possible retaliatory action what Germany might take. The French papers said that Bonnet was appalled by the news and worried about the potential damage to Franco-German relations that might ensue. The only consolation, they concluded, was that the gunman was a Polish Jew and not a French Jew. It was bad enough that the crime had taken place on French soil. Other Frenchmen worried that Jacob's shots would be as fateful as those of Gavrilo Princip, the assassin who killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the act that sparked off the Great War.

Pascal couldn't read what the Yiddish papers had to say about he was fairly certain that most Jews would be hoping and praying for vom Rath to survive.

Shimon turned up an hour later. He looked pale and tired.

"I can't believe what Jacob's done," said Pascal as Shimon slumped down into the chair opposite him. "But then again, when I remember the state he was in the other day...But still, damn it! To shoot vom Rath; like that!" Pascal shook his head in disbelief.

"I talked to him only yesterday, right there," Shimon pointed to a table a few feet away. "I tried to talk some sense into him but I could see he wasn't having any of it."

"Well when I come to think about it, he really did have his back to the wall, you know," said the tramp. "His situation was becoming more and more impossible and Jacob sees things in black and white; right and wrong. Who knows, maybe he had a point."

“Well, I know he was convinced he’d never see his family again. I guess that’s what set him off.”

“He acted with the right intentions, Shimon. He wanted to bring the plight of the Jews to the attention of the world, but...”

“Yes, I know,” said Shimon. “But it’s probably not going to turn out that way, is it? His understanding of things is simplistic. He’s never really grasped the true extent of Hitler’s obsession with eliminating the Jews. And he’s never really understood the world’s unwillingness to do anything to stop him either.”

“I’m afraid you’re right,” sighed the tramp. “I wonder what will become of Jacob now...”

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, most of the Nazi party leadership gathered together in Munich to celebrate the anniversary of ‘Beer hall Putsch’, the attempted Nazi coup of 1923.

Representatives of the armed forces paraded at the Feldherrnhalle to a sixteen gun salute which thundered over the city. They observed a moment of silence while Hitler laid a wreath at the memorial and then the whole procession moved to the Königsplatz carrying flags tilted in salute to the accompaniment of ‘*Deutschland über Alles*’. The ceremony was broadcast live on the radio throughout the Reich.

Afterwards, Hitler and his closest comrades met in the Old City Hall. Joseph Goebbels, relishing his position as the Reich’s Minister of Propaganda, planned to capitalize on the occasion and use it to rekindle the fervor of the Party faithful. A few days before the ceremonies, he had limped around the Hall with his walking stick carrying a bundle of photos that were to be enlarged and hung about the corridors and meeting rooms.

“I like the Führer to be seen in a serious mood, to be seen in command,” he told the assistant who was following in his trail.

“Here, take this one of the Führer shaking hands with vom Rath. This one has to go in the main entrance and another copy of it in the conference room. Everyone must be reminded of this terrible blow to the Reich, the cowardly attack on one of our most noble and eminent men.” He pointed angrily with his stick.

Surrounded by these images, the comrades mingled and chattered together while Hitler went around personally to greet as many of them as he could. He shook their hands to give them his personal seal of approval and encouraged their sense of purpose.

Sometime shortly after 8PM, a messenger entered and cut his way straight through the crowd towards Hitler. Pulling him aside, he informed the Führer quietly that vom Rath had died earlier that afternoon from his wounds.

Hitler went straight to find Goebbels and in a highly agitated manner, broke the news to the Propaganda Minister.

“But Mein Führer,” declared Goebbels with an enormous, gleaming smile. “This is a heaven-sent opportunity. We’ve been waiting for something like this. We’ve made sure that the attack on vom Rath dominated all the front pages both yesterday and today and already the people are beginning to respond. In Hesse and Magdeburg, they are already breaking into Jewish businesses and setting fire to synagogues.

Hitler listened attentively while in his mind he formulated the fine details of the plan they had been working on for several months.

“Have we reported the attacks against Jews?” he asked.

“Yes. In today’s paper we reported ‘spontaneous demonstrations’,” replied Goebbels.

“Good. Good. We can’t let this opportunity pass us by. Of course, the Party can’t be seen to be officially organizing any demonstrations like those at Hesse or Mageburg, but we don’t have to stop them if they do occur ‘spontaneously’, do we? Perhaps it’s a good time for the SS to have its fling as well. I’ll take care of it.”

Hitler called for the dinner to begin and for two hours there was feasting and boasting as everyone reveled in Germany’s recent victories. As soon as the meal was over, Hitler ascended to a podium and prepared to make his traditional closing speech. The atmosphere was electrically charged as everyone waited in eager anticipation. They had all experienced the inspiration of the Führer set piece orations many times before.

Hitler stood before them with his hands clasped stiffly behind his back. Then he rocked up and down on his toes several times without saying a word. He glared around the room with a clenched jaw, then picked up a piece of paper and waved it angrily at his audience.

“Gentlemen, I have news here for you tonight which demonstrate what happens to a good German when he relaxes his vigil for just one moment. Ernst vom Rath was a good German, a loyal servant for the Reich, working for the good of our people in Paris. Shall I tell you what happened to him? He was shot down!” Hitler bellowed out the last phrase.

“In the course of this duty, he went unarmed and unsuspecting, and in return for this, he has had two bullets pumped into him. Now he is dead.”

He paused and looked around the room once more to allow the full effect of his words to sink in. Then he crashed his fist loudly onto the hollow podium, the sound of it booming and echoing through the room. He raised his voice still further.

“Do I need to tell you to which race the dirty swine who perpetrated this foul deed belongs? Of course not. He is a Jew! He spends tonight in jail, in Paris, claiming that he acted alone, but there were no collaborators with him in this dreadful murder. But we know better, don’t we?”

There was an answering chorus from all around the dining hall as his audience shouted out calls from the vengeance against the Jews.

Hitler looked around the room once more and let the tumult reach a crescendo before he raised a triumphant hand to quiet the audience again. “All Jews are cowards!” he continued. “They are all weak and despicable, they attack unarmed men! Comrades, we cannot allow this attack on us by International Jewry to go unchallenged. We will respond to Jacob Grynspan *tonight*. His act *must* be repudiated. Our people *must* be told of his crime and their answer to it must be ruthless and forthright! I ask you to listen to me, while together we plan our answer to foul Jewish murder and the threat of International Jewry to our Glorious German Reich!”

Roars of *Sieg Heil!* filled the air.

“There have already been spontaneous anti-Jewish riots in various parts of the Fatherland. Similar spontaneous demonstrations must be organized immediately!” He lowered his voice. “Remembering, however, that the Party itself must not appear to be responsible for them.”

Just then, the great oak door of the dining hall creaked opened and a young SS officer in a sharp black uniform stepped smartly in. He spun around on his heels in front of the Führer, clicked his boots and saluted his outstretched arm.

“Salute Heil!” he barked.

Hitler smiled and returned his salute.



“Yesterday, gentlemen, we had a problem. Today we have a solution. I would like to introduce to you Lieutenant Ulrich Schellenberger. He will help you to coordinate your show of strength against the insidious evil of the Jews.

Hitler turned to Schellenberger, shook his hand and without any further ado, left the room.

As soon as the door closed behind the Führer, animated chatter filled the room. Detailed plans were drawn up and instructions immediately transmitted by the Party members to their regional offices. Under the orchestration of Lieutenant Schellenberger, the witches’ Sabbath began.

## Chapter 9 The Night of the Broken Glass (Kristallnacht)

In the center of the hub in the Old Town Hall in Munich were four men – Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich and Ulrich Schellenberger.

Heydrich handed Schellenberger a list of addresses of prominent well-to-do Jews in the city.

“We wasn’t to know *all* their assets and how to access them. Anyone who does not want to cooperate can go to Dachau to think it over.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“And I trust you will take extra care not leave tracks.”

“Yes, Sir. Of course. Heil Hitler!” Schellenberger saluted and left.

In the meantime, Goebbels was speaking with Himmler regarding the imminent riots.

“I just got off the phone with the Fire Chief. Jewish owned buildings that catch fire are not to be put out; only those buildings owned or occupied by Aryan Germans are to be protected. But I don’t want to encourage burning homes or businesses; it is needless destruction of property. Once they are vacated, they can be taken over by Aryans. Synagogues and so forth, that’s another thing, we have no use for them.”

As the eleventh hour on November 9<sup>th</sup> passed, the covertly organized destruction of Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues began. The smell of smoke hung in the air and soon the sky filled with the glowing cinders from the dozens of blazes.

In front of the Wiesenthal home, two black cars stopped. Five men got out and there was a loud pounding at the door. Bernard stumbled out of bed and in a hurry, hastened to the front door in the dark.

“Wiesenthal?” shouted a voice.

“Yes. What is it?” asked Bernard politely from within.

“Open the door! Schell! Or we’ll break it down,” shouted the voice. The lock unlatched and Bernard opened it a crack.

“What do you want at this hour?” asked Bernard timidly.

Schellenberger ignored him and barged in, followed by his four accomplices. The Wiesenthals were not on the list he had been given by Heydrich, but Schellenberger was eager to take this opportunity to cover up his embezzling activities.

“I know you don’t have the Herzen Factory anymore, but there are a few questions I need to ask you,” said Schellenberger.

Bernard looked at him amazed. How did he know about that? Samuel had closed the deal with the SS officer secretly. Worried, his eyes darted from one black uniformed officer to the next.

Schellenberger gave a brisk order for his men to stand on guard at the door while he took Bernard into the adjoining room. Sarah peered downstairs from the top landing trembling, clutching her housecoat around her.

“Please, don’t harm us. Take whatever you want,” Bernard pleaded as Schellenberger closed the door behind him.

“We are going to anyway,” he scoffed. “Now, I’m only going to give you one chance, Wiesenthal. Cooperate and you’ll be fine.”

“Yes, yes...of course,” he stammered submissively.

“Where’s your cash?”

Bernard knew that was what he would be after and went immediately to his desk, opened a small drawer and pulled out a pair of keys. He then went to the bookcase, knelt down and unlocked a bottom cupboard.

Schellenberger bent down and took a bundle of cash from the cupboard and inspected it. They were bundled of 20 Swiss Franc notes. For a fleeting moment a devious grin broke his icy expression.

“You’ll have to turn this in to the Reich. Get a bag and fill it up!”

Bernard stood, staring at him. “All of it?” he gasped. “But what are we to live on?”

“Are you deaf, Wiesenthal?”

Bernard went into a closet and returned with an old leather sac-à-dos from Shimon’s school days. One by one he placed the bundles of cash in the bag then did up the buckles. Schellenberger snatched the bag of money, reached deep in the cabinet and felt a few pieces of jewelry and a pocket watch which he grabbed and quickly stuffed into the inside of his overcoat.

“Now, I want you to go upstairs to your wife and stay in your bedroom, both of you.”

Bernard, relieved that their ordeal was over, left Schellenberger, passed the four stone-faced men without looking at them and scurried up the stairs. He grabbed his wife who was still cringing at the top landing and pulled her into their bedroom.

“It’s alright now. They just wanted money. I gave it to them; they’ll go now,” he whispered fervently. “We still have enough in Switzerland.”

Downstairs, Schellenberger needed to create a distraction for his men so they would not see him carrying the bag. There was no way he was about to share it with them just to keep them quiet about it.

He called the youngest of the four into the room; their newest recruit.

Schellenberger was leaning calmly against the desk when the eager youth came in and stood to attention. He was in his late teens.

“How long have you been with the SS?” asked Schellenberger.

“Six months, Sir.”

“Have you ever shot anyone?”

“Uh...no...no, Sir.”

“Are you a coward?”

“No, Sir.”

“Well, now you can prove yourself. I have a job for you.”

A few moments later the youth came out of the room with a revolver awkwardly in his hand. His eyes darted around and he was pale in the face. Knowing his instructions, he went directly upstairs.

His older companions looked at each other after he was gone and began to laugh.

“He’s going to shit himself; you wait and see,” said one.

No longer in the sight of his comrades; now in front of the Wiesenthal bedroom, the young SS officer halted and looked at this weapon in his trembling hand.

Schellenberger emerged from the room, told the men to grab whatever they could carry before they would have to move on.

“We have five minutes.”

The sound of banging and slamming was heard upstairs as they ransacked through the Wiesenthal’s home.

Bernard held Sarah tightly as they sat on the end of the bed listening to the ruckus below.

There was a light knock at the door, and then it creaked open. Sarah and Bernard stared at the frightened youth holding a handgun by his side standing in the doorway. Mustering his courage, he raised the gun and pointed at them.

"Oh, my God!" Sarah cried out. "What are they doing?" and began to sob, clinging desperately to her husband.

Unable to pull the trigger, the youth stood immobile, the gun wobbling in his two hands as he kept repositioning his grip. *'They didn't even protest'*, he thought. *'What kind of coward can shoot people like this? Why, they hadn't done anything?'* All of a sudden he let his arm drop and disappeared from the doorway.

Bernard let out a deep breath and clasped his wife's head close, kissing her and holding her tightly.

There was an inaudible altercation downstairs and a moment later the youth was standing in the doorway of their bedroom again. His expression was firmer, more deliberate than it had been the last time. He raised his pistol and aimed it at them again.

Bernard looked at him and straightened his back. The youth breathed heavily, his nostrils flaring.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wiesenthal," he said in a low broken voice. "I am very sorry. I don't want to do this, but I have to."

Bernard and Sarah now sat quietly huddled together, more composed, looking at the youth straight in the eye.

The youth, now holding the pistol in both hands, closed his eyes. Bernard, in a low, calm voice, said, "Son, I understand. Open your eyes, hold the gun steadily, and for God's sake, aim properly."

The youth took three paces forward and fired two shots.

Schellenberger was the last to leave the house. He struck a match and held it under the curtains until the flames were a foot high. Swinging the bag of money over his shoulder he shut the door behind him. His men, happy with their own spoils paid no attention to Schellenberger's bag.

It was nearly midnight when Schellenberger's gang arrived with a screeching halt at the Gutmann house – the first on his list.

Samuel and Esther were still awake and packing a few possessions. Anna had already finished and was getting ready for bed. A feverish excitement filled the atmosphere as earlier that day they had received their papers to Palestine. Aaron and Vera had received their papers to Egypt some time ago but were waiting to leave together with the others. The plan was to meet up with Shimon in Paris then all travel to Palestine together. Anna, anxious to see Shimon could hardly wait till morning when they would be on their way.

Samuel went to answer the pounding at the door. He opened it only a crack to see who was there when it flew open, knocking him against the wall. Schellenberger forced his way in, grabbed Samuel and immediately began to kick and punch him. Caught off guard, Samuel was quickly down on the floor.

Esther and Anna stood watching helplessly. It had happened so quickly and suddenly that they only managed to cry out.

"We meet again, Gutmann," Schellenberger said contemptuously standing over him as he struggled to his feet, searching for his glasses. As he reached across the floor, Schellenberger stepped on them, crushing the glasses under his polished black boot.

Samuel managed to get up, holding his left side in pain. Schellenberger ignored Samuel and went to Anna, grabbing her by the hair. As she shrieked, Samuel made a start towards them but was held back by two of the SS.

He signaled with a nod for them to let him go, "I'll handle this; take her," he indicated to Esther.

The four men took Esther out of the room and began to ransack the house looking for valuables. Schellenberger dragged Anna into the living room. Samuel followed.

"Look here, you filthy Jewish swine, if you know what's good for your daughter, you'll show me where you keep your money," barked Schellenberger.

Samuel could barely see, but felt his way towards a small liquor cabinet in the corner of the room. He pushed it to the side, exposing a green metal safe. Kneeling down, he fumbled with the combination lock and tried to open the safe but it wouldn't budge. Unable to decipher the numbers, his hands trembled as again and again he tried the combination.

"I can't see!" he said frustrated. "I can't see without my glasses!"

Schellenberger, annoyed and impatient, thought of what to do. Suddenly he let go his grip on Anna and threw her down next to Samuel.

"You do it!" he shouted.

Anna looked at her father who quickly whispered, "Go ahead, open it."

In three turns of the dial, the safe opened.

"Put everything out here on the table," he ordered.

When all the bundles of German banknotes were laid out, Schellenberger once again flew into a rage.

"What's the matter with you Gutmann? You think I'm stupid? I know you've got more, where is it?" He was holding Samuel by scruff of the neck. Anna tried to come between them but Schellenberger shouted at her.

"Get out of here, or I'll kill him!"

Anna backed off and left the room.

Schellenberger rammed Samuel up against the wall.

"You think you're smart Gutmann?" He punched Samuel in the side of the head so hard he fell on the floor like a rag. Schellenberger then went to the liquor cabinet, poured himself some brandy and gulped it down. It would numb the pain in his hand he thought stretching and flexing the fingers on his right hand. He poured himself another glass, threw it back also, and then left the living room.

"You! Come and show me where the rest of the money is," he snarled at Anna, grabbing her by the arm when he found her. "I'm running out of patience!"

Anna led him to her father's study. She switched on the light and went to the still-life painting that hung behind her father's desk. She took it down and quickly spun the dial on the safe. In seconds, it too was opened. Inside was nearly seven hundred and fifty thousand Swiss Francs.

Schellenberger had been leering at Anna in her dressing gown as she led him to the safe. Now that she opened it, he grabbed her from behind and began ripping at her robe and groping her body.

Anna struggled with him but he quickly overpowered her, throwing her down on the couch. Knowing she couldn't get away, she screamed out.

"No! Stop!" she repeated.

Samuel was roused from his unconsciousness by the shrieks and scuffling of his daughter in the next room. Realizing immediately what was going on, he got to his feet and stumbled into his study where he found Schellenberger straddling over Anna on the couch.

"Papa, help me! Please help me!" she cried.

In that instant, Samuel scarcely remembered his wounds; grabbed the letter opener from his desk and hurled himself at Schellenberger.

In the last moment, Schellenberger moved away and the letter opener pierced his coat, only scratching the surface skin of his arm.

At the sound of the commotion in the study, the four SS men came running and pinned Samuel when they saw him brandishing the knife.

"You son-of-a-bitch, Schellenberger! How dare you Nazi force your way into my home, breaking everything in sight, stealing my money..."

"Shut up, Gutmann!"

"...and now you put your filthy hands on my daughter! What is it you want, Schellenberger? What more do you want? You already have the money and the factory..."

"That's enough!" he barked. Schellenberger was now worried that his men would hear too much from Samuel.

"Get the kit," he ordered to the young recruit, who immediately sprang out of the room and went into the car. He returned a moment later with a black leather bag and handed it to his boss.

"I've had enough of your loud mouth, Gutmann! I've come here to do a job and I'm going to do it. Hold them!" he ordered.

The senior SS pulled out a revolver and forced Esther and Anna back against the wall.

"What are you going to do?" Esther's voice was panicky.

They ignored her. The other three held Samuel pinned down on the floor as Schellenberger stood over them opening the black case. He pulled out a needle and thin wire thread and deftly threaded it.

When Samuel saw what he was doing, he began to writhe violently trying to free himself but it was no use, there were three of them on top of him.

Schellenberger quickly bent down and got to work.

Esther and Anna could not see what was happening; the backs of the SS men blocked their view. All they could hear were Samuel's terrible screams that soon became muffled and turned into painful moans.

When Schellenberger was finished, the men tied together Samuel's hands and feet.

It was then that for the first time, Anna and Esther saw that Samuel's lips had been sewn shut.

"Now, we can get some work done! Take the two of them over there," Schellenberger pointed to the adjoining living room. "And you," he looked at Esther, "get on the piano and play so I know what you're up to."

They dragged Samuel into the next room and leaned him against an armchair.

"You, stay here," he ordered Anna who was now torpid from shock. She obeyed. The doors to the living room closed with a slam.

Esther knelt at Samuel's side, tears streaming down her face as she cried uncontrollably. Samuel's face was swollen, battered and bloody from all the blows. He could barely see out of his eyes. His mouth was covered in blood from the wires pulling at his flesh.

"Oh dear God, what have they done to you?" Esther tried to wipe his face. Samuel reached up with his hands and touched the tears on her cheeks then brought them to his lips.

"I love you too, Samuel. So much! We just have to live through this."

He closed his eyes in agreement. She put her head gently on his chest and he tried to hold her, feeling her hair between his fingers.

There was a loud banging on the doors. "I said play!"

Esther shuddered.

Samuel loosened his hold, as if to encourage her to do as she was bid. Esther picked herself up and sat behind the piano searching her mind for what to play but everything was now a blank. She broke down at the keys and began to sob again. "I can't Samuel, I just can't...I don't know what..."

Samuel raised his hands, tied at the wrists, and made a half-moon sign. Esther watched trying to figure out what he wanted to say. He then brought the moon towards his heart.

"I remember," she whispered, wiping her face with her sleeves and straightened her back. "Samuel, sweetheart, this is for you."

She began to play Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*.

On the floor, Samuel leaned against the armchair relaxed slightly when he heard the melody. Through his throbbing pain he remembered the first time she played that piece.

It was on their honeymoon in Vienna. They had gone to a ballet and afterward stopped in the hotel lounge for a glass of wine and a small late night snack. They were the only ones in the lounge and, Esther made her way to the baby grand piano in the middle of the room. She played *Moonlight Sonata* then. She said she liked it because it always made her cry.

Samuel looked at Esther tenderly now, just as she had so many years ago on their honeymoon. Now more than ever he realized how much in love with her he had always been and how happy she had made him over the years.

He prayed to God that they would get through this.

In the library next to the living room, Schellenberger was alone with Anna who was cringing in the corner holding her tattered robe about her. He sat at Samuel's desk with a bottle of brandy in one hand, counting out the money, putting it into Samuel's briefcase with the other. By now he had consumed nearly half the bottle and was slurring his words.

"Thought you could fool me. I knew there was more." He clicked the briefcase shut and leaned back in his chair, gazing directly at Anna.

She noticed him staring at her now and tensed up, fidgeting with her robe.

"You're pretty good looking for a Jew", he said getting up. She shrunk away from him as he approached her. Grabbing her by the arm he growled, "Now you're going to tell me where the jewelry is."

"It's in my parents' room," she said, her voice a whimper.

"Show me," he ordered.

Anna took him upstairs into her parents' bedroom. Her mother kept her jewelry box under the bed. Anna pulled it out reluctantly for Schellenberger. Inside was jewelry that had been passed down for generations.

He pounced on the box like a bird of prey. While he was inspecting the pieces, Anna slipped into her mother's closet to put on some clothes. She dropped the torn gown that scarcely covered her anymore and reached for an undershirt and skirt. Just as she pulled on a sweater, Schellenberger realized she was missing.

His eyes darted around until he spied her in the closet. Schellenberger grabbed Anna by the hair, pulled her back and threw her with all his force onto the bed and ripped off the few pieces of clothing she managed to put on.

"I have done all you wanted, let me go, please," she pleaded, starting to cry.

He took out a short whip from his coat and lashed her three times over the shoulders and back.

She let out a horrible piercing scream.

Quickly, he unzipped his pants, pried her tense legs apart and forced himself on her.

By now Anna was so terrified she no longer resisted, she lay motionless, biting her lip to remain silent.

When he was done, he sat slumped on the bed and reached for his brandy again. Anna curled up into a ball with her back to him and pulled the sheets over herself staring into space. She wanted to burrow right into the bed and disappear.

He looked over at her after a few minutes and saw the bright red welts on her back. Reaching over, he ran his hand over them. Anna, repulsed by his touch, cringed and stiffened her whole body.

Forcing her, Schellenberger pushed her over onto her stomach and started to rape her again.

With a sly look, he reached for his brandy and poured it over the open wounds on her back. Anna screamed out in pain again as the liquor burned her raw skin.

A short while later, after collecting the jewelry he left the room, stumbling but still toting the bottle. On his way downstairs he shouted to one of his men, "You're next!"

The first of the men entered the room and found Anna lying motionless on her back, her legs apart staring at the ceiling. She was like a corpse under him.

In their turn, all five men raped Anna.

When Klaus Schoon learned of the riots against the Jews had begun, he set out to warn his friends. He pulled up at their house and saw it fully lit. At that late hour of the night, he immediately knew it was already too late. He took his pistol from his holster and crept in the dark towards the windows and from the shrubbery looked inside.

The SS were still smashing an already vandalized home. Everything was in splinters. In the living room was the macabre scene of Esther playing the Viennese Waltz to her husband whose face was grossly disfigured. The sight sickened him. Klaus scurried around



the house under the cover of darkness to size up the situation and figure out what he could do.

Esther stopped playing and went to Samuel's side again after about half an hour. By then the blood on his lips had crusted and was beginning to pull. Esther slipped into the kitchen for a bowl of water and a cloth to moisten his lips with. As she patted the cool damp cloth carefully over his lips he tried to suck in some moisture.

"Are you thirsty?"

He nodded. She pressed the soaked cloth closer to his mouth.

As Klaus moved toward the back of the house he stopped suddenly as he heard voices. Two of the men were standing outside smoking and sharing a bottle of liquor.

"So how many places do we have to hit tonight?" asked the first officer.

"I dunno. As many as we can, I guess. We're just stalling here awhile. Got to speed up from now on."

"What are we going to do with 'em?"

"Get rid of 'em and probably torch the place."

"I thought we weren't supposed to burn stuff down; just synagogues."

"Yeah, but I think there's more to it with this one. The boss had a bone to pick."

Klaus stood as still as he could, not to be detected. When the two went back inside, he quickly found the rain gutter and holding onto it, climbed up to the second floor and crawled inside through the hall window.

Without making a sound, he walked toward the stairway, revolver in hand. Along the hallway he passes the room where Anna lay prostrate on the bed. When he came closer he was nearly overcome by disgust. Anna's face was blank, eyes staring up at the ceiling, legs still apart. Her body bruised all over.

He closed the door then quietly went to her side and whispered into her ear.

"It's Klaus. I'm here to help you. Can you hear me?"

She did not respond.

He put her legs together and pulled the sheets over her naked body. It was then when Anna realized that he would not hurt her that she moved her eyes to look at him and pulled the sheet up to her neck.

"Anna, we don't have much time. We have to hurry. I'll help you get dressed."

She sat up slowly, stiffly. He went over to get Anna some clothes hastily pulling out some warm sweaters and a coat for her from the dresser.

Anna sat sitting crouched at the edge of the bed clutching the soiled sheets trembling. When Klaus returned to hand her the clothes, he realized how badly she had been beaten. She was covered with smears of blood and smell of liquor.

"Anna, maybe you should have a quick wash. You'll feel better." He helped her to the bathroom where she ran the water quickly.

Klaus looked around the room. Things were turned over and broken, everywhere were smears and fingerprints of blood. He was disgusted and enraged at the men who did this, and cursed himself for not coming sooner.

While waiting for Anna, Klaus threw together a bag of spare clothes. Suddenly two shots rang out from downstairs.

He dropped the bag and slowly crept out of the bedroom, into the hall and down the staircase holding his revolver. At the bottom of the stairs he came face to face with three of

the SS men. They looked at him with a particular expression but Klaus didn't give them any opportunity to speak. Without saying a word, he aimed his gun and in three shots they were dead.

As the gunfire was still ringing in his ears the sound of footsteps came from behind Klaus. He spun around and saw the young SS rookie standing in shock staring at his comrades lying prostate on the floor. Before Klaus could do anything, the young rookie turned and ran out of the house into the street, disappearing into the night.

Klaus next walked into the library. Slumped over the keyboard was Esther, a bullet through her head. At her feet was Samuel, also shot in the head. Klaus now faced Schellenberger who was staggering toward him in the doorway. He calmly raised his gun and shot Schellenberger in the chest.

In the early hours of the morning, Rabbi Weiss was awakened by the telephone ringing. As he picked up the receiver, he realized the heavy smell of smoke in the air. Like many, he was not yet aware of the past night's events.

The frantic voice of one of his students told him of the devastation that had occurred and was still going on.

"...and they've set the fire to the synagogue," said the shaking voice.

Rabbi Weiss dropped the receiver and ran to the window. In the faint light of early dawn, he saw, two blocks away, the synagogue, ablaze with enormous forked tongues of flames lashing toward the sky spewing black smoke. Outside on the street were the *Strolls of the Law of Moses* in the mud, the blue velvet drape torn to shreds on the stairs.

When the Rabbi saw this, he made a dash for the door. Ruth had just emerged from the bedroom when she saw her husband in a panic. Sensing the danger, she clung to him, imploring and begging him not to go outside. He was at first oblivious of her pleas but then gave in to her persistence and was brought back to his senses.

Storm troopers and fire brigades stood around the synagogue watching with stern faces over the unruly crowd gathered around, which would obey their command.

"Look, they will shoot you immediately. Come see for yourself," she pointed down at them.

He stood there by the window, looking in front of him in disbelief. Leaning against the windowpane, tears streamed from his eyes. "Why?" he whispered benumbed.

Ruth went to the telephone and picked up the dangling receiver. The student was still on the line.

"There are fire brigades all around, why didn't they put it out?" she asked.

"They're only supposed to protect the buildings next door. Stay inside. Don't go outside. It's too dangerous," said the voice.

She hung up the phone.

"There's been a terrible outbreak of violence all last night. Everywhere – all over Germany," Ruth said quietly.

Before long, later a rampaging mob was making its way up the street breaking into houses, smashing furniture, throwing belongings into the street; shouting. Just then there was a knock at the Rabbi's door.

"It's Peter, from upstairs," said the voice.

Ruth looked at her husband bewildered.

"It's ok," he nodded.

When she opened the door, the seventeen year old neighbor that lived upstairs came in agitated and wide-eyed.

"They're coming!" he shouted. "You have to close up the windows like you're not here. Don't worry. I'll protect you."

With that he ran back upstairs and changed into his Hitler Youth uniform.

Ruth closed the window and pulled the curtains as the boy had instructed, then went to sit next to her husband. There was nothing they could do but wait.

As the mob drew near, Peter went out onto the balcony dressed in his uniform, leaned over the railing and shouted, "Go away. There are no Jews here! This is Aryan property, if you damage it, you will be responsible!"

The sight of the familiar brown uniform was enough for the vandals and they moved on.

For the next two days the Rabbi and his wife didn't set foot out of their apartment. They contacted Karl Becker who was relieved to hear his old friend was unharmed.

"I'll drive by your place after dark and take you out to Father Katz's monastery. Have your bags packed and be ready to go after five o'clock. I'll come by as soon as I think it's safe. Don't worry about anything else. I'll take care of it."

For Lilianne and Leon Weiss, living in Bamberg, the storm of violence fortunately passed them over. They moved to the new town under new assumed names; the Fischers, and were living as Catholics.

The members of the family that left Germany before Kristallnacht learned of the events as they trickled out in the news. The press headlines were calling it '*a pogrom hardly surpassed in fury since the Dark Ages*'.

Despite numerous telephone calls home, none of the family outside of Germany was able to find out what became of their loved ones. All the telephone lines were cut off.

When Moshe heard of the riots, he had a terrible feeling that something had gone wrong with his twin brother Samuel. They always had a close bond and he felt as if something had been severed. He was the first to learn, weeks later from Fritz to whom he sold his shoe stores, of the fate of his brother and sister-in-law. When he broke the news to his mother, she was so heartbroken she fell ill and was bedridden for weeks.

In Paris, Jacob Grynspan, who had hoped to make a clear gesture of protest, burst into hysterical sobs as he sat in a French jail. To his horror, he realized that tens of thousands of the very people he had wanted to help had actually suffered and died as a direct result of his deeds. Jacob admitted to everything in his interrogation after his arrest and a show trial with impact the world over was revving up.

As the months dragged on, the date for Jacob's trial remained undetermined. The French government was the least interested in pursuing this politically sensitive case. Georges Bonnet was afraid that if Jacob was found innocent, it would antagonize Hitler and, likewise if he was found guilty but only given a nominal sentence. Either way, Bonnet was leery of Hitler's retributions against France which would undo all the good work he had done to reconcile his nation with Germany. If Jacob did receive a death sentence or other severe punishment, the opinion of the West would be affronted.

Clearly, there seemed no attractive option. Jacob remained lingering in custody.

In the terror that spread through Germany in the aftermath of vom Rath's death, 7,500 stores, 30 warehouses, 171 houses and 191 synagogues were burned and 76 were demolished. Thirty thousand Jewish men were sent to Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps. An estimate of 236 were killed; among them 13 children and more than 600 were permanently maimed.

## Chapter 10 The Escape

It was early morning as Shimon strode briskly toward the *Café Tout va Bien*. He stopped at the newspaper stand, gave the boy some change and folded the paper under his arm as he continued on down the street. He turned his collar up against the cold and damp Paris air.

The café was a local meeting place where refugee Jews from Germany and Austria gathered to debate politics and exchange the latest immigration information. It was also a hive of bustling activity and Shimon enjoyed its lively atmosphere. Paris had been a lonely place for him since his arrival. His thoughts were still hundreds of miles away in Germany with Anna and the others who had still to make their escape.

For the past two months, the main topic of conversation had been the Munich Agreement. Tempers were running high. *Munich* had become an emotive word that no one could speak about dispassionately. Everyone in Europe was trying to guess Hitler's next move.

As Shimon rounded the corner he saw a group of men standing outside the café, talking and gesturing at each other in a heated fashion. As he walked past them in to the warmth of the inside, he saw the café was packed.

Shimon glanced at his watch. Eight o'clock. Why was it so busy at this hour?

"What's going on?" he asked a man, amidst the din and the uproar.

"Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"There've been terrible riots against Jews in Germany. They've smashed homes and businesses everywhere. They've burned over 200 synagogues!"

Shimon took the newspaper out from under his arm and read the front page. All over Germany on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November, Jews had been the targets of vandalism and violence. Nearly thirty thousand people had been arrested, damages ran into millions and there were scores of recorded deaths with the number still rising. Shimon turned on his heel and ran down the street towards the post office to telephone his family. A painful knot formed in his stomach, causing him to hunch over as he raced along the pavement. He had a dreadful premonition that something terrible had happened at home.

Still out of breathe and with his heart pounding, he gave his parents' telephone number to the operator. She dialed it, giving him an odd look as she saw the beads of sweat from little rivulets and pour down his forehead.

"I'm sorry sir, but the line's dead."

He fumbled through his wallet with trembling hands. "Here, try this." He handed her the Weiss' number.

She dialed again as he paced round and round the office in his agitation.

"I'm afraid it's the same."

Then he tried the Cohens. Still no answer.

Shimon left the post office wandered the streets anxiously, unsure of what to do next.

Eventually he made his way to the banks of the Seine, hoping to find Pascal. As he'd expected, the tramp was in his usual spot sitting on a bench, a bottle of wine in one hand.

"I really can't believe everything that's going on these days. First Jacob, now *this*. What a mess! Have you heard from your family?"

"I tried to call. All the lines are down," sighed Shimon heavily.

Pascal nodded sympathetically, "Let's hope all is well."

"Any news of Jacob?" asked Shimon.

"No. But I don't suppose he'll ever see the light of day again. He left you a letter. He gave it to me the last time I saw him. I've been meaning to give it to you for ages, but I haven't seen you around for a while." Pascal reached into his pocket.

"I had a funny feeling about him you know. I knew something wasn't quite right," said Shimon sorrowfully. "It was after he got the letter from his cousin. I didn't think much about it at the time; we all get so much bad news these days. But I should have noticed. I should have *done* something..."

He unfolded Jacob's letter and started to read it.

*November 6, 1938*

*Dear Shimon,*

*I have taken the decision to do this because I feel I have no other choice. I am not a fighter by nature but even a mouse fights when it's cornered.*

*We Jews are chased and hunted everywhere, like animals. Wherever we go it's the same, but a way has to be found to stop this persecution. I can't get Hitler, but I can get to vom Rath. By striking back at him, I will set a strong example which I hope others might follow.*

*I don't expect to survive this. I am entirely prepared for the consequences of my actions. My wish is to show the world that we are not going to go like lambs to the slaughter anymore. We are going to fight back like angry lions!*

*I leave my saxophone to you. It's all I have left and I would like it to end up in a friend's hands. You'll find it at the George V with the concierge.*

*Farwell,  
Jacob*

Shimon folded up the note and buried his head in his hands. What could Jacob have been thinking?

"I wonder what he's thinking now. If he still can think, about how it's turned out," said Pascal.

"All the riots and all those deaths for one lousy Nazi."

"But it's not only about vom Rath is it? Pascal said. "That was just an excuse for the Nazi to do what they've wanted to do for a long, long time. If it hadn't been vom Rath they'd have cooked up something else sooner or later."

That night Shimon got no sleep at all. He tossed and turned in his bed wondering what had happened to his parents and his friends and above all, he was desperate to hear news of his beloved Anna.

The church clock struck eleven o'clock as Anna and Klaus drove towards the small but ancient town of Ettlingen in the northern tip of the Black Forest. They'd been traveling for two days now with false identification papers that Klaus had managed to get hold of.

The cobbled streets were unlit and deserted as they searched for somewhere to stay. Nearly every window was dark but finally after half an hour, they found a small inn at the outskirts of town with a dim yellow light above the doorway.

"Wait here and I'll go in and see if they've got a room."

Anna nodded and wrapped her coat and scarf more tightly around her. She felt at the pistol strapped to her thigh.

Klaus had protested when she'd told him she wanted to carry a gun. "Anna, you don't know how to use it and if you're not prepared to fire it, you're just going to end up getting yourself killed," he'd said. But she'd been totally adamant so, in the end, he'd given in and gave her some lessons on how to use it.

Anna strapped it to her thigh and had worn it ever since. She had not taken it off once, not even when she went to sleep. Especially when she went to sleep.

She was cold and tired now and she ached all over. Her bruises were turning black and blue over most of her body. She was desperate to find a room. She couldn't wait to have a warm bath and wash herself. All she had been able to think about for hours was washing; letting herself scrub away the memory of those filthy men touching her, violating her.

Klaus returned a few moments later with the good news that there was a vacant room and that they could get dinner. Anna breathed a huge sigh of relief as Klaus parked the car out of sight from the main road. He picked up her luggage and led Anna inside.

"Mr. Brenner, you and your wife are in room No. 3," said the innkeeper, watching Anna closely while he handed him the key. "My wife will have some food ready for you in half an hour."

"Thank you, that's very kind. We'll be down shortly," said Karl.

As Klaus followed Anna upstairs, the innkeeper kept his eyes on her. There was something strange about this couple he thought, especially the woman. She has obvious bruising to her face and she appeared to be limping slightly. He went to tell his wife to prepare a meal, then returned to his armchair at the front desk and resumed reading the city's newspaper.

As soon as Anna entered the small, cramped room and the door was shut behind them, she began to cry.

"It's ok, Anna. Everything will work out in the end," said Klaus softly. "But for the moment, until we're across the border, you must be strong."

Anna nodded, wiping the tears away from her face.

"Why don't you have your bath now? It'll help calm you," he suggested. "I'll have a wash and a shave later."

She shut the bathroom door behind her and secured it by propping a chair under the doorknob. She knew she had no reason to be afraid of Klaus. He'd rescue her from her degradation and saved her life but she still felt such deep fear inside that she couldn't stop herself. She ran a hot bath and poured in some Epsom salts from a jar that was on a small wooden shelf near the tub.

Anna's whole body was stiff and tender. All her muscles were still knotted in pain and apprehension but the hot water felt good. Washing herself clean felt good. Washing away those men...

Her recollections of her ordeal were broken and jumbled. Bits and pieces of it kept coming at random into her mind. There was no way she could stop it. It was a constant onslaught and it was exhausting. But then again she was so exhausted because she couldn't sleep. *He* wouldn't let her. Every time she closed her eyes she could see *his* face and smell *his* foul breath, acrid with the smell of cigarettes and liquor. It made her feel nauseous and the worst of it was she couldn't make it stop. It was like a sickening movie which went on and on and on. One she could never turn off.

Anna worked the soap savagely into a thick lather and ran more hot water through her hair.

What was she going to say to Shimon? How could she possibly tell him what happened? How could he ever bear to touch her again once he found out? Part of her longed to see him but the other part wanted to hide from him forever. Conflicting thoughts raced through her mind in endless confusion until she began to think she was going crazy. She wanted to blot it all out but the more she tried, the more those terrible images returned to haunt her.

The light from the bathroom lamp caught the diamond in her engagement ring and made it sparkle. Suddenly the memories of those brief, idyllic days in Rome flooded back. They seemed so remote now; things would never be the same again. Nothing would ever be the same again.

The dining room was clean but austere and was furnished with dark polished wood against a background of white plaster walls. Every small footstep or rustle of clothing seemed to echo and reverberate around the room.

The innkeeper's wife placed a steaming platter of dumplings, sauerkraut and sausages on the table then went out again to fetch some beer.

Klaus was totally famished and devoured his food in no time at all but Anna had no appetite. She pushed the dumplings around and round aimlessly on her plate with a fork as she tried to force herself to eat.

Again, Anna noticed the innkeeper eyeing them from the front desk over the top of his newspaper. She nudged Klaus.

"He keeps staring at us. I don't trust him. He's giving me the creeps," she whispered.

Klaus glanced over and saw the man talking furtively into the telephone, his hands cupped over the mouthpiece so as to muffle his voice.

"Come on, let's go upstairs. Something's not right," said Klaus getting up from the table.

As they approached the desk, the innkeeper put the receiver down quickly and fixed his gaze intently upon them in a defiant stare.

There on the desk next to the phone was the newspaper that the innkeeper had been reading earlier. It was open at a page bearing an article which had Klaus' photo on the top of the page. The words 'murderer' and 'traitor' written in large bold letters jumped out at him.



Klaus' eyes met those of the innkeeper and in an instant he knew that the man had betrayed him. He turned quickly and pushed Anna firmly towards the front door, pressing the car key into her hand.

"We have to get out of here *right now*. Go to the car and start the engine," he said in an urgent voice. "I'll go get our bags and be straight down."

Fear shot through Anna like an electric current. This was it! They've been caught. After all they've been through, to be caught like this, like cornered rats in this country inn, miles from anywhere. It's all over, she thought.

She hurried out of the front door and ran across the uneven cobbles to the car. Fighting against her mounting panic she fumbled with the keys in the dark. The first one didn't fit so she tried another. That didn't fit either. Her chest tightened and her breathing became shallow. In her fear and her panic the simple task of unlocking the car door seemed totally beyond her. Her hands trembled and her eyes blurred with tears. She could not face being taken by the SS again.

Her eyes searched the darkness for any sign of movement in the shadows. Nothing. 'Calm down', she told herself. There's nobody there! She tried again and finally the key went in all the way and turned inside the lock. Anna opened the door quickly and jumped inside, slamming it tightly shut behind her. Shivering violently, she fought to draw air down into her lungs as she choked and gasped. She felt a growing sense of nausea. Pulling all her strength together, she started the engine.

Where was Klaus? Each moment felt like an eternity. She felt her thigh for the pistol. It was still there.

'Where *is* he?' She began to pound on the dashboard over and over again with her fists.

Finally Klaus appeared. He tossed the bags into the back seat, threw the car into gear and sped off into the blackness of the road ahead.

"My face is in the papers. They're on our trail now." His voice was firm, masking his own fear. "We have to cross the border as soon as we possibly can."

Anna reached into the back of her coat and threw it over herself. In her silence, her rage was building, the image of Schellenberger still clear in her mind. God *damn* him. *He* was the cause of all this. Her mind wandered back again to that night, as, for the hundredth time, she replayed those terrible events. She was consumed with anger at herself for not having tried to fight back!

She clenched her fists. What a fool she'd been! All her life she had been so passive and ladylike and what good had it done her? She pledged to herself that never again would she be so weak. From now on she would rather die fighting than submit to anyone!

For hours, Klaus drove south in the darkness. From Ettlingen he headed towards the border town of Strasbourg. They had to stop once at the side of the road to refill the gas tank from the can in the trunk, but after that they carried on driving nonstop.

It was past three in the morning and Klaus was struggling to stay awake. The road through the Black Forest was winding and treacherous. He opened the window to let the cold air in and help him stay awake.

Suddenly Klaus noticed two distant headlights in his rear view mirror and it wasn't long before he realized that the car behind him was traveling at high speed. His pulse quickened as suddenly he was totally awake, the adrenalin pumping through his veins as he too stepped on the gas.

Anna noticed his constant checking of the mirror.

"What is it, Klaus?"

"It's them. They're onto us."

"Are you sure?"

"Who else would be speeding down the road at this hour of the night?"

Klaus gripped the steering wheel and clenched his teeth. The tires screeched as he threw the car around the hairpin turns.

"Do you think we can make it to the border before they catch us?" asked Anna nervously.

Klaus made a supreme effort to clear his head and concentrate. He reckoned they were about thirty miles from France and he wasn't sure that he could get there with enough time to clear the border check, even assuming it all went smoothly. Then the obvious struck him that the border guards would already have been notified and they'd be caught anyway. There was only one thing they could do.

"Hang on, Anna. We're going to have to lose them. I'm pulling off the road!"

The car rumbled over the gravel by the side of the road then plunged into the forest. They were now on a rough track and the terrain was treacherous.

"What are you doing?!" shrieked Anna holding onto the door handle as the car bumped and shook along.

"We'll have to get over the border on foot," he explained. "But for now we've got to get *them* off our trail."

For a while the main road remained dark and quiet, and then the low purr of a car engine announced the arrival of the SS patrol. A black Mercedes drew up and began to slow down. Two black uniformed SS men were leaning out of the car windows searching for a trace of the taillights that had suddenly disappeared.

"Look over there!" said one. They saw the skid marked of the tires and deep grooves in the gravel leading off the forest.

"You don't think?" said the other incredulously. "That track leads to a dead end at the river!"

The black Mercedes pulled off down the gravel road in pursuit as the officer in the passenger seat stubbed out his cigarette so he could hang on.

"God, Klaus, we're going to have a flat tire, slow down!"

"It's us or them!" yelled Klaus. "I can't slow down!"

They were passing a sign that said 'River Ahead - Dead End' when they saw the headlights behind them once again.

"Oh God, Klaus! What do we do now?"

Before he could answer, the sound of half a dozen gunshots erupted in the darkness. Bullets ripped their way through the car and one of them hit Klaus' shoulder. Their car veered to the left and slammed into a tree, hurling Klaus with great force onto the steering wheel. He slumped forward, unconscious.

The Mercedes approached slowly then came to a stop several yards away its bright lights glaring like a demon's eyes in the darkness. Two tall and powerfully built men stepped out, pistols in hand. They separated and began to peer into the woods cautiously. Everywhere outside the beam of the headlights was pitch black. One of the men moved towards Karl's Opel, the gravel beneath his feet crunching under each measured footstep.

*“Mach Keine Dummheit! Don’t do anything stupid!”* his colleague shouted in warning. “He’s dangerous. I don’t want to lose *my* hide too.”

Anna’s heart was hammering in her chest as she watched the two guards walk inexorably towards the car. In desperation, she threw open the door, jumped out and made a dash for the bushes.

“What was that?” asked one of the guards, alerted by the noise.

“Never mind. First things first. Let’s check the car.”

Klaus was still slumped over the steering wheel when the two SS men reached the car with their flashlights. Anna stayed nearby, hidden by the trees, trying to see what was going on without being spotted herself.

“Where’s the woman?” asked one of the guards. The other didn’t answer but carried on his search of the car interior with his flashlight.

Anna came close enough to smell the smoke of their cigarettes wafting through the air. There *he* was again, in front of her face, *his* hands prying...the smell of Schellenberger; his liquor and cigarettes. She could see his face so clearly now. Her blood ran in cold anger.

“Where’s the woman? The guy said he was with a woman,” she heard the guard repeat.

“Never mind that, let’s make sure this one’s finished off first and then we’ll look for her.” The first guard raised his pistol, pointed it onto the car and took aim.

Shots tore through the black night and echoed amongst the trees before silence fell once more.

Anna let out a long, deep breath and let the arm with the gun fall limply to her side. With legs that felt like rubber, she moved forward cautiously into the beam of the car headlights, stepping over the bodies of the SS men as they lay on the ground. Suddenly, one of them stirred and began to moan feebly, like a child. Lifting up her pistol once more, she took careful aim and shot him clinically through the forehead. A rustle followed by a groaning sound came inside from the car. The shots had roused Klaus back to consciousness.

“Come on, we have to get out of here!” Anna said, pulling him out of the car. Klaus got out of the car gingerly but could barely stand. He was in pain and disoriented. Anna grabbed their two bags, threw them over one shoulder and managed with some effort to raise Klaus to his feet. She wrapped his good arm around her other shoulder and together they managed to stagger to the edge of the river.

The cold water snapped Klaus out of his dazed state. His eyes began to grow alert once more.

“Hold still while I sort out your shoulder,” said Anna. She cleaned his wound as best she could and made a sling out of his shirts. “The less you move your arm, the less your shoulder will hurt. It’s not too bad; you’ll be fine if you’re careful.”

When she was done, they sat on the river bank contemplating their next move. Anna took out the map and squinted at it in the darkness.

“I can’t see a thing. It’s too dark,”

“We have to move this instant. Every minute is precious. Once those two guys are found all hell will let loose. Let’s think. We were going downhill before we turned off, heading west to the border. Water runs downhill so if we follow this stream it should take

us into France. With a bit of luck, they won't figure out those two are missing until morning and we'll be safe by the time they find them."

Anna gathered her things together and helped Klaus back to his feet again.

"Let's walk a short way in the water to throw them off the scent in case they come after us with dogs."

"But its winter!" cried Anna.

"Doesn't matter, just for a short way, then we'll put our shoes back on again."

They took off their shoes and waded in barefoot. The water was icy cold and the sharp stones in the river bed cut their feet as they splashed along in short, faltering steps. Anna counted ninety paces before the cold was too much for her to take any longer.

They climbed back onto the bank and put their shoes back on. With Anna still supporting Klaus' weight, they carried on downhill at a steady pace, following the path of the water. After plodding along for another two hours, they fell exhausted onto the ground and lay down to rest. Their feet were sore and bleeding.

By the time they woke up it was about nine o'clock in the morning but they still felt only partially rested. It was a beautifully sunny November day and the birds were singing in the woods all about them.

"Come on, let's go," urged Klaus. "We can rest properly once we've gotten to safety."

They walked for another hour or so and then came to a clearing. At the far side of the clearing there was an almost sheer drop of about a hundred feet. The steeply sloping sides were covered with dense bushes. From where they stood they could see the stream twisting through a meadow and under a bridge before disappearing into the vineyards beyond.

"I'm not sure exactly where we are," said Klaus, "but France can't be far away now."

A narrow path led steeply down through the thicket which they began to climb down, but they were not well equipped for terrain such as this and they ended up sliding and slithering down. Everything they were wearing now was covered in mud or blood or torn to shreds. At the foot of the cliff they took out clean clothes from their bags and changed into them.

"We don't want to draw attention to ourselves by looking like refugees," said Klaus.

The short, level walk across the meadow was a great relief to them after the hard going of the woods and the steep slope. As they crossed the bridge they came across a farmer who was leading a horse pulling a wagon full of turnips. He was whistling to himself, absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Just relax and smile, as if everything is perfectly normal," said Karl out of the side of his mouth.

The farmer tipped his hat as he passed, bade them a brief *Bonjour* and carried on across the bridge whistling *Aloutette*.

Anna and Klaus stopped dead in their tracks, and turned to look at each other. Then they hugged each other wildly around each other until they fell into the parapet on the bridge.

"Ouch, my shoulder," complained Klaus, but not very seriously.

The moment that Anna had been both longing for and dreaming was drawing near. The train from Strasbourg that she and Klaus had caught just a few hours ago was now pulling into the Paris station. In what seemed like no time at all, their taxi was pulling up in

front of Shimon's pension at 6 rue de Petit Ecuriese, a plain grey building set among dozens of other plain grey buildings.

Klaus went inside first and pressed the buzzer to Shimon's room.

"He might not be in, you know. It's mid-afternoon," said Klaus. But Anna knew he would be in, she had absolutely no doubt whatsoever. Klaus was on the point of pressing the buzzer a second time when suddenly they saw Shimon bounded down the stairs towards them.

"I knew it! I knew it would be you!" he shouted throwing his arms around Anna and kissing her in wild excitement. "Oh, thank God you're alright. I've been worried about you so much..."

He broke off in mid-sentence as he suddenly became aware of Anna's body stiffening and tensing in his embrace.

She took a pace backwards into the light of the hallway lamp and for the first time, Shimon saw the bruising on her face and hands and her torn clothes.

"My God darling! What on earth?"

Klaus helped Anna to the seat in the hallway where she sat down weakly. "There is much we have to tell you Shimon," he said gently.

"Klaus, my good friend. I'm so sorry; I've been totally ignoring you!" Shimon pumped Klaus' hand warmly. "But what's been going on? How come you're here and how on earth did you get those bruises, Anna?" He looked from Klaus to Anna and back to Klaus again. He could see that something was very wrong.

"It's all a very long story," said Klaus softly. "Anna will tell you everything, once she's settled."

"But what happened to your arm, Klaus?"

"It's part of the same long story." Klaus eased his coat down off his shoulder to inspect his injury. "I think I need to get this looked at."

"Yes. Yes of course. I'll arrange that for you, but let's not all stand here," Shimon reached for their bags, still bursting with excitement. "Come upstairs and rest. I'll sort everything out."

Anna and Klaus exchanged glances.

"What's the matter?" said Shimon. It was becoming more apparent by the minute that things were not at all right.

"I need to rest and the two of you need to be alone. I think I'll go and see if there's a free room here for me."

"Oh. Yes, of course." Shimon put down the bags again. "I'll talk to Madame. I know she's got plenty of empty apartments."

Shimon returned a few moments later.

"All done. I've got you a room right down the hall from me. Come on, let's go."

A little while later, Shimon and Anna finally sat down together on the couch in his room. She'd been strangely quiet since they'd left Klaus in his apartment and it was clear to Shimon that something awful had happened to her. He reached out his hand to touch hers but she pulled it back sharply and turned her head slightly away, her eyes cast downwards.

"What is it Anna?" Shimon said softly.

Anna opened her mouth as to speak, but then stopped and began to sob uncontrollably.

“Anna, darling. What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know where to start. It’s so awful,” she sobbed, burying her head in his shoulder.

“There, there, my love,” he stroked her hair tenderly. “Come on, take a deep breath and start from the beginning.” He lifted her head and dried her eyes gently with his handkerchief.

Anna looked into Shimon’s loving, anxious eyes and summoned up all her resolve. She began to tell him everything that happened to her since the night of November 9<sup>th</sup>. As she spoke, she could scarcely believe that she was talking about herself. The things which she was describing were so awful that it seemed like she must be talking about someone else altogether, not her, not Anna. Somehow, though, reliving it all this way, speaking it out loud at last two days and finally cleansing herself of them.

Shimon listened in dead silence throughout the whole of her account; his face transfixed in shock and disbelief. When she had finished, he buried his head in his hands and cried like a child for several minutes.

At last he lifted his face to look at her.

“Anna, Anna...,” he said, but that was all he could say. He felt so inadequate, so helpless and the thought of those men ravaging Anna was like a dagger digging and twisting inside him.

“Anna...” He held her in his arms as she started to cry again until, slowly, her sobs died away and she fell asleep in his lap in sheer exhaustion. Shimon’s mind was in turmoil. It was full of contradicting emotions. His own heart felt like it had been broken into a thousand pieces. But in spite of that, holding her like this and comforting her while she cried like a little girl seemed one of the warmest and tenderest moments he’d ever experienced. He felt an overwhelming need to be with her, to be close to her.

He cradled her head in his lap as she slept for what seemed like ages until, with a start; he suddenly remembered Klaus and his wounded shoulder.

Shimon gently lifted Anna’s legs up on the couch while she slept and rested her head on a pillow. He took a blanket from his bed and covered her with it. Leaving her for a moment to sleep, he went to fetch Dr. Mendel from his apartment block just down the street. He needed a doctor who would treat a gunshot wound without insisting on writing up a police report about it.

After cleaning and disinfecting the wound, the doctor put some stitches in and gave Klaus some painkillers to take.

“I’ll come back in three days to check on you, but if you start running a fever and don’t feel well, you must let me know straight away.”

“I will. Thank you, doctor,” said Klaus.

“We are one people. It is our duty to help each other,” said Mendel as he left the room.

Shimon saw the doctor out then came back to sit next to Klaus’ bedside. “I’ve talked to Anna,” he said in a shaking voice. “I don’t have words enough to thank you for what you did for her.”

Klaus shrugged. “She saved my life as well. I owe her a lot too.”

"You, er, wouldn't know anything about my parents, would you, Klaus? I've not been able to contact them or anyone else back home now for days. I just can't stop worrying about them."

"Sorry, Shimon. I can't help you. There wasn't any time to check."

"I understand."

He went back briefly to his own room to see how Anna was. She was still sleeping peacefully so he pulled the blanket over her a little more; then tiptoed out of the room again. He needed to be by himself now, just for a short time, while he tried to make some sense of what had happened. He left the apartment block and decided to go for a walk. His head was still seething with a dozen conflicting emotions. All he could see in his mind were images of brutal men ravaging Anna. *His* Anna. Rage fulminated and grew inside him until he didn't know how much longer he'd be able to take it. If Schellenberger were alive and in front of him now, he'd have killed him with his bare hands. The feeling was primitive. For the first time in his life, Shimon knew he was capable of killing.

Through Anna's violation, he felt violated himself. Robbed. They had not yet made love and now Schellenberger had had her first. He'd wanted her first time to be something loving and special, to be spent with him in a moment of shared beauty and bliss. But now this had been stolen from him along with their dreams, their innocence, and their very lives together. He kicked savagely at the low wall which ran along the side of the pavement.

He was glad he was alone. If Anna could see him like this she'd be terrified by his rage.

He walked on and on until finally he reached the Seine. He was climbing down the stairs onto the bank with his hands in his pockets when he heard a familiar voice calling to him.

"Over here!" It was Pascal; sitting bundled up in a blanket on a bench and holding a steaming cup of coffee.

"Clearing your head?" asked Pascal

"Aahh!" Shimon growled and shook a fist.

"What's the matter, my friend?"

"Everything. Everything's the matter! *Damn* Jacob! What a bloody stupid thing to do. To shoot a Nazi! It's because of *him* that all of this has happened."

"You mean the reprisals in Germany?"

"Huh?" Shimon grunted.

"Don't be too hard on Jacob. He did what he felt was the right thing for him to do. He had the *courage* to see it through. He wanted to fight back, no matter what the price might be."

There was a long silence before Shimon managed to summon up a reply. "I know. You're right really. Deep down, I suppose I admire him. He was a nobody, wasn't he, but look what he did. There are plenty of powerful men around Hitler who hold no truck with the Nazis..." he paused, "but none of them had Jacob's guts."

"Then what is it, my friend?"

"I'm just angry I wasn't there."

"How do you mean?"

"I could have protected them. I could have helped them or at least *been* with them. Instead, I was here, cooling my heels in Paris!

"Them? Who are you talking about Shimon?"

"My parents. Anna. The Weisses, Everyone! All my damned, high minded newspaper article. What good did they ever do, for me or anyone?"

The tramp looked searchingly into Shimon's eyes. "You know, I think you're a lot like Jacob yourself. You want to change things but too where you use a pen, he used a gun. You've both taken risks for what you felt was right and you've both paid the price. You know, there isn't much difference between the two of you at all."

Shimon picked up some stone and threw it angrily into the river. It thudded into the water with a loud splash throwing up a thousand droplets of water which, for a brief moment hung suspended in the air in the glow of the street lights.

"But why are you so upset about all this just now when...?"

Pascal stopped in mid-sentence as realization suddenly dawned. He looked intently at his friend. "You've heard from your family!"

"No. Well, not really. But Anna arrived in Paris today and..." Shimon related the events of her parents' murder and her escape with Klaus.

"They're both very brave," said Pascal quietly, but his keen lawyer's mind had sensed that Shimon was not quite telling him the whole story.

"What about Anna? Is she ok?" he asked, as tactfully as he could. But all he received in reply was a non-committal grunt.

"Look, I'm very sorry to hear all of this, but listen to me Shimon. Anna will need a lot of love, patience and understanding to get through this. The pain is fresh now, but time heals. Look at what happened to me, but I got it over it. Trust me, it will get better. Give it time."

"Well, they're fine words Pascal, but our lives have been shattered into a million pieces. I just don't see how we'll ever be able to put them back together again."

"You must. You will, and when you do, you will build something new, something stronger."

Shimon returned to his room in the pension carrying a large bouquet of flowers. He turned the key in the lock but the door refused to open. He put his ear to it and knocked lightly.

He could hear the sound of furniture being moved and then the door opened an inch or two.

"Is that you Shimon?" came Anna's voice from inside.

"Yes, of course. What are you doing, darling?"

"I'm sorry. I woke up and when I saw you weren't there, I barricaded the door with the dresser. Just a minute."

There was more sound of furniture moving and then the door opened fully wide.

He went inside and held out the flowers with a smile. "Just to tell you how much I love you and how happy I am that you're here."

Anna smiled. She looked tired with black circles under her eyes and bruises on her neck and arms were dark and ugly. He put the flowers down on top of the dresser and held her tightly in his arms. He'd decided something while he'd been out. Pascal had given himself good advice. He'd resolved that they must try to put what had happened behind them and start anew. They must not allow evil to triumph.



Things weren't the same any more, their lives have changed forever, but what mattered now was survival.

"Anna, I've been doing a lot of thinking. My feelings for you haven't changed at all. I'm still desperately in love with you. I need you, darling. Let's get married next week."

The taxicab drew to a halt and Aaron got out. He paid the driver and walked along the tree-lined street of prosperous looking new homes. He's agreed to take the extra precaution of traveling by cab rather than us his own car, but rather more for Karl Becker's sake than for his own.

The butler ushered him into a comfortable sitting room.

"Mr. Becker, I'm Aaron Cohen," He extended his hand. "Thank you for seeing me at such short notice, especially as you don't know me from Adam." He gripped the brim of his hat nervously as he tried to gauge the nature of his host's response.

"Not at all, Mr. Cohen. Please come in and sit down. Let's talk about what I can do for you."

Much of Aaron's initial tension eased. They sat across from each other in large armchairs on either side of a carved oak table on which there stood a radio shaped like gothic church window. There was the sound of the BBC broadcasting coming over the airwaves. Karl leaned over and switched it off with a flick of the knob.

"Has your family been affected by the riots?" he asked.

"Not directly. My parents got a tip off about what was going to happen and we all managed to get out of the house and go to the friend's house. They're still there with Vera. They're too afraid to go back home. We all are. We're all so frightened that they're going to come back."

"You're right to think so. Keep your guard up, Aaron you're engaged to one of the Weiss girls aren't you?"

"Yes, that's right – Vera. She was with us that night. She went with us to our friend's place. When I went to take her home the next day we saw they'd completely burned her house down. She's devastated. But we still don't have any idea what happened to her parents or her sister. If they escaped or were arrested, or..."

There was an awkward silence for a moment before Karl spoke again.

"You mean you don't know yet?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"Know what?"

"I'm afraid I have very bad news for you. Samuel and Esther were both killed before the house was set on fire."

"No!" Aaron cried out and struck the board arm of the chair with his fist before slumping back again. He couldn't believe what he'd just heard. He'd had dinner with them just other night.

Karl called his housekeeper to bring them some coffee.

"Samuel was a fine man," said Karl in a low voice, "and a good friend to us all. That is a terrible thing that's happened."

"But you haven't mentioned Anna. What about Anna?"

"We don't know for sure. We think she might have gotten away but up to now, we've no firm news of her."

Aaron felt relief that at least there might still be some hope for her at least.

"All this only reinforces why I've come to you, Mr. Becker. I've come to ask your help in getting me and my family out of Germany. We all have to leave the country as soon as possible."

"Where do you want to go?"

"We've already decided. Cairo. I've got an uncle there and we can stay with him till we get on our feet. What we need are the necessary transit and immigration visas."

Karl scribbled a few notes on a piece of paper while Aaron spoke.

"We were planning to go to Paris together with the Weisses. We were going to meet up with a friend of mine who's there already. You see, Shimon, my friend is engaged to Anna."

"Yes, I know them both. Were Shimon and Anna going to Cairo as well?"

"No. They want to go to Palestine. He's a committed Zionist."

"Ok. Well this is what I suggest you do. I have a friend in Warmsried, a priest called Father Rampp. He has a small monastery where you'll be safe. Take Vera and your parents there and wait until I can arrange all the necessary papers. In the meantime, let's all keep our fingers crossed and hope that Anna is safe."

"Oh God! Nooo!" Vera screamed hysterically. She began to pound her fists on Aaron's chest. "What am I going to do?"

"Look at me. You have me, Vera." He gripped her wrists tightly. "Darling, I'm here for you. I'll always be here for you."

"But everything's gone. Mama. Papa. The house. Everything! And what about Anna? Where is she?"

"Well, let's hope she got away. We still don't know anything for certain."

She pushed him away. "How are we going to live, Aaron? It's all gone!"

"We'll be ok," said Aaron gently. "I'll work and..."

She shook her head and threw herself down onto the sofa, sobbing violently. Aaron stood uncertainly at the sofa's side, shifting nervously from foot to foot.

After a short while, Vera calmed herself and sat up again with a strange look in her eyes. "Aaron, your parents didn't take anything with them when they left the house, did they?"

"Uh, I don't know. Frankly, Vera, it wasn't the most important thing on my mind at that time. Nor anybody else's for that matter."

"Well, it is now! You have to go and double check. It won't be long before the thugs will be back to take everything they own like they took everything we had."

"You're upset now Vera, I understand. But I've been to see someone who will help us get out of here. Everything will be fine, honestly."

"This can't wait, Aaron!" She shrieked. "Damn it, you have to find out if they took the money! If they didn't, you have to go and get it yourself!"

At Vera's insistence, Aaron went upstairs to talk to his mother and father. It turned out that, in their haste, they had not been able to take anything from the house at all. While he was talking to them, Karl telephoned with the news that the SS had appropriated their house and that a high ranking SS official would soon take it over as his official residence.

"None of you, under any circumstances, are to return to your house. It's far too dangerous!" he warned.

Once Vera heard that the Cohen home was going to be lost along with all its valuables, she went berserk.

"Why did you wait this long, you coward!" she screamed. "How do you expect us to go to Egypt without a penny? They won't even let us into the country once they find out we're paupers and even if they did, how do you suppose we're going to live? We have to go to your house now and get what we can before it's too late." She strode briefly out of the room to get her coat. Aaron was the first taken aback with this show of determination but in the end he realized that she had a point. It *would* make all the difference in the world. Aaron capitulated.

"Alright, but let's wait until after dark."

Later that night Aaron and Vera drove in shocked silence past he smashed and looted shops near his home. Broken glass and belongings were strewn all over the streets where Jews had once lived and conducted their businesses. The acrid smell of smoke from the still smoldering fires filled the air and seeped into the inside of the car. Once they'd reach the Cohen house, Aaron took the car around the back door, making their way carefully towards the cellar in the darkness. When they were safely down in the dark and musty cellar, Aaron turned on his flashlight.

"Follow me." He led the way to a far corner where he pushed aside a large trunk from the wall, exposing a wooden trap door in the floor. He opened it to reveal a concealed metal safe and quickly spun the combination.

"It doesn't look as though they've touched the place," said Vera, holding the flashlight while Aaron worked.

"No, I don't think they have."

"It's a good thing we came when we did then, isn't it?"

In a few seconds, Aaron was straining to lift the heavy steel door. Inside were piles of documents and bundles of cash.

"Vera, there are some suitcases under the stairs. Grab one and help me fill it up. Quickly now!"

As Vera rummaged in the darkness under the stairs, Aaron quickly leafed through the documents from the safe, the deeds to the house, to the factory, important receipts.

Vera came back with a large suitcase. "Hurry!" she whispered.

They filled it up as fast as they could then Aaron closed the safe and the trap door and pushed the trunk back in place.

"Is there anything else, Aaron, while we're here? Your mother's jewelry? Paintings?"

"No, we need to get going!" he said as he struggled up the stairs with the heavy suitcase.

"But the paintings are worth a fortune! Let's just take a few of them."

Vera stood on a chair and began to take as many canvasses out of their frames as she could, her hands working nervously. "Aaron, don't just stand there, help me do this or go and get your mother's jewelry at least!"

Aaron returned a few minutes carrying a velvet pouch. "Let's go!" his voice was edgy.

"No, I want to get all of these too," she pointed to the paintings on the wall of the dining room.

"Vera, if we're caught, we're done for. Forget the rest and let's just go!"

"It's not like we're stealing anything that isn't ours," she retorted.

“Try explaining that to the SS if we’re caught. You don’t get it, do you Vera!”

“No, Aaron, *you* don’t get it. This is our future you want me to leave behind in this house for the Nazi swine to get their grubby paws on. Well there’s no way I’m going to leave it for them. Don’t just stand there, help me!”

Aaron helped her pull the canvasses from their frames, growing more and more agitated as he did so. Finally he grabbed her arm. “We’re going *now!*” he said hoarsely.

Vera finally gave in. They left the dark house the same way they had come in, through the back door, like two thieves in the night.

Although the violence following vom Rath’s death had spread throughout Germany, it had not occurred with equal ferocity everywhere. The reprisals had been particularly patchy in the smaller country towns and villages as few villagers were devoted party members. Besides this, country people generally had little time for such ideological niceties. All their energies usually had to be channeled into the more mundane needs of providing the means of their survival. Thus many rural areas remained relatively untouched by the political fervor that was sweeping through the major cities.

The village of Warmsried, nestling as it did in the Swabain hills, had a self-reliant community that did not accept outside interference very well. Two prominent figures in Warmsried were largely responsible for this; Father Andreas Rampp and its Mayor, Johann Huber, a devout Catholic and local landowner. So powerful was the influence of these two men that from the earliest days of National Socialist rule in Germany, no party meetings were ever held there. No Nazi women’s organizations existed, no charity functions for the party were ever allowed and no swastikas had ever been displayed. Organizing any kind of activity without the support of Father Rampp or Mayor Huber was not even worth contemplating.

It was the evening of the next day when Vera and Aaron arrived in Warmsried. He drew the car up to the monastery gates, come to a halt and got out. A large mongrel dog began to announce their arrival with an eruption of barking as a thin set man in long black robes emerged from a small door in the gates to see what the commotion was about. The dog quieted down and began to wag its long, bushy tail as it trotted at its master’s side towards their visitors.

“Father Rampp?” said Aaron.

“Yes.”

“I’m Aaron Cohen,” he held out the note from Karl.

“Goodness gracious, yes. I’ve been expecting you,” said Father Rampp disregarding the note. “Come in, please. Your parents are already here.” The priest reached for the keys that dangled from the chain about his waist and bent down to unlock the gate so he could drive in.

Once inside, the priest turned to lock the gates again behind them.

Aaron introduced Vera.

“How was our trip? Did you have any problems along the way?”

“No. It was fine, thank you. Just a long, long drive,” replied Aaron. He opened the car boot and unloaded three large suitcases onto the ground.

“Well, I’m sure you’re hungry. I have a stew on the stove, but first you must let me show you to your rooms. Your parents will be so pleased to see you, Aaron. Here, give me

your luggage.” The priest bent down to pick up one of the bulky suitcases. “My goodness, that’s heavy. What on earth do you have inside here?”

“All our worldly goods, Father,” replied Aaron smiling weakly. “All that we have left; that is.”

“Goodness me, but never mind. We’ll take good care of you. Come on, let’s eat!”

## Chapter 11 The Orient Express

Like a great iron dragon, the locomotive hissed and spewed out steam as its fires were stoked and fed. It was 10:15PM and the train was scheduled to leave at 10:29. The engine's whistle blew urgently and the sound reverberated backwards and forwards along the platform.

"Where *are* they?" Aaron paced impatiently down inside the barrier.

His mother Hedy glanced at the enormous station clock. "They're two hours late!" she exclaimed to her husband Abraham.

"Wait. I'll speak to the conductor," said Shimon. He turned and walked quickly away.

Anna and Vera stood huddled together, their collars turned up against the January wind. But Anna didn't mind the cold. She loved traveling by train and the smell of the coal, the oil and the steam brought back happy memories and filled her with a sense of impending adventure.

Next to them stood the magnificent Orient Express, its brass crest with the twin lions of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits gleaming in the yellow platform lights. Inside the trains, the table lamps with their blue lampshades were already lit and threw out a tantalizing promise of the comfort waiting for them inside.

The Gare de Lyons was a hive of activity. At the far end of the platform, porters were loading food into the restaurant car where the *chef de cuisine* stood in his white hat inspecting the provisions, tasting this and sniffing that.

Meanwhile, passengers were boarding. There was a Turkish businessman with his hair pomaded back in a sleek shine. Just behind him was a French actress in a flamboyant feathered hat, carrying a coiffed Bichon Frisé under her right arm and followed by three porters carrying a small lap dog and a vast array of luggage. Then there were several pale Englishmen in tweed and an Italian politician with a red carnation in his lapel and patent leather shoes on his feet. An elderly Belgian couple was next, and behind them a Romanian Count dressed in an impeccable Saville Row suit.

The adjacent platforms were also swarming with travelers bound for different destinations along the main arterial routes of the European continent. The aging and dusty trains on nearby platforms contrasted dramatically with the sparkling exterior of the Simplon Orient Express.

An announcement was made on the station loudspeaker. "There's been a delay in the connection from London due to rough seas," he said. "The ferry had to wait till the weather improved before it could sail. The conductor says that if they don't get here in time, we won't be able to wait." An icy gust of wind blew down the platform.

"Why don't you all get settled in," said Shimon. "Aaron and I will watch for them for as long as we can."

Anna and Vera boarded the train gladly, as neither of them had bought any warm clothes on their brief shopping expedition in Paris. There had seemed little point in buying thick woolens when they were off to the Middle East. The porters picked up the luggage and followed the sisters aboard to their compartments.

"*Les Mademoiselles sont ici,*" he announced, "*Et Madame et Monsieur sont lat.*" He led Hedy and Abraham down the corridor.

“Look how beautiful it is, Anna,” said Vera, admiring the pale blue upholstery and polished marquetry on the compartment’s walls. Anna opened her small black suitcase so she could hang up a few items of clothing and the long lace wedding dress that she’d bought in Paris. She tucked them away carefully in the small closet and took off her hat. She looked at her watch again, still very anxious that her Uncle Leo and Aunt Ruth were not going to make the train.

“Why are you so worried, Anna? If they don’t catch this train, they can always get the next one,” said Vera.

“Vera, we’re a family. We’re all going to start a new life in Palestine together,” Anna tried to keep the exasperation from her voice. “Besides, he’s the one who’s supposed to be marrying us, remember?”

“Yes.” Vera did remember, even though she was trying not to.

The train’s whistle blew urgently again and the conductor shouted down the platform.

*“En voiture, toute le monde!”*

Anna noticed Aaron in the middle of a heated discussion with the conductor just below their window. He was pointing to his watch and the conductor was shaking his head. Suddenly in the distance, she could see a porter pushing through the crowd followed by Leo and Ruth, desperately trying to keep up with him.

“They’re here!” Anna shrieked, running out of her compartment and climbing down to the platform.

“Wait! You must wait just one moment. Look, they’re here!” she begged the conductor in French.

Puffing and panting, Rabbi Weiss and his wife made it on board just as the signal turned from red to green. The conductor gave a final shout, closed the doors and the locomotive began to emit great clouds of swirling steam. Then with a convulsive jerk, the train moved slowly forward and out of the station.

After the hugs and kisses had been exchanged, the women settled in their compartments while the men went forward into the club car to talk while the attendant made up their beds for the night.

“Ruth and I were certain that we’d miss the train,” said Leo. “The ferry didn’t want to set sail at all and when she finally did, the trip was so slow that I felt we must be crossing the Atlantic.” He took a sip of his brandy. “By the way, where’s Father Rampp?”

“He went back to Warmsried.”

“Ah,” the Rabbi nodded and picked up his glass.

“And now, you must fill us in on what happened in London,” said Abraham. “What on earth made you resign your post after all these years?”

“Hmm. Lots of different things happened all at once, or should I say, became clear to me at once. That’s why I resigned. The most upsetting thing was the row I had with the British Colonial Secretary.”

“But surely, you didn’t resign over a mere difference of opinion?” said Shimon.

Weiss took a moment before replying, and then looked his young friend straight in the eye. “Do you know why the sun never sets on the British Empire?” he asked.

“No. Why?” said Shimon, puzzled by the Rabbi’s question.

“Because God doesn’t trust an Englishman in the dark.”

There was a moment's silence as the Rabbi's friends tried to tell from his face whether this was meant to be a joke. It was soon clear that it was not.

"For all these years, we've been working together with the British to operate the Mandate. Now, suddenly, Britain has done a complete U-turn. If you were being charitable, you might just say that I would still be able to carry on my work. But what I can't get over, and the reason why I resigned is..." He hesitated for a moment. "Well, it's a little more personal than that."

He got up from the table and turned away to look out of the window.

"I thought that the Colonial Secretary was my friend. But I learned, quite by chance one day, that I'd been foolishly deluding myself. He was actually conspiring against me behind my back. That's when for the first time, I began to piece it all together. I tell you, the British never had the slightest intention of giving Palestine back to the Jews. This crisis in Europe has merely brought it all out into the open sooner than would have happened otherwise. So, I'm not going to waste any more of my time in London. I'm going to Palestine instead where I can be of some use to my people.

"Having no doubt about it, Britain is failing us in our hour of need just like they did the Czechs. They've let us both be sacrificed at the altar of political expediency. So much for their much trumpeted democratic principles and moral superiority!"

There was a shocked silence as his words sank in. Shimon was the first to speak. "So, what exactly are you going to do in Palestine?" he asked.

"Well, there's a lot of life left in me yet and I don't plan to just wither away. I still appear to have a voice that people will listen to. I've spoken to my friends in the Jewish Agency in Palestine and they were delighted to hear I was coming to help them. They've invited me to head up the Immigration Department and that will suit me down to the ground. Up till now, I've done a lot of talking and it's led nowhere. Now it's time for some action."

"Action? What kind of action?" asked Aaron.

"There are three very clear aims which we must pursue," replied Weiss. "Firstly, we must procure proper arms for our growing Haganah militia so that we can fight and defend ourselves. Secondly, we must encourage Jews to buy up as much land as possible in Palestine before the new legislation to forbid it comes in effect. Thirdly, we must bring in as much immigration from the endangered regions of Europe as we can. We must pursue these three objectives by every means available to us, whether they are fair means or foul. Everything is permissible now!"

"But the British have capped the immigration quotas," said Abraham.

"Yes. That does throw just a little spanner into the works, doesn't it?" said Rabbi Weiss with a disarming smile. "But there are ways, my friends. There are always ways."

"But enough of politics. Aaron, I really must congratulate you on your engagement to Vera. When do you plan to be married?"

"We've already spoken to the *Chef de Train* about the arrangements. It will be the last night on board. Vera and I and Shimon and Anna are going to be married together.

"Why, that's wonderful!" Rabbi Weiss beamed. "Come, we must certainly drink to what. Let's order another round of cognacs."

They were woken the following morning by the clanging of metal hammers. Vera pulled the blind halfway down and bright daylight poured into their compartment.



"We're in Lausanne," she said, reading the station sign.

The train stopped for a few minutes and then with a shrill burst of the whistle, jerked forward once again on its journey.

Anna and Vera entered the dining car and sat down for breakfast. Their table was laid out with starched white damask tablecloths and decorated with gilded china place settings and fresh flowers. There were just two other people in the car. The French actress sat in a fauteuil still draped in her silks and enjoying Crepes Suzettes which the chef was flambéing for them at the table. At the far end of the dining car sat the Turkish businessman, his head buried deep in his newspaper.

They ate their breakfast watching the spectacular scenery of the Alps pass by as the train made its way from Switzerland into Italy. By noon they were in Milan and the weather was noticeably milder.

The sisters had not yet spoken of their parent's death. Anna desperately wanted to share the horror of that night with Vera but somehow she didn't feel that the moment was ever right. Vera seemed entirely caught up in the headlong chase after whatever diversion she could find. She hadn't even asked about what had happened. Anna stared at her sister in quite puzzlement as she chatted away.

It wasn't until late afternoon when they were alone together in their compartment that Anna decided to finally broach the subject.

"Vera, there are some things I need to tell you about the night Mama and Papa died," Anna swallowed. Her mouth suddenly felt very dry.

Vera put down the magazine she'd been reading and sat motionless. Anna proceeded to tell her in detail the events of that terrible night and all of her own ordeal. Vera listened to her sister's horrific account in total silence. Her face remained tightly impassive throughout without a hint of any emotion. After Anna had finished speaking, there was a silence that seemed to last forever before Vera finally asked, "But you are alright now?"

"Yes. I have to be." Anna's voice was a whisper.

She rose from her seat and reached forward to take Vera's hand but before she could, there was a brisk rap on their door and they heard Shimon's cheerful voice from the corridor.

"We'll be in Venice in a few minutes," he shouted, before moving down the corridor to knock on Hedy and Abraham's door.

"They say Venice is beautiful," Vera said, turning her head away to look out of the window. "We're due to stop there for three hours aren't we?"

Anna leaned back against the pillow and closed her eyes. She ran the back of her hand across her forehead and felt it damp with sweat. Didn't Vera care at all about what happened? Didn't she want to know? Weren't there a hundred questions she wanted to ask? Anna turned her face away and stared dry-eyed at the reflection of her own face in the window.

"They say the same thing happened to our cousin Rachael," said Vera suddenly. "We just have to...to get over these things and carry on. Everything's changed anyway."

"Yes," Anna said quietly. "I know." She paused, and lowered her eyes. "It must have been horrible for her too."

A heavy silence descended between them once more as the train crossed over the bridge into Venice's Santa Lucia Station and drew to a halt.

"Shall we get going?" said Vera.

"You go ahead," Anna replied. "I just need to freshen up a bit." She picked up her brush and began to arrange her hair.

As soon as Vera had left the compartment, Anna threw herself into an armchair and began to cry. Instead of easing her pain, the attempt to share her ordeal with her sister had made it much worse.

Once Anna had pulled herself together, she emerged from her compartment to find Shimon waiting patiently for her outside.

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"Oh, they couldn't wait to go off exploring," he smiled. "Aaron and your sister have decided to hire a *vaporetto* to do their sightseeing from the water.

Anna and Shimon left the station and began to wander on foot through the maze of narrow crossed arched stone bridges, losing themselves in the intricate weave of the streets. Before long they had no sense at all of where they were. In a way, Anna didn't care. She felt her spirits lifting, walking long like this, hand in hand with Shimon, far away from the prying eyes of everyone else. They walked along the narrow stone streets near the Doge's Palace and stumbled upon a small church dedicated to Saint John and Saint Paul.

There were quite a number of people inside. Some were kneeling at the altar crossing themselves and others were praying silently in the long rows of wooden benches that filled the nave. Anna caught sight of an elderly widow by the long table of candles, her eyes darting anxiously about the church to see if anyone was watching her. A single coin clicked into the box but she began to light an entire row of candles as she whispered endearments to a long list of departed loved ones. The old woman carried on speaking over the candles for a very long time and it seemed to Anna that she was reciting a monologue. It was as if she were updating her nearest and dearest in the next world with the latest news from this one.

Anna smiled sympathetically as the woman eventually rose to her feet and with one last look behind her left the church. Anna went over to the table of candles, dropped three coins into the box and picked up three candles. She dedicated the first one to her mother and the second to her father. After a moment's hesitation, she lit the third.

"Who's this one for?" whispered Shimon.

"It's for me," said Anna, "for the part of me that died."

They left the church and went back into the narrow street outside. Shimon put his arm tightly around Anna's waist and she leaned her head on his shoulder for a moment before turning to smile back at him.

They returned to the train shortly before eight. That evening there was to be a gala dinner and all would be dressing in their most elegant finery. Vera tired her hardest to outshine the French actress but she had neither feathers nor a lapdog, so had to resign herself to second place. Still, she was in her element. She always enjoyed being in the lap of luxury.

The gargantuan meal consisted of ten courses and seemed to Anna to go on all night. As was to be expected, everything was of the highest possible quality, from the first course of turtle soup, through the massive main dishes, to the rich Anisette soufflé for dessert.

Before Rabbi Weiss retired, he called Aaron and Shimon to his compartment for the traditional *'Reading of the Law'*, the ritual before marriage which laid out the duties of the heart, of mutual respect, of chaste conduct and kindness. Once this had been completed, Abraham showered them with candy, a symbol of the sweetness of marriage. Then the two young men returned to their own compartment and got ready for bed.

"Well, this is our last night together. Tomorrow, we'll be sharing our beds with our pretty young wives," said Shimon with a mischievous grin. "Not that you're unattractive or anything, Aaron, but I have to say, Anna's got much nice legs."

They laughed for a moment but their laughter faded as Aaron's expression became suddenly quite serious.

"I'm very worried about Vera, Shimon. She hasn't seemed herself at all over the last few weeks. She's been in a terrible mood the whole time. I can't seem to get anywhere near her."

Shimon bit his tongue. He'd already sensed that his future sister-in-law didn't seem exactly ecstatic at the prospect of her impending marriage. "It's probably just all the upheaval," he said. "It's hardly surprising. We've all been through such a lot."

"I know. Vera won't discuss anything, though. She said we just have to be practical and survive. She says that's all we can do."

"Maybe she's right," Shimon answered softly. He switched off the light.

When Anna and Vera returned to their compartment after dinner, they found that the attendant had made their beds and turned down their sheets. Vera sat down in the armchair next to the window and opened the blinds to look out at the moonlit countryside. Outside in the darkness, nothing was visible except for the occasional flash of light from a small station or house by the side of the line. The transparent reflection of her own face stared dully back at her from the window glass. She suddenly caught a glimpse of Anna watching her intently.

"What's the matter, Vera?" asked Anna.

"It's nothing really," Vera replied, trying to deflect her sister's attention.

"Oh, come on, I know you better than that. What is it? Tell me Vera."

"Well," Vera shook her head. Her sister was so passionately in love with Shimon. How could Anna understand what she was feeling about Aaron?

"I...I was just thinking about Mum and Dad," she lied. "They won't be here to see us getting married tomorrow will they?"

Anna softened. So Vera did care after all. She just had a strange way of showing it. She knelt down next to her sister and took both her hands in hers, tears filling her eyes.

"They'll be watching, Vera, and they'll be happy for both of us."

Vera nodded but made no reply.

When the lights were out, her thought returned once again to Aaron. Was she doing the right thing in marrying him? She certainly didn't have stars in her eyes the way that Anna did. The spark was missing, the chemistry just wasn't there. What would happen if she called the whole thing off? Could she move to Palestine with her sister and Uncle Leo? No, that wouldn't do. Palestine seemed like the end of the earth to her. What could she possibly do there? Could she live in Cairo by herself? No, that was impossible too. Or what about resettling somewhere in Europe by herself? Out of the question.

She liked Aaron well enough and cared for him in her own way, but did it amount to love? He'd always been there for her, that was true and it was obvious he adored her. There

was no doubt at all that she'd have a good life with him – a beautiful house and anything she wanted. Her future would be secure.

Vera turned over and sighed deeply. She grabbed a corner of the sheet and clutched it tightly in her hand. What about the physical side of marriage? Could she really grow to love Aaron in the way he would want her to?

For the next three hours, Vera tossed and turned in her bed as she tried desperately to sort out her confusion. Finally, at around four o'clock, she sat bolt upright and took a sip of water from a glass on the shelf by her bedside. She had made up her mind. She would go ahead with the marriage, and simply accept everything that followed. *Be practical, she thought, and survive.*

The next day, the train came to a halt in the middle of nowhere, halfway between Zegreb and Belgrade. Passengers began to look out of the windows, curious about the reason for the delay.

Rabbi Weiss announced that they had stopped quite close to the River Danube. Little stone houses clung to hills in the distance, and the path of the river could be made out from the line of low wooded slopes that formed its banks.

"What's the matter? Why are we stopping?" asked the Romanian Count as the conductor passed through the car in a hurry.

"Oh, it's nothing, *Monsieur*. Just a problem with the switching mechanism at the points. There's no cause for alarm. Please return to your seats *mesdames et messieurs*."

Most people sat down again and continued to read or to chat. Ruth, Anna and Vera were engaged in a game of cards when all at once they heard the sound of music approaching.

"Look!" exclaimed Anna. "A band of gypsies!"

Everyone came back to the windows to take a look. A troupe of over a dozen men and women dressed in traditional costume made their way up past the stationary train. They were dancing and playing fiddles, flutes and tambourines. Two of the performers brought up the rear, straining under the weight of big brass drums. They were accompanied by a large, tightly muzzled bear on a leash.

They finished the song and their leader, a swarthy man with a huge black moustache, greeted the passengers with a torrent of words in Romany, the language of the gypsies. But it soon became clear to him that no one understood so he began again, this time in Romanian, which Anna was then able to translate.

"He says that he is the King of the Romanian gypsies and that they will entertain us while we are stopped here."

The gypsies played for over two hours without showing the slightest sign of tiring, encouraged by the enthusiastic response of their audience.

The bear cocked his ears and looked Aaron straight in the eyes. When bidden to perform he rose up on two legs and took the long pole that was offered to him, holding it like a traveler's staff. With his other paw, he tapped the tambourine.

"See how gently he plays the tambourine," remarked Vera.

"Amazing," Aaron replied, putting his arm around her shoulders. Vera stiffened instinctively for a moment but then forced herself to relax. "I'll be gentle with you," he whispered in her air. She nodded, knowing that Aaron was above all else a decent man. She'd be ok.

The passengers were so captivated that it no longer seemed to matter that they were still waiting on the tracks. A few of them moved some of the tables and chairs aside and began to dance. The Turkish businessman actually managed to persuade the French actress to join him in a jig or two and soon even the *chef de cuisine* took off his tall white hat and joined them in a well-known gypsy song.

The merriment ended suddenly when the locomotive blew its whistle and the train lurched slightly forward.

The big brown bear fixed his deep sad eyes on Aaron once more. Suddenly, moved by this great creature's plight, Aaron reached into his pocket and threw the trainer some money. Vera watched with interest as he gazed sadly after the bear. It was a brief glimpse of another side of his character which she'd never noticed before.

At six o'clock in the evening, as they left the city of Belgrade, Rabbi Weiss made his way to the lounge car where the *chef de train* had arranged for the private wedding ceremonies to take place. He'd even provided an impromptu canopy and two violinists who'd boarded the train in Belgrade.

Aaron and Shimon went to fetch their brides-to-be who were waiting in Abraham and Hedy's compartment, dressed in white lace. Each man covered his bride's face with a veil then led her down the corridor to the lounge car. Abraham and Hedy followed closely behind, each of them holding a candle and a branch of myrtle.

After the brides had circled their grooms three times under the canopy, Rabbi Weiss began the ceremony with the traditional Seven Blessings. As he spoke and chanted, everything began to seem strangely unreal to Vera. She felt as though she was floating in a cloud of cotton wool, her Uncle's voice sounding remote and incomprehensible. The rest of the ceremony passed her by in a blur.

"I will." Aaron's words rang out loud and clear.

Vera's attention wandered again for a moment but then she became aware of the Rabbi staring expectantly at her. "Oh, yes. I will," she repeated in a soft and trembling voice.

Aaron smiled at her; an encouraging, understanding smile that helped her convince herself that she had, indeed, done the right thing.

"By breaking the glass," said Rabbi Weiss, "you will leave your past life behind you and move together into a joyous future."

Shimon and Aaron stamped enthusiastically onto the glasses with their feet. They shattered with a loud crunching sound.

There was cheering and the two people kissed. "Mazeltov!" everyone cheered.

Just for a moment, Anna's strange threatening dream of a few months ago hurtled back into her consciousness. Had it been a bad omen? She darted an anxious look around but this time she could see she was surrounded by the smiling, happy faces of her friends and family.

Shimon noticed Anna's brief attack of anxiety and took her hand.

"What is it, my love?" he asked.

"Nothing Shimon. Nothing at all. Let's dance."

The newlyweds stepped forward and began to dance together, their hands linked by white handkerchiefs.

After the ceremony was over, the wedding party joined the rest of the passengers in the dining car.

Vera enjoyed basking in the attention of her well-wishers and admirers. In her beautiful wedding dress, she was even managing to outshine the French actress. The music, the champagne and the toasts carried on late into the night until Shimon, yearning to be alone with this new bride, bid everyone good night and they withdrew.

They had swapped compartments so that Anna and Shimon now had the one previously shared by the two girls. Shimon wrapped an arm around Anna's waist and lifted her across the threshold.

Without taking his eyes off her, he shut the door behind them and pulled her close to him. Just for a moment, she hesitated.

"Shimon, slowly please..."

He folded his arms gently around her and she nestled her head on his shoulder. They remained like that for several minutes; swaying slightly from side to side with the motion of the train. At last, they kissed. Shimon unbuttoned the back of her dress and it fell lightly on the floor. They began the night of healing passion. Anna would wake up the following morning feeling more whole and less broken than she had in months.

Aaron and Vera took their cue to leave shortly after Anna and Shimon, but as Vera walked down the corridor, she felt tight knots forming in her stomach. Once they were alone together, Aaron began to study Vera carefully. They hadn't spoken much all day and he'd accepted her silence but it was obvious now that something was really not quite right with his bride.

Seeing the bed sheets already turned down, Vera began to chatter nervously. "You know, Aaron, I'm looking forward to starting our life in Cairo. A new house – maybe near the pyramids or the Nile. Won't it be romantic? You'll find a business right away, I'm sure of it."

Aaron listened in amusement as she prattled on. He realized how grateful he was to her. If it hadn't been for Vera's insistence, they would both have left Germany without a penny. Everything they had was thanks to her presence of mind.

"It will all happen in time," he said. "I want you to be happy more than anything else in the world. But our life together doesn't start in Cairo, Vera my love. It has started already."

He settled down next to her on the bed and took her hand gently but immediately her back arched and her body stiffened. Aaron smiled a reassuring smile and released his hold. He got up and went to open the bottle of champagne that was sitting in the silver ice bucket.

"I know this is a difficult time for you," he said pouring her a glass and sitting back beside her again. "But you know that I love you very much, Vera. We must both be patient. Time will heal everything in the end."

She began to fidget with the counterpane which she'd carefully positioned as a barrier between her and Aaron.

"I'm not going to force you, Vera," he said.

She nodded and released her grip on the fabric allowing herself to look him in the eye for a moment. She gave a weak smile.

"Darling," he moved closer with his glass of champagne, "may this be the first happy moment of a lifetime filled with happiness."

Her heart melted a little at Aaron's kindness. Yet she still wanted to scream.

"In Paris, the train leaves on time," explained the French actress to the Romanian Count. "It arrives in Lausanne on time and in Italy it is on time until Milan. Then the delays come. We're two hours late in Venice, three in Yugoslavia, four in Bulgaria and by the time we get to Turkey, ah, who knows! It seems that as we go further South, the sun begins to melt the timetable!"

On the third evening, the Orient Express made its way towards Istanbul's Sirkeci Station with the Sea of Marmara on their right and the ancient walls of Byzantium on their left. It was the north easterly station in Europe; the place where the West meets the East. From the train they could see the minarets of Istanbul rising dramatically through the shroud of mist against the orange sunset.

Sirkeci was timeworn, dusty and most of the panels in its large glass canopy seemed to be broken. Virtually all the clocks in the station had stopped.

Hundreds of people crowded onto the platform, some in drab clothes, and some in extravagantly embroidered silks; others strolled along leading goats or pulling melon carts or carrying animals in cages. A red-capped musician and several coffee vendors vied for the attention of the crowds while a turbaned sheikh dressed entirely in white, marched through the throng followed at a discrete distance by his four wives dressed from head to foot in long black robes. Istanbul was clearly a city where things were very different from how they were in the West. Everything seemed to be entirely disorganized and utterly chaotic.

The party hailed a couple of taxis and rode to the Pera Palas Hotel where the porters showed them to their rooms.

For the first time in several weeks, Vera's face was bright with enthusiasm as she turned from the window in the hotel room. "Aaron, let's stay in Istanbul for a while. There's so much to see and after all, we're in no rush to get to Cairo, are we? Please Aaron. It can be our honeymoon."

"I don't see why not." He was pleased to see a little of the lost sparkle return to her eyes. "Why don't we stay another week? I'll wire Uncle Sharron later tonight."

The next day Anna and Shimon boarded the Taurus Express bound for Haifa together with Ruth and Leon. There were long, tearful goodbyes, many hugs and lots of promises to write and visit. After the train crept out of the Hayarpassa Station, Vera, Aaron and his parents went back across the Bosphorus in slightly subdued spirits to the European side of Istanbul.

From the ferry they could see the multitude of narrow cobbled streets and the minarets of the historic Aghia Sofia. Vera could imagine the colorful processions of Sultans in the ancient times as they passed by in front of its doors.

They got off the boat and began walking towards the vast, fortress-like monument. The narrow and winding streets leading to it were filled with the smells of strong tobacco, coffee and cooking.

"Let's go to the Grand Bazaar!" exclaimed Vera.

"Why don't the two of you go by yourselves?" Hedy suggested, nudging Abraham as she spoke.

"Yes. Yes," said Abraham. "I'm sure you two lovebirds want to be alone. Your mother and I are perfectly capable of looking after ourselves." And so they agreed to go their separate ways for the rest of the day. Vera and Aaron headed off in the direction of the *Kapali Cars*, The Grand Bazaar.

As soon as they'd entered the labyrinth of alleyways inside, they were assaulted by the hoarse shouts of porters and the loud cries of the vendors. They were dazzled by a sea of colors and a thousand different smells. Everywhere people were haggling with the merchants, waving their hands about and gesticulating wildly as they spoke. Children of twelve or so were hard at work in the shops, conducting their business with as much aplomb as any adult. Water sellers clicked their silver and their brass to attract passersby. Cane juice vendors turned the cranks of their presses and poured out yellow juice. An endless array of shops and stalls filled every available space selling carpets, ornaments, jewelry, leathers, perfumes, furniture, clothing, silver, ceramics, coins, fabrics, dried foods, nuts, spices, shoes, everything. Vera was mesmerized by all the wonderful things that were on display. She bought so many things that they had to buy two additional suitcases to put time in.

"Let's go back again tomorrow!" Vera exclaimed as they were riding back to their hotel in a taxi.

"No chance!" Aaron laughed. He hadn't enjoyed being pounced on by the traders who'd seen them as wealthy foreign tourists and an easy target. But Vera had been enchanted by the Bazaar. She'd been paid more attention in one afternoon than she'd ever received before in her life.

They dropped off the things they'd bought at the hotel and set out to find something to eat. Turkey was a distinctly male dominated society, and many local cafes were patronized exclusively by men. So when Aaron and Vera walked into the café down the street from their hotel, a sharp silence fell on the room and all heads turned towards them.

"Let's get out of here," muttered Aaron under his breath. He turned around and pulled Vera back into the street.

"Did you see their faces?" Vera laughed with one hand over her mouth.

"Yes. They looked at us as though I'd walked in with a rhinoceros."

"But I'm starving, Aaron."

"Come on," he said leading her down the street. "We'll go to the waterfront and see what we can get there."

As they wandered along the streets in the gathering twilight they could see the fishing boats coming in with their day's catch. On the promenade next to the wharf they found a small restaurant where they ate fresh bread and drank Turkish wine while they watched their fish grilling over red-hot wooden embers.

For the rest of their stay in Istanbul, Vera and Aaron did all the things that honeymooners were supposed to do together. He took her to elegant and romantic restaurants where the best food was accompanied by candlelight and fine music. He took her to ancient remains of lost empires where they walked hand in hand through gardens and stone arcades. He bought her roses and on one night he took her on a moonlight cruise on the Bosphorus.

Aaron was her best friend, her protector, her provider and her closest companion, almost everything a woman could ask for. But still it wasn't enough. The inescapable truth was, the main reason that she'd married Aaron was, for security.

So, during the day, Vera escaped into the magic and the bustle of Istanbul, distracting the restlessness of her soul with constant activity and diversions. And night after night, she yielded herself to the empty reality of her marriage.



Vera had married Aaron for better or for worse and she was determined to try to fulfill her promise. She would do her best. She would somehow find the way to make her marriage work. And in time, she hoped she just might come to love Aaron in the way that a good wife should love her husband.

The end of the week finally came and it was time for them to move onto Cairo. The ferry took them to the Asian side of Istanbul where the Taurus Express was waiting in the Hayarpassa Station to take them to Egypt. Vera allowed herself just one backward glance towards the turrets and minarets of the Istanbul skyline, and then she turned to board the train.

## Chapter 12

### Felix

It was the end of October 1938. The days were shorter now and during the night a glistening frost covered the flowerbeds and fields around Leòaky until the mid-morning when the warmth of the sun melted it away. The last of the brightly colored leaves fell one by one, dropping lightly to the earth where they scattered and danced in little whirlwinds on the dry fields. Now only the crooked old fingers of the bare branches reached up to the sky.

The harvest was safely stored away for the winter and an autumn stillness descended upon the hamlet. A mixture of odors filled the air; wood smoke from the chimneys, fresh cut pine, rye straw in the cowshed and the sweet smell of hay in the loft.

In the wood beyond the meadow, Jasmina and a few of the children from the village were gathering sticks and pinecones into large baskets. When each basket was full, two of the children would grab a handle each and carry it back home. The wood and the pinecones were added to the growling piles already stacked high against the walls of the houses, ready for winter use. Then they went back to the wood to collect more.

In the kitchen, Lotte had four large pots of water on the stove. She was hurrying about the house this morning. It was the day of the Harvest Festival and Kamil was due to come home. The last time she saw him was nearly six weeks ago. There were still so many last minute things to do before the celebrations of the afternoon. She had to iron their clothes and bake some more pastries then get ready herself. All before Kamil arrived. She took two rags, lifted one of the pots and poured the steaming water into the tin washtub on the floor.

“Zofie, bath time!”

The girl skipped into the kitchen and began to unlace her shoes.

“I’ll pour in the cold water,” said Lotte picking up a pitcher, “and you tell me when to stop.”

Zofie dipped a finger into the water. “Ouch! More cold water please. What time’s Daddy coming home? Oh, stop. The water’s fine now.”

“The train gets into the station at ten o’clock so it’ll be about twenty minutes after that.”

Zofie looked at the clock on the wall. It was nine o’clock.

“Mama, why can’t Daddy stay here with us?” she asked, stepping into the washtub. “Why does he have to be in Prague so much?”

Lotte sighed. Children always had the knack of asking the most awkward questions.

“Because sweetheart, like I told you before, Daddy works in Prague and it’s a long, long way away; too far away to come home every night. And he works very hard.”

Lotte and Kamil had agreed not to tell the girls anything about his work; that he worked for the Czechoslovakia Intelligence Service. He deliberately took an apartment in Prague to separate himself and his work from his family. In these uncertain times, it was the most sensible thing to do for their safety. Should anything happen to him, his family in their small hamlet away would be safe from the authorities’ attentions and the possible discovery of Lotte’s Jewish origins.

“Well, what does he do there all the time?”

"Zofie, he works in an office," answered Lotte, "and it's very hard work. Here's the soap, don't forget to scrub behind your ears."

Zofie scrubbed away while still deep in thought. "But I still don't understand," she said frowning. "All the other kids' fathers work hard too, but they work here, and they come home every night. If he wants to work hard, he can do that here, can't he? That way we can see him more than just on holidays."

"Come on, hurry up now," said Lotte, changing the subject. "Dry yourself off and put on your nice dress." She held out a towel.

By the time Kamil arrived, Lotte had the place looking spotless and the three of them were waiting anxiously in their holiday best. Kamil arrived, as usual carrying gifts. For Lotte there was a beautiful silk blouse, for the girls, a new pair of shoes. In the excitement and happiness of the moment, the long weeks of waiting were suddenly forgotten.

At four o'clock the festivities began. The entire village gathered in the local tavern, dressed in their finery. Out came the ribbons, the lace, the heirloom pins, the button sleeve blouses and the buckled shoes. The older people in the village wore their traditional colored kerchiefs and embroidered aprons in patterns specific to the district. Food abounded. There were sausages and dumplings, roast goose and cabbage and dozens of pastries and cakes. Lotte brought her specialty – poppy seed and raisin yeast cakes. Everyone showered her with compliments. The wine and the beer flowed and the tables were full of lively conversation and laughter.

A six piece band struck up lively music and soon everyone was singing and dancing. Mr. NemeÖek brought out his hand cranked gramophone with its large funnel shaped speaker to make sure there was no lull in the music when the musicians stopped for food or for beer.

"That's a fine looking piece you have there," said Kamil, admiring the brass and carved wood.

NemeÖek smiled proudly. "I bought that for me and my wife. God rest her soul, when I came back from the war. Got it in Italy. Oh, the happy hours we used to spend around the gramophone." He listened wistfully to the familiar tune playing, and then sighed heavily.

"We were fighting the Germans then and now we have them on our doorstep again!"

The two men lapsed into a thoughtful silence and drank their beer as they watched the people dance to the waltz music from the gramophone.

"I've been meaning to ask you something; a favor," said Kamil hesitantly.

"What's that?"

"I've a radio I need to set up. Your place is quite a way out of town. I was wondering if you wouldn't mind, if I could set it up in your barn. No one would ever think of looking for it there."

Mr. NemeÖek scrutinized Kamil. He didn't have to be told what the *radio* was for. He knew. He remembered his own soldering days very well.

"Of course. Come anytime."

"Thank you. I can assure you it's worth the risk. But please, not a word to anyone."

"No need to explain, my boy. Whatever it is, you can depend on me."

Then next morning, Kamil packed the radio transmitter into an old burlap sack and slung it over his shoulder.

"Where are you going with that?" asked Lotte as he made for the door.

"I'm going to set something up," Kamil's response was deliberately vague. He never mentioned details of his work at home.

"Kamil, I don't like it. I'm scared," she eyed the burlap sack.

He saw the worry in her face and put down the radio.

"Come here," he pulled her into his arms. "Don't be afraid." He kissed her on the forehead.

"You disappear for weeks Kamil, and I have no idea where you are or what you're doing. I don't sleep or have a moment's peace till you're back." Tears began to fill her eyes.

"I can't tell you. It's for your own protection," he explained gently. "You know that."

"Whatever it is, I know it's too dangerous," she sobbed. "What if something happened?"

"It's my job, Lotte and a lot of guys rely on me. There are things I just have to do – dangerous or not."

"But you have two daughters to think of." Lotte wiped her eyes and reached into her apron pocket. "Look here. I got a letter from Anna just the other day. She's in Palestine with Shimon and they've bought a house and land and..." she held the letter out to her husband.

"Lotte, we can't keep on running away from our problems. We've already moved once, from Germany. There comes a time when you have to stand your ground and fight. You have to put aside personal considerations. The Nazis will never go away if everyone keeps running before them. Now, we've talked about this lots of times. I told you I was going to work for the Secret Service, for my country. And you agreed."

"I know," she moaned, sinking into a chair.

"And I told you about the risks."

She nodded; her eyes downcast.

"So, why not give me a little smile then?"

Lotte raised her eyes to him and mustered the weakest of smiles. "I just worry about you the whole time..."

General Frank Moravec, Chief of the Czechoslovakia Intelligence Service was seated at his desk shifting through the formidable mountain of paperwork. His office was small and crowded. Every bit of space was full of steel files and mounds of technical books, reports and communiqués. A cigarette burned in the ashtray next to him and a thin trail of smoke rose and curled above his head.

Czech President Edvard Benes, his longtime friend had just left the country to live in the United States in the aftermath of Munich. His successor, Emil Hácha, was an ailing, senile man who sniveled and quivered before the Germans.

Hácha, good puppet that he was, had ordered the General to stop all hostile activities against Germany. But he was going to do no such thing. Moravec grunted to himself at the memory of that day. He'd known ever since that there would be mounting pressure for his dismissal and arrest. German agents were constantly watching him. He knew his days in Prague were numbered.

But unlike Benes, Moravec was determined to remain undaunted by the events that had overtaken his country. He was not going to surrender.

His deputy walked in and placed a pile of mail on his desk, adding to the mounting backlog. Moravec grunted dismissively in acknowledgment.

Lieutenant Colonel Kamil Navák remained standing to attention.

“Excuse me, sir,” he added.

“Hmm?” Moravec raised his eyes over his dark rimmed glasses.

“I installed the Karpar radio transmitter yesterday.”

“Oh, good, good.” Moravec acknowledged absently.

Kamil nodded and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Moravec shuffled casually through the pile of mail until he came upon a thick unopened blue envelope marked ‘*Personal*’. He glanced at the postmark. It was from a small border town in Bohemia. The handwriting was unfamiliar and there was no return address. He opened it to find three pages typed in German.

*General Moravec,*

*Let me begin by emphasizing that this letter must be treated with the utmost secrecy. I am writing to you to offer you my services. Below is a list of the categories of information that I will be able to supply you:*

In paragraph after paragraph the writer covered subjects concerning German military mobilization plans, battle orders, German defense plans, and armament information – tanks, planes, airfields; and details of German espionage within Czechoslovakia.

*...should you be interested in arranging a meeting, I suggest Plzej. If this is the case, reply to Post Office Box 9, Plzej;*

*Felix*

Interested? The letter touched on the areas which were of vital importance to Czechoslovakia Intelligence. Moravec got up and paced the room, then sat down and read the letter again.

In his profession, this letter was the written equivalent of a ‘*walk in*’; an individual who literally walks into Intelligence Headquarters and offers to work as a spy either for money or for reasons of conscience. It was usually about money, but Felix had not asked for any. Nevertheless, Moravec remained skeptical. These rare walk-ins were often enemy agents dangling just enough bait to infiltrate the other side. What’s too good to be true is often a trap, he reasoned. Even the fact that the letter was posted on Czech territory made it highly suspect.

But on the other hand, Felix seemed to be too well informed to be an outright crank.

The first two pages looked like a catalogue from a commercial firm marketing its products. The terminology used indicated a professional who was well-versed in military matters.

Moravec had to decide whether or not to respond.

It was probably a German trick.

But suppose it *wasn't*? It is a very poor trick that looks so much like one. If the Germans had cooked it up, surely they could come up with something more subtle. The scope of the offer was unprecedented; a fantastic, irresistible Intelligence coup. But if it was bait, whoever he sent to meet Felix would certainly never return.

Moravec returned to this desk and began to pound away on his typewriter. He mailed the note to Post Office Box 9, Plzeň.

Within a week, the reply came.

Felix stipulated the rendezvous time as 11:00PM, December 15<sup>th</sup>. He would identify himself by stopping in front of the Church in the old town square where he would stop and set his watch by the time of the steeple.

Moravec went into action. For the first time in his career he decided not to send an agent but to go to the rendezvous himself. Weeks before the meeting, he sent two of his officers to reconnoiter the meeting area. Based on their report he requested a dozen men from the state police who knew the locality to be posted in adjacent streets around the square on the appointed day. Twelve officers from his own department, all experts on German affairs; specialists in photography, mimeography, secret writing, document testing, was also to be included in the party. A local safe house was commissioned for their use.

Moravec did not like all the melodrama of the arrangements, but it was essential that every possible precaution be taken.

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, Moravec and Kamil went to the Golden Pheasant Restaurant in Plzeň's old town square at about 9:30PM.

"We already know Hitler has his eyes on occupying the whole country," said Moravec chomping through a pork cutlet. "What I want to know from this Felix guy is *when*,"

Kamil swallowed hard on his food. His nerves were almost at breaking point. Compared to him, Moravec seemed ice-cool. He wondered how he did it. Moravec had a wife and two daughters at home too. It must be down to experience, he thought as he gulped down another potato dumpling.

Outside, all four sides of the square were occupied by police and secret servicemen. They were scattered about in dark corners so that they remained in visual contact with each other without being obtrusive.

Moravec glanced at this watch. 10:47PM.

"Let's go," he said. "We'll settle the bill then grab a little fresh air and make a round of inspection."

Kamil paid the proprietor and they left.

The square was dark, damp and gloomy. A few gas street lamps flickered a faint yellow light. Moravec noticed the clock on the steeple had stopped.

"Suppose *he's* genuine, but the German Secret Service or the Gestapo is having him trailed?" Moravec's mind was always alert.

"Come on, don't start all that again. Not now!" said Kamil nervously.

"Ok. Ok."

The only sound was the wind stirring in the bare trees. They dug their hands deep into their pockets and began to pace around the square beneath the rows of trees. The shops were dark and empty.

Moravec glanced at this watch again. 11:15PM.

“He’s late.”

“How much time are we going to give him?” asked Kamil.

“Oh, I don’t know. Another hour – till midnight. Then I’ll call the men off.”

As the minutes ticked by, Kamil’s anxiety mounted steadily. Everything felt wrong. The worst of it was that Felix was late. Very late. They began their second round of the square.

Suddenly a shot rang out.

Two dozen figures emerge from the shadows, pistols drawn, ready to shoot whatever moved.

“Jesus Christ, Kamil!” Moravec turned on him and pushed him against a shop door. “What the hell are you doing?”

In the tension, Kamil has accidently pressed the trigger of his revolver as he was gripping it in his pocket. The bullet passed through his coat and through the cloth of Moravec’s trousers.

“I...I... I’m sorry...just a little jumpy,” stuttered Kamil.

“Of all the times! We’re supposed to be professionals, not a bunch of cowboys in a saloon. For God’s sake put the safety catch on!”

Moravec signaled ‘*all clear*’ to his men and they retreated back into the shadows.

“Now not only is it almost half past eleven but whoever’s out there’s heard the gunshot!” grumbled Moravec. “What kind of guy bringing this kind of information is going to show up now?”

Kamil walked along beside him in mortification.

But not a single light was turned on in response to the gunshot. There was not one shout of enquiry about what was going on. Anyone who had heard the shot had obviously chosen to ignore it.

11:42PM.

“It’s a trick,” said Moravec. “I think we should call it off.”

“Shh,” Kamil put a finger to his lips, and then whispered. “Look...”

A shadowy figure entered from the far corner of the square.

“Let’s watch what he does,” whispered Moravec.

The stranger reached the church, put down an oversized briefcase and looked up at the stopped clock. He went through the motions of setting his watch by it.

“Go to him,” ordered Moravec.

Kamil hurried across the square, said a few words to the man then motioned with this hand to Moravec. They crossed the square into a nearby side street where Moravec had a car waiting.

The stranger got into the rear seat of the car beside Moravec. Before many introductions could be made, the man said in German, “Good evening. I’m Felix. I’m in a hurry.”

It seemed to be the General that his contact was entirely calm and collected, as if they had known each other for years.

“Alright. Perhaps we can talk while we drive to an appropriate location?” suggested Moravec.

“Fine.”

Kamil drove as they spoke and Felix opened his briefcase for Moravec's inspection. The General took out a flashlight and leafed through the bulging mass of documents in the darkness.

This man was incredible, thought Moravec. He had dared to cross the German border loaded up with thousands of documents virtually all of which were stamped '*top secret*' in bright red ink. Moravec knew he must hold a position of some importance to be able to pass the German border guards without being challenged.

After they'd arrived at the safe house, Felix handed the briefcase to Moravec's officers for inspection and photographing. The two went into the living room.

"Can I offer you some coffee or brandy?"

"No, thank you."

The room was wired for sound. Every word was being recorded.

"Are you working alone?" began Moravec.

"Yes." Felix leaned back in his chair. "I think I should probably save you a number of questions and tell you something about myself. I'm working alone. I'm not doing this for money so I don't expect any payment. All I ask from you are two things. Firstly, your personal assurance that you will not attempt to make the standard inquiries about my identity. That will be certain to attract attention to me and will blow everything.

"Agreed." This made sense to Moravec.

"Secondly, you pay for certain minor expenses that I incur as a result of our exchange. It's not a question of money. I just don't want to leave behind a paper trail leading back to me."

This was a trivial request and once again logical in the circumstances. Moravec nodded.

"May I ask what you are doing in Czechoslovakia?"

"I've been sent here by the German High Command to evaluate industrial capacities relating to the production of armaments and munitions. It should come as no surprise to you, Mr. Moravec, that the Führer is focusing a great deal of attention on the Czech industries. As this is my particular expertise, I'm here to look at supply routes, output, productivity, opportunities of conversion, and opportunities for expansion and so on."

Felix went on to speak at length about the German war effort.

Moravec listened silently and attentively.

"Make no mistake. I love my country just as you love yours. That's why I'm doing this. Because I know we're heading for disaster. War seems almost certain if nothing is done to stop it and I don't want another crushing humiliation like the one we endured in 1918. To prevent that, I'll do everything I possibly can to stop us following this downward spiral any further. It's my duty. Perhaps helping you is the best way for me to play my part. The lives of too many people are at stake.

Kamil listened to Felix's words by the side of the tape recorder in the adjoining room. He smiled to himself. They reminded him of his own explanations about duty to Lotte.

But Moravec was only partly impressed. A skeptic by profession, he knew very well that good spies were adept to spinning convincing yarns. Time would tell.

"Let's talk about how we're going to communicate in the future," said Moravec.

"I'll send you written notes or contact you in person." Felix explained how he would write '*in water*', the latest method of writing with secret ink.



While they were speaking, Moravec's experts photographed and analyzed the documents from the briefcase. There were explicit mobilization plans for the occupation of Czechoslovakia and references to clandestine German radio transmitters in Bohemia-Moravia complete with cipher codes. This was highly significant. This sort of detailed planning was only part in place as a prelude to an act of war.

"Are you able to give us a date for the planned invasion of Czechoslovakia?" asked Moravec finally.

"March. The actual date is still to be confirmed, but probably mid-month."

It was nearly four in the morning and Felix said he had to leave. Moravec handed him back his briefcase and they shook hand.

Kamil drove Felix back to the old town where he stepped out of the car and disappeared once more into the night.

Over the next couple of months, Felix supplied Moravec with a constant stream of information. It soon became apparent to the General that Felix on his own was worth a whole network of spies.

It was a glorious day in early March and Lina Heydrich was making final preparations for the conference of the Security Police leaders and Chiefs of the Gestapo to be held at her summer home. She was reviewing a 'to do' list with the housekeeper when she heard the roar of a low flying airplane. Her youngest son Heider ran in from the back lawn.

"Look Mama, Papa's here!" he shouted, his young face full of excitement. He ran out again to catch another glimpse of the plane.

Lina looked upward from the window. Reinhard always did an acrobatic spin over the house to announce his arrival before landing at the airfield near Lübek.

Reinhard squinted his eyes against the sun before veering off to the left. He loved flying. It gave him an unrivalled feeling of power. Two hundred and sixty horsepower at this command, in the palm of his hand. It was a setting he considered almost fitting for the head of the Reich's Security Police.

The SS was organized into three main formations; the General SS, The Command SS, and the Security SS. Only the first two categories wore steel helmets and carried arms as those of the infantry. After 1934, the Gestapo also found itself under the SS umbrella. It was a jungle of competing jurisdictions and cutthroat intrigues whose only unity lay with Heydrich at the head. He found the situation useful for controlling those under him and ultimately held all the power. Yes, it was like flying a plane by pressing the buttons on the control panel.

Minutes later he landed and made his way to the ferry that would take him to Fehmarn.

Dressed in his black and gray SS uniform, with his fair Nordic features he cut an awesome figure. Though he made the trip to his chalet in Fehmarn every weekend and met the airport personnel, ferrymen and ticket agents regularly he never went beyond the most necessary exchange of words. Everything to him had to have a purpose, a means to an end. People, sentiments, convictions, even conversations. If they had nothing to offer him, why bother?

People parted to let him pass when they met him on the ferry. He was a man to be respected, even feared. This thought delighted him.

Leaning over the rail of the ferry, he looked out over the passing waves.

Reinhard Heydrich was born in Halle, Saxony, and the eldest of three children. His family lived comfortably among the middle class but his father was forever frustrated at his failure to move up professionally and socially. He was hampered by more than a lack of talent as a composer and opera singer; there were persistent rumors that his own father was half Jewish. In the anti-Semitic atmosphere of class minded Kaiser's Germany, it was a large hurdle against being accepted into polite society.

As far as Reinhard could remember, there were always nasty whispers about his family. At school the children used to taunt him and his brother in the playground. Whereas his younger brother used to get into scraps, Reinhard avoided open confrontation and became a moody loner instead. To prove himself, Reinhard was determined to excel in the classroom and competed ferociously in sports. Despite his achievements he never shook the childhood jeers and developed an inferiority complex that drove him to become more Nordic than anyone else.

Reinhard entered the Navy in 1922. It was a respectable alternative to attending university, something which his parents could not afford.

Although he remained an introvert and odd man out in the Navy, his accursed Jewish past rose to plague him once again. As before, Reinhard overcame it through hard work. An aptitude for the technical side of the Navy distinguished him in the eyes of his superiors and he was promoted to Lieutenant in 1928. After a series of unpleasant scandal with women, Reinhard met and quickly became engaged to Lina Oster. Then in 1931, just as he was dreaming of one day becoming an Admiral, his Navy career came to an abrupt end.

Only days after his engagement, an agitated Reinhard had to explain himself not only to the Naval Court of Honor but also to his new fiancée. He stood accused of 'conduct unbecoming' for impregnating a girl whose father was a close friend of Grand Admiral Raeder.

Reinhard managed to talk his way out of the corner with nineteen year old Lina but not the Court of Honor. They dealt him the greatest affront of his life and cashiered him immediately.

In the depth of the Depression, Reinhard found himself stranded, neither officer nor gentleman, one among five million unemployed.

Deeply humiliated, but spurred on by Lina, he went for an interview with Heinrich Himmler and to his great joy was offered the job as head of the SD, the SS Intelligence Unit.

The black order offered Reinhard both a route to power and an instrument for revenge against the establishment that had rejected him as a child and then as a Naval officer. Through the SS, he could become a member of a new aristocracy. With the SS's emphasis on racial purity, Reinhard could lay to rest the Jewish ghost of his past. Yes, the SS would fit him perfectly.

Since that day in August 1931, Reinhard rose rapidly through the ranks as he displayed an uncanny ability for Intelligence work. His first task was to create a card index of Nazi Party members, Communists, Social Democrats, and Liberals. Reinhard made it his job to know everything about the people on his index. He sought out their weaknesses, their idiosyncrasies, habits, personal histories, any scandal there might be, their aspirations, emotional and family relationships, sexual preferences, places they frequented, their earnings and expenditures, movements of bank accounts. In short, he gathered

together anything and everything that could be used against them. The SS became the instrument of totalitarian rule, watching over every aspect of national life. From the highest ranks of the ruling class to the lowest gutters of criminal activity, the SS were there.

At the same time he searched our competent professionals to join his staff. Among these had been the lawyer Ulrich Schellenberger.

The sphere which plagued him was never subdued from long. Three times after he joined the SD, he appeared before the law to disprove allegations of his Jewish origins. In one case the defendant produced a bill from the stonemason Heydrich and employed to replace the original headstone of this paternal grandmother inscribed Sarah Heydrich with the inscribed simply S. Heydrich. The defendant 'disappeared' without a trace. Later Heydrich destroyed all of Sarah's marriage and birth records.

But although he now had the power to destroy the physical evidence and squash all accusations, he was still unable to quite his self-doubts.

No matter how much power he accumulated or how many promotions he received, he remained beset with a consuming inner angst despite being outwardly the very essence of the Aryan ideal. The truth of his own birth was a phantom that would continue to haunt him for the rest of his life.

His position as head of the SD allowed the venom of hate without him to be unleashed. Behind his steely cool exterior lay the burning desire to cleanse. Reinhard Heydrich was a truly dangerous man.

He walked into the living room to find Lina arranging a bouquet of flowers on a side table. For a few brief seconds she stared at him coldly then turned and left the room, slamming the door behind her.

She must be in another one of her moods he thought. He went upstairs, had a shower, changed and came back downstairs to spend some time playing a ballgame with his sons on the lawn.

Evening arrived and the housekeeper announced that dinner was served. Throughout the meal, Klaus and Heider bombarded their father with questions with Lina maintained an icy silence, deliberately avoiding speaking to him or even looking at him in the face.

"Now run upstairs and get ready for bed," she ordered after they'd cleaned their plates. "I'll be up to tuck you in in a minute or two."

Lina and Reinhard remained at the table. The awkward silence continued. Finally Lina spoke.

"Last week, when I was sorting through your laundry, I found a shirt of yours with lipstick on the collar. I don't wear lipstick, Reinhard. Do you want to tell me how it got there?"

"Is that what this is all about? I've no idea what you're talking about."

"Where did you go last Wednesday?"

"A business meeting probably. I can't remember. What's the big deal?" he was beginning to sound irritated.

"It's not the first time it's happened is it, Reinhard? In case you've forgotten, I'm supposed to be your wife."

He got up from his chair and turned to walk away. "You're making a scene about absolutely nothing and I don't feel like listening to it."

“So, you don’t feel like listening, eh? Well how am I supposed to feel when it’s one girl after another all the time?” Tears of rage began to fill her eyes.

“You can feel any way you like. You’re just becoming hysterical as usual.” Heydrich disappeared upstairs.

Lina clung to the back of her chair. She didn’t know what was worse, the pain of his betrayal or his indifference to it.

The next morning was filled with activity and talks of the impending conference. Heydrich had been working for years plotting and scheming to bring down his rivals and promote the expansion of the SS. His major adversaries were the Armed Forces who still held much sway with Germany and with the Führer. But one by, one he pursued his enemies and brought them down. His favorite ploy was to attack to target with charges of homosexuality, treason or assassination plots against the Führer. And as each General or Reichs Marshall fell victim to the web of treachery he spun around them all, he felt a deep sense of satisfaction. After all, had it not been the Armed Forces that had shamed him with a dishonorable discharge? He was getting his revenge, and more. The sprawling tentacles of his intrigue slowly allowed him to acquire control of the Gestapo, the Criminal Police, as well as his own SS Intelligence Service. Soon there were few in the Reich who did not fear him. Even his superior, Heinrich Himmler was cautious in his dealings with him.

But he wanted more.

His aim was to become Protector of Bohemian and Moravia. This was soon going to be territory of the Reich but the success of this plan would lie with the performance of his men in the imminent campaign. For this reason he had called the conference to focus the minds of his men.

“With the occupation of Czechoslovakia,” he outlined, “you will work in cooperation with the Army, just behind the advancing frontline. In the wake of the soldiers, it is your task to weed out Marxists, traitors and any other enemies of the Reich we can identify. Every one of you will know exactly who your targets will be. Thanks to the diligent work of Herr Schellenberger in planting a comprehensive network of agents in Czechoslovakia, we already have in place there a number of action groups. They have all the information you will need for you to track down the enemies of The Reich.”

Heydrich already had plans to make use of Schellenberger’s action groups in later campaigns. He’d already coined a name for them, ‘*Einsatzgruppen*’. And Hitler would never know that it hadn’t been entirely his own idea.

At the end of the conference, he invited his guests to stay in Fehmarn over the weekend. However, he slipped away quietly and left for Berlin.

It was March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1939. Felix sat anxiously in front of Moravec. There was clearly tension in the air and a rigid formality had descended on the proceedings.

The meeting had been arranged as a matter of urgency by Felix at a busy café in Prague’s Wenceslas Square. Moravec went alone, taking extra precautions to make sure he had shaken off anyone who might have been trailing him. It was becoming increasingly difficult for even Felix to contact Moravec lately as the date of occupation was drawing nearer. The spread of Nazi influence outside Germany was growing steadily. Felix feared they may well have been infiltrated the Czech Intelligence Service. He could see everything blowing up in his face.

"I have a document." Felix handed over a folded piece of paper. "It's an order for the Gestapo to arrest all Czechoslovak Intelligence Officers as the invasion armies advance. Your name is at the top of the list, Frank. You have to get out."

Moravec read the document with trembling hands. So the day they'd all been expecting was upon them. As he read, the words jumped out at him with a terrible poignancy, '*subject them to interrogation with severe gravity...learn the identity of their agents...*'

"You have to get out right away," repeated Felix.

Moravec nodded vacantly.

"Do you have a way out? Do you know where you'll go?"

Moravec's eyes met Felix's. If he told Felix where he was going and Felix was caught...

"I've made preparations."

"I assumed so. If I can offer you a word of advice; wherever you go, *do not* chose France."

Moravec had no intention of going there. He was still smarting and bitter from the French betrayal at Munich.

"Wherever you go, I assure you that I'll find you and we'll pick you where we left off."

Moravec forced an ironic smile. It was a nice way of parting, he thought. He knew there would never be a trace of Felix again.

Their business over, both were eager to be on their way before they were noticed.

"Can I ask you one last favor?" Felix looked unusually alarmed. "Take care that you don't leave any traces that might lead to me."

"I've already taken precautions. No need to worry."

Felix stood up straight and extended his hand, "Good luck, General."

"Thank you."

"This is not goodbye but *auf Wiedersehen*".

After his meeting with Felix, Moravec went straight to the Premier's office. He was informed by an aide that the Cabinet was in session but on Moravec's insistence, Premier Beran interrupted the meeting to receive him.

Moravec explained the gravity of the situation but the Premier remained silent, looking vacantly out of his office window. Finally, he turned to look his visitor straight in the eye.

"With all due respect General Moravec, I think you're probably a little overworked. You're becoming nervous. I have direct reports from our embassy in Berlin which contradicts everything you say. The Berlin Government continues to remain on very friendly terms with our representatives and there are no signs whatsoever of any kind of military operation against our country. We don't want to respond against unfounded reports as we did in May last year. We mobilized prematurely and we irritated Hitler considerably then. We don't want to make the same mistake again."

Moravec was not to be put off so lightly. He continued to press his point.

"Believe me Sir, our country is at risk. The invasion is scheduled for the day after tomorrow. But we still have time."

"Time for what?" said the Premier dryly.

“To order all our military aircraft to fly aboard, to remove or destroy our most secret military weapons, to burn all our record, to destroy all industrial blueprints and bomb our munitions factories. If we do that, then at least we won’t be handing our assets straight over to the enemy on a plate!”

The Premier almost burst out laughing. “I’m certain you’re a very capable intelligence officer, General Moravec, but I do believe you need a few days off.”

“Mr. Premier, you must listen to me...”

“No. You listen to me! And take this as a warning. I will not tolerate this kind of fear mongering. It will lead to nothing but needless unrest throughout the whole country. “Beran shook his finger angrily at the General. “And if you continue to disseminate this false information it will constitute a violation of the law and I will see to it personally that you are arrested. And just so you understand how serious I am, I’m going to call the Chief of Staffs right away!”

While Moravec stood listening, Premier Beran shouted into the telephone. “General Syrový, listen very carefully, I am issuing you a direct order. In the event of a German invasion, *all* military personnel are to be confined to their barracks. *No* resistance should be shown to the advancing German armies and *no* material or documents are to be destroyed. All files are to be left intact and the German commanders will be received with the proper politeness and courtesy!”

Moravec knew what he had to do. And he’d had to do it without the help of anyone else. He has to act against the direct instructions of his own government. He had forty two hours.

He hurried back to his headquarters and in a frantic effort rummaged through the thousands of files in his office. He threw a few in a large suitcase and handed the rest to Kamil who fed them into the incinerator.

The next day Moravec faced up to the most difficult decision of his career. All the previous day, he had been preparing the list of the eleven intelligence officers who he would take away with him into exile to continue the fight against the Nazis from abroad.

Major Gibson of British Intelligence had informed him that a plane was being sent to evacuate him and his family. In the end Moravec forced personal and emotional considerations aside and chose the eleven best qualified officers who would begin with him the new Intelligence Service in exile.

On the evening of March 14<sup>th</sup>, he met these men one by one and put his plan to them. None of their families were to know where they were going. The precautions were necessary for their families’ safety. All agreed.

His final task was to talk to Kamil. Moravec found him working at his desk. He was unshaven and had dark circles under his eyes.

“Kamil, I’m leaving tonight. I’m going to London and I’m taking some people from the department to help me set things up.”

Kamil was searching Moravec’s face in disbelief. Was he being left out?

“I’m appointing you Head of Operations here. None of us are taking our wives and, well, Lotte being Jewish and all...If you left her here, I think the strain on you knowing she could be in Nazi hands would be too much.”

Would interfere with his performance, thought Kamil. The General was right.

“I’m relying on you now,” said Moravec putting his hands on Kamil’s shoulder.

“You can depend on me.”

It was midnight and the Dutch airplane stood on the tarmac at the Ruðyn airport on the outskirts of Prague. It almost failed to arrive because of a snowstorm. The dozen intelligence men boarded the plane in twos and threes. For what seemed like hours the pilot conversed with the radio tower about the dangerous weather conditions. Moravec's nerves were stretched to breaking point. It seemed that the storm was going to ground the plane. He moved forward to speak to the pilot. He persuaded him to take the risk and leave. He would be a dead man for certain, argued Moravec, if he was caught helping wanted men escape.

The plane rolled along the tarmac through the blinding snow and moments later rose into the air.

No one spoke.

As they were gaining altitude Moravec became aware of the miles that already separated him from his family and country. He found himself suddenly overcome with black thoughts.

The bitter struggle by so many over so many years, what had it all amounted to? For the second time in his life he would be in exile.

He glanced at the small suitcase his wife had packed for him; two shirts and two pairs of underwear, a toothbrush and his razor. That was all. He told her he would be home the day after tomorrow. Would he ever see his wife and daughters again?

He put his head in his hands and tears filled his eyes.

Hours later through the bitter cold and howling wind, panzer divisions crashed across the Czech border, shaking the ground with a deafening roar. In their wake were the Gestapo and the SS.

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1939, the Germans troops invade Prague. Prague fell with no resistance and now the whole of Czechoslovakia was under the control of the Reich. Himmler and his SS went into the Czechoslovakian National Bank to arrest all the bank officials. He took them into the newly set up SS Headquarters for questioning and began with the National Bank's president.

"You are the President of National Bank, I understand," Himmler opened.

"Yes, Sir."

"Where's all the gold?"

"It's not here."

"Then where is it?"

"I had orders to transfer it out."

"How much did you transfer?"

"Forty four million American dollars."

"And where did you transfer it to?"

"To England. It's to be kept in the Bank of England in the account of the Bank of International Settlement."

Himmler smiled. "I see," he said. "So the Bank of England has control over this money?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You can go now."

The following day, Himmler placed a call to Montague Norman, the Governor of the Bank of England.

“Good morning, Montague and how are you today?”

“I’m fine, Heinrich. How’s my Godson?”

“He’s extremely well. He asked me yesterday when you’re going to come to visit us. He misses you very much, you know. Oh, and Elsie sends his regards.”

“I miss you all very much too. I hope I’ll be able to get over to Germany soon.”

“Well when you come, you’ll be able to see how well our little business venture is doing.”

“Good. Good. I look forward to that. I knew that doing business with you would be extremely profitable for both of us. How’s the Führer?”

“Oh, fraught as usual. He takes on far too much. But he’s much happier now after the events of Czechoslovakia.”

“There’ve been a few mumblings of protest round here but they’ll die away soon.”

“I need to ask you a favor. A personal request from the Führer.”

“Ask away. You know I’m only too happy to oblige the Führer.”

“The Czech National Bank has sent you 44 million dollars’ worth of gold bullion for safe keeping. Now that we’ve taken over the protectorship of Czechoslovakia, we’re going to need the money to use for the Czech people.”

“Ah, yes. I believe there has been a very large deposit of gold bullion recently.”

“Good. I’m glad it’s come under your jurisdiction. Can you help us out?”

“Of course I can. Let me just find the best way to do it and I’ll be in touch.”

Norman was as good as his word. The bullion was on its way to Himmler within a few weeks of their conversation.

It was during late May in 1939 when Christoph Borer, at the Swiss National Bank received a large quantity of gold bullion from the Reichs Bank. It amounted to exactly 44 million dollars. Borer went to see his superior at the bank.

“We’ve just received a large amount of gold bullion from the Reichs Bank.”

“So, what’s the problem?”

“Well, when we inspected the bars, we noticed they were stamped with the Czechoslovakian imprint. They don’t belong to Germany.

“These damn Germans are so bloody careless! I’ve told them time and time again that these bars should be melted down and re-stamped with the imprint of the Reichs Bank.”

“So what are we going to do?” asked Borer.

“Well, if the Bank of England wants to breach international law by giving Czech gold to their German conquerors, what can we do about it? Better get it melted down and put a Swiss bank imprint on it all. That should cover all our backs.”

The exiled Czech President Benes was urged by his team to raise a formal objection to the Bank of England regarding the transfer. He was politely told that there was nothing that the British Government could do and he was strongly advised not to raise the matter again.



### Chapter 13

#### Pope Pius XII

It was early on January morning when Karl and Elsie saw Father Ramp to the train station in Zurich. The wagon lit conductor walked up to them. The train was about to depart, he said.

Father Rampp put down his small valise and briefcase to bid his friends farewell.

"I'll see you on my way back," he said. "In about a week to ten days."

"I can't wait to hear all about it!" said Karl.

"*En voiture!*" shouted the conductor down the platform after a sharp blow on his whistle.

Elsie embraced Father Rampp, as if not wanting to let go.

"I'll be fine, my child," he comforted her. She forced a smile through her tears.

Karl shook Father Rampp's hand, and then he climbed aboard the train. The conductor climbed after him and shut the door. With an enormous jerk and billowing masses of steam from the locomotive, the train moved slowly forward.

Elsie searched for Father Rampp in the windows and waved her hand when she caught a glimpse of him.

"Brr," shivered Karl. "It's cold."

"*Voila, Padre!*" the conductor showed Father Rampp with a dramatic gesture the finely appointed sleeping compartment Karl had arranged for him.

"If Padre wishes, there is a comfortable lounge in the next wagon in front and a restaurant wagon behind. We will be serving breakfast there in one half hour. Padre requires anything else?"

"No, thank you," Father Rampp placed a folded banknote in his hand.

"*Merci, Padre,*" the conductor smiled, tipped his hat slightly and withdrew.

Father Rampp had little sleep the night before in anticipation of his trip. It was still only six thirty in the morning. Tucking his briefcase of documents safely out of sight under the bed, he decided to curl up for a nap.

When he awoke, it was nine o'clock and after straightening himself, he went to the restaurant coach to have some breakfast and hot coffee.

Nearly every table was full when he entered. As he approached, he received friendly smiles and nods in respect of his robes. The only available seat was with two elderly ladies who invited him to sit at their table. Father Rampp accepted gratefully.

Both ladies appeared to be in their early seventies, and judging from their accent, the ascertained they were German-Swiss. They confirmed they were from Bern.

"My name is Frau Meili," said the heavier of the two. "And this is my sister, Frau Baer."

Both wore dark colored traveling dresses and hats worn at the fashionable angle.

"My pleasure," he responded. "I am Father Rampp. Where are you ladies traveling too?"

"When we got off in Rome, our destination is the Vatican," said Frau Baer proudly.

"So is mine, in fact."

"We have always wanted to visit the Vatican at least once in our lives. Every Catholic ought to, at least *once*," said Frau Meili. She was a robust woman with a round face and rosy cheeks and tended to chat incessantly.

Her sister was quite the opposite. Slim and frail, her hair pulled back tightly in a bun, she spoke quietly and very little often just nodding in agreement.

"We have never had the opportunity until now," said Frau Baer.

"It's my first visit too," said Father Rampp.

"Just once, I want to see the Holy Father with my own eyes," said Frau Meili adoringly. "We're going to the Sunday Mass and will attend one of his speeches. That's why you're going too, I suppose, isn't it Father?"

There was a moment's hesitation as Father Rampp considered how to respond. He didn't want to minimize the significance of a mere sighting of the Pontiff by telling his companions he had his own private audience.

"As a matter of fact, you're correct; to see him with my own eyes and to hear him speak."

"I must tell you, Father," said Frau Baer. "That we are ever so excited to see him in person. My sister and I and all our families go to church every Sunday. We try to follow the guidance of our Father's sermons but to hear the words from the Holy Father himself ..." she clasped her hands reverently, obvious affected even by the thought.

Father Rampp studied the simple, unquestioning faith of these women with admiration.

"The words of the Holy Father," he mused. "It is quite true that whatever the Head of the Roman Catholic Church utters is taken with great weight and papal decisions can be far reaching; even as far as the Middle East, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The Pope is one of the few authorities on Earth, perhaps the only one, who can proclaim the ultimate moral values. Even those not of our faith welcome his insistence on absolute ethical standards."

The ladies listened rapturously to Father Rampp.

"You are quite right, we all look to the Holy Father for guidance," agreed Frau Baer.

A waiter brought Father Rampp an omelet and a steaming cup of coffee.

"I see you've come already equipped with a guidebook, Madam."

"Yes," Frau Meili smiled. "We've been reading up on the history and some fascinating facts. Did you know there are a million nuns in the Roman Catholic Church and only four hundred thousand priests! That's less than half. And then I was amazed at the amount of treasures the Vatican holds." She reamed off a library of facts and trivia without scarcely taking a breath.

"They say no one knows how many rooms there are in the Vatican but they have counted 12,000 windows!" exclaimed Frau Baer.

"And in the Vatican Gardens are specimens of plants from all over the world – cedars from Lebanon, shrubs from Japan, roses from Texas; all given as gifts."

Father Rampp listened with amusement the excitement and reverence of his companions. When he had finished his breakfast he politely excused himself and returned to his compartment to sit in quiet contemplation and read his Bible.

It was late morning by now and the train was crossing the mountains bordering Switzerland with Italy. The winter scenery outside was a spectacular sight. Father Rampp made himself comfortable by the window. The snow piled heavily on the trees made the

branches sag under the weight. It was peaceful and pristine; surely such a beauty was the work of God.

His mind wandered to the enigmatic persona of the Pope. Who was he?

Without question, he is the most exalted, glorified and revered of any man alive, Father Rampp thought to himself as he held his Bible open in his lap.

Whenever he appears before crowds, people try to grab his hand and kiss it, touch the fabric of his robe, parents hold up their children in the hope he may touch them. Awe and mystery have surrounded the position of centuries and had led believers to idolize him. The massive architecture of St. Peter's and the pageantry of the pontifical court have created an atmosphere in which the Pope is a divine being.

Surely a man who has risen to this office over scores of other learned men, thought Father Rampp, must possess a level of spirituality, empathy and intelligence of the highest order. Surely he can be reasoned with.

As Father Rampp read from his hardbound Bible, the stifling heat in his compartment and the swaying motion of the train made him sleepy and he soon dozed off.

He did not hear the footsteps in the corridor, his compartment door opening nor closing behind the thin figure in the dark coat. Father Rampp's head was leaning against the window, his Bible still opened in his hand as the figure slowly, cautiously approached. From the inside of the black coat, a leather gloved hand pulled out a gleaming serrated knife and raised it, aiming, high above the shoulder.

The train suddenly plunged into a tunnel and the compartment was in semi-darkness. The loud hollow din from the train in the tunnel woke Father Rampp from his slumber with a start.

All he was able to see was the looming figure and the lightening flash of the blade as it came down on him.

In that instant, he moved to his left, turning his arms in front of him for protection.

The knife struck the hard cover of his Bible, splitting it in two and lodging itself in the pages.

He cried out for help but his voice was lost in the noise.

Two leather gloved hands grabbed his neck and he struggled with his assailant in the darkness before he found the button to ring for the conductor.

*Ping...Ping...Ping...*

The bell sounded again and again as he held his finger to the button.

The figure in the shadows, hearing the bell and realizing help would come at any moment, let go his grip of Father Rampp and ran out of the compartment slamming the door behind him.

The train emerged from the tunnel and brilliant light filled the room again. The bewildered Father Rampp sat on the floor holding his left temple where he was struck, his mind racing. *'Who was the attacker? Why?'*

In that confused moment, Father Rampp deduced it was the German Gestapo, who, having found out he was in possession of the stolen documents, were having him eliminated.

They were already well inside the Fascist Italian border. What luck would he have explaining to the local authorities his cause and reason for holding these documents. He was guilty, it was clear.

Hearing the quick footsteps of the conductor, he kicked the knife and Bible under the bed just as he opened the door.

"*Qu'est ce que c'est, Padre?*" the conductor exclaimed alarmed seeing Father Rampp on the floor, his head gashed.

"I stumbled in the darkness when the train went into the tunnel and I hit my head."

"*Mon Dieu!*" the conductor helped him to his feet.

He brought a cold compress and attended to Father Rampp's injury, which fortunately were not serious.

"Not to worry, it will heal nicely."

"I wonder if I could ask you to do me a favor. I've been travelling for a while now and I'm not feeling myself. Perhaps you could move me out of the private compartment and into one where there are a couple of people. In case I'm not well again, I'd prefer not to be alone," asked Father Rampp.

*The best and most elect Christians inspired by a crusading enthusiasm, must gather together in the spirit of the truth, justice and love, and rally to the cry 'God wills it!' - prepare to sacrifice themselves like the crusaders of old.*

*The essential aim of this necessary and Holy Crusade is that the star of Peace, should burst forth once again in its shining light, as promise and augury of a better, more fruitful and happier future...*

*Pius XII, Christmas Message, 1942*

It was January 13, 1943 when Father Rampp arrived in Rome. He took a taxi to the Vatican gates where he was met by one of the Swiss Guards. When he gave his name, the guard made a brief phone call and in no time one of the Pope's many aides came to meet him at the great Bronzed Doors on the right side of St. Peter's. From there the aide took Father Rampp through a vaulted corridor that led to the Courtyard of St. Damascus within the Papal Palace.

The room was small and spartan, furnished only with a bed, table and chair and an armoire. He had only one small suitcase, which didn't even need unpacking other than to hang up his cassock for the next day.

There were still a few hours of daylight left so he decided to take the opportunity of discovering the Vatican. He tucked one of the copies under his robes. The second set was left in his briefcase, which he hid, beside the armoire.

Father Rampp went first to St. Peter's Basilica, for all Catholics the greatest church in the world. As soon as he entered its dark silent interior, the familiar smell of frankincense filled his nostrils. Dipping his fingers in the icy cold holy water, he made a sign of the cross and found a seat in an obscure corner. A few black-garbed priests and nuns in crisp starchy habits walked past. Boys in lace smocks checked with candles in the chapel near the confessionals.

It was here, as he sat contemplating alone, that the impact of his circumstances fully hit him. There would be no returning to Germany, his home, after tomorrow. He would have to choose a place to go where to live and continue God's work. He knelt and prayed for peace, for understanding and for guidance.

As he repeated the words of his prayers, an idea came to him – to go to Jerusalem. There, he could carry out his life's work, far away from the chaos of Europe where he was not able to help any longer. In Jerusalem, he could be closer to the essence of his faith.

With that decision now clear in his mind, he rose from his bench, knelt facing the altar and quietly whispering, *'Thank you Lord, for guidance.'*

At exactly seven o'clock in the morning the alarm clock on Pope Pius' bedside table went off in a metallic frenzy. He reached over quickly to stop its irritating sound immediately. With a sigh, he sat up, fumbled for his spectacles then put them on carefully. He wasn't asleep anymore anyway. The air in the Pope's room was cold as he went to the window to open the shutters and allowed in whatever little light there was on an early winter morning. Pigeons fluttered about in the square below.

Barefoot, Pius pattered towards his enormous custom-made bathroom. The goosebumps on his skin subsided as he stepped onto the warm marble heated from underneath with hot water pipes. It was modernizing the bathroom, redecorating the papal office and bringing his six German nuns, who had been his personal servants since his days in Berlin, that were the only luxuries he admitted to having. After donning his white Cossack, he went downstairs for prayers before breakfast at eight thirty.

Sitting alone with his breakfast, as tradition dictates, he angrily tore at this bread and gulped his coffee till he nearly burnt his mouth. Hastily finishing the food on his plate, he got up to begin his day. Walking down the long hallway to his papal office, his *Maestro di camera* scurries in this trail, hurried reviewing his audience arranged for that morning. But on this morning he did not need to be reminded, he was only too well aware of his visitor; that interfering short-sighted Father Rampp.

The two guards stationed outside his office opened the doors as they saw him approaching. Pius, as Pope, runs the world's smallest yet one of the most powerful states as an absolute autocrat. No one questions, dares to question, his decisions and the moves he makes each day.

Pius made straight for his desk where he sat down heavily in the high-backed white satin chair. The *Maestro di camera* continued to drone away on the particulars of the day as Pius fidgeted with the small gold pillow behind his back until he was comfortable.

He interrupted the *Maestro* in mid-sentence.

"Thank you, *Maestro*. Can you please call in Cardinal Maglione? There are a few things I need to discuss with him before our first meeting."

"Of course, Holy Father, of course," he bowed and turned to leave.

"Oh, and by the way, there is a chance I'll run late with Father Rampp. Perhaps you can move whoever is not urgent for tomorrow."

The *Maestro* bowed again, and then left.

Pius sat behind his desk imperiously looking around the office as if searching for answers within the walls. His private office was impressive, with three great recessed windows overlooking St. Peter's Square, draped in beautiful gold damask. The walls were paneled in soft blond wood lined with books up to eye level and paintings above.

"*Bon Giorno*, Holy Father," said Cardinal Maglione out of breath. Pius coolly indicated for him to take a seat. He sat down in one of the six smaller red satin armchairs in front of the Pope's desk. The Cardinal already picked up on Pius' level of agitation this morning.

"Did you get them?" shot Pius without a greeting.

“Yes, right here,” the Cardinal patted a thick folder of papers. “We got them while he went to St. Peter’s yesterday afternoon.” The Cardinal handed the folder to the Pope who put the folder on his side table next to his typewriter. He liked his desk free of anything.

“With the documents safely here now, we need not fret over Father Rampp anymore,” reassured the Cardinal.

“Mmm... We’ll hear him out first,” said Pius only slightly relieved.

The Pope looked at this watch. Ten a.m. He picked up the receiver on his gold and white telephone, “Call him in,” he said tersely.

Though his heart was pounding, Father Rampp tried to appear casual as he entered the papal office. Everything about Rome and especially the Vatican made him realize how difficult, if not impossible, his task was.

After the greetings dictated by protocol, Pius began in a quiet voice speaking perfect German. Cardinal Maglione, whose knowledge of the language was limited, strained to follow.

“Please be seated Father. I hope you are having a comfortable stay here at the Vatican,” said Pius.

“I am in awe, Your Holiness.”

“I have always been very fond of Germany. It is as you know the place I was privilege to spend thirteen years as Nuncio, and I have nothing but pleasant memories of my days there. Please tell us, Father Rampp, how you came about the documents you claim to have?”

“I’m afraid, Your Holiness, that I cannot divulge that information.”

“What is your purpose with them?”

Father Rampp had been rehearsing this conversation for weeks. “Your Holiness, there have been many occasions over the past four years when I and many Catholics felt let down by the attitude and position the Vatican has taken, or rather failed to take, in the face of blatant aggressions by Germany. Aggressions perpetrated not only against other European states but also against civilian populations, most notably Jews.”

Pius’ silence encouraged Father Rampp to continue.

“Following the Christian principle of *love thy neighbors*, I have been endeavored to help as many German Jews fleeing persecution the past seven years as I have been able to. I cannot understand why the Holy See has been so tolerant and silent about the Nazis. I have risked my life standing up for the truth. All my fellow clergy and I have looked towards you for guidance, only to find that you have put the onus back onto us. But now, after having read these documents, which I’ve obtained with great difficulty, and after hearing your recent Christmas address, I can plainly see you are *favoring* Germany. My purpose is to find answers. Then I will decide what to do.”

“Father Rampp, how dare you be so insolent in front of the Holy Father!” rebuked the Cardinal in German with a heavy Italian accent.

The Pope raised his hands to the Cardinal to calm him. In a more restrained, but still stern, the Cardinal continued, “Pray, show us these documents of which you speak.”

Father Rampp reached into his old leather briefcase and produced a bundle of documents that he placed in front of the Pope.

“There you are.”

The Pope shot a look at the Cardinal whose face went pale. Father Rampp returned to his read satin armchair and added, "I must mention that this set, as well as a second set that mysteriously went missing from my room yesterday, is a carbon copy. The originals are out of Germany and safely in the hands of a trusted friend.

The Pope stared at the pile of documents on his vast polished desk. There was an uneasy silence as his mind raced at what to do.

"If you don't mind Father, I would like to have a word with the Cardinal Secretary of State, alone. We shall not be long."

A cold sweat glistened on the Cardinal's brow. When Father Rampp left the room, Pius turned like a predator on the Cardinal.

"For God's sake, didn't you look at them beforehand? Why do I have to find out about this now?" he hissed.

The Cardinal mumbled confused phrases, wiping his brow with a white handkerchief.

"He's crafty," he finally blurted out. "But if we haven't got the originals, what are we going to do?" the Cardinal shook his round, mastiff-like face in confusion.

"We'll have to be patient with him, explain our position, and convince him that we have the best interest of the Catholic Church in mind. Surely, as a priest, he will understand that."

When Father Rampp returned, the Cardinal's tone toward him was more congenial, and he switched to Italian, the language he felt more comfortable in.

"Father, may I point out to you how fortunate for Great Britain, France, Norway, Denmark and Belgium is that Pius XII, who in these troubled times, sits on the seat of the throne."

"I can assure you, Your Eminence, that none of the countries you mentioned feel fortunate as they lie occupied and bombed; neither does Great Britain who is engaged in pitched battle with the Luftwaffe. All the while the Pope on his throne has not uttered one word of condemnation at the aggressor. Worse, he has blessed the very Messerschmitt who are killing innocent civilians."

"This is a war of principles rather than of nations and His Holiness is the first to realize it," said the Cardinal.

"What principles?" Father Rampp cut in. "Your principles of waging unprovoked war, murdering innocent women and children, and forcing hundreds of thousands out of their homes?"

"The Vatican must be seen to be impartial and avoid meddling in politics," said the Pope.

"Your Holiness, you've been politicking all along; not just meddling but outright interfering."

"I beg your pardon?"

"For example, this document dated April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1939, after the liquidation of Czechoslovakia has you saying to a German audience ho you '*rejoice at the greatness of Germany, at her resurgence and her prosperity*'; June 1939, you pressured Poland to give up the Danzig to the Reich; no less than half an dozen communiqués to this effect. At the end of May 1940, the Office of the Papal Secretary of State expressed '*that it would be well advised for Belgium to capitulate and that France should do the same*'" Father Rampp held up the documents in his left hand.

“Enough!” shouted the Pope. “I had the greater good in mind, and the Christian commonwealth in particular. If I outright condemn Germany, I will offend and estrange the thirty million Catholics in Germany.”

“What of the tens of millions of Catholics in the attacked territories?” There are far more than thirty million between Poland, France, Belgium and the others. Are you implying that the German Catholics are more important to you?” Father Rampp was growing more and more angry.

“The vast majority of German Catholics support Hitler.”

“And so that Pope is afraid of denouncing Hitler because he’s popular? You’re saying that nearly two thousand years of Catholicism doesn’t hold a candle to one conniving politician?”

The Cardinal once more cut in to appease. “The German Catholics are very important to us. In the years after the Great War, they were a shining example of vigorous religious revival; a loyal and reliable flock. With the cooperation of the Government, eight percent of German Catholic taxable earnings is collected and given to the Catholic Church. This law, as you know Father Rampp, was reaffirmed in 1933 in the Concordat between Hitler and the Vatican.

“Yes, I know. This eight percent mandatory tax from thirty million German Catholic translates into a guaranteed income for you. In other countries, people merely donate voluntarily as they wish. And now with the war, voluntary donations have dwindled but not the *‘church tax’*.” Father Rampp took up the Cardinal’s line of reasoning.

“This law applies to *both* main religious denominations in Germany,” retorted the Cardinal.

“And this law be revoked by Hitler if the Vatican displeases him,” said Father Rampp. “Or he may roll it out into occupied and conquered countries after the war.”

“Let us not get off topic,” said the Pope. “Up until the outbreak of war, even in the last few hours, I did my utmost to avert bloodshed,” he said in his defense.

“Utmost?” Father Rampp shook his head. “I don’t question that you did not wish war, but you did your utmost to prevent the Allies and the Soviet Union joining together in a pact against Germany. You wanted to prevent war but only under certain conditions. Why? Here...May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Your Holiness feared such a pact *‘would open the way for Bolshevik penetration into Europe’*.”

“It is true that I tried to persuade Britain, France, Germany and Poland to work together toward peace. I prayed they could come to an agreement before any alliance with the Soviets could be concluded. Don’t you see that Communism is a menace to the West!”

The Cardinal added, “You have to understand that we tried to promote peace through political medication. Unfortunately, these efforts failed and war broke out.”

Father Rampp paced a few time, rubbing his chin. “Utmost? Utmost? So, if you made efforts on the diplomatic level and failed, why did you not make efforts on the spiritual level; the realm of the Church; the realm of the Church? Your Holiness, in your strenuous efforts to avert war, why did you not respond to Dr. Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s proposal? He made it on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1939, five months before war broke out.

*“There are multitudes of people in ever country, most loyal to their own States, and yet members of another society, the Christian Church, using the term in the wildest sense.*



*It occurs to me to ask whether in this present grave situation it may not be responsible to give Christendom a voice. I renew once again, as I have in 1935, this invitation to the leaders of all Christian communions.*

*Much of course must depend on whether His Holiness the Pope would be willing to give his leadership. Is it inconceivable that under his leadership, other leaders would be unwilling to make a declaration to the same effect? If moved by the present state of the world, he were willing to make some declaration, I think I can surely promise that all the leaders of the Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches would give simultaneous support.”*

Father Rampp stood facing the Pope’s motionless gaze waiting for a response. None came.

“If Your Holiness ever desired to gain prestige and influence, an opportunity to demonstrate true moral and religious leadership without deference to a political party, this was an unprecedented occasion.”

The Pope’s reply was cursory. “Father, you know full well that reasons of a theological nature forbid the Catholic Church to join its voice on matters of faith and morals with that of other Christian confessions. Our Church, since time immemorial has a tradition of ‘splendid isolation’ to those schismatic communities.”

“So when war finally broke out, what reasons of a theological nature prevented Your Holiness from condemning it? Not one word of protest, not one word that Germany was responsible for aggression, even against Catholic countries such as Poland or France.

Irritated at Father Rampp’s impertinence, the Pope quipped, “The fact spoke for themselves. Let *them* speak. From that point on I would not be involved in temporal controversies and territorial rivalries between states. I must maintain impartiality.”

“But you wasted no time condemning aggression where the Russians were concerned, when the Red Army crossed the Polish frontier and occupied the Eastern regions after the fall of Poland.”

“Then, as now, I fear the incalculable danger arising from the sinister threatening shadow of these enemies of God.”

“Enemies of God; the atheistic Communists? It makes Nazi aggression negligible? The Nazis are the first real threat.”

Father Rampp saw the Pope so caught up in his own pursuits of diplomacy that he was paralyzed for any real action. If his attempts to appeal to Pius’ sense of right in the political arena failed, he was now more hopeful to appeal to his humanitarian side.

“Your Holiness, hundreds of thousands of Jews, Slavs, Gypsies and Russians from every country occupied by the Reich are being deport to camps where they endure terrible cruelty, privations, disease and death. The world awaits to hear you speak up against these crimes.”

“I have published a dispatch in December 1940...”

“Yes, but where? In the *Act Apostolica Sedis*. It deals only with the forced euthanasia of the handicapped under the Nazis. The *Acta* is an internal theological publication and the article is written in Latin!”

“I will have you know Father, that it distresses me greatly about all the innocent people suffering, but there is nothing I can do,” said the Pope.

“The Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople has given his Bishops directives to help Jews with all the means in their power. Why has the Holy See not done the same?” asked Father Rampp.

“We don’t have *real* proof,” said the Pope irritated. “In every war there are isolated incidents of atrocities, but how can we know for sure? How can we believe it is not propaganda? I can’t point a finger at Germany merely on rumors or vague news.”

“The Nuremberg Law are not rumors, neither was the Jewish expropriation of property in Austria, nor Kristallnacht or the ghettos of Poland. These are not rumors, they are well known facts. But you also know of worse.

In March 1942, you learned of the planned deportation of Slovakian Jews and urged the Slovakian government not to carry it out. Why? Because you knew it amounted to condemning them to death.

Concerning the Poles; the Polish Ambassador, in September 1942, approached Your Holiness to urge you to take a stand on the persecutions in his country. Surely he explained to you what these entailed. And here I have three letters from you to Cardinal Hlond and to the President of the Republic of Poland, where on each occasion you lament that you ‘*already know from other sources*’ the situation of Poland. You *admitted* you knew!

But the most alarming information to date has reached Your Holiness late last summer.”

The Pope and Cardinal Maglione exchanged another alarmed glance.

“In January of last year, there was a meeting of all the Reich’s Ministers. At this conference, held at the Wannsee Villa, they laid out the plans to deport and exterminate eleven million...*eleven million* Jews, in the plan they termed ‘*The Final Solution*’. An individual with access to the upper echelons of the Reich relayed this information to the Foreign offices in the United States and Great Britain. In September, Your Holiness saw, with Cardinal Maglione, Mr. Taylor who implored the Vatican on behalf of the President of the United States to condemn publically and in specific terms the Nazi atrocities in German occupied areas. Similar approaches were made to you by representatives of Brazil, Great Britain, Belgium, Poland, Uruguay and Yugoslavia. Again, not a word came from the Vatican.

A few months later, a soldier by name of Gerstein sent Your Holiness a first-hand eyewitness report from the Belzec Concentration Camp where he had been stationed. He reported seeing cattle trains packed full of men, women and children entering the camp, people being stripped of all their possessions, even their hair and ultimately, being crammed into gas chambers and asphyxiated with diesel exhaust. He noted that often, as in the instance he describes, the engine malfunctioned and the procedure took nearly three hours before the victims died.

Last year, on two separate occasions, Admiral Canaris, Head of the Third Reich’s Secret Service spoke here in the Vatican about the large scale exterminations of Jews both in Eastern camps and behind the advancing Russian front.

On each of these occasions, the Vatican has been silent.”

“What difference will it make?!” the Pope shouted and pounded his fists on his desk. “If anything, it could only make things worse!”

“Worse for whom? With people already dying by the hundreds of thousands at a time, how could the Pope speaking up in their defense make it *worse*? Isn’t helping the downtrodden a basic principle of Christianity?”

"I pray for their souls and for God to alleviate their suffering," the Pope said imperiously.

"Their relief can only be imagined," mumbled Father Rampp under his breath.

Cardinal Maglione, anxious to cool the tempers flaring on both sides said, "I can assure you Father, that the Holy See and I are doing all we can to bring about an early peace which will bring an end to all these sufferings. In the meantime, his mind is very much on the welfare of the Catholic Church in these threatening times. It is for this reason we cannot allow ourselves to be carried away by the sense of grief and outrage that these horrors arouse."

"So, if we read between lines, now that war is under way, as long as the Roman Catholic Church weathers it well, all other issues such as the murder of Jews, Slavs and other sacrifices are of lower priority?" remarked Father Rampp bitterly.

"I remind you that you are in the presence of the Holy Father, perhaps a little respect," glared the Cardinal.

"I beg your pardon," Father Rampp bent his head to the Pope, who stared at him with piercing black eyes from behind his spectacles.

Father Rampp composed himself and continued.

"Your Holiness, acknowledging that your interests must focus predominantly on the activities of the Catholic Church and its welfare, I would like to ask about what has been occurring in Croatia since April 1941. The Ustashi government that has taken over claims to be a Catholic state. Their leader, Ante Pavelic, a convicted murderer, sits with twelve clergy in his parliament where Croat policies are openly discussed."

"What are you getting at?" asked the Cardinal impatiently.

"That the Ustashi regime, with the blessing and support of Archbishop Alojzje Stepinac and our clergy, has implemented what may truly be called a Holy War against the Orthodox Serbs using brutality we have not seen since the Middle Ages in compelling them to convert to Catholicism."

"I have reminded the Episcopal Committee, which was set up to oversee the conduct of the conversions, that must be observed exact observations of canonical rules and should not be the result of external coercion," explained the Pope.

"Archbishop Stepinac, who is a member of this committee, has, since 1941, overseen the conversion of over 200,000 Orthodox. Do you want me to believe they were all voluntary?" asked Father Rampp.

"I don't know anything about the Ustashi crimes in connection with the conversions, but it does not pertain to us because the Episcopal Committee sees to it that there is no abuse in this matter," replied the Pope.

"The Ustashi Minister of Education, Budak, had a different interpretation. On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941, he said in parliament, *"The basis for the Ustashi movement is religion. For minorities such as a Serb, Jews and Gypsies we have three million bullets. We will kill a part of the Serbs, others we will deport, the rest we will force to accept the Roman Catholic religion'*. Since then, the regime has put their words into action and units throughout Croatia have been liquidating entire villages in the most brutal and sadistic matter imaginable. In each unit is a priest whose function is to goad members on in their murdering, to bless their weapons and to fight alongside them with weapons in hand as an example."

"Croatia is a young country Father Rampp," rebuked the Cardinal, "and the young often makes mistakes, it is inevitable. So it is hardly surprising that Croatia, too is guilty of

this. It is human, understandable; enemies, however, are not prepared to understand. In any case, these mistakes can be corrected.”

“Your Eminence, the situation is not about sporadic misdemeanors, but rather the mass murder of those who do not convert, and many in fact are not even presented a choice. People are murdered, usually after tortures where the order of the day is cutting off noses, ears, poking out eyes, bludgeoning with wooden hammers, burning alive, chopping to pieces people with an axe before the eyes of their love ones. I could go on and on in gruesome detail. These are not mistakes, surely not if carried out with the support of the Croatian Catholic clergy and under the eye of Archbishop Stepinac., Why are not even children spared? A priest, Ivo Guberain claims that ‘*all Serb children should be killed because they could grow up and be dangerous; which is why their slaughter is appropriate for preventive reasons.*’ He is among a group that calls themselves ‘*Crusaders*’. To date, about 600,000 Serbs have lost their lives, including nearly 15,000 children. These cold-blooded massacres are occurring everywhere in Croatia; are supported by every tier of government and the clergy. More importantly, Your Holiness knows about it and has known from the outset. Why have you allowed it...said nothing?”

The Pope squinted his eyes at Father Rapp, “Are you aware that the Serb signed a treaty with the Russians and Communism is marshaling an attack on Croatia from its bases in Serbia?”

“If Communism is the concern, why are the Croats imposing a ‘*convert or else*’ policy on the two million Christian Orthodox. That is *religious* persecution, *not* political.”

“As we said before, there are always isolated incidents of excess,” the Pope replied confidently.

“Your Holiness, is the Vatican accepting the injustices in Croatia because it increased the influence of the Catholic Church or because the Croats, like Hitler, are for you another bulwark against your dreaded atheistic Communism?”

“Both!” shot back the Pope. “Like the Crusaders of old, they are fighting for the will of God and the defeat of the infidels.”

Father Rapp went red in the face. “We, as Catholics should be ashamed of the Crusaders. When the Fourth Crusaders reached Orthodox Constantinople in 1204; in short order they broke down its outer walls and seized the city. The next day the massacres began, and just as in Croatia, the barbarity defies description. For three days the Crusaders roved through the streets raping, murdering and looting. Priests among the rampaging bands robbed the Orthodox Churches. In the streets, no one was spared; women were subjected to unspeakable obscenities, men were killed on sight and small children had their heads cracked like eggshells against the walls as soldiers swung them by the heels. Fires raged uncontrollably, leaving whole districts charred black. And these men called themselves Christians. In the end, they all rejoiced and gave thanks to our Lord for the honor and victory God had granted them. Thus they celebrated Palm Sunday and Easter Day, with hearts full of joy for the benefits our Lord and Savior had bestowed on them.

When the news of the Crusaders’ victory reached the West, everyone went mad with delight. Pope Innocent III, who instigated the Fourth Crusade, when he heard of the fall of the capital of Byzantine world, was pleased, for it meant the extension of his divine authority over the world of the Eastern Church. He gave his approval to everything that had been done to the Orthodox. Even when Innocent III later heard of the brutality, though he was horrified, he nevertheless didn’t give voice to a second thought.

It is Your Holiness, very reminiscent of what is happening in Croatia today.”

The Pope was silent.

“The fact is that behind your silence an seeming impartiality, you anxiously await the success of the German armies in the West but have also prepared for the advance of Catholic propaganda into Orthodox Russia, and maybe Croatia is a testing ground. Priests have already been mobilized, trained in the Russicum, to follow the Nazi armies and organize the first religious advances. Is the war with Russia and the defeat of Bolshevism the Crusade of Pius XII? The Crusade you spoke of in your Christmas address?”

“You are a short-sighted fool, Father Rampp! I, less than anyone want to see wars raging around the globe, but Bolshevism is a virulent evil dangerous to the whole world. At least the toll of sacrifice in this war, if it must be, will not be in vain,” said the Pope angrily.

Father Rampp stood stunned.

The Cardinal, seeing the tide of the argument turning, said, “I’m afraid, Father Rampp, you have taken the words of the Holy See and the Vatican out of context.”

“On the contrary. More significantly, it is not so much what the Holy See has said, but that he was silent when he should have cried out. It is the *context of his silence* that is scandalous,” retorted Father Rampp. “His terrible sin of omission.”

“We are at this stage of the war not as concerned with the war-in-progress, which is naturally out of our hands, but devote our attentions more to post war problems. The Holy See is preoccupied now with thoughts of the future more than the present. As head of the Church, His Holiness must concern himself with bolstering any weakening of the faith in Europe. We have spoken on several occasions with Herr von Ribbentrop on these issues of *settling up* after the war.”

“Don’t you comprehend the magnitude for the Vatican if the Bolsheviks are beaten compared to if they become victorious? The Russian people have been forced into atheism and will whole-heartily embrace Catholicism once their evil oppressors are gone,” said the Pope.

“So, it’s about power.”

The Pope was furious now. “The fact of life is that you need money to keep the Roman Catholic Church alive and well. For decades we have been struggling financially. We need more people to contribute and resurrect the Church after more than a quarter of a century of financial troubles. The number of Roman Catholics worldwide is about 350 million. The population of the Soviet Union is about two hundred million. If Hitler allows the Catholic Church into Russia in the event of his conquest, that would open up the doors to vastly increase our numbers and our realm of influence.”

The Pope rose belligerently to his feet, put his hands on his desk and leaned forward toward Father Rampp and spoke in a low resonating voice.

“The sacrifice will not be in vain if, by the will of Providence, we gain victory over Bolshevism. In the boundless land where Satan has found his instruments and collaborators, there, brave soldiers are fighting to the greatest battle of all. May God bless the Italian and German soldiers who at this decisive hour are defending the ideal of our freedom against Red Barbarism!” He glared right through Father Rampp with a righteous air, then strode out of his office.

## Chapter 14 From Cairo to Haifa

The heat rose in waves from the ground as the rays of sun beat down fiercely. In the distance, the mountain peaks hovered above clouds that obscured their base. Ancient rains had scoured deep gorges into the rocks and shale hills of Egypt's Eastern Desert.

At the head of the camel caravan was Ahmed, their *khabirr*, or desert pilot. A Bedouin tribesman from deep in the Sudan, he had traveled the deserts all his life. By day he followed landmarks; hills, the changing color of sand or gravel, even the direction of the wind. At night he navigated by the stars.

Behind him, in single file were Omar, his wife Leila, Aaron and Vera and finally two pack camels carrying their supplies and water. Aaron, liked Omar and Leila had chosen to wear loose fitting Arab clothes for their trip across the desert to the Gulf of Suez, but Vera had insisted on wearing Eastern style riding breeches, a shirt and a straw hat. She silently regretted it now, her second day astride the camel in the blazing sun and dust. Whatever glamor she gained in her finery was lost in the strain of discomfort that showed on her face. In addition, she had not yet learned to ride her camel at Ahmed's easy pace. She proceeded at a skipping trot that was hard not only on her back, but also on her backside as well.

As their camels padded uphill through the narrow mountain pass, the silence around them was almost oppressive.

"I always imagined the desert to be all sand and nothing else," said Aaron.

"Most people picture it that way," nodded Omar, "but only one seventh of the Sahara is sand. The rest is mountains, plateau, rocks and gravel. Some say the desert is monotonous, but I see in it a hundred faces. Some are fierce, some serene, some frightening, others empty; so empty you can pass for days and not see the feature your eye will remember."

"Do you come out into the desert often?" asked Aaron.

"Not often as I would like, but I love it out here," he sighed contentedly as he leaned back in his saddle. "To be in the desert is to be alone and to be alone is to be safe. Certainly it's a dangerous place and you must be treated with a great deal of respect but, you know, the desert is predicable where people are not. With people, even with the ones you're closest to, there always comes a time when they do the totally unexpected!"

Aaron chuckled. "That's true."

"Leaving civilization behind is a great relief to me. Military life is very regimented and restricted. There are limitations everywhere, of rank, of hierarchy, of technology. Here, I am free. When I visit my Bedouin friends..."

"You have friends among the Bedouins?"

"Oh, yes, since I was a boy. When I am with them, I live a completely different life to the one I lead in Cairo. The only problems I have here are finding the next watering hole and sheltering from the sun. *Nothing* else matters. This is where I come to gather my thoughts, where there is nothing else to do but look inwards."

"I suppose that's why the prophets and wise men used to go off into the wilderness from time to time," said Aaron. "The experience of privation and contemplation provides a strong discipline."

"I see you understand, my friend."

The wind was coming from the east was like a blast from a furnace. A sudden gust picked up the dust and blew it towards their eyes. Omar frowned and pulled his head cloth down to protect his face. He looked at the ground below them. There was no shadow. At high noon the heat was so intense it was almost a solid thing, brutal and uncompromising.

"We'll make camp and sit out the heat of mid-day," he said to Aaron. Then he called out some words in Arabic to Ahmed who nodded in agreement and pointed to some boulders ahead; the only spot where there was any possibility of shade.

Aaron expressed they would reach the boulders in twenty minutes. In fact it took nearly an hour. The large fallen granite rocks were next to a wadi, a dry riverbed, along which some thorn bush was growing. Ahmed dismounted, helped the ladies from their camels and unloaded the animals to let them browse on the shrub. Only then did he set about making a quick camp for the afternoon by stretching a large canvas between the thickets.

The heat was only marginally more bearable in the shade but it felt good to stretch stiff muscles. Ahmed prepared a meal of bread and dates, garnished inevitably with sand. Aside from the grittiness, the dates were fresh, sweet and melted in their mouths.

"The route we are taking is the same one the famous Cairo-Mecca caravans used centuries ago. Right here through this pass, across the Sinai and into Saudi Arabia," Omar pointed down the valley. "Caravans two to three thousand camels strong would set out from Cairo one month after Ramadan carrying silks, fabrics woven with gold and silver threads, papyrus paper, French and Venetian clothes, knives and weapons, precious oils and dried foods. For weeks they traveled across the desert and when the caravan arrived in Mecca, it was one of the biggest occasions of the year. It would be welcomed by the beating of drums and a festival at a bazaar. After the merchants had sold their goods and the camels were rested, the caravans would set off back to Cairo. This time the beasts were laden with emeralds, pearls, diamonds, musk, civet oil, Indian silks, spices and balm of Gilead. So enormous was the expedition, it was only undertaken once per year. But it was very profitable. They say that merchants could double their investment if they put their money in the Cairo-Mecca caravan."

The sun was at its zenith now and peace surrounded them in the valley as its rays blazed down. A falcon flew silently overhead. Only the gentle flapping of the canvas made any sound. Vera listened to Omar telling stories of the desert and of ancient times, as enchanted now as she had been the first time she'd met him nearly two years before. "Even before the great caravans, the Pharaohs would come here in the days of ancient Egypt to hunt lions. And they had their secret goldmines somewhere within these hills."

Ahmed collected some bone-dry scrub and ignited it with a fistful of straw to make a fire. He filled a small black pot with water and began to brew some tea. They sat in the shade until about three o'clock in the afternoon when the blistering heat of the day began to wane. It was time to set out again and Ahmed went to fetch the camels which had wandered off in search of the sparse scrub.

On his way back, he sang and talked soothingly to them, telling them they would soon be by the sea. Something must have been lost in the translation as they bawled and protested as strongly as ever when he came to harnessing them.

He loaded the supplies onto the two pack camels first, taking care to put most of the weight over the front legs. Then he tugged on the head ropes of Leila's and Vera's camels to make them kneel. The first animal went down without protest but Vera's camel roared,

belched and backed off. But Ahmed tugged patiently and firmly until finally the camel calmed down.

Vera sat on her rug and held on as the animal stood up, rump first. Her own rump still sore, she enviously eyed Ahmed's beautifully polished wooden saddle, draped with precious rugs and a variety of saddlebags. Leila noticed Vera's gaze.

"Where he comes from," she whispered, "the more ornate a man's saddle is, the more status he has in his tribe. And it's a way of showing off to the girls."

Vera smiled. "It just looks rather comfortable to me."

"Look, I think if you change your camel's pace, you'll be more comfortable. I'll show you when we get going."

Aaron was determined to learn how to master his camel by himself and declared his intention of mounting without Ahmed's assistance. "I'm beginning to get on very well with Betsy here," he announced.

"How do you figure that out?" laughed Omar.

"Every time I come up to her, she puts her muzzle over my shoulder and belches in my ear. It's a sign of affection, no?"

They all laughed.

"Now, don't be afraid of her!" instructed Ahmed as he noticed Aaron approaching his camel somewhat apprehensively. "The camel knows when you're afraid!"

Aaron had jumped up to grab the head rope which was some eight feet in the air. He hauled the enormous head down. Aaron leaped several times but his mount wasn't very keen and every time he came close she either flicked her head away or tried to bite his arm off. She was still untethered and so free to roam. And roam she did. Aaron followed her about making friendly noises like Ahmed had taught him while she dodged and side-stepped around him, roaring loudly. Eventually, he managed to catch the loop around her head and pulled it backwards. The camel roared and jerked her head away in annoyance.

"No. Down!" shouted Aaron.

Aaron pulled the rope down and eventually made her kneel. He mounted but in a few moments found himself head over heels in the thicket. He brushed himself off and, humbled but undaunted, he approached the camel again. He was more successful this time and miraculously managed to stay on, amidst much flailing of limbs.

Ahmed hopped easily onto his camel and soon they were on their way again, everyone's sides still aching with laughter. Aaron was riding just behind Ahmed and even though he had to hang on like grim death with hands which were red and swollen from the fall, he felt like the monarch of all he surveyed.

They traveled until the sun dipped behind the evening haze and turned the world an amber rose. The wind died down and the temperature began dropping so quick that in minutes they were shivering. Ahmed quickly put up the tents and soon he had made a fire. They huddled around the flame cross-legged while Ahmed prepared their dinner. He mixed water and flour into a flat cake of dough, raked away the coals, put the dough on the hot stones and raked the fire back in place. Meanwhile he warned some smoked meat and made tea. Twenty minutes later he dug the dough out and trashed it about to dislodge the sand and charcoal.

While they were eating and the last rays of sun slipped below the horizon, the dew began to collect on the tent and all their things. Suddenly, shots like gunfire shattered the peace around them, echoing through the valley.



“What’s that?” cried Vera, putting her food down in fright.

“It’s nothing,” said Ahmed shaking his head and waving his hand casually. “The sudden change in temperature splits the stones and rocks. It sometimes makes very loud noises.”

They finished their dinner and sat back against the cushions, relaxing in the tent’s warmth as the light from the fire sent shadows dancing against the canvas. Outside, the darkness was high, deep and wide.

“It was a night like this one. The weather outside was cold and sharp,” Ahmed began. “In our camp the fires were no more than glowing embers and most of the men were asleep in their tents. Not far away the camels were drowsing in the moonless night. A couple of horses were tied up to posts driving into the ground and our hunting dogs were curled up around the eaves of the tents. Everything was peaceful and silent.”

Ahmed’s eyes were wide and he gestured with his arms as he spoke.

“Then, as silent as leopards, camouflaged by the darkness, a band of men moved towards the sleeping herd of camels. With shining daggers they cut the ropes holding the beasts then disappeared back into the bushes. After a while, one of the camels stood up, remembering some tasty leaves she’d seen earlier that today. She began to walk towards them. Then another camel, finding herself free too, followed the first. Then a third. With half a dozen of the camels were munching away at the leaves in the bushes, one of the sly ones came out from his hiding place. He was so skillful that not once did any of the camels make a sound as they were led away. It was only as the last camel being mounted that it groaned and set the dogs barking.

Right away we were awoken and scrambling out of our tents with our sabers and rifles. But we were too late. They had come and gone with expert precision. Even the best of our trackers couldn’t follow them in the darkness. We had to wait till morning to pick up their tracks. But by then, they were far away and we never saw our camels again!”

“Who were the raiders? Did you ever find out?” asked Leila.

“The Bedayatt. May their fathers be cursed!”

“Bedayatt?” asked Omar. “I’ve never heard of this tribe. Where are they from?”

“From Chad. They were their *imam* like this”, he swept his head cloth across the lower part of his face. “They don’t know Allah, those cowardly thieves!”

Ahmed told stories of other camel raids, shaking his head after each one and denouncing the perpetrators to Allah and the Prophet.

As diplomatically as he could, Aaron asked whether his tribe ever stole camels.

“Oh, well! Every tribe has its robbers, even my tribe has. Some say stealing a camel is a passage to manhood and a man can’t marry until he’s stolen a few camels. But we steal only a few, not like the Bedayatt!” Ahmed’s voice rose into a fury again. “They steal whole herds and drive them off into Chad. And their women make up songs and poetry about how brave they are.” He spat into the sand in disgust.

The conversation dwindled with the flames of the fire. Ahmed moved the water flashes inside the tent so they wouldn’t freeze. The company crawled onto their mats and covered themselves with heavy rugs. Soon they were all asleep.

“*Salaam al laikum gemel!*” Ahmed exclaimed when he reached the group of camels the next morning. They had wandered a full mile away from camp. They began to roar and grumble as he walked them back.

Ahmed packed up the gear and this time when Aaron mounted Betsy, she groaned and spat but didn't throw him off. Led once more by Ahmed, they headed eastwards towards the rays of the rising sun.

Later that morning, for the first time in three days, they saw other people; black robed forms herding goats over rocky, arid terrain. For those who lived in the desert, life was an eternal and often arduous search for water. Towards mid-day they were spotting more and more tracks of goats and donkeys on their trail. Gradually, the mountains became smaller in height and turned into hills.

Suddenly Ahmed let out a yell and pointed to something small and black in the sky. They strained their eyes to follow its flight over a nearby hill.

"A dove! The sea is near!"

The trail was now descending rapidly and the crisp dry air was becoming moist and salty. By early afternoon, they could make out a hazy line of palm trees which marked the shore, like a mirage in the distance. Then the vision was lost as they descended further into the valleys. There was a tremendous change in the morale of the whole camel herd now as they smelled the water. They strode forward like demons.

By late afternoon the trees came into sight again, their tops glistening deep green in the breeze. Ahmed took a sharp left at the foot of the last hill and led them to a small river. The camels almost stampeded down the water's edge, and the party dismounted to let them drink. Aaron and the girls knelt down beside the river and splashed water over their parched faces from cupped hands. Only Ahmed remained composed, waiting for the camels to finish drinking before drinking himself. Leila and Vera plunged into the water fully clothed and splashed about in the sparkling current.

Once the camels had drunk their fill, Ahmed climbed up one of the palms and shook down some dry dates for the beasts to eat. Then, content that all the herd's needs had been met, he set up the camp. After all their bags were unpacked the two couples changed into their bathing costumes and headed off to the white sandy beach of the Gulf.

The next morning they went to the port town of El Suweis and hired an Egyptian boatman to take them and their animals across to the Sinai Peninsula. By noon they had reached El Shatt where they decided to stay for a day before carrying on down the Sinai Coast.

Towards the evening, Vera emerged from the tent and noticed Omar praying, his face pressed closed to the ground. She watched him in silent fascination. He was part of this exotic Arab world which she found so odd and mysterious.

When he'd finished, he noticed that she'd been watching him. He went to the little pot over the fire and poured some tea. "Would you like some?" he offered.

"Yes. Thank you." She sat on a stone next to him. "Are we still on the route to the ancient caravans?" Her tone was excited, almost childlike.

Omar smiled. "Yes, but we'll be leaving it tomorrow morning," He pointed to the valley in the East. "Through there is the Mitla Pass. It's been used for centuries by caravans and it's still the most important land route today between Egypt, Palestine, Damascus, Baghdad and Saudi Arabia."

"I can see why you like the desert. I never thought you would enjoy it so much. But it's hard to believe that people can actually live in such a barren land."

"Yes, but the Bedouin..."

He spotted suddenly as he noticed a lizard scurrying past. It had blood pouring profusely from a wound on its back. Seconds later it collapsed.”

“Shhh,” he put his index finger to his lips. “Don’t move.”

His eyes were full of alarm. Vera, unaware of exactly what the danger was, sat motionless. Omar reached slowly for a stick from the fire. Then, with a sudden and rapid movement, he brought the glowing stick crashing down on the ground.

Vera was stunned to see a snake lying on the ground just a few feet behind her.

“It’s alright. It’s dead now.”

“Was it poisonous?” she managed to ask finally.

“Yes, it was an asp.”

The next morning they were all ready to set off down the Sinai Coast. Moved by her close encounter with the snake, Vera took a knife and etched a few words on the stone she’d been sitting on the previous night. ‘*Vera, Aaron, Leila, Omar; 1939*’. Who could tell if she would ever return to see it again? But she would remember this spot for the rest of her life.

## **Chapter 15**

### **The Promised Land**

“How was your trip, Mr. Cohen?” asked Fatima, the Cohen’s cook, the morning after their return to Cairo.

“The trip was an ordeal, I must say, but I had the best time of my life,” answered Vera. She flopped down into a chaise lounge shaded by a large umbrella on the veranda. She was still in her robe.

“You look quite pale, Mrs. Cohen. Are you not feeling well? Maybe I can make you some breakfast.”

“No, thank you.” Vera wiped her forehead. Her skin was clammy. “I feel a bit queasy. I think I got heat stroke on the way back. It was awfully hot.”

Fatima knew what the trouble was, but kept her thoughts to herself.

“Has Aaron left already?”

“Yes, about five minutes ago.”

“I’ll just have some tea before I go out today.”

“Shall I bring it to your dressing room, Mrs. Cohen?”

“That’ll be fine,” Vera was getting up and heading upstairs.

Shortly after Vera and Aaron returned to Cairo, Sharron Cohen helped his nephew with the purchase of the Mubarak Army Cap Factory. Hussein Mubarak was ready to sell, and Aaron was eager to buy it. The transaction was completed within two weeks.

While Aaron was busy with the factory, Vera went in search of a home. She found a villa for sale in the Giza neighborhood. Swiss Ambassador George Vochée and his wife lived there. After many years of service in Egypt, he was retiring and returning to Switzerland. Not long after Aaron closed the deal on the factory, they purchased the villa, which included three servants and a chauffeur.

Vera loved the house because of its spaciousness. From the entrance hall a majestic spiral stairway led to the bedrooms and guestrooms upstairs. Their master bedroom suite overlooked the pyramids of Giza.

While Aaron was absorbed in updating the equipment at the factory and bidding for large contracts with the factory and bidding for large contracts with the British, Vera kept herself busy furnishing the house. She decorated the hall with extravagant urns filled with azaleas, and the living room with Persian silk carpets. She was particularly pleased with the dining room which was large enough for the lavish parties she would hold when the house was ready. Vera also hired a gardener. She wanted exquisite gardens that would set off her home to perfection.

Egypt was fascinating to Vera, with its weird and astonishing history and culture. But she socialized mainly with the foreigners who lived in Cairo, mostly British. This seemed the natural thing to do, since most of them lived in her Giza neighborhood. The Colonial society of Cairo was large and well established. It functioned almost entirely divorced from Egyptian life. What a difference it was, being part of a classy elite, instead of a humiliated and branded and tortured minority, as she’d been in Germany. She would hang onto his life for all she was worth. She owed it to her people, not just to survive, but to flourish.

Vera was especially fond of Jacqueline Lampson, the British Ambassador's wife, who lived a few blocks away. They became fast friends, and it was through Jacqui that Vera was introduced into high society circles. It was Jacqueline's suggestion that Vera join the Turf Club where she gathered with her lady friends for luncheon, and the Gezierh Sporting Club, where they played tennis or golf.

Every night of the week, except for Sunday, there was a dance at some hotel or club. Being the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the Middle East, Cairo attracted the most popular Eastern shows and celebrities. During the winter season the theatres abounded with London plays and musicals, Paris ballets and concerts and Italian operas. In the first few months, Vera saw Noël Coward, Nijinsky, and Josephine Baker. For the idle rich there were endless dinners and cocktail parties. Vera and Jacqueline spent hours at their favorite couturiers in Ezebkia.

In Cairo, Vera underwent a metamorphosis. She realized that her life was far better here than it ever would have been in Europe, even without the Nazis. She threw herself completely into the social life, and into the pageantry that accompanied it.

Vera finished the tea that Fatima brought her. She got dressed, and had the chauffeur drive her to Gezireh, where she had made plans to meet Jacqueline and tell her all about her trip. While Vera was away, her friend had managed to secure for her two tickets to the social event of the season; the Annual Khedive Ball. This Highness King Farouk would be hosting it at the Abdin Palace. The Ball was in one week and Vera could hardly contain her excitement.

"I've got great news!" exclaimed Aaron as he walked through the door that evening.

"What is it?" Vera looked up from the biography of Lawrence of Arabia she'd been reading.

"We've got the contract with the British Army," he beamed. With the threat of war looking over Europe in May 1939, securing a contract with the British Army was a lucrative prospect to say the least.

"Oh, Aaron!" shrieked Vera. "That's fantastic!" She threw her arms around his neck. She had asked Jacqueline to do her best to pull some strings for this job. Miles Lampson was a very good friend of the General.

"The second bit of news is I got a letter from your Uncle Leo in Haifa today." Aaron rummaged through his briefcase, then pulled the letter out and handed it to Vera. "He says a man who recently immigrated, a Mr. Reuben remembers Dad from Dachau. Vera, I must go and talk to him and find out more. If this Mr. Reuben could get out of Dachau, maybe there's a chance for Dad."

Vera sighed and nodded. A picture of her parents the last night of their lives flashed through her mind. And her sister. She pushed them fiercely away. She wished Anna had never told her. "When are you going?"

"Tomorrow. There's no time to lose. The situation in Europe is getting worse every week. Now Hitler is making trouble in Poland."

Vera shook her head and walked toward the veranda. She didn't want to hear, not talk about the politics, not about the military stuff. Not about any of it. Especially not now when her life was so good. It was not a good time to bring up the Khedive Ball either, she thought.

"Aaron, you go ahead to Haifa. I'm still not feeling well. I've been feeling clammy all day. Still the heat stroke, I think."

Aaron looked at her puzzled. "Are you sure? Your sister would love to see you. I'm sure the heat stroke will pass."

Vera shook her head. "No, not this time. I can go another time. It's not that far away, after all."

Aaron spoke no more about it, but made preparations to leave. The next day Vera accompanied him to the train station.

"One ticket please, from Cairo to Haifa," he said to the man behind the wicket. "Vera, are you sure?"

"I'm sure. You go ahead and see what can be done for your parents."

"Return, sir?"

"Yes, in one week."

In one hour, Aaron was aboard the train, heading northeast to Haifa. Vera returned to her car.

"Where to Mrs. Cohen?" asked the chauffeur.

"Ezbekiya," she replied. There was a particular gown she had had her eye on that would be perfect for the Khedive Ball.

Anna stood outside the Haifa train station, squinting in the bright sun. It had been a pleasant ride from Istanbul, but nowhere near as luxurious as the Orient Express. She opened her purse and pulled out her silver compact, dabbed her nose with powder discretely, then snapped it shut and put it back in her purse.

She looked around the square in front of the station. There were not as many horse-drawn wagons as cars, if not more. Most of the local people wore short pants, and short sleeve shirts opened at the neck. Other than her husband and uncle, and perhaps a few people who had arrived on their train, no one wore a jacket or tie. She glanced down at her Parisian black wool dress and fashionable high-heeled shoes. Specks of dust were already starting to collect on them. She asked herself, would she ever need them again? Or her smart hat, kid gloves, silk stockings, or even her compact for that matter? Clearly, she was overdressed for her new life. But the air was warm and filled with the glorious, intoxicating scent of orange blossoms from the citrus groves nearby. Soaking up the sun's warmth, and breathing in the wonderful fragrance, she felt a deep and spiritual sense that she had come home. This was the place of her people's origins, and their destiny. This was the *Promised Land*.

The Jewish Agency has prepared a home for Leo and Ruth Weiss near the Jewish Agency building where he would be working. The gleaming white houses were spread up a hillside. Around them were planted roses, bougainvillea, and morning glories. Beyond that, the hills and surrounding areas were sparse and barren.

Anna and Shimon would stay with her parents until they found a place of their own.

Rabbi Weiss, who had lived his life in the forefront of politics, now shifted into working behind the scenes. Soon after arriving, he met up with his longtime friend Eliahu Golomb. Eliahu was head of the Haganah, the 'official' underground defense groups that had sprung up, like the Irgun, but they were radicals. The Rabbi preferred the relative

modernization and restraint of the Haganah. He despised bombings, killing innocent civilians, and the anarchy of any sort of terrorism.

Now, as the assistant head of the Jewish Agency's Aliya (immigration) section, he would work with Eliahu to fortify Haganah's fledging program of illegal immigration. He was determined to sway the Agency's long standing opposition to anything illegal. Rabbi Weiss saw illegal immigration as a vital tool in the struggle to change the White Paper policy, a sort of mass immigration rebellion. Without it, Zionism was bound to fail. It was their last chance to hang on to their country. They must wage a battle not for immigration, but through immigration.

Over the next few weeks, Anna and Shimon scoured the streets of Haifa. They looked for a place to live, and work for Shimon. But they also wanted to become familiar with the town, which was so different from any place they had ever known. The oldest part of Haifa was nestled around the port. It was the Muslim area, with several mosques and minarets. Beyond the old town were the newer Jewish neighborhoods with wider tree-lined streets.

Anna and Shimon often stopped in one of the many European style cafés. Here they found Jews from all over Europe, sipping French café au lait from large mugs, Turkish coffee from demitasses, Russian tea in tall glasses with lemon and English tea in cups with milk. They read newspapers and conversed in whatever language was common and comfortable for the group; Hebrew, Polish, French, Hungarian, Arabic, Czech, Bulgarian, Romanian, English, Russian, German. As new visitors would join the table, the language would shift for their benefit. Two men from Riga speaking Latvian might change to German when a man from Warsaw joined them since he would know no Latvian and their Polish was poor. Russians might shift to Polish, English or French. Hungarians got along in German or French. Germans often knew English and French. The English knew only English, and the Americans knew slang.

The hottest topics of discussions were the British and the Arabs. Ubiquitous British soldiers carried swagger sticks, ostensibly to prevent Arab attacks on Jews. But clashes between the British and the Jews were not uncommon. Nearly every day the radio reported Arab attacks on the kibbutzim. In contrast to the lovely atmosphere and pleasant weather, the human situation was volcanic. Some vulnerable communities were on the brink of hysteria.

"I never realized there was such a problem in Palestine between the Arabs and Jews," said Shimon over dinner one night.

"The kibbutzim are surrounded by stockades and have thirty five foot searchlight towers for protection against Arab raider," explained Rabbi Weiss. "And, with good reason."

"I guess we were too absorbed in Hitler's latest decree against us back home to pay much attention to what was going on in Palestine," said Shimon.

Anna put her fork down. "But we have to carry on. Our people have struggled to bring this desert to bloom. They've worked together, without hierarchies or class distinctions. That's what I like."

The Rabbi nodded in agreement. "Life here is dominated by a completely different set of values than in Europe. Labor is what earns respect. Wealth is unimportant, so are titles and all the paraphernalia."

"I'm beginning to realize that I won't be able to make much a living here as a journalist. I'll probably have to think of something else."

"I believe there is a shortage of people who know how to milk cows."

They all chuckled.

"Have you seen a house you like yet?" asked Ruth.

"No, not yet."

"I heard there was a nice place for sale just at the edge of town, at the northern tip. You might want to check it out," said the Rabbi.

"Well make a point of looking at it tomorrow."

The house was on high land overlooking a spectacular expanse of sandy beach and the turquoise blue Mediterranean. It sat on twenty acres of property, part of which was an old citrus grove. Beyond the grove, the hills were bare except for the old tuft of wild mustard or thistle. Further along the coast, the plain was still under water from the winter rains.

The house itself was separated from all this by a row of eucalyptus trees. There were palm trees and flowering hedges, now overgrown. It was a fine house by Palestinian standards, with two stories, wide verandas, a large dining and living room with an open marble fireplace. Upstairs were four bedrooms and another broad balcony. The garden and flowerbeds were choked with weeds. The stables and outbuildings had not been used for years. The air was filled with the scent of the citrus blooms and the whirr of hummingbirds.

Anna and Shimon stood on the ridge overlooking the beach. A man with half a dozen heavily laden donkeys was walking along the sand heading north. The beach was still the most efficient highway between coastal towns.

"What are you thinking?" asked Shimon, his eyes meeting Anna's.

"I love it. It's perfect," she smiled.

"It's going to need a lot work."

"It's perfect."

Later that evening at the Weiss' home, Anna and Ruth were putting the finishing touches on the table setting. They laid out heavy silverware and gold rimmed porcelain the Weiss' had had shipped from their London home as soon as they were settled. Anna carefully fixed the flowers in the centerpiece.

"This is a very special Sabbath; in celebration of your new home," Ruth said, placing wine on the table.

"It's going to take time to fix the place up. The owner is an old man who hasn't had the strength to do much since his children left and his wife died."

"But you'll do it and make it beautiful. I'll help you."

"Oh, Aunt Ruth, you don't have to."

"Hush. We only have each other now, and many hands make light work."

In the living room Rabbi Weiss was congratulating Shimon.

"This is wonderful! It's a fine house. I went around to have a look at it yesterday. Needs sprucing up but a fine house and a beautiful spot on the beach.

"More than sprucing, I'm afraid, but we're very happy with it."

Rabbi Weiss rubbed his chin. "You know, I've been thinking."

"What about?"

"The land beyond the house."

"You mean the wasteland?"

"Yes. It belongs to an Arab landowner, I checked it out. Suppose you and I went in together and bought it?"



"For heaven's sake, why? It's all swamp or scrub past the groves. What would we want it for?"

"Nearly all of Palestine was swamp or scrub, and look what the people have done with the land. Look what the old man did. Those twenty acres looked the same before he came along."

"Well, how many acres are you talking about?"

"Five hundred, a thousand? Depends on how much the Arab will sell it for."

"Five hundred!" Shimon explained. "What would we do with it?"

"Cultivate it."

"But I'm not a farmer and neither are you. I wouldn't know where to start. Besides, the twenty acres we've got is more than enough to keep me busy."

"I understand, but let me put it to you in another way. When the White Papers come into effect in May, there will be restrictions on Jews purchasing land, particularly from Arabs. We might not have another chance. It is our responsibility, in the interest of building a homeland, to develop and improve this place. And there will be plenty of strong, young immigrants who will be willing to work for room and board. Who says we have to do it all at once? Think about it, Shimon."

They made their way into the dining room. "I will," Shimon promised. "I'll talk to Anna about it tonight."

Uriel Meyer was sitting in his rocking chair on the veranda when Anna and Shimon drove up to the house. It wasn't often that he had visitors any more, and he was glad for the company. He offered them some tea sweetened with cherry jam; a traditional drink from his native Russia.

"When did you come to Palestine, Mr. Meyer?" asked Shimon.

"Uriel, please." He sighed and fixed his eyes on the cresting wave of the sea. "We came in 1905 from Petrograd after the last Tsarist pogroms. I came with my wife, my son and two daughters, my sister and her husband. There were five hundred of us who sailed from the Black Sea."

Uriel lit a cigarette; his face was lined and leathery, his hands worn from years of manual labor.

"We came to live on the land, and died in the swamps. Of the five hundred, three hundred and fifty died of disease, mainly malaria. Some fled to the hills to escape death." He raised the cigarettes to his lips and took a long draught.

"My youngest daughter died of the fever after two years. She was eleven. I thought then I would die of grief." His face showed pain still sharp thirty years later.

"For four years our crops failed and the trees still hadn't produced fruit. We were heading for bankruptcy. Then the Baron Edmond de Rothschild of France gave us money to keep the farm afloat until we could harvest crop. There were some good farmers amongst us early pioneers, but we were new to the climate and soil. We planted the wrong crops, at the wrong time. The Rothschilds helped many of the early farmers with donations.

"Finally, after the seventh season, we had a harvest. We began to build this house. By then my wife and I had had another child, a boy. We were so happy that things were getting better. Then my sister died. My brother-in-law returned to Russia. Many settlers returned to Europe in those days; life was too hard for them here. A few years later, he was killed in

the war." Smoke drifted about his grizzled face. The struggles and hardships of his life were etched there, but his toughness and determination shone through.

"We believed that returning to the soil was the only way we could make a life here. We worked hard, and from nothing we made a beginning. In other countries, people worked for personal pride or ambition or status. We lived and worked for the dream."

"Did you ever have trouble with the Arabs?" asked Anna.

"Not in the beginning. We had many here as hired hands. That was before the Great War, when Palestine was under Turkish rule."

"What happened?"

"During the Great War, Britain was fighting the Turks, who controlled the Ottoman Empire. The British asked the Arabs to help them. Sherif Hussein, the Arab leader, and Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner, came to an agreement. The British promised to repay the Arabs' efforts with a stake in liberated territories after the war.

"While the British were in negotiations with Sherif Hussein, a secret pact known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement had been agreed by the Allies. They would carve up the Ottoman Empire for themselves. And, because British wanted to capture Jerusalem from the Turks, they made the same deal with the Jews as they had with the Arabs.

"When Britain won, the Palestinian Arabs made their claim, but the British insisted that this particular territory was excluded from the original promise. The whole of the Middle East was divided between the British and the French as spoils of war. When the Arabs found out about the Sykes-Picot Agreement, a pall of disillusionment swept over the Arab World. The British then turned around and signed the Balfour Declaration, whose terms would see Palestine made into an independent Jewish state."

"So they felt betrayal and double-crossed," said Shimon,

"Naturally, and I can't say I blame them. They don't trust the British, and resent us."

"Now that it looks like there's going to be another war," said Shimon, "the British are dropping us and trying to win over the Arabs again."

"Especially since most Arab leaders are flirting with the Nazis. The British are afraid of an oil embargo so they are ignoring their promises to us. Now, *we* don't trust the British and resent the Arabs." Uriel sighed. "I don't think they really want either the Arabs or the Jews to have Palestine." He snuffed out his cigarette, leaned back in his chair and gazed out at the horizon again.

When Anna and Shimon left Uriel, their minds were made up. They would buy the extra land, as much as they possibly could. Inspired by Uriel's spirit, they were determined to work the land as he had done. They would make a beginning by standing on Uriel's shoulders, and others would make a beginning by standing on theirs.

Anna had discovered a driving force inside her, a patriotic feeling she had never had before. There had always been talk about building a Jewish homeland, with Uncle Leo President of the World Zionist Organization, and the Jewish Agency in London. Shimon had spoken about it passionately when they were dating. Zionism had been a concept in her mind. Now, she felt it in her heart. At last she understood Shimon's passion. She was prepared to work not only for herself, but for the mutual good of the people. Anna, like Vera, was becoming a different person.

Shimon and Leon invested nearly all of their money in the purchase of one thousand acres of land. They Arab sold it to them gladly. It had always been called the Land of Thistles. Nothing would ever grow on it. His sheep couldn't even graze on it. Good riddance.

They moved into the house in mid-February. There was such an overwhelming amount of work to be done; they didn't know where to start.

"I think we should bring electricity into the house first," said Anna.

"No, we can get by with kerosene lamps. What we have to do is clear the undergrowth in the orchard and prune the trees."

"But we don't know how to prune trees. We'd hack them to death. Let's drain the swamp."

"What about the drive to the house? Every time it rains, it turns to knee-deep mud."

In the end, Ruth had the answer. She and Anna would start fixing up the house, and arrange for electricity to be brought in. Shimon would till the garden to prepare it for vegetables.

They quickly learned that the land did not run with milk and honey, as the scriptures claimed, but was strewn with sand and rocks and swarming with mosquitoes ready to infect them with malaria. Quinine was a lifesaver.

Everyday Ruth came to the house, and she and Anna scraped, sanded, painted, chalked, hammered and sawed. Outside, Shimon tilled the earth until the blisters on his hands burst and his hands were wrapped in bandages. When the plot was ready for planting, they sat around the table deciding what to sow.

"Look here," Ruth rummaged through the bag she had brought with her. "I've bought a book. It's called Gardening for Beginners." They read about clay soil versus loamy soil, acid this, phosphate that, hybrids, cultivation and cross-pollination. They were having a hard time with it.

"I think we need a book with more pictures," said Anna.

"Perhaps you should have got a book called Gardening for the Ignorant," suggested Shimon. "That might have been more helpful."

"Or Gardening for the Absolutely Hopeless," said Anna.

They all laughed.

They asked for advice in the garden shop, and purchased some seedling tomatoes, peppers, melons and cucumbers. It was a start.

They began their day at dawn and didn't rest till long after sundown. In the evenings, they spent a few hours learning Hebrew, the ancient language being revived in Palestine, and making lists of what was needed for the farm.

"There!" announced Anna after making some calculations. "We're going to need two good farm horses, four good milking cows; three hundred early hatched pullets, one motor car and three dozen young orange trees."

Shimon looked at her from his book, 'Modern Conversational Hebrew'. "What are pullets?" he asked.

Her eyes went back to her paper and then she shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. I thought you'd know. I asked one of our neighbor sand she said we needed them."

One moonless night in early March, a fishing boat put down its anchor a few miles from the shore. A tall, muscular man jumped from the boat into the black water and began

to swim towards shore. He was fit from years of training and swam the distance with ease. As he approached land, his eyes scanned the shoreline. Every house he could see held equal risk. He had to choose. He picked the one that stood alone at the northern tip. Less chance of being noticed.

Emerging from the water, he made a dash across the beach and climbed up on to the top of the sandbank.

He knocked on the door.

After what seemed to be an eternity, a light went on and the door opened.

"I'm sorry to wake you. My name is Ben Yosef. I've come from Austria with fifteen others. Will you help us?"

Shimon and Anna stared in disbelief at the towering figure before them, dripping wet in his clothes.

"Yes, of course," said Shimon. "Please come in. Where are the rest?"

"They're still on the boat. I'll have to go back to get them."

After Ben had determined that his group would be safe here, he swam back out to fetch them. The sixteen young men settled into the stable for the night, making their beds in the straw.

"We belong to the Hehalutz Youth," explained Ben the next morning. "All of us have trained on farms, preparing for settlement in Palestine. We've been educated in agriculture, Hebrew and Zionist ideology. Year after year we waited for immigration certificates, but they never came. When Hitler took over Austria, we decided we couldn't wait any longer. By the time legal arrangements could be made, we might be all dead."

"Believe me, we understand," said Anna. "I escaped Germany after Kristallnacht."

There were mumbles and nods among the group.

"I decided to organize a trial run, to see if a workable route could be used by others. We took a train through Italy, Yugoslavia, and into Greece, where we hired the boat that brought us here. It wasn't easy, but the Captain managed to break through the British Naval Blockade."

"What are your plans now?" asked Shimon.

"I need to report that our trip was successful to the Hehalutz leaders in Vienna. Then we have to find a way to make a living. Eventually, all of us want to join the Haganah so we can help others escape.

"Why don't I make you an offer? You can all stay here as long as you wish. God knows we could use some help. Tomorrow, you and I can meet with people in the Haganah to talk about making arrangements for others to be brought over."

Ben breathed his first real sigh of relief. They've found a home.

By the time Ben Yosef arrived, the Haganah had already created the Aliya. They drew members from among those who had already organized illegal immigration expeditions. Shimon, Ben and his fifteen friends began basic Haganah training, and also trained in coordinated landing techniques. Since the Haganah was basically an organization of outlaws, they had to live seemingly normal lives; holding jobs, running businesses, or attending school. When called on, they would quietly slip away. When the job was done, they slipped quietly back.

Extreme precautions had to be taken to avoid being noticed by the British police. They trained in remote areas where they could learn to use firearms, and their arsenals were kept hidden underground.

The work on the estate moved into high gear with the arrival of so many trained agricultural workers, and progress was made in quantum leaps. Ben sent four men to prune and clear the overgrown orchard right away. Then he sat down with Shimon and together they drew up plans to reclaim the swampland section by section. The first step was to dig drainage ditches in the submerged plots. They sank wells for irrigation and for fresh water. Beneath the stagnant sandy surface, they found the soil was good.

Once the ditches were dug, it wasn't long before the water drained away. Then the hard work really began. Their muscles ached and strained, the sweat poured down their bronzed backs and faces as they toiled in the burning sun, removing heavy rocks from acre after acre of land to make it ready for the plough.

Shimon, who had spent most of his life with a book or a desk in front of him, now labored shoulder to shoulder with the men from Austria. They got ready to plough the first ten acres. The plough, a hand-held single-bladed contraption, was hauled along behind two massive horses. Blisters on top of blisters covered his hands. Nevertheless, working out in the sun, despite the hardships, was like living part of a dream.

"Are you going again tonight?" asked Anna, waking from her slumber as she heard the rustling in their bedroom.

"Yes," he said pulling on his khaki trousers.

Anna never asked about the details or his night missions. She knew he was involved in the landing organization that helped refugee boats, but that was all. She would catch bits and pieces of conversations; "the Astra...many destroyers...searchlights...deportations...the Aegean...barely seaworthy...engine trouble, two weeks late...ran out of food...the Nicola...overcrowded..."

Shimon bent down in the darkness and kissed her. The intensity of her love had grown in the blazing sun of this *Promised Land*. "Bye," he said.

"Take care," she answered. The door clicked shut behind him.

Anna went to the window. The shadowy figures of Shimon, Ben and three others from the farm were walking, rucksacks on their backs, down the beach. She felt again the sickening worry about them being caught. It would be another steepness night.

Shimon had not yet returned, and the other men had gone into town for the morning. Anna was alone on the estate when Ruth, pruning the oleanders that had crept up the lower windows. Suddenly they heard a commotion coming from the hill behind the house.

"Look," Ruth stopped, squinted her eyes and pointing, "What's going on?"

Anna didn't answer; her mouth went dry. They were struck with horror as they saw a black-robed horde of men heading for their estate.

"Arabs," Anna whispered.

"What are we going to do?" Ruth went pale.

Anna ran inside the house and telephoned the police. She tried to control the panic in her voice as she explained their situation.

"We'll be out as soon as possible."

"They're on our drive! When are you going to get here?"

"Can't tell you exactly. Like I said, as soon as we can."

Anna slammed down the receiver. They couldn't stay inside the house. She never wanted to be cornered in a room again. Memories flashed through her mind, and her throat tightened.

"Come on," she grabbed Ruth by the hand and pulled her out of the house.

"Where are we going?" Ruth was trembling with fear.

"Ruth, pull yourself together now," Anna shoved a rake in her hand, and picked up a hoe for herself. "We're going to go down the drive and meet them face to face." She didn't wait for Ruth's incredulous reaction, but headed down the drive. Ruth gulped, took a few deep breathes and followed. She had never been so afraid in her entire life.

When they were fifty yards away, the Arabs hesitated at the command of their leader. Several of the men at the head of the pack exchanged glances. Anna could hear her heart pounding. The Arabs began to shout incomprehensible words back and forth.

"*Seebohm...doul si taet!* Leave them...they're just women!"

Suddenly, without explanation, they turned back down the drive and disappeared over the hill.

Anna and Ruth put down their rake and hoe and cried, holding each other.

Half an hour later, two policemen on horseback arrived via the beach. Anna explained that the men had left without incident. The policemen asked if she wanted to press charges or trespassing. She shook her head and they left. That same week Anna joined the Haganah.

The meeting was held in the packing house in the middle of a citrus grove; paraffin lamps provided the illumination. Yacov Dosstrovsky, the Haganah commander for Haifa, sat grim-faced at the table with a Bible in front of him. The newcomers each placed their hand on the Bible and swore an oath. It was a simple procedure. When all the new members had been sworn in, a tall, thin Englishman with penetrating blue eyes came in. He shook hands with Yacov, and began speaking.

Captain Orde Wingate, a British Intelligence Officer, had been posted in Palestine since 1936, the height of the Arab revolts. He was an outspoken supporter of the Zionism, and was convinced that the Jews had a legitimate place in Palestine. Wingate admired Jewish resilience in the face of the world's hostility. He identified on a personal level with the Jews, due to his experience of bullying in prep school. He was particularly disappointed at the way the British were keeping their peace. He complained to his supervisors when Jewish settlers were arrested and put in jail for defending their settlements against marauding Arab invaders. He complained when British soldiers were forbidden to shoot at attacking Arabs, but had to shoot in the air. He was enraged that the Jews were limited in their right to bear arms while the Arabs could have all they wanted. Wingate's vociferous stance caused much consternation among his military superiors.

Orde Wingate had started to train the Haganah in all manners of defense; guerilla warfare tactics, surveillance, the surprise element, and the special night squads. Those Haganah members who trained under Captain Wingate gained priceless knowledge and experience, which led to increased victories over Arab assaults.

At the meeting, Ben and three others from the farm were chosen to go to Hashara in three days.

“Our purpose is to seek out Arab raiders in the countryside, lie in ambush for these gangs, and destroy them. Our modus operandi is Responsible, Restrained, Coordinated.

“If it comes to fight between you and the Arabs, you can win. In modern warfare it is intelligence, equipment and skill which count, not numbers or position. You must learn to rely on defending yourself. No one else will ever do it for you. You must learn to live with one hand on the plough, while in the other you hold a spear, just as in the ancient days.”

Aaron arrived in Haifa as the setting sun was spreading a honey-amber glow over everything, giving the town a translucent, gilded warmth. Leo and Shimon met him at the station. Aaron was glad to be among old friends. But he missed Vera.

“Look at you Shimon!” he exclaimed. “I’ve never seen you so bronzed. You always used to be pasty-white.”

“You don’t look so bad yourself,” answered Shimon.

“Where is Vera?” asked Rabbi Weiss.

“She wasn’t up to the journey,” Aaron replied as convincingly as he could.

“Oh dear, is it serious?”

“No. A touch of heat stroke. We just came back from a trip into the desert. We went down to Mount Sinai.” Aaron told of his camel riding skills while they drove to Leo’s home.

Anna was surprised and extremely disappointed that Vera hadn’t come. “Are you sure she’s alright?” she asked Aaron more than once. Aaron did his best to reassure her, but she remained unconvinced.

They all sat down to a meal Ruth had prepared, and talked into the small hours of the morning. Aaron hadn’t had a good kosher meal in months, and realized how much he’d been missing Jewish food.

In the morning, Leo went to fetch Saul Reuben. Aaron waited impatiently, unable to touch his breakfast. He sat rigidly in an armchair. Shimon sat in another across from him. Silence filled the room until Aaron burst out, “I should have gone with Leo! I can’t stand this waiting around.”

Shimon looked out the window at the Port of Haifa, beautifully nestled against the turquoise sea. His mind was on his own parents. Aaron still had hope, he thought to himself. He didn’t.

“Have you heard from your mother lately?” Shimon asked.

Aaron shook his head. Five minutes passed, then another five.

“If Reuben got out, there *must* be a way for...” Aaron didn’t finish his sentence. They heard the sound of voices approaching the house. He rushed into the foyer, followed by Shimon.

Saul Reuben appeared in the doorway. He was tall, with dark hair and olive skin in his mid-forties.

“Hello, Aaron,” said Saul, holding out his hand. “You’re the image of your father.” His soft, slightly nasal German was of Austrian origin. Aaron took his hand, feeling both proud and desperate.

When they were seated, Saul began to speak.

“I was involved with the Betar Zionist group in Austria for many years. After Hitler came to power and things started to turn ugly, the Betarists were one of several groups who advocated a boycott of German goods. After the Nazis invaded my country, the Germans declared such activity treason. My offices were broken into, but I managed to

destroy the most damning papers before I was arrested, so I ended up in Dachau rather than being executed on the spot.

"I had been in Dachau for almost six months when your father, Abraham, arrived in our barrack hut. He spoke often as you and your mother. The two of you were always on his mind."

Saul spoke of the terrible conditions they endured, the privations and the deaths. It was far worse than his listeners had imagined.

"How did you manage to get out?" Aaron asked.

"While I was in Dachau, several of my friends in the Betar group were still free, and trying to negotiate for the immigration of as many Jews as possible. It's a complicated procedure that involves raising money for passage, immigration permits from Nazi authorities, transit visas for the countries en route and so on. It's a nightmare. But they were successful in my case. I was released on the condition that I would leave the country within two weeks.

They were stunned by this last revelation.

"They released you from a concentration camp and *made* you leave the country?" Shimon was incredulous.

"Yes. Quite a number were released from jails and concentration camps on these terms. The Nazis want to get rid of the Jews any way they can; to make all the Reich *Judenrein*. That's the argument my friends used with the authorities; that they were helping to meet one of the Reich's highest objectives. They were lucky to have hit on the right man, a Lieutenant Schellenberger. They appealed to his desire to impress his superiors by freeing the Reich of Jews."

Shimon's face went pale. "Lieutenant Schellenberger."

"Yes. Second Lieutenant Schellenberger," replied Saul. "You know him?"

"Unfortunately," Shimon's voice was bitter now. "He must have distinguished himself in Austria, because at the time I was acquainted with him, he was a First Lieutenant."

"Saul, what can your contacts do to help Abraham?" asked Rabbi Weiss.

"Is there anything I can do?" implored Aaron. "Money is no problem; an immigration visa to Egypt is no problem. Just tell me what I can do!" Aaron was almost shouting.

Saul shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid our group doesn't exist anymore. All of them have been arrested, or they escaped or disappeared. I'm sorry. I wish I could do something. Your father is a fine man." Aaron hung his head and wept.

Later in the afternoon, Shimon drove Aaron to the farm. Along the way, Aaron noticed all the new homes being built. He recognized the distinctly European flavor of certain streets, and the occasional familiar drift of German or Yiddish caught his ear. There was none of that in Cairo, and he realized for the first time that he missed home.

The car bumped along the drive and came to a stop in the shade by the barn. Aaron looked at the house, overgrown with magenta bougainvillea, and the stretch of beach.

"You live here?" he exclaimed. "It's fantastic."

It hadn't the stately elegance of his home in Cairo, but it was for a more to Aaron's liking. This was a home. What he had was a residence.



“Hello!” called a deep voice behind them. Aaron spun around. A muscular giant strode toward them. He was stripped to the waist, wiping his forehead with his arm. “This is Ben,” Shimon said. “Ben, meet my brother-in-law, Aaron.”

“Ben Yosef. Pleased to meet you.” They shook hands. “Let me help you.”

Ben reached into the trunk of the car and picked up two enormous bags of fertilizer. He slung them over his shoulder with ease. There was a quiet gravity in his manner that impressed Aaron immediately. He wanted to know Ben better; he seemed to have the strength of an ox and the soul of a saint.

Shimon and Anna’s home, Aaron quickly learned, was a world in itself. Because of their move toward self-sufficiency, and the help of the workers that lived in the stables, there was little need for outside intervention. Because the workers were illegal immigrants, the more reclusive they all were; the better.

Despite the physical hardship of ploughing the land, removing the stones, digging the ditches, Aaron was smitten by the place. This, he thought exultantly, was life. He would trade his cultivated haute couture life for this one any time. Cairo was tame compared to this; this was wild.

Several dozen young lemon, orange and tangerine trees were waiting to be planted. Aaron offered to help. He was surprised when Shimon told him that the saplings would not bear fruit for seven years. But he saw that it was this working for the future, carving out their lives from the sand and stone of this place that was required. Their vision kept them going, gave them dignity and courage. Aaron almost envied their dream.

They worked from dawn to dusk planting citrus trees and among them a few eucalyptuses, ‘to drink up the swamp’. Ben worked like a man in the grip of some obsession. He did as much as two men, yet never tired. It was grueling work, but he didn’t mind. He didn’t even mind the hordes of flies. It seemed the harder the work, the better he felt.

Aaron and Shimon tired their inadequate best to keep up with the others. At nightfall, they all headed down to the beach for a swim.

“Ben and the lads are a great help to you,” remarked Aaron, splashing the dust from his face.

“Couldn’t have done it without them,” agreed Shimon.

“He’s Herculean,” said Aaron. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“And not a lazy bone in his body either.”

“How did you find such good workers?” asked Aaron.

Shimon chuckled. “Actually, he found us.

As Shimon was recounting circumstances of Ben’s arrival, an idea struck Aaron.

“Did you say he belonged to the Betar Youth?” Aaron cut in.

“Yes!” Shimon hit upon the same thought. “Maybe he can help.”

When Ben heard the story he said he would contact his organization as soon as possible to see what could be done.

“I leave for Hashara early tomorrow morning,” Ben explained, “but I’ll send a cable the day I get back. I’ll only be away a week.” Aaron left for Cairo three days later, with rekindled hope.

"Vera, there's something serious we need to talk about," said Aaron as Fatima served their dinner. "I was very impressed with everything I saw in Haifa. I'm wondering if it wasn't a mistake not to move there."

Vera shot him an alarmed look. "What? It's just a bunch of struggling farms. What would you do there?"

"Buy some land, like Shimon."

"Ok. Buy land. Lots of people own a few acres in Palestine. It doesn't mean we have to live there."

"Actually, Vera, I want to live there. Why don't you go and visit your sister and see for yourself?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Aaron. There's nothing to do there! I'm not even going to consider it. Besides, we've just bought this house and the factory."

"We'd sell it in a flash." Aaron was growing angry.

Vera could see he was serious. But there was no way she was going to pack up her life in Cairo to be struck on some farm.

"Aaron, you don't know the first thing about farming and neither do I."

"Neither did Shimon and Anna. They learned. So have thousands of others. Look, there's more to life than just taking the easy road. A person has to do what's right."

"There's been nothing easy about my road. Now that we're living comfortably, what's so wrong with enjoying it?"

Aaron sighed in frustration. "We have our duty to our..."

"I don't want to move there!" Vera shouted.

Aaron stared down at his plate, and then said, "Vera, I remember home, and the way we used to live." His tone was very wistful. "It's Friday night, and I sit here at my table without candles or benediction."

"So that's what's bothering you?"

"It's the Sabbath!" he exploded.

"Our world's changed, Aaron, and we've got to change with it," Vera threw her napkin down.

"I would never have thought you would give up so quickly."

Vera listened resentfully.

"We may have had it tough in Germany the last few years," he continued, "but we always knew who we were. And when we got married, I thought I had a wife who would be the head of my Jewish household."

"Oh, let's stop this here and now," Vera stood up and pushed her chair back.

"Vera, you don't act like a Jew anymore. What would your mother and father say if they saw you now?"

"Moving to Palestine is not the answer. The Jews do nothing but fight Arabs there."

"All the more reason. We should be there fighting with them!"

"I want to live in a country as an equal, not as an enemy or a stranger."

"That's the coward's way!"

"At least I have the courage to say I don't want any part of Orthodox Judaism anymore! It's brought us nothing but misery and trouble." The words tumbled out of her mouth before she thought of stopping them. Now they hung heavily between them. Fatima disappeared into the kitchen.

Vera's words were like blows to Aaron. He rose to his feet.

"I can't believe what I'm hearing. Being a Jew is not a *choice*, Vera. You are a Jew whether you like it or not and our children will be too.

With that he turned and walked out. The slam of the front door resounded like a cannon shot through the house.

But Vera held the high card in her determined little hand. She would wait for him to cool down. When he returned, she would tell him she was pregnant.

Outside the town of Hashara, golden foothills curved up to the rocky Canaan Mountains. The town was encircled by forest. A small brook dropped down from the hills and sparkled over the stones. The night tracks of lizards and birds could be seen in the dust on the roads. Only the buzzing of insects cut the heavy, hot silence.

There came the sound of footsteps on dry leaves. Three men emerged from the bush onto the road. Ben, with his rifle slung over his shoulder, was followed by two boys from Hashara; Zvi, seventeen and Ari, nineteen. The two boys' eyes darted about nervously. Ben extended his arm to signal calm.

"No sign of anything here," said Ben. "We'll stay hidden and keep an eye out. This is a good vantage point." They disappeared back into the bush.

The late morning sun sliced between the leaves and lay in bright puddles on the ground. Ben put his hands into the cool brook water and splashed his face, then drank. Lying back on the riverbank, he crossed his hands behind his head. It was nearly noon. They waited in silence.

Then, a distant shout pierced the air. They turned their heads in the direction of the road. More voices, all shouting now, and coming nearer.

Ben, Zvi and Ari crept to the edge of the wood, their rifles ready. The rumble of an engine could be heard down the road. Ben listened keenly. It was too loud for a car; it was something larger.

A bus came into view, bumping slowly over the road, raising a cloud of swirling dust behind it. A bustle of shouts and hands and elbows came from its windows.

Ben stood in its path, the two boys flanking him. With a wave of one hand, he motioned the bus to stop.

"Don't lose your nerve and do anything crazy," he called back to his two companions.

The bus did not slow down. Now they could see it was full of Arabs.

"Do you recognize them?" asked Ben.

"No, no one we know," shouted Zvi.

Ben waved to the bus to stop. It did not.

He began to shout and waved frantically. The vehicle continued to rumble ahead. Ben stood squarely in the middle of the road, gripping this rifle. He raised the barrel and fired into the air. The bus shuddered to a halt. Heads popped out of the window and scuffling broke out inside.

The three figures on the road didn't move.

A few moments later, the driver shifted gears, turned the bus around, and drove off down the road. It did not return.

At the end of their shift, Ben, Zvi and Ari were relieved by three others. When they returned to town, Ben reported the incident to the Haganah chief.

Before sundown, three truckloads of British soldiers roared into Hashara.

"We have a warrant for the arrest of Ben Yosef. Zvi Shein and Ari Dyuravin," announced the British officer to the mayor, holding out the written documents.

"There must be some mistake. Only a warning shot was fired. No one was hurt," the mayor pleaded with the British officer.

"They can tell it to the authorities," said the officer coldly. Ben, Zvi and Ari were placed under arrest and taken to the Acre Fortress for detention.

Anna and Shimon learned of Ben's arrest over the radio. Despite their pleas, the three were sent to trial. The trial lasted only a few days before the British judges were ready to pass sentence.

Ben Yosef," the presiding judge announced, "I sentence you to the gallows where you will hang by the neck until dead.

Anna, Shimon and everyone who knew Ben were devastated by the news. Tears fell from Austria to Haifa.

Ben rose from his chair in the courtroom and said in a loud voiced, "Long live the Jewish State!"

Unperturbed, the judge turned to Zvi Shein and Ari Dyuravin. Both were sentenced to life imprisonment. A slight reprieve, as they were not illegal immigrants.

With that, the judge slammed down his gavel and strode out of the room. He had served in India and knew how to deal with 'troublesome natives'.

Dawn was only hours away. Ben strained in his chains to carve these words on the cell wall; "To die, or to conquer the Heights!" He finished a quarter of an hour before the first blue light appeared from the east. A peaceful expression came over his face as he watched through the tiny barred window. He was proud to be the first Jew to go to the gallows for his country. Perhaps in death he would go his people as great as service as in life. Let the world see that Jews would pay with their lives to win and keep the homeland God had promised them.

## **Chapter 16**

### **The Tiger**

“Anna, there’s someone I want you to meet,” said Rabbi Weiss after one of her Haganah training sessions.

“Oh, and who might that be?”

“Eliahu Golomb, the Haganah Commander in Chief.”

Anna looked at him in surprise but the Rabbi raised a hand in a gesture to halt any further questions.

“I’ll let him explain everything to you. He’s waiting for us across the street.”

They walked into a sparsely furnished café where a man with a heavy tan and deeply etched lines on his face sat alone by the window. He was wearing a khaki battle dress.

“This is Anna,” said Weiss. “Anna, allow me to introduce you to Eliahu.”

Golomb beckoned them to sit down. He came straight to the point.

“I’ve looked at your record,” he announced. “It says you speak six languages.”

Anna nodded. She was aware of him studying her with his penetrating eyes, measuring her response.

“I started young, I suppose. I liked to travel with my father. He always encouraged me; you know; got me tutors at home and bought me books.”

“You are married?” It sounded to Anna like more of a statement of fact than an enquiry.

“Yes.”

“The kind of work we do often takes us away from our families. Would you be willing to leave your husband for an undermined period of time?”

“That would depend on the mission.”

“I’ve read a report on your escape across the border. So you know how to fire a gun.”

“Yes.”

“Can you drive?”

“No.”

“Can you ride a motorcycle?”

“No.”

“You’ll do.” He nodded at Rabbi Weiss. “We have a mission for you in Romania, if you accept it.”

“I’ll do it,” replied Anna without hesitation.

“Just like that, without wanting to hear any more about it?”

“My only wish is to serve my people!”

“Fine,” Golomb explained. “The Mossad is a branch of the Haganah, but on which works independently. Your operation will fall under our Illegal Immigration section.

“Joining the Mossad means you give up your personal security and maybe even your own life as you’ve know it. You are not to discuss any aspect of your work or your mission with anyone else, not even your husband. Is that clear?”

“Very clear.”

“And finally, our work is considered to be illegal by every government in the world, including our own. If you are caught, there will be no one to help you.”

Anna nodded. “Just tell me what the assignment is.”

“To arrange for the transportation of illegal immigrants from Europe to Palestine. Your posting will be in Romania. You’ll be leaving in a few weeks for Bucharest where you’ll be working with our agent Joseph Karpal.”

June in Bucharest was sweltering and the sweat ran down Anna’s forehead as she walked out of the train station with her single suitcase.

The station square was jammed with taxis, street cars, buses, cars and even horse-drawn carriages. Gypsy women milled among the crowds selling flowers.

Anna hailed a taxi and after some bargaining with the driver, agreed on the fare and climbed inside.

“Hotel Continental,” she said and off they sped.

Bucharest was the Paris of the Balkans. Anna was surrounded by the buildings with colorful shuttered windows rimmed with balconies decorated with flowers. The closer that one was to the center of town, the more elegant the shops, the restaurants and the hotels became. She pulled a powder compact from her bag and wiped the grime and sweat from her face. She took out a comb and passed it through her hair.

The cab pulled up sharply in front of the Hotel Continental which, though fashionable at the turn of the century, was now distinctly faded in its elegance. Anna noticed that its oriental carpets were slightly frayed and the fabrics on the lounge chairs were visibly worn.

She registered at the front desk, handed over her passport and followed the porter to a small musty room. She went inside and surveyed her surroundings. There was a damp, stale feel to the place, as though it hadn’t been opened to the outside world for centuries. She went over to the window, pulled back the heavy velvet curtains and opened the window to let in some fresh air. The phone rang.

“Shalom, Anna,” said the voice, speaking in Hebrew. “I’m in the restaurant on the corner. Come down when you’re ready.” He hung up before she could ask how she would recognize him. How did she know she was here? How did he know what she looked like?

Anna went quickly into the bathroom only to find that there was just a small sink and no bathtub. She managed to find a communal bathroom for the whole floor further down the hall so she went inside and turned on the water. It ran ice cold with just the tiniest amount of hot water coming out every now and then. So, splashing herself with a flannel, she scrubbed away as much sweat and dust as she could and then changed into a clean skirt and blouse from her suitcase. She hurried downstairs, crossed the empty lobby and stepped down into the street outside.

There, just as her caller had said, was a small restaurant just across from where she was standing. She crossed the street, went inside and was looking around the crowded interior when an olive-skinned man in a grey business suit approached her.

“This way, my dear,” he said, as if he had known her for years. “I have a table reserved for us.”

Was he her contact, she wondered. If so, he was quite different from what she’d expected. But who else could it be, he’d spoken in Hebrew to her, the language that all Mossad members used. Few other Jews and virtually no one else outside the Jewish community could speak it. They would be fairly certain of not being overheard and understood even amongst the crowds thronging the inside of the restaurant.

“You must be Joseph Karpal,” she said as they took their seats.

He nodded then passed her the menu. While they were waiting for their order, Joseph Karpal filled her in on their situation in Romanian.

"We have virtual *carte blanche* on how we get the job done as long as it gets done and the authorities don't catch us. If you're caught, it's your look out."

"So I've already gathered." His tone seemed a little patronizing, thought Anna. She could tell that he was irritated that they'd sent him a woman. She realized that she would have to work hard to prove herself to him.

"Our work here is to achieve five virtually impossible objectives," he continued. "One, secure a ship to take illegal cargo when in these troubled times it costs a fortune even to hire a ship *legally*. Two, obtain enough funds to do this when all the organizations around the world, including some Jewish ones, are opposed to what we are doing. Three, once we have a ship, we have to convert it so it can hold as many people as possible hidden out of the way so the authorities don't spot them. Four, we take our dilapidated, overburdened old crates and run the British blockade made up of the latest Royal Navy patrol vessels and high speed destroyers. Five, we have to get hundreds, maybe thousands, of illegal immigrants who don't have proper papers across this country and onto the ship without being apprehended.

The odds are stacked against us. We will be asked to risk everything, including our lives, and months of hard work could well end up in nothing at all. Or worse than that, it could end up in the loss of the very lives we are trying to save!"

Karpal sat back and waited for Anna's reaction. She knew all about those ill-fate ships, as did everyone in Palestine. The British made sure that the capture of every illegal vessel was widely publicized so as to discourage further attempts. And then there were those less publicized ships that were lost at sea. She began to seriously question whether she had done the right thing in choosing to come on this mission.

"No doubt you're wondering what you're doing here, Anna." Karpal looked her directly in the eyes. "I'll be quite alright if you decide to return home to your husband."

"No, I won't be doing that. Have you found a boat yet?"

"I'm working on a few possibilities but there's nothing definite yet. That's what we're doing tomorrow; meeting a few Greek shippers. You can translate. I don't speak Greek and their only other language is French. You'd better prepare yourself for some hard bargaining," he said brusquely.

Anna nodded.

"But just as an interpreter," he added quickly. "Leave the negotiations to me, is that clear?"

"Quite clear."

The next day was one of frustration as they haggled and argued but in the end they still weren't able to knock the price down below ninety pounds sterling per head from any one of the three shippers they hired. The price remained simply too high for the very limited funds they had at their disposal.

"I have an idea," said Anna when they returned to the hotel.

"What?" Karpal sounded tired and irritated.

"I know someone in Egypt. I could ask him to go to Piraeus for us. Talk to the Greek shippers in their own backyard."

"We do not involve strangers in our affairs."

“But he’s not a stranger! He’s my brother-in-law. He’s married to my sister. We can trust him absolutely.”

She paused and then said more quietly. “He’s been through everything that I have.”

Karpal looked thoughtful.

“Ok. But don’t tell him too much,” he warned.

Aaron arrived in Piraeus in the early morning on board a tiny fishing boat he’d hired in Alexandria. He stepped gingerly off the boat onto the jetty and shook the skipper’s hand.

“Wait for me,” he said. “With luck, I’ll be able to conclude my business by the end of the day.”

Aaron was not by nature a good sailor and the overnight crossing of a rather choppy Mediterranean had left him feeling a little queasy. Not only that, he felt rather ill at ease in this new role in which he found himself. He had never had an ambition at all to be in international secret agent! He made for one of the waterfront taverns which crowded around the port’s many quays and ordered a Metaxa brandy.

The place was packed full of fishermen returning from their morning out at sea. They joked and gossiped over coffee and ouzo while Aaron, with his limited Greek, strained to follow their conversation.

He ordered a full bottle of Metaxa and took it with him to a table by the window occupied by three of the fishermen. He pulled up a chair.

“Yassoo,” he said. “Mind if I join you?” He plunked the bottle of brandy on the table. “Anyone care for a drink?”

A few Metaxas each and his new companions were more than happy to help him out with the information he needed.

Aaron rose from the table and after much back slapping; he left the tavern with a crumpled piece of brown paper. On it was a name and address written in flaky pencil.

He made his way to a side street where the air was stale and heavy with the smells of cooking. He stepped inside a cool, muggy foyer and climbed the stone stairway to the third floor where there was a landing with a single door.

He could hear female laughter inside as he pressed the button and rang the buzzer. After a few moments the door was opened to reveal a tousled-hair woman clutching a loose-fitting crimson dressing gown about her. She had stifled her giggles now and was looking Aaron up and down.

“I’m here to see Stavros,” said Aaron ignoring her attentions.

“Who is it?” bellowed a voice from inside.

“My name is Aaron Cohen.”

She shouted his name back inside. There was a brief “ok” from within and Aaron was ushered into the living room that was, to his surprise, luxuriously furnished. The woman disappeared down the hallway and he was left to wait alone. There was a rustling in the bedroom; the sound of drawers opening and closing and then Stavros emerged through the doorway, still stuffing his shirt into his trousers.

“Aaron. Good Morning. Can I offer you coffee, some breakfast maybe?”

“No, thank you. I’m fine.

“Well, tell me then, what can I do for you?” he settled into an armchair.

“I’ve been told that you have a boat for hire.”

“What do you need it for?”



"To transport people to Palestine."

"Oh yes, and what people would these be exactly?" said Stavros, knowing full well what the answer to his question was going to be.

"Ok, this is the job. We plan to take Jews to Palestine illegally."

A grin came over Stavros' unshaven face. He knew of these risky operations run by desperate people. And desperate people know how to pay desperate prices.

"You know I only have cargo ships, not passenger liners."

"Cargo ships are what we want."

"Well, I'm sure something can be arranged. I can offer you a twelve hundred ton cargo ship. The *Tiger*. Properly fitted out, she can carry thirteen hundred or so of your passengers."

"Is the *Tiger* seaworthy?" Aaron had become familiar with the crooked dealings of unscrupulous Greek shippers.

"Seaworthy? Of course she's seaworthy! What do you take me for?" he retorted indignantly.

"Alright then. How much?"

"Eighty five pounds sterling per head."

"What?! That same trip only costs thirty by luxury liner." Aaron was outraged.

"Yes, but this is a risky business that you're expecting me to undertake."

"I know, but you won't exactly be providing first class amenities, will you, just a rough plank of wood for people to sleep on. And a similar size cruise ship would only take about three hundred people. With thirteen hundred people on board, you'd still make a tidy profit even if you charge us a lot less."

"Tell your people to take a luxury liner then," he shrugged.

"They would if they could, you know that; but the British issue only so many immigration certificates and..."

"Ah! The British!" Stavros leaned back and stretched his legs. "Funny you should mention them. Do you realize that there are at least two dozen British patrol boats parading up and down the coast of Palestine as we speak? And they have just one purpose; to catch boats carrying illegal cargoes. I'm running a big risk here and the *Tiger* will be impounded." His tone became more businesslike. "Which means that in addition to the fare, I will need a deposit of ten thousand pounds sterling; the value of the ship in case she does not return."

Aaron's head began to spin. He was not used to doing business in this fashion.

"...and then there's the cost of the captain and crew, the flag..."

They bargained and argued for over an hour until, finally, a sum was agreed and Aaron left. He found his way back to the waterfront and boarded his boat.

The skipper was stretched out on deck asleep. Aaron prodded him gently. "Thank you, Captain," he said. "We can go now."

It was six o'clock in the evening when Anna's telephone rang. She ran to answer it.

"Hello."

"I've just got you a house," Aaron said, using the code which Anna had instructed him to.

"How much?"

"I've knocked it down to thirty a head, plus expenses."

Anna sighed in relief.

"But he wants ten thousand pounds sterling as a deposit."

"So, what's the total?"

"Seventy five thousand."

"We'll take it."

"He needs the deposit within a week to secure it."

"That's no problem. We'll get it. Thank you, Aaron. I'll be in touch."

She put down the phone and ran to Karpal's room. He listened carefully then said, "And how exactly do you propose we raise ten thousand pounds in one week?"

"What about the Jewish community here?"

"They're far too concerned about their own safety here to risk writing us a cheque for our grubby little operations. You might get small change here and there, but nowhere near the amount you're talking about."

"We have to get it!" Anna exclaimed. "We have to think of a way!"

She sat down at the end of the bed and tried to remember the names of the associates her father once had in Romania. He had done some business with them a number of years ago. She racked her brains to come up with a name.

"I've got it!" she burst out. "George Mandler. Have you tried him yet?"

Karpal exploded with laughter. "George Mandler the banker? He didn't get to where he is now by giving handouts to everyone who asks."

"Well, why don't we give him the chance to say no for himself?" She rose to her feet.

"Come on, Anna. He has half a dozen assistants whose main job is to sift through all the people who want to see him." He paused for a moment. "But, if you insist, go ahead. Be my guest."

"We'll see him first thing in the morning," she said.

"Fine," he called after her, "but don't forget, we have business here tonight first. Be back at my room by midnight."

Anna went back to her own room for a short rest. At midnight Karpal's room became a focal point for Mossad operations throughout Europe. From that hour, calls came in from the nine other European Mossad agents scattered around the continent; from Germany, Austria, France, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy and Switzerland. Karpal acted as coordinator for the group as illicit immigration from all of those countries would be ultimately funneled through to him. He listened, gave out instructions, passed out messages and information and discussed details in cryptic coded languages. The majority of the conversations centered on the attempts of his contacts to raise funds. Anna quickly learned that lack of money was a recurring theme in these discussions and one which limited their activities as much as the activities of the Nazis did. It wasn't until four in the morning that the phones died down and she was able to return to her room and go to bed.

Anna put on her best black dress and patent leather shoes to see Mandler. She knew that she would have to look her best to give her any chance of succeeding. Karpal went with her as far as the bank's ground floor foyer then took a seat in an armchair by the wall and buried himself in a newspaper. Anna went up to the teller, clutching her purse tightly.

"Excuse me; is Mr. Mandler in, please?"

The teller looked up at her with a blank expression and stared at her without speaking.

"My name is Anna Wiesenthal. Would you please tell Mr. Mandler that I'm here?"

"You have an appointment? He looked at her over the rims of his spectacles.

"Well, no, but..."

"Then I'm afraid Mr. Mandler can't see you."

"I have a very important matter to discuss with him, something he would wish to know about."

"Just one moment." The teller went to speak with a stocky man in a dark suit who was seated behind a large desk behind the counter. They exchanged a few words in whispers, and then the man came forward towards Anna.

"Mademoiselle, I'm afraid it is completely out of the question for you to see Mr. Mandler without an appointment. His diary is completely full for the rest of the month," said the secretary.

"Yes, thank you. I understand that he is a very busy man, but this is a matter of extreme urgency."

"Perhaps it is something I can help you with," he said crossing his hands and rocking slowly on his feet.

"I'm afraid not. Could you tell him that I have news from a Mr. Samuel Weiss in Germany?"

It was obvious that they had heard of the name. His expression changed immediately.

"I will speak to Mr. Mandler's assistant," the secretary said and walked away.

Anna turned to glance at Karpal but his face was still buried behind the newspaper.

The secretary returned with the assistant.

"Mademoiselle, Mr. Mandler will see you when he can find an appointment for you."

"Please," Anna burst out, "I won't leave until you at least ask Mr. Mandler himself."

The teller, secretary and assistant exchanged weary glances. The assistant sighed, his professional veneer of patience clearly wearing very thin. He glared at Anna and then reappeared shortly afterwards in a doorway to beckon her forward. Anna hurried across the floor past a row of typists hammering away at the keys of their typewriters. The sound echoed oppressively in the stone walls of the foyer.

"Mr. Mandler will see you now," the assistant said grudgingly. "You have exactly five minutes."

Anna nodded but said nothing. She had five minutes to persuade an eminent banker to give a huge amount of money to a completely unknown organization that she was not even at liberty to tell him anything about. She had prepared a speech in her mind, but that would take at least half an hour. Her palms began to grow clammy. She had to get the money. The lives of hundreds of people depended on it. Where would she start? What could she say? What should she leave out?

The assistant opened the heavy wooden doors and showed her in.

The man behind the enormous oak desk rose to his feet. He was tall and imposing with grey hair with was carefully slicked back. He wore an expensively tailored dark colored suit.

"Please have a seat. What can I do for you Mademoiselle that is so urgent? Do you need a loan?" He came around his desk and stood in front of her.

"You might put it that way," she said in a thin and uncertain voice. She felt very small in that room, in front of that massive desk, in front of him.

"Are you in some sort of trouble?"

"All Jews are in trouble," she lifted up her eyes so that they met his for the first time. Mandler's manner stiffened. "I hope you haven't come here to discuss politics."

"Please, Mr. Mandler, let me explain," Anna begged.

He remained silent. She could tell that she would have to do some very quick thinking if she were to come up with an effective way to say what she had to say in just a few short minutes.

"Do you have children, Mr. Mandler?"

"I do."

"If their lives were in danger and you could rescue them, would you pay thirty pounds sterling for a voyage to safety for them?"

"Is that why you're here?" You need thirty pounds?" his voice was becoming impatient.

"No. I'm here to ask for much more. I will give you the chance to save not one life or even two lives but one thousand lives."

He laughed. "Are you doing all this by yourself?" Clearly, he was not taking her seriously. Anna hesitated. She was not supposed to tell him too much. Mr. Mandler was powerful. With a single telephone call he could blow the Mossad's cover throughout Romania. But, he *was* Jewish.

"You have three more minutes. Is there anything else you have to add?"

"I'm with the Mossad," she blurted out.

"The who?"

She realized that this would be hard for him to believe. She didn't exactly look like a secret agent. Even Karpal didn't take her seriously.

"I'm with the Division of Immigration that organizes transit to Palestine for those who do not have the correct papers," she chose her words carefully.

"I see! You represent the division of *illegal* immigration. Would that by chance be the same department which organizes those ships we read about in the papers all the time?"

"Lots of ships have been lost or captured, but not all of them are ours. And what's more, those you hear about are the ones that don't make it, but there are many other ships that do arrive safely; the ones the newspapers never know about. The law says it's illegal, but it's not wrong Mr. Mandler, it's the only way to save the lives of thousands of Jews; by bringing them back to their homeland. Palestine has always been promised to us by the British. The only reason why this whole business has suddenly become 'wrong' now is because they've decided to change their minds."

"No, I'm afraid I can't help you. I simply do not believe in your cause let alone your fly-by-night organization. You may think you'll be saving those people, but actually I think you'll be putting them at even greater risk, maybe even the risk of death."

Anna remembered the fate of the *Atrato* a month ago. It had been captured by the British and now its three hundred passengers were all in detention camps. The *Assimi* was sent out to sea with three hundred and sixty nine passengers on board and was never heard of again. Just the previous week, the *Liesel* had been apprehended along with nine hundred people.

"Mr. Mandler, it is precisely because the situation is one of life and death that we have to do this. Any Jew who remains in Hitler's Europe faces certain death. If they try and make it to Palestine, then at least they have a chance."

"And you mean to tell me that your shaky old tubs are able to outmaneuver the British blockade?" He looked incredulity at her. "And how much did you say you wanted?"

"Ten thousand pounds."

He burst out in laughter.

"And your collateral?"

"None."

The mirth suddenly disappeared from his voice and now he spoke in measured tones, carefully articulating each word.

"Mademoiselle, you are wasting my time."

The assistant knocked and entered. Her time was up.

"Your next appointment is waiting, sir."

If she left his office now, that would be it. Anna raised her head and looked Mr. Mandler straight in the eye, ignoring the assistant.

"Please, I've said it all wrong. I haven't made you understand Mr. Mandler. Do you remember someone by the name of Samuel Weiss?"

"Yes."

"He was my father. By 'was', I mean he's dead." She was suddenly aware of the banker's renewed attention. She told him of what happened to them all on the night of the Kristallnacht. Mandler motioned his secretary to leave them.

"...soon all Jews in Europe will be trapped. There's no time to wait in some vain hope that the laws are going to change, that the politicians will wake up to what's going on. Lives are in danger even as we speak but *we* have the chance to save them. The Jews of Austria, Germany and Czechoslovakia can still get out, but only if they leave all their money and possessions behind. The money for their passage has to be provided for them from the outside. By people like you, who *can* see the danger and who *can* help."

He was now listening carefully to her.

"Mr. Mandler, heaven forbid that you should witness what I've witnessed. If someone you loved were in danger what would their life be worth to you? If that person died, what wouldn't you give to have them back again?" Her voice was calm now.

Mandler walked around the desk and sat down heavily in his large leather armchair. A somber expression came over his face. He took a silver cigarette case from his breast pocket, snapped it open and held it out towards her.

Anna shook her head. He took out a cigarette, lit it and inhaled deeply.

"You can have your ten thousand pounds, Mademoiselle." His words were so unexpected that Anna could scarcely believe he's said them. She gaped at him open-mouthed.

"You have nothing to say? You were very eloquent just now." He looked at her quizzically.

"You mean we can have it all?"

"It's not only the stupidest decision I've ever made, but it's also one which will quite probably land me in prison. So, there is one condition. There is to be no mention of my name in any of this. Strict anonymity, understood?"

"Of course," she stammered. She finally dared to smile. "And Mr. Mandler, if you ever need any help, or your family does..."

He gave her a friendly smile. "Mademoiselle, I'm not buying a life insurance plan."

Anna shook his hand, thanked him again and his secretary on her way out.

In his office, Mandler swiveled around in his armchair and stared out the window.

Thirty four years ago he had been engaged to a girl named Rosa from a small town in Poland. They had gone to visit her parents one summer when suddenly a pogrom erupted one quiet afternoon. Half the Jewish Quarter was set on fire and nineteen people were killed. Rosa was raped and then brutally murdered while he was tied to the bedpost and forced to watch and listen. Sometimes he could still hear her screaming now. He would give everything he had to bring her back; to wipe out the past.

"Mr. Mandler! Mr. Mandler, your next appointment!" the voice of his assistant brought him back to the present again with a jolt.

He pulled his chair around to face the desk again.

"Send him in," he said.

"See!" Karpal was waiting for her outside on the street. "I told you it was pointless, not to mention incredibly risky."

"I got the money."

"What?"

"You heard. I got the money."

For a moment Karpal was speechless. He looked Anna in the eye for a sign that she might be joking. She returned his gaze fixedly.

"You don't mean to say he's going to give us the whole ten thousand pounds?"

"That's exactly what I mean to say."

Karpal stared at her in astonishment.

Anna smiled in triumph. She knew that this had brought her a big step closer to becoming accepted as a full member of the Mossad.

"Let's go eat and we can talk about what to do next now that we have the *Tiger*."

The midnight telephone conversation with the other Mossad members turned into a fierce and heated debate. Every one of them wanted the ship filled with as many people from his own country as possible. Karpal had to spend a large amount of time arbitrating between them all until eventually; he managed to arrive at a detailed scheme that at last most of them would agree to.

The days were now numbered and the countdown to August 1<sup>st</sup> began.

The next few weeks were filled with meetings, finalization of arrangements, making contacts and sending cables. Everything was a problem. Every move, even the most simple, could expose their whole operation. They worked on despite their lack of experience and a lack of any well tested plan to follow. It was all trial and error but without the luxury of any room for error.

First there was the matter of obtaining false passports for their passengers even before they knew who they were. And then there was the problem of getting fake entrance visas when on one was willing to issue any.

Do this. Phone here. Run there.

And all if it was done in no particular order as nothing could wait for anything else to be settled first; any delay in any small part of the plan might mean missing the deadline.

How big a crew? How much food? How much water?

Each step forward brought with it a host of further complications or difficult decisions to be made. And always there remained the hunt for more money.

All the while, the newspapers were full of reports that the British were sending more and more patrol boats to Palestinian waters.

Two weeks before the *Tiger* was due to set sail and in the middle of this round-the-clock frenzy, Karpal was sent to Greece to arrange for another ship for a new mission. This left Anna to complete the arrangements by herself with the help of a few of their local men. The boat was not ready to sail, they still had no visas and they'd run out of money for provisions. They were still thirty five thousand pounds short of meeting their costs.

It was now ten days to go before the *Tiger* sailed and the ship was still not ready. Anna decided that she couldn't wait any longer so she made the day long trip up the Danube to check on the progress of the conversion work. The ship had been docked in the small port of Braila, away from the watchful eyes of officials and the foreman in charge of the work came to pick Anna up from the train station.

"Hi, I'm Sammie," he shook her hand. He was a Greek Jew and according to Karpal had converted several ships for them already. As he drove to the pier he explained to her in detail all the countless problems they had encountered which had caused them to be behind schedule.

The car slowed and came to a halt. "There she is," he pointed and then stepped out of the car into the still, humid air. It was becoming dark and the full moon was causing a silver sheen across the quiet waters of the dock.

The ship had no nameplate and was much smaller than she had imagined. It was battered and rusty and it listed slightly to one side. Anna thought it might sink at any moment.

"What were you expecting? The Queen Mary?" he asked, reading her thoughts.

"No, but I was expecting something a little better than that."

It wasn't until she crossed the gangplank and climbed down into the stifling, stale blackness of the hold that she understood the reality of what lay in store for the refugees. Until then, the whole mission had been merely a matter of arrangements, phone calls, meetings, lists and numbers.

She shuddered, imagining herself crammed in there with hundreds of others out in the open seas. She pictured herself seasick or worse, with dozens of others around her seasick as well, all of them trapped down there below decks in the dark, unable to get out.

The berths were made of rough wooden planks, three to a section. She crawled into one. There was just enough room to stretch out, but not enough to sit up without banging her head. She lay there for a moment listening to the creaking metal hull and the scurrying rats somewhere in the darkness. Revulsion bordering on nausea filled her.

Was what they were doing just plain insanity? What if nothing worse than Kristallnacht ever happened? What if war broke out and Hitler was defeated quickly?

Maybe all those people were right after all when they said that what they were doing was ridiculous.

This was surely a death trap.

Suddenly she screamed, sat up and banged her head on the bunk above.

"What happened?" Sammie shouted from above, shining a flashlight down.

"I think a rat ran over me. I'm getting out of here." She stumbled to the ladder and climbed up into the fresh, clean air.

"What's causing the delay?" she asked.

"A part in the motor. It's an old motor. They don't make them anymore. Couldn't get one anywhere so we had to make a mould and cast it. But it's done now. Should be ready the day after tomorrow.

She was glad that this delay had occurred; otherwise she would have never seen the terrible travelling conditions for herself. There was no way she could put a thousand people in that ship. Seven hundred and fifty at most. And that would solve another problem. It would save seventy five hundred pounds straight away. She also now had a better idea how much food and water the ship could hold. Plus they would need to create a small space to use as an isolation room in case anyone came down with a serious disease. That hold was an epidemic waiting to happen.

Anna returned to Bucharest the following day. With the deadline now just over a week away and time moving ever more quickly, the urgency of raising the last twenty seven thousand pounds for supplies and the Panamanian 'visas' became a formidable task. At least, having seen the ship for herself, she was now able to speak to the city's wealthy Jews with a new sense of conviction. She found she was able to leave with a cheque in her hand more often than not. But still it wasn't enough. Days and nights blurred into one and sleep hardly seemed to exist anymore.

It was now four nights to the *Tiger* sailing.

She walked to the telephone booth at the railway station. Her call could not be traced from there and so she could speak more freely, even though getting a long distance call through generally turned into a shouting match. 'Repeat the number please' would be demanded again and again and connections would cross with other calls and then break off with the operator invariably seeming determined to sabotage the call.

"Egypt, please," Anna requested with a slight tremor in her voice. The long days of frustration and the nights without sleep were beginning to take their toll. To her irritation, she found that tears were beginning to form at the end of her eyelashes.

After a few rings the call was answered.

"Hello," said a familiar voice.

"Aaron?" her throat tightened and her eyes filled with more tears.

"Anna? Anna? Is that you?" The line hissed with static.

"Yes, it's me."

"Anna, my God. But this is wonderful. How are you? You've been in all our thoughts. How are the arrangements going?"

"Oh, Aaron..." Her voice trailed off as she paused for a moment to blow her nose and wipe her eyes.

"Anna, is something wrong? Are you crying?"

"No, I'm ok." She began to compose herself again. "Listen, Aaron, I know I've no right to ask you again, after the way you put yourself out so much for me before, but I need your help just one more time."

"Go on, Anna. It's fine. What do you need?" Aaron's voice was soothing and reassuring through the static.

"Well, I'm in Bucharest now trying to make the final arrangements but..." she stopped. What if someone was listening in on the call?



"I can't hear you, Anna. Are you still there?"

"Yes, I'm still here. Look, the long and short of it is, that we're all ready to go but we're short of money. We can't do it with the amount we've got. They'll send them all back to where they came from and everything we've done will have been for nothing," she began to sob.

"What in the world are you talking about Anna?"

"Please don't ask me to explain."

"Ok. Ok. Just tell me how much do you need?"

"Eight thousand pounds sterling."

"That's fine. Where do you want me to wire it to?"

Anna rested her head against the telephone in relief.

"Thank you, Aaron," she sighed, wiping her nose on her handkerchief again. "You don't know how important this is to me. Send it to the Central Bank in Bucharest. Care of Mr. George Mandler."

"I'll do it first thing in the morning."

At eight o'clock the next morning, Anna's phone rang.

"A gentleman is here to see you, Mademoiselle," said the tiny voice of the hotel receptionist. "A Mr. George Mandler."

"Thank you. Send him up." Anna knew something must be wrong. He wouldn't come to see her at this hour of the morning if everything was alright. She opened her door. There were no preliminaries.

"Where have you been? I've been trying to get a hold of you since yesterday."

"Sorry, I took a walk to the railway station last night."

"A British delegation is here in Bucharest to discuss a loan that Romania has been trying to secure for some time. But there are conditions and one of them is that no more illegal ships are to set sail from any Romanian port.

"Starting when?"

"Starting yesterday."

Anna couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"When the transport from Poland arrives at the border it will be sent back to Warsaw and the *Tiger* will be impounded by the Romanian authorities. Direct orders from Premier Calinescu."

"It can't be true." Her mind was in a whirl. All that money she raised for the ship, all those months of endless work all lost! And those seven hundred and fifty wretched souls trapped in a country where war was certain to break out within weeks.

"I'm afraid it's true," Mandler said grimly, sinking into a chair.

"We have to do something. You must know *someone* who can help us." She was almost shouting at him.

"Who's going to go against the Premier's orders? And for what? Who'll jeopardize his own position and a much needed international loan for the sake of a ship load of foreign Jews?"

But Anna wasn't listening. "You know the Foreign Minister. What about him?"

"He's anti-Semitic."

"The Minister of the Interior?"

Mandler shook his head.

"Please!" she implored. "The orders have just *got* to be lifted. We're ready to go in two days. Everything's paid for. The train's already left Warsaw."

"I'm sorry, it's just not possible."

"Please, we have to try. We have to think of a way!"

"Get a grip of yourself!" he said firmly. "Look, Anna, if there was anything I could do, I would do it. But believe me, there's nothing anyone can do. You have to accept it!"

They both sat down and for several minutes, neither said a word.

"Damn the British!" she shouted suddenly, tears once more filled her eyes.

"I'm so sorry." Mandler rose to his feet. "If you need anything, this is my home number." He left a card on the table and quietly left the room.

Anna tried in desperation to contact Karpal in Greece but she couldn't track him down. She tried to place a call to Warsaw to have the transport halted but all the lines to Poland were busy.

Eventually she fell onto the bed in frustration and exhaustion. Nothing more could be done. She had to accept the situation and face the fact that there was nothing left for her to do. By the time she could get through to anyone by telephone, the station master would have already turned the train back.

That was it! The station master!

Anna changed as quickly as she could, grabbed all the cash from the treasury box, stuffed it into her bag and ran outside to flag down a taxi.

"The railway station!" she said, jumping in quickly.

It was midnight when she returned. She went to reception to pick up her messages and found she had two plus a large package. She went upstairs to her room and ripped the package open to find inside a neatly folded, long black evening dress with a note. It was from Mandler.

*I tried to call you but you were out. There is a special dinner party tonight that I must attend. Influential businessmen and politicians will be there. We could try one last time. I'll pick you at eight unless you call back to say you can't make it.*

*George*

*PS. It's black tie. I took the liberty of buying you an appropriate dress just in case.*

Mandler picked Anna up at exactly eight o'clock.

"A perfect fit," he commented as he offered her his arm. "You look lovely." He had a horse-drawn carriage waiting. "It's a beautiful night; I thought this would be rather more enjoyable than traveling in a cramped taxi cab." He held her arm and helped her into the carriage.

"Do you really think there's a point in doing this?" she asked as they started off.

"You've changed our tune! I thought you were the one who never accepted defeat."

Anna shrugged.

"No," he said, his voice changing to a more serious tone. "To be honest with you, I don't really think there is, but we're going to give it a try anyway. Besides, do you have anything else planned for tonight?"

Anna shook her head.

"So, what were you up to today?"

"I went to see the station master. I greased his palm with fifty thousand lei to look the other way when the transport comes."

He whistled. "That's a bit steep!"

"Prices are high for a man who makes a career out of accepting bribes."

"How's he going to explain why he went against a direct order from the Premier?"

"He tampered with his telegraph so that it stopped working. That way he can say he never received any such orders."

Mandler laughed, "You're amazing."

The house was brightly lit and full of people laughing, talking and sipping champagne. Anna's mood was far from jovial, but she knew that she had to put on a convincing act. She had to give this her best shot. It was her last chance, however slim it might be.

George Mandler understood this too. He had the advantage of knowing everyone there and so moved amongst the guests, going from group to group, talking to anyone he could find who might just possibly be useful.

Whenever he found someone who he thought might be willing to listen, he would introduce them to Anna. But everyone rapidly changed the subject or made a hasty retreat as soon as they detected that Anna might be looking for money or favors. However, Mandler remained undaunted.

"There's Monsieur Milinescu. He might be sympathetic and he's influential enough to arrange for the *Tiger* to be let out if he wants to.

Milinescu was tall and of aristocratic appearance. He was suntanned, with grey sideburns and had the most charming smile. Mandler made the introductions and then diplomatically slipped away to chat with their host.

"Let's sit over here, shall we? And you can tell me what this is all about." His interest seemed to be genuine and hope rose again within Anna. She briefly explained the dilemma facing her passengers and their ship, being careful not to mention either the name of the ship or the exact nature of the operation. She paused to gauge his response before deciding whether to divulge any more details.

"Do you know that you are the most beautiful woman in this room?" he looked intently at her.

Anna stared at him in surprise.

"Please tell me some more."

She was suddenly unsure of where this conversation was going. She hesitated.

"Ah, yes. I understand. It's difficult to talk about it here with so much commotion all around. Perhaps we could discuss it later on this evening, when our partners have...er...left?"

"Monsieur Milinescu!" Anna's voice took an angry tone. "I haven't the time for leisurely chats later this evening in a restaurant, in a bar or in bed! I've seven hundred and fifty lived to have to worry about."

“Come on my dear, you’re taking all the fun out of it.”

“There is nothing in this situation which remotely resembles fun, Monsieur!”

“Mademoiselle, you are being very foolish. There isn’t a man in this room who would even entertain the ideal of trying to help you. The Premier at this very moment is considering the nationalization all the country’s major industries. Most men here are industrialist. Their minds, I assure you, are preoccupied with the millions that they stand to lose. They are hardly likely to upset the Premier for the sake of a shipload of beggars. You are quite wasting your time tonight, my dear.”

Anna glared at him in contempt and disappointment.

“You should thank me, Mademoiselle. I’m the only one who’s been gallant enough to tell you the truth.”

At that moment, the butler announced that dinner was served.

Milinescu stood up, kissed her hand and said, “Perhaps Mademoiselle will reconsider my offer for a little tête-a-tête later this evening?”

Anna made no answer. He smiled, bowed discretely and left, just as Mandler was returning.

“I want to go,” Anna replied. “I can’t stay. There’s no one here who can help me and I’m too upset anyway. It shows on my face.”

“I take it didn’t get anywhere.”

She shook her head.

“Well, why don’t you stay for dinner anyway? I guarantee it’s much better than anything that comes out of your hotel kitchen. Our hostess is famous for her dinners.

The dining room was magnificently decorated with flowers and the table was set with gold china and crystal goblets. The food and the wine, as Mandler had promised, were exquisite but the meal was an interminable ordeal for Anna. The conversation around the table was all gossip and trivia. It all sounded so unimportant and trite.

Anna noticed a woman who was sitting next to the hostess at the other end of the very long table. Like herself, she appeared to be an outsider and hadn’t uttered a single word during the entire meal.

“Who’s that?” she nudged Mandler.

“Oh! That’s Madame Milena Lupescu,” he whispered quietly as he could. “She’s King Carol’s mistress.”

Anna looked at him, intrigued.

“He met her years ago, before he met Queen Helena. She’s the daughter of a Jewish druggist.”

Anna didn’t ask any further questions but watched Milena out of the corner of her eye. She was very beautiful, with green eyes and long auburn hair.

While everyone was enjoying their liqueurs after dinner, Anna followed Milena out on the veranda.

“You don’t know many people here?” Anna said to her.

“Milena smiled, “Ah, actually I know everyone,” she shrugged. “And you?”

“I’m visiting.”

“From where?”

“Palestine.”

“Really? That’s most unusual. Is it business or pleasure?”

“Business.”

Milena smiled enquiringly.

"It's hard to explain exactly," Anna continued. "But I guess you could say I'm in the shipping business." She went on to tell Milena the story of the *Tiger*. This time she went into more detail. She felt she could trust this woman.

Milena listened to Anna's story with keen attention and without interruption. When Anna had finished, Milena lowered her gaze, saying nothing. An agonizing silence stretched between them.

"Madame is there anything else you can think of that I could do? Is there anything *you* can possibly do? I have less than forty eight hours left!"

"I have nothing to do with the politics, Mademoiselle," replied Milena in a warm, sympathetic voice. "And I can't promise you anything, but perhaps I can arrange an audience for you with the King. Where are you staying?"

"At the Hotel Continental."

"Then wait there until you hear from me. I promise to call, one way or the other."

"Thank you, Madame. I am almost truly grateful."

The telephone rang and Anna grabbed for it so hurriedly that she knocked it to the floor. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed picking it up again with trembling hands.

"Hello?" She was afraid she'd cut the caller off.

"Mademoiselle Anna?"

"Yes." She recognized the voice at once.

"You have an audience at the Palace in twenty minutes."

Anna breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you so much!"

"Good luck."

Anna dressed swiftly, once again putting on her black dress and patent leather shoes; the outfit that had become her uniform of late. Moments later she was in the taxi, pulling up in front of the Palace gates.

Two guards in bright blue uniforms stood smartly at attention. She told them she had an audience with the King and they let her pass. Inside the gates a slender, imperious looking man came to meet her. She gave him her name.

"Please, follow me," he said.

He led her down a long hallway hung with tapestries and studded with statues. Anna hurried to keep up with him, her heels clicking on the polished marble floor.

"I must advise you, Mademoiselle that His Majesty knows all about the *Tiger* and wishes to hear no more about it. He has agreed to see you merely out of what we might call..." he paused for a moment "...curiosity."

Curiosity, she thought. What did he mean by that? They arrived at a set of double doors where the palace aide stopped and turned to speak to her.

"Now, let's see how you curtsy," he held out his hand, his head held high.

Anna took his hand and bent down on one knee.

"A little lower...fine. Now I hope you know the protocol. You stand when the King enters. You always use the third person when addressing him; His Majesty this, and His Majesty that. And you are not to ask any questions of the King or speak to him until he speaks to you. Is that all clear to you?"

"Why doesn't the King want to hear any more about the *Tiger*?"

The aide glanced at this watch and grasped the doorknob.

"Come on, we can't keep His Majesty waiting. You have twelve minutes." He ushered her into the room and clicked the door shut behind her.

The room was much smaller than she had imagined. It was comfortably furnished, like any gentlemen's library might be and the walls were hung with paintings. Besides the portraits of various Romanian Kings and Queens, there were several El Grecos. It was said that King Carol had the finest collection of El Grecos in the world.

She stood waiting in the empty room, the only sound being the ticking of the golden clock on the King's desk.

Then she heard the sound of brisk footsteps and a door opened through which King Carol entered. He was wearing a dark suite and she recognized him straight away from all the pictures of him which were hung around the streets of Bucharest.

He walked towards her and held out his hand. Anna touched his fingertips and bent into a low curtsy.

"Please be seated."

Anna sat down carefully in one of the blue velvet armchairs in front of his desk.

"Would you like some coffee? Perhaps an aperitif?"

Anna began to feel tense again. Twelve minutes was no time for pleasantries.

"No, thank you, Your Majesty."

"I understand you are visiting Bucharest."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Have you enjoyed your stay here?"

Enjoyed? "Yes, Your Majesty, very much." She was very much on edge.

The King noticed her unease. "Well, Mademoiselle Wiesenthal, I hear you wish to ask for my intervention in a matter of my Premier's orders so that you may pursue your illegal enterprise."

"I wish to offer His Majesty the opportunity to make a unique humanitarian gesture. One which will be remembered and respected in years to come."

"Really now, Mademoiselle Wiesenthal."

"His Majesty is loved and respected as a man who cares deeply about his fellow beings."

He raised his fingers to interrupt. "Indeed Mademoiselle, I do. I care very much about my people. Just as you care about yours. It just so happens that I consider the Premier's orders to be in the best interest of my people. Therefore, I really do not wish to discuss the matter any further with you."

Anna cast her eyes down to the floor in disappointment.

"Perhaps it was wrong of me to grant you this audience. But truthfully, I was curious. I'm used to receiving pompous old men, you see." He was now smiling again. "How long have you been involved in this kind of work, Mademoiselle Wiesenthal?"

"Three months, Your Majesty."

"And your activities keep you busy?"

Anna was beginning to feel that she had only been allowed this audience so she could provide the King with some sort of amusing diversion. How many more minutes did she have? Eight? Nine?

"His Majesty describes our work as being an illegal enterprise. Does he consider it illegal to save innocent lives? He must surely have read the newspapers and therefore know of the favorite cries of the Nazi mobs. 'Jews must perish!' Already it has spread from

Germany to Austria and now to Czechoslovakia. Tomorrow it could well be Poland and where will it stop after that?"

"Please, Mademoiselle, don't you exaggerate just a little? I can understand that the group you have put together wishes desperately to reach Palestine, but to imply that if they're sent back they will be put to death!"

"Your Majesty, most of them are from Poland. It's common knowledge that Germany's invasion of Poland is imminent! The Nazi's purpose is the complete destruction of the Jewish people. Any Jews who are sent back there will be in mortal danger. Nothing is more certain. Your Majesty, all we ask is to be allowed to bring the people who are on this train safely into Palestine."

"Mademoiselle Wiesenthal!" There was for the first time a slight trace of irritation in his voice. "May I remind you that the British makes the laws in Palestine, and may I also point out that the ruler of one country does not sabotage or disregard the laws of another? Furthermore, I can see that you're completely sincere in what you are doing, but has it never occurred to you that you may actually be working against the best interests of your people in the long term in you pursue this?"

He came closer and stood directly above her.

"I have recently met with the British delegation, so I can speak with some authority when I tell you that as a reprisal against any further illegal immigration into Palestine, the British are prepared to cut off entirely the allotment of all *illegal* entry certificates for six months. In other words, you will end up losing more than you gain."

Anna was stunned. It all seemed so cruel.

"But Your Majesty, they issue so few entry certificates. That is why we're forced to do this."

"Fine then. Sail away. But not from a Romanian port."

"Then from where, Your Majesty? That's what everyone says to us. *Not here. Not us. Not through our country.* His Majesty will be familiar with the outcome of the Evian Conference."

"Mademoiselle, you ask me to look at this mater from your view point. Now, I ask you to look at it from mine. Romania is in a very vulnerable position right now, trying to keep the very same Germans that you speak of from entering its own territories. Besides infuriating the British and jeopardizing our international loan by doing what you ask, if we allow the *Tiger* to sail, we will also antagonize the Germans. I can just picture the German headlines, can't you? *'Jew Lover King Carol aids Criminal Jewish Agents'*.

"We are just as anxious to stay out of the headlines. And as for the Germans, His Majesty can say that he was merely helping to cleanse Europe of its Jews. And if the loan he wishes to secure is a profitable one for those who are making it, then one solidary ship sailing from a Romanian port is unlikely to affect the transaction. Especially since, according to the ship's papers, it's sailing to Panama, not Palestine."

"I could use you in my staff, Mademoiselle Wiesenthal. You are most accomplished in the art of double-talk."

"Will His Majesty lift the order for the *Tiger*?" Anna said softly.

"No, Mademoiselle Wiesenthal."

He looked at his golden clock. Her time was up, but he had not dismissed her.

"If Your Majesty were not a King but a man who loved a woman who happened to be a Jew..."

He glared at her with icy blue eyes.

"If she were one of those who were crammed into the hold of that ship with hundreds of others out in the open sea. If it was in His Majesty's power to save her, but he turned away..."

The King stood up abruptly, turned his back on her and walked away to stand looking out in the window. A thunderous silence descended upon the room.

She had done the unforgivable. All of Europe gossiped in private about The King of Romania and Milena Lupescu, but no one dared to mention it in front of him. It was a forbidden subject.

He loved Milena. As Crown Prince, he had given up his right to the throne for her and had gone into exile. But then he returned, dethroned his young son and proclaimed himself King, promising his followers to cut off all ties with her. But he couldn't do it so two months later he sent for her and issued an edict that anyone who mentioned her name would be subject to immediate arrest.

Would he summon the guards now? Anna sat holding her breath.

Then suddenly, he turned around and stared straight at her for what seemed an age. Anna tried hard to read his expression but without success. Finally he spoke.

"Mademoiselle, you may have heard that *baksheesh*, bribery rules Romania. Unfortunately, this is too often true. Incredible though it may seem it *is* possible that large sums of money paid to minor officials can override the direct orders of even a Premier. Can you believe that, Mademoiselle? But I want to make one thing very clear. I know nothing about the sailing of the *Tiger*. Nor does any government minister. The Premier's orders are quite clear and unambiguous. But somehow, if there was a slipup, a matter of *baksheesh*, perhaps...?"

He raised his arm imperiously and the tone of his voice became sharper. "However, this is never to happen again!"

Anna's eyes were riveted on him. His voice softened once more.

"Do we understand each other, Mademoiselle?"

It was a dark moonless night and the rain barely cooled the hot air in the port of Constantza. The *Tiger* lay by the dockside waiting.

The metallic sound of a train inching along the tracks to the port terminal could be heard above the pitter-pattering of the summer rain. Then came the sound of locks being unbolted and doors sliding open. Dark figures stumbled down the steps. Some fell to their knees on the ground and others helped them back up on their feet. The black silhouette of a woman could be seen with raised arms, her face turned upwards to the rain.

For over a week, five hundred people had been sealed into six railcars. Silently now, they hurried towards the *Tiger*. They climbed the rickety boarding plank and disappeared once again into the shadows of the ship's black hull. With little ceremony and just a few whispered commands, the *Tiger* prized itself free of its moorings and lurched forward into the dark waters until it, too, was swallowed up by the night.

Three weeks later, high on the dunes of Tantura Beach, the Palestine Landing Organization was in position waiting for the arrival of the *Tiger*. Shimon was in command. He had two dozen men, all dressed in khakis, all watching the night horizon. Twelve of them waited in six fishing boats anchored at the base of Carmen Mountain while ten more,



including Anna, back now from Romania, waited on the dunes. Two more took up a position by the shore, mounted on horses.

Shimon nervously scoured the black sea, waiting for a speck to appear on the horizon. But there was no sign of the ship.

Night after night they kept their vigil. The *Tiger* was now already a week late. It was August 28<sup>th</sup>.

The next night, at two in the morning, Shimon spotted a ship. He ordered everyone to be alert then took his powerful flashlight and made the signal – three short flashes and one long. The same signal came back in reply – three short flashes followed by one long.

For a moment the shore crew hesitated. Could it be that the ship had misunderstood the code instructions? Shimon strained his eyes through the binoculars again, and then suddenly shouted, “Run! Disperse! It’s British!”

The ship that had responded was a British patrol boat and now it was speeding towards the shore. But when the boat’s landing party reached the shore and looked around, Shimon’s entire group was gone with a trace.

The next day an urgent cable arrived.

*Tiger diverted to save passengers from sinking Prosala – over eleven hundred on board now – down to one cup of water per day – tried to put into Rhodes for water – turned away – disease broke out – tried to put into Antalya for food, water, medicine – turned away – spotted by British – no food, water or medicine – situation critical – Aaron.*

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, Shimon once again spotted a ship on the horizon from his position on the dunes. It was moving very slowly. Was it another trap? He signaled the Landing Crew to stand by.

Within an hour the ship was clearly visible though it was still well beyond the three mile international waters limit. Shimon focused and refocused the binoculars. He wanted to be totally sure that it wasn’t another British trap. He search and searched the surrounding waters for any sign of a patrol boat but he found none.

He took his flashlight and aimed it at the dark speck. Again, he signaled three short flashes followed by one long one. The ship responded almost immediately this time with three long and one short.

“It’s them! Move out! They’re here!”

The six fishing boats immediately started their engines and raced at full speed towards the ship. Shimon monitored the operation from the top of the dune.

Twenty minutes later he could see the fishing boat returning. They stopped on the shallow sandbanks two hundred yards offshore and people began to jump out into the waist high water. As soon as the passengers had disembarked the fishing boats sped away.

Hundreds and hundreds of people now waded through the water towards the shore, weighted down by large rucksacks on their backs

As they crawled; exhausted, sick and feverish onto the beach, two men on horseback disguised as Arabs began to drive them on.

“Go! Faster! Don’t stop!” they shouted from their rearing horses as they rode backwards and forwards along the line of people emerging from the sea. On and on they

drove the line of refugees, herding them towards the dunes. No one was allowed to sit or rest, no matter how exhausted or ill they might be. The smallest delay at this critical point could result in discovery.

At the edge of the dune the other members of the Landing Crew split them up into smaller groups and now the long march across the dunes began in several different directions at once. Those leading the march kept their eyes peeled for British soldiers or Arab attackers waiting to ambush them from the bushes.

Anna trotted at the rear of one of the groups and struck up a conversation with a young woman refugee.

“I heard you were spotted by the British Navy.”

“Yes, early in this morning. A patrol boat spotted us while it was still dark. It found us with its searchlights then it opened fire.”

“Was anyone hurt?”

“It’s amazing. Two people were killed but by some miracle, the ship was able to get away. I still don’t know how we managed it, being as overloaded as we were. Oh, two women died on the way of Scarlet Fever, sadly. When we picked up the passengers from the *Prosala* there was almost a mutiny. The crew was sure we’d sink or all die of disease. God, when you put it all together, it really is a miracle that any of us made it at all.”

Anna trotted on beside her companion in silence for the rest of the way. Everything about the *Tiger* had seemed to be a miracle.

After several more hours of forced march, prodded and harried all the way by their khaki dressed escorts, the immigrants finally reached the line of buses that would take them all to safety.





VOLUME TWO

# Sadness with Joy

*Emil Malak*

*Dedicated to all the donkeys.*

# *Sadness With Joy*

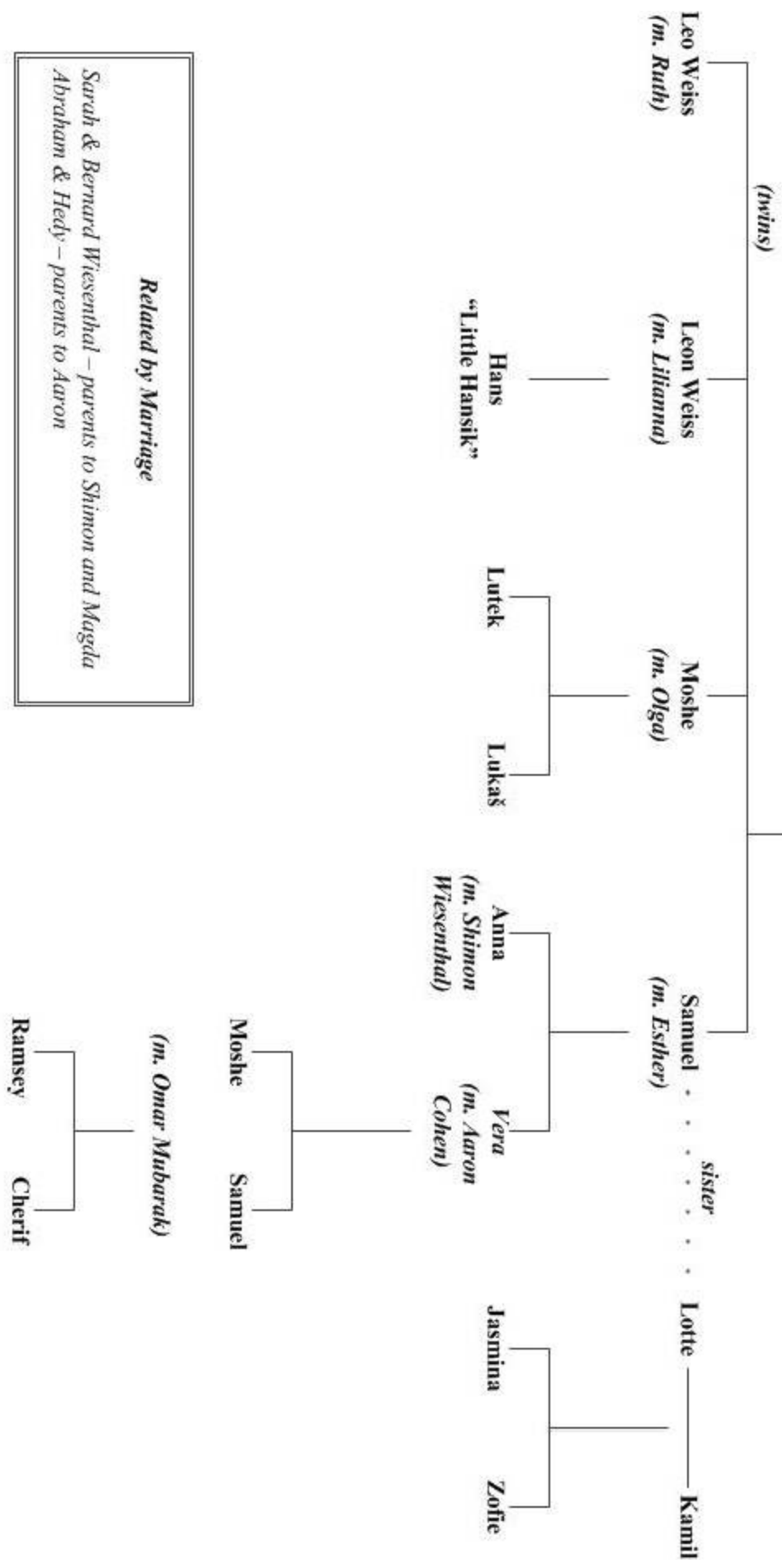
**Emil Malak**

Volume Two

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**Grandma Elli Weiss**  
*(m. deceased)*



**Related by Marriage**

*Sarah & Bernard Wiesenthal – parents to Shimon and Magda  
Abraham & Hedy – parents to Aaron*

**Close Friends**

Father Andreas Rampf  
Sister Maria Teresa  
Karl Becker  
Elsie Becker

**Acquaintances**

Shimon Wiesenthal  
Christopher Borer

**A woman is loved for lifetime by two men.  
She bears their children.  
She gives life to half brothers with milk  
from the bosom.**

**From this one womb are born children  
who choose opposing sides....**

**When they become adults  
they take up arms again each another**







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## Chapter 17 From Umbrella to Sword

On April 1, 1939, the *Times*' headlines were written in one inch high bold letters.

### **BRITAIN WILL FIGHT FOR POLAND!**

*Yesterday, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that His Majesty's Government considers itself bound to afford the Polish Government all possible support in the event of Poland being attacked.*

The whole of Poland was not the issue in dispute – yet. It was merely the port of city of Danzig. The city consisted of four hundred thousand persons, the vast majority of who were German. It was an ancient metropolis which throughout its history had been a rich and powerful trading center. It passed from Polish rule to Prussian rule in 1793 and after the German defeat in 1918; the Treaty of Versailles placed it back in the hands of the Poles once again. The newly independent but landlocked Poland needed a gateway to the sea. But furious protests continued to rage on. Danzig Germans claimed that the port was a place significant for its German culture and German ways, so different from the chaos of the 'Slavic East'.

Danzig nestled in the valley of the Lower Vistula, at the mouth of the river. The river flowed for most of its course through ethnically Polish territory, but the final stretch was a corridor cut out from Germany so that Poland could have access to the city and the sea. To the west of the valley was German proper, and to the east was the German province of East Prussia. Like the Germans of Danzig, the Germans living in the Corridor felt strongly about their own territory. They'd possessed this land since the eighteenth century when they'd bought out or expropriated Polish land. It was theirs now. They regarded the Polish as a servile and inferior race, the *Untermensch*. If the Germans in the Sudetenland were liberated, then the Germans in the Polish Corridor had to be as well. It was a matter of German prestige.

England's position was incomprehensible to Hitler. How could a country which had colonized one quarter of the globe and held both civilized Irishmen and belligerent savages in bondage, oppose the right of German to seek the return of territory which had been theirs for over a hundred years? The British wished to encircle and attack him. That was their aim, and he wouldn't allow it.

From Poland sprang a plethora of 'incidents' that smeared themselves across German headlines. They were curiously similar to the reports that Czech treatment of Sudeten Germans a year earlier. Mobs of Poles were reported to have smashed buildings up. Members of choral societies were beaten up on their way home from practice. News was turned inside out, upside down and backwards to suit Herr Goebbels, who was always

at his best when given this kind of opportunity. Every tavern fracas was turned into an international conflict. It was all depressingly familiar.

Two days after the news broke in the papers, General Halder and Admiral Canaris were riding in the *Tiergarten* Park. They could talk freely without fear of being overheard.

"You're sure Karl is coming?" asked Canaris impatiently.

"Yes, I'm sure he'll be here soon."

"Franz, I'm shocked beyond comprehension. Where were Britain and France when Hitler took the Rhine? Where were they when he walked into Austria? They let him help himself to the Sudetenland last year, and they said nothing at all when he took Bohemia-Moravia two weeks ago!" The Admiral's face was flushed with anger. "Now, when they've lost every single tactical advantage they had before, the British and the French were rushing in to help the Polish and without even bothering to get the help of the Russians!"

General Halder shook his head grimly.

"You're right, of course," he agreed. "It doesn't make any sense at all. The British should have acted sooner. The military odds were in their favor at the time of the Rhineland and Sudetenland. But they're not now."

"I wonder how they think they can help Poland," asked Halder cynically. "Their planes can't fly that far and there's no possibility of tanks being sent. Nothing. It's a totally empty gesture. Doesn't anyone look at maps anymore?"

The thumping of a horse's hooves announced Karl's arrival at a gallop. "I've just heard the latest," he gasped. "The Führer's just given orders to plan for Case White – the attack on Poland. It's to begin no later than September the first. He doesn't care what the West might say. He's convinced they won't do anything."

"When did you hear this?" asked Canaris.

"Just now. I bumped into General Keitel coming out of the Chancellery."

Admiral Canaris spurred on his horse and rode out of the middle of the clearing. The others followed close behind.

"Alright gentlemen," said Canaris quietly. "No one can hear us here. Listen carefully. We can be certain that this so-called pledge to aid Poland will settle nothing at all. We have between now and September the first. We still have time to do something."

But Karl knew that their options were very limited. "I think the only thing we can do is stop Hitler reaching a pact with the Russians. Like it or not, it's Stalin who holds the balance of power. Everything depends on whose side he's on. The only way to stop Hitler from getting into bed with Stalin is to persuade Britain and France to beat him to it. The three great powers must band together." It was a terrible act to contemplate; to deliberately rig things so that the world's leading powers would band together against their country, but it seemed the only possible way now.

General Halder and Admiral Canaris exchanged weary glances.

"Well, I have to admit," said the General, "that even though I don't like the idea one little bit, I can't see any other option. Even Keitel and von Brauchitsch agree the Führer can't make any moves if the Russians turn against us. Two fronts," he shook his head. "That's what brought us down in 1918. Hitler knows it."

He turned to Karl. "You must tell the British. Go to them and explain how important this is."

Karl remembered his last trip to London with distaste. He had no desire for a repeat performance. "I'm sorry. It's impossible for me to go at the moment. You'll have to find someone else."

"But who else is there?" asked Canaris. He and Halder tossed around a few names and eventually decided upon Erich Kordt. He was a fellow conspirator in the Wednesday Club and a Counsellor in the Foreign Ministry. Kordt would go.

Neville Chamberlain aligned his pince-nez and read the typed note which had been passed to him by Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax.

*'We urge the British Government to vigorously pursue an agreement with the Soviets. Such an entente is Hitler's greatest fear and is the only thing which will stop him from invading Poland. The invasion date is already set for September 1<sup>st</sup>. The Führer is, himself, racing to secure a non-aggression pact with Stalin. We believe the lives of tens of millions of people depend on you beating him to it.'*

"What do you make of it, Prime Minister?" asked Lord Halifax.

Chamberlain furrowed his brow and pursed his lips into a thin line. "You know every well what I think! I would rather resign my office than sign an alliance with Moscow. Those damned Soviets again! Damn and blast them!"

He'd been bothered twice in the past four weeks by Foreign Commissar Litvinov with requests to discuss some sort of agreement. Before that Russia had wanted a six-power conference in Bucharest to discuss the blocking of German aggression. Chamberlain had instructed Lord Halifax to give the proposal a resounding no. Then Litvinov was at him again yesterday wanted a pact between Russia, Britain and France. Now here was this bothersome Agent 999 again demanding the very same thing! He signed wearily. And on top of all this, of course, there was always the vituperative Winston Churchill who made no secret of his views on the matter.

"Our three nations must band and break Hitler's neck!" Churchill had declared to the Prime Minister just the day before. "Without Russia our guarantees are just empty promises that we will be in no position at all to keep. Saying no to a pact with Stalin amounts to plain lunacy!"

Chamberlain sat back in his chair and looked sternly at Halifax. "Soviet aid is worthless, military or otherwise," he spat. "I don't think they can mount a single offensive and I distrust their motives entirely. I will not be drawn into make any agreement with Stalin. What's your view, Halifax?"

"I agree, Prime Minister. It would be rather like having a boa constrictor as your best friend."

Chamberlain snorted and tossed the note scornfully into the rubbish bin by his feet. He was beginning to feel his age. He was seventy years old, grey-haired and totally exhausted. The events of the past months had been nothing short of astonishing to him. "You know, I always felt the defense of Britain came first," he grumbled miserably. "Then the trade routes come second, overseas territories and dominions next, and last of all, the defense of territories belonging to our allies. Now I find myself putting the destiny of Britain and the entire Empire completely into the hands of Poland! It's a nightmare!" He looked down wearily with an air of defeat.

“But how shall we reply to Commissar Litvinov on this subject of this latest pact proposal?” prompted Halifax. “A Gallup Poll shows that 92 percent of the British public is in favor of it.”

Chamberlain waved his hand and grimaced. “There’s no rush. We have more important matters to concern ourselves with.”

So, no British response at all was offered to the Russian proposal. On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, while Chamberlain was attending to his more important matters, Foreign Commissar Litvinov was relieved of his duties and the granite-faced, ruthless Premier Vyacheslav Molotov replaced him.

Daylight comes earlier to Moscow during the warm months of summer and it lingers late into the evening.

Joseph Stalin was sitting with Commissar Molotov on the veranda of his country *dacha* outside Moscow.

“I trust no one, not even myself,” he said softly, puffing away at his pipe. Stalin never shouted his opinions. He preferred to remain patient, unhurried and speak in a low voice. The two men were listening to Russian folk songs on a record player on Stalin’s phonograph. He was a music lover and was especially fond of his country’s folk traditions.

Since 1917, Stalin had lived in a world of suspicion, treachery and betrayal. He saw enemies all around him and had them swiftly executed or sent to the gulags of Siberia. No one would be given the license to betray him and get away with it. Absolutely no one.

“Now, the most untrustworthy bunch of them all, the Western Capitalists, are coming to me.” He poured a glass of Crimean red wine for Molotov and himself. “Drink.” It was a command. Molotov knew it. He drank.

“First, the Capitalist tried to squash the Revolution,” Stalin continued, leaning back in his armchair and gazing out over his garden. “Then they set up and financed a band of their satellite nations round our borders to try to hem us in. Now they want to know if I will join in an alliance with them against Hitler.” He downed his glass of wine in one gulp. “And this comes after turning down my own offers to do so countless times. That was not nice. It was not nice at all. What do you say, comrade?”

Molotov was a very wise comrade. He always agreed with everything that Stalin said. “It wasn’t nice. Their offers are not to be trusted in any way,” he affirmed.

Russia’s latest war against Germany had precipitated the death of the Tsar. Stalin was not going to let the same thing happen to him. He knew Hitler was a man looking for a fight and that soon enough he would find it. It could be with Russia or it could be with the West. Better with the West, thought Stalin, while he sat snugly behind his buffer zone. “We need to win ourselves some time, at least two years’ time.” He rose to flip the record over onto the other side. “Only then will the Soviet Union be able to defend itself against the might of Germany.” Yes, he thought, “I’ll hold Hitler’s coat for him while he bloodies his nose in the West. With the greatest pleasure...”

“Three times Chamberlain went to see Hitler, but not once did he wish to come and see me,” Stalin remarked mildly. He poured them another glass of wine. “Drink,” he said again. Molotov was already feeling the effects of the first glass but nonetheless he drank obediently.

Stalin leaned over to Molotov, smiled faintly and wagged his finger. “It’s not so easy to fool comrade Stalin. I’m not going to let the West drag us into war with Germany. If they think that then they are very mistaken. I won’t allow myself to be lured into unnecessary

danger by warmongers who like to take the fires of their wars with the hands of other nations. We will talk to the Germans.”

Molotov winced inwardly. Lenin must be turning cartwheels in his grave, he thought. From the very start, Russia had called for a united front against Hitler and now Stalin wanted to create an alliance with him.

“What about all the propaganda?” asked Molotov. “For years we’ve been attacking the Nazis. How are we going to explain to the people that they’re suddenly our friends?”

Stalin shrugged. “Why are so puzzled, comrade Molotov? It’s simple. We just *tell* people. It is so very simple.” He poured himself another glass of wine. “It’s like this,” he explained, “you start on the Left. You turn once, twice, you turn a third time, and before you know it, you’ve come out on the Right. He lifted his pipe to his lips and beamed at this companion.

So overnight, Russian policy made a sharp and complete about turn. Molotov set about securing a deal with Adolf Hitler. Unlike his predecessor, Molotov was convinced that neither Britain nor France would act unless directly attacked themselves. He privately discounted the value of any further negotiations with the West, although he kept up the semblance of diplomatic contact as he knew this would fuel Germany’s sense of the urgency of the situation.

But there was at least one distraction that dark summer; the state visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to the United States. Roosevelt had invited the British King and Queen to add the United States to their itinerary on their visit to Canada. Roosevelt wanted to make a show of solidarity with the British; to demonstrate on the world stage that the democracies would stand together in case of war. Also, it would be very good for his own prestige. It was to be the first ever visit made to the United States by a reigning British monarch. Roosevelt felt it would go a long way towards improving Anglo-American relations.

The President was determined to take charge of the occasion himself and every detail of the event underwent his own personal scrutiny. He and Eleanor made careful researches on royal protocol. The most helpful information came from William Bullit, American Ambassador to France. Bullit had gleaned a wealth of details during a recent royal visit to France.

“The King’s bed must not be along the wall,” Bullit reported in a secret memorandum. “His blankets must be eiderdown and he must have silk covers. There must be a full-length mirror for him to see himself when standing. He must have four bathroom glasses; two hot water bottles, a bath thermometer, several spoons of assorted sizes and a box of matches by the ashtray.” A separate list outlined the needs of the Queen, the courtiers and the ladies-in-waiting. It created a large amount of stifled amusement among the White House staff.

But there were those who did not laugh. Among them was the Mayor of Chicago. Rather than extend a warm welcoming hand, he would have liked to punch the British monarch in the face. Perhaps not so much George VI but rather his father George V who had dragged the United States into a world war in 1917. The mayor considered that George VI could only be coming to America for one reason, to prepare the way for another American rescue to England. Many Americans isolationists agreed. They could see the angry clouds of war gathering over Europe and viewed the Royal visit with the greatest suspicion.

President Roosevelt was hampered by being the president of an intensely isolationist America. Disillusioned by the seeming pointlessness of the Great War, many US citizens saw a second impending global conflict as a sign of European imperial ambitions gone mad yet again. The New World had to remain aloof for such intrigues. The Great War was always spoken of as a tragic mistake for the American nation.

At the forefront of the isolationists were Senator Nye of North Dakota, and Senator Borah of Idaho. Both saw the King's visit as a thinly disguise means of drumming up sympathy for Britain. To make matters worse, it was just at this time that President Roosevelt was trying to persuade Congress to repeal the Neutrality Act. In particular he wished to repeal that part of it which placed an embargo on the supply of arms to nations at war. Needless to say, so far Roosevelt wasn't having much luck.

The First Lady was assailed with unique problems of her own. Among the many events on the Royal itinerary, Eleanor was planning an all-American outdoor picnic on the estate of the President's mother in Hyde Park. On the menu, along with smoked turkey, cured hams from different parts of the country, salads and strawberry shortcake, were hot dogs. Hot dogs! These hot dogs were causing intense indignation in certain society circles.

In the forefront of the objectors was no less a person than the President's mother, Sara. So strongly did she feel about this detestable food being served up to Royalty that she wrote Eleanor a note and sent it off to Washington. Hoping to rein Eleanor in before she disgraced the whole country, Sara bolstered her argument by enclosing letters she'd received from her society friends, begging her stop Eleanor from disgracing them all.

Eleanor smiled impishly as she read the bundle of letters. Sitting down at her typewriter, she answered both her overbearing mother-in-law and Sara's society friends in the most democratic way she knew how, with an article in her syndicated newspaper column, 'My Day'. Eleanor replied to Sara and all who worried that the 'dignity of the country will be imperiled'. She assured her readers that there would be other foods on the menu as well and that the event would be run with all due protocol being observed. Eleanor merely wished to show the Royal couple a range of American's traditional foods. She concluded her article with the words, 'I am afraid it is a case of not being able to please everyone and so we will try to just please our guests'. Sara's reaction to having this delicate matter spread so brazenly across the nation's paper can only be imagined.

Their Majesties crossed the Atlantic on the *Empress of Australia*. They made their tour of Canada then crossed over into the United States at Niagara Falls. From that moment the bustle of press attention and the flashing of cameras never stopped. Queen Elizabeth raised a white silk parasol and at once parasols became all the rage among fashionable American women. There was the British Embassy Park where beforehand the debates had gone backwards and forwards about whether or not the ladies should curtsy for fear that voters at home would not like the spouses of their elected representatives being seen to bow and scrape to unelected monarchs. Others were of the opinion that they should curtsy out of respect for the culture of a different country. In the event, the only newsworthy item was that Eleanor chose not to. It caused a propagandist's storm that called all the way to Italy, where the *Popolo di Roma* called it the 'greatest scandal in the present era'.

A few days later, at the White House dinner, new ground in protocol was broken. It was customary at Buckingham Palace to serve the King, and then wait precisely thirty seconds before serving the Queen. But at the White House, the President is always served first. With typical American practicality, Roosevelt came up with the solution. The King and



President would be served simultaneously followed by their wives and then the rest of the guests. However not all of the President's guests were such keen observers of Royal protocol and ceremony. The Vice President, 'Cactus Jack' from Texas grabbed King George by the forearm as the evening was drawing to a close and gave him a hearty slap on the back.

From Washington the Royal couple went on to Hyde Park calling in on New York on the way to visit the World's Fair. The Polish pavilion had attracted a great deal of attention that year and it was one of the most visited by the Royal Family. Eleanor and her husband went ahead to Hyde Park, taking the White House butler and other serving staff with them to wait on Their Majesties. Sara was not at all happy with this arrangement. She considered her servants to be much better than those of the Executive Mansion. Hyde Park's English butler decided to take a holiday rather than see the White House's black staff serve the Royal couple. Despite this minor disagreement, Sara did agree to act as official hostess for the visit. For everything, that was, except the infamous hot dog picnic.

The day of the picnic was a bright and sunny one. It was late morning and Franklin and Eleanor were quietly relaxing on the veranda before the arrival of their 165 guests. The President was arranging a cocktail tray when Sara happened to pass by. She cast a disapproving eye over the tumblers and the shaker. "Surely the King would prefer a nice cup of tea to a cocktail."

"Perhaps, Mother," he replied, "but, just in case, I'll have it all ready." She sniffed loudly and disappeared inside again.

One of the first guests to arrive was Senator Borah. The President waved to him from this lawn chair.

"Hello, there, Bill!" Roosevelt held out his hand. "Why don't you join us? Eleanor and I are just relaxing before it gets busy."

"Thank you, Mr. President." He pulled up a chair and nodded towards Eleanor, "Ma'am."

Roosevelt looked archly at Borah, his Republican opponent on the Neutrality issue. "I'd offer to make a cocktail myself, but I know you don't drink. How about a soda?"

"Don't mind if I do. Thank you, Mr. President."

Roosevelt motioned to one of the army of attending waiters and he went off to fetch the Senator a soda. The offer of a drink was a thinly veiled jibe at Borah, whose greatest interest after foreign affairs was Prohibition. For years he had held forth about liquor's many sins; being fit only for brothels and being the bringer of crime, dishonor, death, misery and poverty.

"I just received your invitation to the meeting, Sir," said Borah. He was referring to the forthcoming meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "The Neutrality of Legislation will never be repealed, Mr. President. The American people won't stand for it." These were confident words.

Roosevelt's expression became more serious. "Well, that's why I called the meeting so that we can discuss it. Neutrality just ties our hands, Bill. Americans are in far greater danger with the embargo in place than we would be without it."

The waiter returned with the Senator's soda. He took a long drink then shook his head. "Like you, Mr. President, I've been in public office a long time and of all of the votes I ever cast in the Senate, the one I regret most was when I voted for America to go to war in 1917. We were no more than Britain's lackeys then. We fought for their own interests, their

imperialism, their endless European quarrels that have been going on since the days of the Roman Empire. And they'll do it again without batting an eyelid. No, Mr. President, we have to keep out."

"Look Bill, I don't want war any more than you do, but if it was made plain to Hitler that US industrial power had entered the equation..."

"Now you're talking rearmament, and that opens up a whole new can of worms. We were conned into entering the last war by our own munitions makers and bankers. The whole shooting match was much more about high finance than it ever was about politics."

Senator Nye arrived as he was speaking.

"Looks like you two are going to gang up on me now," the President laughed. "Take a chair. I was just saying that by lifting the embargo we could act as an effective brake on Germany. And effective brakes are what we need right now."

"Well if they want to fight, let them shoot it out with each other. We don't need to get into it," said Nye, taking a seat.

The President leaned forward. "I still say that if peace is to be preserved," he said earnestly, "then America has to build a navy second to none, as fast as we possibly can. And that's just for starters."

Nye shook his head vigorously. "Thinking that we have to rearm for peace, why, that's a monstrous idea. Why, that's like showing your peaceful intentions towards your neighbor by building a barbed wire fence. The next thing you know he's put a ferocious dog in his back yard and started carrying a pistol. Pretty soon you're moving poison gas and hiding grenades in your basement and he's got a machine gun mounted in the front yard and for the life of you, you can't understand why you're started getting along so badly.

"The ravages of the last war were just too much for our nation's people," added Borah.

Eleanor was compelled to speak for the first time. "I saw those ravages of the war with my own eyes," she said. "I resolved too that it should never happen again. What did our boys die for? I could never understand the reason for that senseless shedding of our own boys' blood. But the things that have been going on in Europe recently have changed my mind. Appeasement and pacifism will never work when you're dealing with someone who has no sense of basic humanitarian ethics. We have to rearm as a preventative measure. That's not to say I preach war. But if other nations aren't willing to disarm, then we certainly shouldn't be the only ones who do. We would leave ourselves dangerously vulnerable."

The Senators listened grudgingly to the First Lady. Borah didn't care for women meddling in politics, especially politician's wives. But he bit his tongue. The First Lady was a force to be reckoned with. Eleanor was the wife of the President but her power didn't come from her influence on him, it came from public opinion. Her syndicated newspaper columns reached millions of Americans and her press conferences and speeches always provoked a flood of telegrams to Capitol Hill. Few people could argue that if anyone spoke for the American people, it was she who did.

"Even if American rearms," Borah grunted, "we still ought to stay neutral."

"But, Senator," said Eleanor, "what if we are pushed into a war? It could happen you know. What then?"

Nye waved his hand dismissively, "If you don't look for trouble, you won't find any. If we keep our own noses out of that mess, then we'll be fine."

Eleanor shook her head. "Let's suppose for a moment that the Germans and the Japanese are victorious. America will find itself caught between two totalitarian blocks. Of what value would our neutrality be then? The fall of Britain would make Americans shores defenseless.

The two Senators remained to be persuaded but the debate was prevented from becoming acrimonious by the arrival of the other guest.

After all the guests had dutifully filed past the President and Their Majesties, the rest of the afternoon was free. Roosevelt persuaded the King to loosen his tie and they all sat under the trees around the swimming pool.

Roosevelt reached for the cocktail tray he had prepared earlier. "My mother does not approve of cocktails," he said. "She thinks you should have a cup of tea."

"So does my mother," replied the King, "but I shall have a cocktail all the same." Franklin grinned mischievously at Sara as he reached for the ice cubes.

Dispensing with formalities, Eleanor served up the barbequed hot dogs herself. In the event, Their Majesties passed them over without comment in favor of the smoked turkey.

With the evening sun reflecting crimson on the Hudson River, the train carrying King George VI and Queen Elizabeth pulled away from the station. The crowd which had gathered to see them off began to sing 'Auld Lang Syne' as Their Majesties waving hands disappeared from view.

The Royal visit had been an overwhelming success. Eleanor had never seen such crowds as those which had lined the streets as they drove past. But the good impression made by the British Royals did little to relax the war weariness of most Americans. And even though public opinion was shifting slightly away from isolation, especially as the Danzig crisis deepened, the shift was not large enough to lead the amendment of the Neutrality Laws. The arms embargo was upheld.

It was a summer of contradictions. The Führer retreated to this mountain hideaway to brood over the British guarantee to the Poles. He was furious that he was being pushed into facing conflict with the country that he most admired and an alliance with the country he most wanted to destroy! All this over some backward Slav nation. In a private meeting with his Generals, Hitler announced that Germany's problems could only be solved by war. He explained that the key was to isolate the conflict to Poland. It *must not* come to a showdown with the West. But if it did, then the fight must be primarily against Britain and France. In the face of these rapid fire reversals, the Generals were left mystified. Canaris' envoy Erich Kordt returned from London and his meeting with Sir Vansittart. He had been assured that Britain was on the verge of concluding an accord with Russia. In reality of course, they were at complete deadlock. It would take a miracle to overcome the ineptitude and obstinacy of Chamberlain and the antipathy of Molotov. Russia and Germany, sworn mortal enemies, were now on the verge of a most unlikely alliance.

All anti-German and anti-Nazi propaganda now suddenly disappeared from the Soviet public arena. Even the word 'Fascism' was banned as a term of abuse. Fascism did not exist. And the tone of German newspaper articles about Russia underwent a similarly dramatic change. There was really no pressing dispute between Germany and Russia, as long as Russia had no plans to join in an alliance with the greedy democracies of the West. Was it not better therefore to maintain friendly relations?

As the European situation deteriorated, the German armaments industries stepped up a gear. They turned out guns, tanks, trucks, airplanes, and ships in large quantities. Europe was in a headlong gallop towards war. Hitler was ranting. Goering was beaming and Ribbentrop was in his seventh heaven. Mussolini thought his neighbor had gone berserk. Chamberlain frowned. The Wednesday Club conspirators were frantic.

Chamberlain was reluctantly persuaded to send a second delegation to Moscow. Perhaps they could secure a more palatable alliance with Russia. The Russians had cut off political talks with the first set of delegates as Stalin considered them to be second rate political officials. London now elected to send second rate military representatives instead; a British Admiral, an Air Marshal and a French Field General. All were retired.

The Russian Ambassador in London was not fully aware of the fast track talks going on with the Germans. He was eager to see these Western delegates make a swift and successful trip. Inviting them to dinner at the Russian Embassy in London before their departure, he asked the Air Marshall, "When do you fly to Moscow?"

"Oh, we're not flying to Moscow," replied the Air Marshall. "There will be over forty of us. With all the secretaries and so much baggage it would not be convenient to go by plane." Rail was also ruled out on the grounds that it would involve crossing Germany. Against the background of such extreme international tension that was considered to be monstrous.

"A fast cruiser, then?" the Ambassador asked nervously, turning to the Admiral. "Now that would be impressive, a military delegation arriving by warship!"

The Admiral shook his head. "No. No. With so many of us on board, where would the ship's officers sleep? We would take up all the cabins."

The delegates dallied in London for days before boarding the *City of Exeter*, bound for Leningrad. It was an ancient merchant ship with a top speed of eleven knots. Chamberlain did not consider that the difference of a few days in their arrival would matter. He was quite correct. They were already three years too late.

Life on board was very pleasant for the three retired military men and their entourage. They sailed languidly through the North Sea into the Baltic. They played badminton on deck while turbaned Punjabi stewards served them up endless bowls of curry.

Seventeen days later the *City of Exeter* made its way into Leningrad harbor. The delegation disembarked and boarded a train which whisked them off to Moscow. When at last they arrived in the capital they were taken to the huge and beautiful home of a former member of the aristocracy. A welcoming banquet had been laid out for them. The food was sumptuous and was served on china and silverware bearing the arms of the late Tsar. In contrast to these elegant surroundings, their Soviet hosts wore ill-fitting and badly worn dinner jackets dating from before the Revolution. Some even wore sweaters and trousers which were visibly wearing thin at the elbows and knees. The clothing spoke volumes about the new Russia, the land of the Proletariat.

The delegates' meeting began the next day at 10:30AM. The man they were dealing with was Molotov. Forbidding and obdurate, his favorite word was *Niet* and he was quiet ready for the Western delegates. He had been through everything before with the first delegation.

They were shown in to Molotov's office in the Kremlin and the military negotiations began. It wasn't long before the usual fourth and uninvited delegate at the conference

arrived; mutual suspicion. Molotov sat imperiously at his large desk, which was raised from the floor on a dais. Sitting on low chairs like schoolboys in a semicircle below him, the delegates had to make notes as best they could. There was a conference table in the room, but no one ventured to suggest that it would be more convenient to use it.

The meeting began. Molotov was quick to gain the upper hand. "I have the authority from my government to sign any pack binding on their behalf," Molotov announced. "What are your powers, Gentlemen?"

The Admiral, of course, had no authority whatsoever from the British Government. Molotov became angry. "Again! You treat the Russians like fools. British want our help but treats us like hired labor. When the West wanted to make its guarantees to Poland, it was done just like that!" He snapped his fingers. "Why are you dragging your feet so much?" He shoved a pile of Anglo-Soviet communiqués to the front of his desk. "Every work, every comma," he banged the pile, "is negative. All you ever do is look for ways to sabotage the talks." The British delegates shifted nervously in their chairs at the Commissar's words. "What are the Anglo-French plans in case of war? What forces do you have available? What means of transport do you have for those forces? Number of guns? Number of tanks? Deployment of troops? The disposition of navel fleets and air forces? How much? How soon? Where and when?"

The military men were left stunned by the rapid fire of the Russian's questions. It seemed that the Soviets wanted every military secret that Britain and France had. They muttered half-answers and gave vague outlines. But Molotov was insistent on knowing the precise size and make-up of the bush a little more; the Admiral finally revealed the Britain envisaged deployed sixteen Divisions immediately followed by a further sixteen at a later date.

Molotov pressed the British Admiral to be more specific. When would the first contingent be ready? The Admiral hedged. That would depend on when war broke out. Supposing, said Molotov, it broke out within a week. The Admiral found himself cornered and had to admit that all Britain could muster at the moment were one mechanized and five regular divisions. He endeavored to sugar the pill by reminding Molotov that in the last war Britain had started with six divisions and ended with a hundred. But this was not good enough for the host.

Molotov inquired sharply whether Russian troops would be permitted to cross the borders of neighboring countries in the event of those countries being threatened.

"Well, that's another tricky question," replied the Admiral uncomfortably. "Poland especially is very hesitant about that." 'Hesitant'? He thought. They were downright hysterical about it. So great was the Polish distrust and hatred of the Russians that allowing them passage through Poland was impossible.

Molotov zeroed in like a shark smelling blood. "I must insist that we settle the issue of Soviet troops passing through Poland," he said. "That is essential."

This was the very last thing the delegates wanted to discuss. They tried at first to stall, then changed track and said they were not in a position to speak for the Poles. The French General decided to try a new approach. "Perhaps," he said, "the time is not yet ripe for the comprehensive scheme you have in mind. What we're looking for is merely a promise that you will be available to help Britain and France if we find ourselves at war with Germany."

Molotov made an angry reply in Russian and concluded with a nod to his translator.

The translator cleared his throat, "The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs," he began, "says that if you think that the Soviet government will accept such loose proposals...": he hesitated and looked towards Molotov who gestured impatiently for him to continue, "...then you must think we are nitwits and nincompoops!" The Foreign Commissar looked sternly at this translator. "Are you sure you got the point across clearly enough?" he demanded. The translator began speaking again. "...simpletons, fools, imbeciles..." he mumbled.

"You will delay," Molotov announced. "And while you ask us for our help, there is no offer from you in return to help us as we find ourselves at war with Germany." He fidgeted with something on his desk and the delegates began to wonder if they were being recorded.

"I want a very clear answer to this very clear question," Molotov continued. "Do the British and the French General Staffs think that Soviet land forces will be admitted to Poland in order to make contact with the enemy? And in addition to this, will Soviet troops be permitted to cross Romania?"

"I am sure that Poland and Romania will implore you to come to their aide," ventured the French General.

"But perhaps they will not." Molotov's tone was harsh and ill-tempered. "I need concrete guarantees, not an endless string of *ums* and *ahs* and *maybes*."

"To talk about Soviet troop deployment," said the Frenchman, "we must first..."

"You are not answering the question again," interrupted the People's Commissar. "I said nothing at all about Soviet troop deployment. I asked if your General Staffs will allow the passage of our troops through Poland and Romania." He sat forward in his chair. "And also through the Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia."

"Comrade Commissar should direct his questions to Poland, Romania and those other countries," said the Admiral. "We cannot give you such permissions on behalf of other Sovereign States."

"Alright then, let's move on," said Molotov in exasperation. "I suggest that a simple pact be written to effect that any attack on Britain, France or Russia would mean that all three would go to war against Germany. Could anything be more straightforward?"

"We can't agree to that," replied the French General.

"It leaves our guarantees to Poland, Greece and Romania dangling in the air," said the British Admiral.

It was agonizing for the delegates. The Westerners found the Russian totally impossible. But Molotov pressed on. It would seem that the British had guaranteed protection to Greece and to Romania without even asking for his approval. They appeared to have completely pre-empted these negotiations. It now seemed that a dozen or more countries were suddenly on the table!

The western delegates were by now exhausted and completely overwhelmed. They were beginning to think they were the victims of some kind of colossal misunderstanding. They asked for a brief recess if they could confer in private.

Once they were out of the room, Molotov rose from this desk and went through the open doorway that led from his office. Stalin sat behind the door on a simple wooden chair. He was smoking his pipe contentedly as Molotov appeared. "You see, comrade Molotov. I was right. The West is only playing at negotiations. I told you they wouldn't order Poland to cooperate with us. How are the talks with the Germans coming?"

"We are already loading iron ore for shipment to Germany."

Stalin smiled slowly, his yellow eyes glinting.

"You want to have a *what?*" asked Theodore in astonishment. He stood blinking at Karl.

"A party, Theodore."

The butler wondered if, with all the work and strain his employer had taken leave of his senses. Everyone in the country was in a state of extreme anxiety about the prospect of impending war. "But, if I may say so, sir, I wonder if anyone is in the mood for celebrations, with things being as they are."

"Nonsense. All the more reason to have a party. I haven't seen anyone laugh or have a good time since...since I can't even remember when." Karl walked towards the back of the house. Theodore followed close behind. "Besides, I only plan to invite those friends of mine who promised not to be bores or talk about politics."

He went to the back study which overlooked the sloping lawn. A Steinway stood in the corner of the room. "And we'll move the piano outside; right there," he pointed to the grassy slopes.

"Outside, Sir?" Theodore gasped.

"Yes, because we're all going to be outside in the sun, playing tennis and swimming. It's summer!"

"But the slopes, sir..."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll be able to find some means of leveling the Steinway up. You're a very enterprising fellow, Theodore!"

It was Sunday, August 30<sup>th</sup> and the guests began to arrive in twos and threes just past mid-day. Theodore and housekeeper Annie saw to what the guests wanted and Karl and Elsie played the perfect host and hostess. Under a cloudless sky and a burning sun, everyone swam, played tennis, sunbathed or played billiards. Towards evening, after dinner was served, a hired piano player came to play on the Steinway and the guests took turns in singing, or at least trying to. In the end even Theodore and Annie had a good time.

After several rounds of schnapps and plenty of song, they all sat on the patio under lanterns talking quietly or dancing on the lawn. It was sunset. The lake shimmered an iridescent red and the air felt like warm velvet. It seemed to Karl that people were suddenly gentler with one another, as if everyone knew that soon a new and very different life would begin.

The telephone rang and Theodore emerged from inside. "A call for you, sir."

Karl glanced at Elsie. They both knew instantly it must be something important. Karl excused himself and went to answer the call.

"Hello, Karl?" It was Hermann Goering. "We need you to come to Berghof right away to advise on materials and supplies. We're coming to the countdown." Karl's pulse quickened. It had begun. The die was cast.

"Are you there?" asked Goering.

"Yes. Yes. I'm here."

"Ribbentrop is in Moscow. The Führer's expecting word from the Russians at any minute. When it comes, then we march."

"When do you want me there?" Karl asked, still stunned at the news.

"First thing in the morning. There'll be a plane waiting for you at the airport." Karl put the receiver down heavily. Elsie came into the room and stood behind him. Hearty laughter could be heard from outside.

"What is it?" she asked, although she half knew the answer.

"I have to go."

"Have to go? Where?"

"To Berghof. It looks like things are moving quickly now."

She put her hand to her mouth and she began to tremble. "Oh, no," she whispered. "I'm scared."

"Maybe...maybe it will still be ok," he said, putting his arms around her shoulders. But he knew that things would never be ok again.

Karl was up early the next morning having not slept a wink. He ate a little breakfast without enthusiasm and Elsie had no appetite at all. By seven o'clock he was on the road, overwhelmed with a terrible sense of dread. Goering, Himmler and Goebbels were already at the Berghof when he got there. Many more top brass were due to arrive the following day.

Karl had been to the Berghof many times before but this time he detected an increased tension in the atmosphere. The house was deathly silent. Everyone was waiting for the final word from the Kremlin. Hitler in particular was beside himself with impatience. Under a brilliant August sun, the Polish roads were dry and hard. By mid-September the rains would come and troops and tanks could become trapped and stuck in oceans of mud. The pact *had* to be signed *now*.

The Führer remained nervous and volatile for the entire day. He stayed locked up in his study, pacing up and down endlessly, Eva brought him milky soup and some apples. He drank a spoonful of the soup, belched, the put it down again. He seemed to be approaching a state of total nervous breakdown. The servants avoided him. He continued to pace.

Karl decided to go to his room and try to get some sleep. A strange stillness hung in the mountain air as he dozed fitfully.

He was roused by the sound of the dinner gong and he dressed quickly before going out to join the other men on the terrace. Most were lounging on the rattan chairs or sitting on the stonework wall which overlooked the valley. Hitler spoke to no one as he continued his feverish pacing back and forth. His hands were clasped tightly behind his back and his eyes were fixed firmly downwards. The forests in the valley below were still green; the rocky mountain faces still a greyish brown. But it was late summer already and soon everything would be covered in snow.

As they waited, the sky began to thicken with dark clouds. Sudden weather changes were common in the mountains but there was something eerie about the turmoil that was building above their heads. Hitler's dog Blondi started to whine and began sulking from one spot to another. Strange colors swirled around in the evening sky; green, yellow, heavy grey, orange and blood red. No one had ever seen such a dramatic sky before and Karl stood up to watch. Gusts of wind arose, making the newspapers and magazines being to flap and fly about. The tablecloths was folded and taken inside before it too was lifted up and blown away.

Hitler stopped his pacing and stood eyeing the storm clouds, transfixed in one of his typical poses. One hand rested on his chin while the other supported his elbow.



Magda Goebbels rubbed her arms as the chilly wind started to give her goose pimples. "This is an omen, Mein Führer," she said, hunching her shoulders. She watched with saucer-like eyes as the clouds moved across the sky. "A very bad omen!" Her voice grew almost hysterical. "It means blood, blood and more blood! Destruction and suffering and blood!"

Hitler spun and looked at her with wild eyes. He turned to look back at the red glowing ball of sun sinking behind the mountain in a haze. He was clearly shocked by her words and was visibly shaken. "If it has to be, then let it be now!" he snapped. A bolt of lightning cracked the sky and the rain began to fall in torrents. Everyone hurried inside.

Dinner was ready and all the guests went straight through to the dining room. Hitler was still gripping by a mood of deep anxiety and spoke very little at the table. Dinner passed in almost complete silence. The efforts of the Goerings and the Goebbels to make small talk failed to produce any results.

Suddenly the telephone rang. Hitler leapt from his chair. It was Ribbentrop calling from Moscow. They had already agreed on a ten year pact of non-aggression between the two nations and had also struck a trade deal. Stalin was now asking for the Baltic States, some eastern sections of Poland, the province of Bessarabia in Romania and the Latvian ports of Libau and Windu to fall into the Russian sphere of interest. These were confidential requests and were not to be made public.

Hitler sent for an atlas. He opened it and studied the map of Europe with his magnifying glass for several minutes before going back to the phone. "Tell him, he's welcome to them all!" he declared.

The Führer replaced the receiver and a wide grin began to spread all over his face. Things were going very well. He ushered his guests through to join him in his private cinema to watch a picture of Stalin's May Day Parade and his review of the Red Army.

Finally, at nearly eleven o'clock in the evening, a messenger burst into the dining room in a state of great agitation and handed Hitler a note. He read the telegram then banged his fist sharply on the table. "Ho! Ho!" he shouted. He flung his hands in to the air and banged the table again; so hard that the glasses rattled against each other. "I have them. We've won! We have the pact with the Russians. Now I have the whole world in my pocket!"

The next day, as Hitler had planned, one hundred of the *Wehrmacht's* highest ranking officers from all three branches of the services arrived. All were in full dress uniform. Goering sported his white gloves and an array of jangling medals. His paunch was girdled by a belt of red leather richly inlaid with gold from which hung an ornamental dagger. Karl was pleased to find that his friends General Halder and Admiral Canaris were among the party. But both seemed tired and the Admiral's complexion was a sickly shade of grey. They'd barely had a chance to exchange greetings before they were summoned to a meeting in the Great Hall. General Halder was instructed to take a seat at the front. Karl and Admiral Canaris retreated to the back of the room.

Hitler took the podium. He was in one of his most arrogant and uncompromising moods. He began with the standard preamble; lecturing them on the subject of his own greatness. One of the generals already seemed to be asleep in his chair.

"I have summoned you here," Hitler said, "to strengthen your confidence and to explain to you the reasons that have moved me to make certain decisions." Hitler went on to tell them that Turkey 'was governed by cretins and half idiots', Romania had a King who

was 'a corrupt slave to his sexual instincts', and so on and so forth. When he got to Italy, his tone changed markedly. "Mussolini! Now there is a great man!" No one thought it was wise to point out that Italy was actually more of a liability than an asset to the Reich.

After three hours, Karl was having a hard time keeping his concentration going. Hitler's opening remarks had at least borne some semblance of the truth of international events, but now his words were becoming more and more ridiculous. He spoke about Poland. He said there must be war. That they had nothing to lose and in any case, they had no choice. Danzig was not the essence of the dispute at all. It was a question of expanding living space - *Lebensraum* - in the East to secure the fatherland's food supplies. The Führer began to wave his arms. Germany's economic situation is so precarious that war had become a necessity. Field Marshall Goering could confirm that. They were facing two alternatives, either make the first strike or perish ingloriously.

The Führer reassured his audience that the attack on Poland would be uncontested by the West. Then, the precision timing, he dropped the bombshell. "I have decided to ally myself with Stalin."

There were gasps of disbelief from around the room. Even those who'd been asleep woke with a start. "Stalin and I are the only ones who have a vision of the future," he declared. Then he returned to his favorite topic; himself. His officers were left entirely mystified as to why Germany was becoming allied to his greatest enemy. "I possess the authority," he continued, shaking his index finger at them, "that no person in Germany has ever possessed before me. Not Bismarck, not even Frederick the Great." He went on at length to describe his own importance to his German nation. Eyes glazed over again. His audience had heard it all before.

"The Western democracies," he shouted, "are not ready for war! They are still in love with compromise. I saw those men at Munich. Daladier and Chamberlain. Worms! Too cowardly to attack. They will make theatrical gestures and they will wring their hands as they did over the Czechs, but in the end they will abandon Poland too. They have no practical way of aiding her."

Karl caught the Admiral's eye. Canaris was taking notes in shorthand. Karl tried hard to look as if he were paying attention while his legs grew number and number from sitting too long in his chair. Finally they were allowed to break for lunch. A cold buffet was served outside on the terrace. It included Russian caviar. After lunch it was back to the Great Hall for another round of speeches.

Karl found himself drifting off but he was yanked back to consciousness as Hitler thundered to his conclusion. He always kept his most persuasive arguments to the end. The security which was the Non-Aggression Pact with Russia now afforded Germany had knocked the weapons out of the hands of the British. Hitler praised Stalin to the skies. "In a few weeks I shall stretch out my hand to him at the Russian-German frontier," he boasted. "We shall then undertake to share the world out between us!"

He brandished Danzig newspapers in the air. He described the Polish indignities against the Germans. Something new was surfacing. The room began to stir in apprehension. Hitler was speaking of commencing real hostilities. But then he meandered off again into the subject of Genghis Khan, the Turks, the Armenians and the successes of Frederick the Great. It was very hard to wade throughout the miasma of metaphors, convolutions and downright lies.

Then it all became clear. "Victory is certain! I shall find a good reason for starting the war. Never mind whether it is plausible or not, my propaganda machine will convince the German nation. And whether the rest of the world believes our reasons or not is of no interest to me. The victor is never asked afterwards whether he told the truth or not. In war it is not the truth which matters. It is victory which matters. Close your heart to pity! Act brutally! Be harsh and remorseless! Steel yourself against all compassion! Poland will be depopulated and resettled with good Germans. Europe will tremble at the knees. I will be ordering the start of operations on Saturday morning. Now is the time for our soldiers to march forward. We shall meet again in Warsaw!"

He stared at this audience unblinkingly for a moment longer then strode dramatically out of the room. He had talked with only an hours' break for lunch, for more than six hours. Both Admiral Canaris and Karl were horrified at what they'd heard.

Karl returned to Berlin with Canaris and Halder. He telephoned his head of staff at the USW the next morning and gave instructions to set up a technical team which would work with Army High Command. Karl spent the next days and nights shuttling backwards and forwards between the Chancellery and *Abwehr* Headquarters. On the one hand he was preparing for war but on the other hand he was still engaged in the desperate last minute plans to eliminate the Führer. It was an absurd and impossible situation. In the back of his mind he hoped that this was just another of Hitler's bluffs. Perhaps a peaceful solution was still possible.

In London there was an outcry against Russian double-dealing. There was particular outrage expressed by the British government against Stalin when they realized that he'd been toying with them all the time while pursuing his secret deal with Germany.

Stalin sought to silence his critics. "The British didn't want an alliance," he announced. "They declined at least twenty separate offers. So Russian had no alternative but to deal with Adolf Hitler. Besides," Stalin now went for the knockout blow, "the Soviet Union has only done what Britain and France did last year in Munich. We have bought time and maintained peace at the expense of a smaller state. If Prime Minister Chamberlain was right to appease Hitler with the offer of Czechoslovakia, then why am I wrong in appeasing him with the offer of Poland?"

Back in London, Chamberlain had not given up hope. He had to admit that the pact had come as a particularly unpleasant surprise, but perhaps something could still be done. He dispatched Sir Neville Henderson to Berlin.

A less appropriate person could not have been called upon to deal with Adolf Hitler in the present belligerent mood. Henderson had all the attributes of a Victorian diplomat. He was aristocratic by nature and an inveterate snob. Fighting gangsters was no work for such a gentleman. He was more used to mixing in the highest of gentile English society than he was to dealing with tyrants. And his own private view that fighting a war on behalf of Poland was totally ridiculous did not help matters.

Hitler was preoccupied with the planning for Case White and had no time for Henderson. Berlin newspapers were crammed on a daily basis with stories of Germans murdered by Poles. Every radio newscast blared out atrocities. The headlines of 1938, such as *'Czech subhuman pushes pregnant German women from bicycle'* required only minimal rewording to incorporate the new enemy. Hitler cried from the Chancellery that all the atrocities must cease! The Poles must give up Danzig and the Danzig Corridor! The Poles must send an emissary to make the necessary arrangements! The emissary must arrive the

very next day! Hitler boasted that his armies were straining at the leash, waiting for his orders to advance.

Henderson could not know that Hitler's enemies were doing no such thing. The Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of General Staff waited patiently for their orders. Von Kaunitz and his frontline troops were still under the impression that there wasn't going to be a war.

Henderson writhed under the onslaught of headlines. He did his best to make diplomatic representation to the Führer but he was rebutted at every step. The Poles mobilized. London and Paris became ever more frantic.

As the Ambassador was getting nowhere in his efforts to talk to the Führer, he settled instead for the Reich's Foreign Minister. With a fresh carnation in his buttonhole, he set out to meet Ribbentrop.

The German minister was plainly in his aggressive mood. "Where is the Polish emissary your government undertook to provide?" he demanded.

"You are being totally unreasonable, Herr Ribbentrop," Henderson countered, "in making such a demand at such short notice! We cannot order the Poles around as if they were schoolboys."

But Ribbentrop did not give any display of sympathy.

"London has asked the Poles not to aggravate the situation at the borders in any way," Henderson continued. "They must show restraint. Germany should do the same."

"It is not *we* who need to show restraint." Ribbentrop's attitude was only hostile. "It is the Poles who are the aggressors. *We demand* that a Polish negotiator come to Berlin!" he shouted. Henderson's face flushed a deep red and his lips trembled in anger. He pulled out a diplomatic dispatch from London and began to read from it but Ribbentrop cut him off in mid-sentence.

"Do you have anything else to say that is worth listening to?"

Henderson said that he had. "We've had reports," he spluttered, "that it's German infiltrators who are committing some of the crimes which the German newspapers are trying to pin on the Poles. It is our understanding that these incidents emanate from the German Security Service under the direct orders of Reinhard Heydrich."

"That's a damned lie!" Ribbentrop roared. He jumped up from his chair. "A typical *plinishe Schweinerhundle* lie. And let me tell you, Herr Henderson that our security services do not engage in such deceptions!"

Henderson leapt from his chair too and squared up to his opponent. "There is no *Herr* Henderson. I have been a knight of the realm for seven years. It's *Sir Neville* to you. And what kind of statesman says the word *damned*? That's not the kind of language which we expect."

Ribbentrop was shocked to be reprimanded in such a fashion. "What did you say?" he came to stand within inches of where Henderson stood. They glared at each other eyeball to eyeball, their nostrils flaring. For a moment it looked very much like the Ambassador and the Foreign Minister were going to come to blows. But after a few moments of the standoff, Ribbentrop snorted and took his seat again. Henderson followed suit.

Ribbentrop picked a piece of paper from his desk and began to read from it in a desultory fashion. His tone was one of utter annoyance. He listed the sixteen concessions which the Germans had been prepared to offer the Poles if they had bothered to send an

emissary. When he'd finished, he contemptuously threw the paper back down on his desk. "But of course that is a totally dead issue now as the Poles have failed to show up," Ribbentrop sniffed.

Henderson had only managed to pick up two or three words from the German's high speech recital. He asked if he could have a copy of the text. This was the usual diplomatic custom.

"No," replied Ribbentrop.

Henderson couldn't believe his ears. Perhaps he'd misunderstood. "Would you be so kind as to give me a written copy of those sixteen points?" he repeated.

"No. In any case, as the Polish emissary has failed to arrive, they are now null and void."

Henderson narrowed his eyes in suspicion. These proposals had clearly been just for show. They were never meant to be put in effect. The Ambassador raised an admonishing finger, "I want you to know something, Ribbentrop. Everything they say about you is true." He rose briskly from his seat and left.

Orders for the invasion of Poland on August 26<sup>th</sup> were issued. Full mobilization for 'Case White' was now underway. General von Kaunitz was ordered to report to Hitler at the Chancellery. It was 3:30PM, less than an hour after the orders had been sent to Army High Command. Von Kaunitz stood in front of the Führer and was informed that he would command the XX Panzer Corps. He would lead the attack on Poland.

Admiral Canaris was waiting for General von Kaunitz when he arrived at the Zoosen Headquarters. His job was to coordinate the activities of his *Abwehr* Special Operations Commando units with those of the *Wehrmacdht*. Their marching orders could come at any time within the next forty-eight hours. It was crucial that everything should go off without a hitch.

"I have sixteen units from my Brandenburg Battalion ready for immediate action," Canaris informed von Kaunitz. "Three will be operating in front of your Corps. They will be in place by tomorrow evening."

Von Kaunitz listened carefully to the Admiral's operational plans. The Brandenburgs had the vital task of clearing the path for his own units.

"So, the die is cast then?" von Kaunitz asked once the Admiral had finished.

"I'm afraid it looks that way; unless there's a last minute miracle. When do you fly out to your Field post?"

"Later tonight." The teleprinters started to clatter and von Kaunitz took his leave. Telephones rang. Dispatch riders came and went at speed and staff officers hurried to and from down the echoing corridors.

All the Brandenburg units were in position along Poland's borders by dawn. They were a tough bunch; renegades who preferred adventure to the daily grind and routine of the regular army. They were dressed in civilian clothes or in Polish uniforms. A few of them were specially selected Polish speakers who would do the talking once they slipped across the frontier. The first of the three units carried high explosives which they would use to knock out the nearest military targets. The second unit was to go in disguised as miners. Its task was to prevent the Poles from sabotaging the local mines. Hitler wanted to capture these intact so they could be used for the Nazi war industries. The most important

mission was given to the third unit under the command of Lieutenant Herzner. He was a big, burly man with sandy hair and he was both intelligent and tough.

Exactly one year earlier, Herzner had been the head of the resistance team which had planned to assassinate Hitler before he dragged Germany into a world war. Throughout September 1938, Herzner and his fellow plotters had hidden out in apartments in Berlin, ready to assassinate the Führer on command from the Wednesday Club. But at the last moment Mussolini called the Munich Conference and all plans were put on hold. Now Lieutenant Herzner stood poised to be the first soldier to fire shots in anger against Poland in the service of the man he had vowed to gun down twelve months before.

Herzner's team had the task of securing the *Gablunkov* Pass in the Beskid Mountains. The railway line linking the Protectorate to Poland ran through the pass. It was a vital point of the invading *Wehrmacht*. Two Divisions of von Kaunitz's XX Panzer Corps would pour through the pass and race towards Krakow. Here they would be able to contain all the Polish forces, and then make the drive towards to Warsaw with little or no hindrance.

When Hitler informed Italy that war was going to break out at any moment, Mussolini shrank away. He wanted no part in such an enterprise, he said. But he also had to save face. Personal prestige was something about which he was acutely touchy. He said he was not ready yet. What would it take to make him ready, Berlin inquired. Mussolini announced through his ambassador that he could not possibly make a move towards war unless Germany granted him vital war materials. He was asked to elaborate. He listed coal, steel, lumber, copper, potassium, petroleum, molybdenum, zirconium, salt, rubber, nickel, tungsten, guns, machinery parts; all in very large quantities.

Halder read over the list and went to report back to Hitler. "It would all come to about twenty million tons. It would require about twenty thousand rail trucks for delivery." He pushed the paper away. "I'm surprised that they didn't ask us to provide them with spaghetti too."

The Italian response surprised no one but Hitler. He was so deeply shaken at being abandoned by his friend that he roamed the Chancellery aimlessly, assuring and reassuring all his staff that everything was still fine. England and France would do nothing at all, he told them, and so the loss of the Italians was insignificant. The war would be limited just to Polish territory as in the days of Frederick the Great. Yet it was all too obvious that he was not coping very well. He sweated profusely. Confusion reigned.

Then more bad news arrived. At six o'clock in the evening, Hitler learned that Britain had formalized the earlier agreement with Poland by putting pen to paper. Then news rocked Hitler. He sat hunched over his desk reading the newly published treaty with his magnifying glass, trying to find a loophole. There was none.

Hitler had always said that his nerves were equal to anything. These recent days had severely tested that claim. Things were not going the way he'd planned. But every so often Ribbentrop would come by to ease his worries. The British and French would do nothing, he'd say. Ribbentrop should know, thought Hitler. After all he'd traveled to Canada once, he visited Paris many times and for a while he'd been the German Ambassador to England. Ribbentrop above all should know how the West would react. But then the panic would grip him again and sweat would trickle down his pale face and his eyes would glitter with fright. He simply could not decide what to do. The Führer was not himself.

Finally, in a fit of panic, Hitler dispatched Kurt with a message for von Brauchitsch. The Commander-in-Chief must come at once. He decided that a supreme effort must still be

made to detach Britain from any alliance with Poland. The Commander-in-Chief arrived from General Headquarters in Zossen late at night.

"I need more time," Hitler beseeched. "Stop the troops. Cancel the attack!"

"But that's impossible!" declared von Brauchitsch.

"You have to!"

Von Brauchitsch remained obstinate. "Not only will it cause total confusion, but it could dislocate the entire war machine."

"No. HALT! They must HALT!" Hitler's voice was hoarse. His neck was stretched out like a bird's.

Once again the telephones rang and cables clattered all along the networks to and from Field Headquarters. Sixty infantry divisions and eight motorized divisions received an urgent communiqué as they inched their way in darkness towards the Polish border:

**DO NOT - REPEAT NOT -  
COMMENCE HOSTILITIES. HALT ALL ADVANCES!**

Von Kaunitz and the other Field Commanders were aghast. They called one another to seek verification of this command. Marching orders this far advanced were to all intents and purposes irreversible. They could not be cancelled on a whim. But patrols were recalled, trucks and artillery turned around and aircraft called back to base. One small unit was caught just before it went into action only because its commander stopped to relieve himself and heard the phone ringing. Thirty seconds later he would have been off to Poland.

Then suddenly von Kaunitz remembered the Brandenburgers. He ran to his telephone and put a call through to Canaris. Luckily he was able to track down the *Abwehr* chief without any difficulty. It was three in the morning but he was sleeping on the coach in his office.

The Führer has called off the invasion on political grounds. You must halt your combat units."

Canaris was relieved and elated. Perhaps it was still possible to avert war. He set the wheels in motion at once. Canaris' staff officers were able to retrieve all the Brandenburg units except for one - Herzner's. At one o'clock in the morning on Saturday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, Lieutenant Herzner gave his final orders to his men. After that there was to be a strict radio silence. He shot a red signal flare high into the sky above the German lines. It was H-hour. The wars with Poland had begun.

The Brandenburgers emerged from their hiding positions and crossed into Polish territory, climbing a mountain road. Despite the cold air of the Beskids, their hands were damp with sweat. Sabotage was, after all, a dangerous business. As they were not in German uniforms, they could not even hope to be considered prisoner of war if they were caught. The best they could hope for was to be put up against the nearest wall and shot.

It did not take long before the commandos slammed into the Polish defenders. But they fought hard, shouting wildly as they moved forward. Within an hour they'd swept the Poles from the mountain road.

Now they advanced along the railway line past Mosty Station. When they reached the town they encountered a mixed bag of border police, soldiers and railway workers. Having heard the shots from further down the line, these men had already dug themselves

in. A stiff fight broke out but the Brandenburgers attacked with such ferocity that soon white flags made from undershirts and tablecloths fluttered out of all the buildings' window. Finally a middle-aged Polish colonel came out with his hands held high above his head.

But by now Herzner was puzzled. Where were the armored cars? Surely the Panzer Divisions should be here now! The Polish colonel burst out angrily at Herzner.

"What do you think you're doing?" he demanded.

"What do you mean, what are we doing? Aren't we at war?"

The colonel shook his head furiously. "We are not. You find out for yourself if you don't believe me."

"How do you mean?"

"Go to the railway station and telephone your base."

Herzner went to Mosty Station. Remarkably, the line had not been cut. That in itself was a bad sign. Herzner got through to his Headquarters in the Slovakian town of Zilina. The frantic *Abwehr* officer who had been trying to reach Herzner for hours bellowed into the phone. "Retreat at once!"

"I've already sustained casualties," Herzner shouted back, "and I've taken prisoners of war! What the hell am I supposed to do with them?"

"*Himmelhergott!* Do you realize the scandal this will cause? Leave the prisoners and everything else there and get your ass back over the border at once!"

The Chancellery was later to blame the 'border incident' on a gang of anarchist Slavs.

The conspirators lived through all of these decisive days in a state of extreme agitation. Early in the morning of August 27<sup>th</sup>, Halder and Karl conferred with Canaris. The moment was ripe to eliminate the Führer.

"The West hasn't weakened after all, they've stood firm!" Canaris cried, "And the German-Italian axis is broken. Hitler can't recover from such an obvious blunder. This mistake could cost him everything. I think we have an opportunity now to ensure peace for at least 20 years."

Halder agreed. "The orders and counter-orders have discredited the Führer in the eyes of the Army. He's dealt himself a fatal blow."

"Then what's our next move?" Karl was keen to get on with some sort of action. "Hitler's on the verge of a nervous breakdown. We should get rid of him now. Strike while the iron's hot."

Halder and Canaris didn't reply, but Karl was insistent. "We can't just let things drift. We have to act immediately. We have to do *something!* If not, Ribbentrop and Himmler will be at his ear again and within a week we'll be back in crisis once again. Both of those two are itching for war." Karl rose to his feet impatiently.

"I'm sorry, it's impossible!" Canaris exclaimed.

Karl turned to Halder. "Franz, what do you think?"

Halder thought about it for a moment. "No," he said. "I don't think there's any other way. He must be assassinated. But it can't be anyone from the *Wehrmacht* who does it."

"Then who else?" Karl rounded on him angrily. Halder made no reply. Karl looked to Canaris. The Admiral remained silent. He had always been against murder. He had never felt entirely comfortable about the Herzner plot.



The elation that Karl had felt only moments before now turned to extreme frustration. "Look at the two of you!" he said angrily. "Both of you are veterans of the Great War. You've killed countless men that you had nothing against personally and now you can't stand up against one irrational and dangerous man! What are you all waiting for? For the Führer to give the order himself before you decide to act?"

Halder didn't raise his eyes. He was the last of a three hundred year old line of German officers. The word treason and conspiracy were an anathema to him. "It's best if he's taken out by a politician," he said quietly.

"Which politician? The leader of the opposition?" Karl snapped sarcastically.

"Karl, I understand your frustration." Canaris said, "But we're still walking on a precipice. Things will develop in their own way, without the intervention of the military. With Italy out of the war and the Allies standing firm against the Führer, the chance that he'll go to war now is extremely unlikely. Leave events to unfold on their own."

Hitler summoned the British Ambassador to him. Sir Neville Henderson put on a dark jacket, straightened his tie and fortified himself with half a bottle of champagne before setting off for the Chancellery.

Henderson was subjected to the Führer's usual ranting and breast-beating before being offered a deal. "I accept the continued existence of the British Empire," he announced. "I offer Britain an alliance. If Danzig and the Corridor are returned to us, then Germany will guarantee the rest of Poland's frontiers." His generosity did not even end there. "In exchange for all this, I offer the German army in the defense of the British Empire against her enemies."

Henderson was mystified. He found himself totally speechless.

"I am an artist, not a politician," he heard Hitler say. "Once this matter with Poland is settled, I'm going to retire and paint! I don't want to make the whole of Germany one gigantic barracks."

Exercising a great act of will, Henderson managed to recover his senses. "His Majesty's government must respectfully decline the Führer's offer of protection. We must stand by our guarantee to Poland. The Prime Minister is quite firm upon the matter."

Hitler seemed to accept this rebuttal quite calmly. But the meeting continued to go nowhere and Henderson left empty-handed. The Führer summoned von Brauchitsch. The attack on Poland was to proceed. The day of the attack was to be September 1<sup>st</sup> and the hour of the attack was to be 4:45AM.

The invasion of Poland proceeded according to Case White. The *Wehrmacht* began its operation with the destruction of bridges, railroads, towns and cities. Hitler was so confident that the West would not intervene that he ordered the bulk of his forces to the East, leaving his back door open for the Allies to walk in if they so choose.

Karl was sitting in the Chancellery War Room with Goering, Ribbentrop and Halder when Hitler addressed the German nation on the radio. Speaking to the assembled Reichstag, the Führer said he had discarded his brown uniform for the field grey of the *Wehrmacht*. Then he declared, "All I desire to be is the first soldier of the *Reich*. I have put on the clothes that mean the most to me. I will only take them off when we have achieved victory. There will never be another November 1918 in the history of Germany." He announced that, despite his best efforts to maintain peace, Poland had attacked Germany. He had been left with no choice but to reluctantly launch a counterattack.

Karl's hopes of avoiding war and catastrophe lay in ruins. When he'd arrived first thing that morning, Karl had bumped into Admiral Canaris and several other *Abwehr* officers. He'd tried to avoid the encounter as they did not ever meet openly but the Admiral had seized him by the arm and pulled him aside. "This is the end of Germany. You were right. We should have done something," he whispered hoarsely. "But now it's too late!"

Hitler returned to the Chancellery from the *Reichstag* after his speech. His car took him through a subdued and somber Berlin. There was no applause from citizens and on one stood at attention when the national anthem was played through the loudspeakers.

"What's wrong with these people?" wondered the Führer.

He ran into British Ambassador Henderson in the hallway of the Chancellery. Hitler's mood was very different from the one that the nation had heard only moments earlier. Henderson stood silently in front of, gripping the brim of his hat. Karl, Halder, Ribbentrop and Goering looked on from the open door of the War Room.

"It's all England's fault!" the Führer shouted. "I have tried my best to end the chaotic situation on the Polish borders where condition resembled some kind of Yugoslavian nightmare. Murder, arson and other atrocities occur on a daily basis. And yet England is mad enough to stand in the way against these barbarians!" His eyes began to bulge and his words came out in short, painful gasps. "Those Poles were raping German women! They were castrating German men!"

"Castrating?" Henderson blinked in embarrassment.

"Six already!"

"Surely not six. Perhaps just one?"

"Six. I tell you! Germany honor is at stake! Things have gone too far. But England is selfish. I have tried all along to meet you half way, but I've always suspected that England wants war. I will crush Poland and I will annex the whole country!" Hitler's face was now inches away from Henderson's. He grew more and more hysterical and began to wave his arms around.

"If England wants to fight for a year, I shall fight for a year!" he shouted. "If England wants to fight for two years, I shall fight for two years!" His voice was shrill. "If England wants to fight for three years, I shall fight for three years." His arms swung more and more wildly in the air as he carried on bellowing. "*Und wenn es erforderlich ist, will ich zeh Jahre Kaempfen* and if necessary, I will fight for ten years!" His whole body jerked fitfully and he shook his fist so violently that he accidentally hit the wall. Finally, he crashed through the doors into the War Room and sat down heavily behind the desk. Within moments, however, he had almost completely recovered his composure. He let out a deep sigh and ran his left hand across his hair to adjust his fallen lock.

This is a man not in full possession of his faculties, Henderson thought to himself, or worse, a fiend.

Everyone in the War Room who watched this flaming display knew he never thought for one moment believed he would have to fight England at all.

Henderson approached Hitler's desk nervously, still gripping the brim of his hat in one hand. "Considering the situation," he said, "perhaps I should telephone Lord Halifax in London. Perhaps we could persuade Polish Commander-in-Chief, Smigly-Rydz, to come immediately to Germany in order to discuss the situation.

Everyone stared thunderstruck at the British Ambassador. To suggest conferences and proposals now, when the Germans were advancing through Poland and whole sections of Warsaw were in flames? Hitler gave a curious smile and nodded his head.

"Yes, perhaps you should do that."

Sir Neville said nothing more and hurried off to find the nearest telephone. Somehow it seemed to have slipped his mind that perhaps the Polish Marshall might just be a little bit busy at the moment fighting back the massive German advance into his country. And if he were to come to Berlin now for talks, that would be tantamount to surrender.

"He's feeling the strain a little," said Goering. Hitler and Ribbentrop burst out laughing but to Karl and General Halder, it did not seem quite so funny.

The summer heat broke with a ferocious thunderstorm over London. The mood in the bars and smoking rooms of the House of Commons was equally tempestuous. There was growing impatience over Chamberlain's inertia in the face of the startling German attack on Poland. He dithered and he vacillated as he tried to consider what hasty last minute negotiations might still be possible. Perhaps the Italians could mediate, as they had at Munich. Chamberlain believed he had a special relationship with Mussolini. At least *he* had a sense of humor, whereas it would take a long and complicated surgical procedure to insert a joke into Hitler's head.

The Prime Minister asked France what they wanted to do. The French didn't want to do anything. They would be happy to see an early conquest of Poland so that, with great regret, they could declare the whole matter over. Chamberlain continued to dither with regard to the time limit he and the French would give Germany for the ceasing of hostilities and their withdrawal. Technical difficulties had to be considered.

"Technical difficulties be damned!" roared Churchill. "I suppose he would call it technical difficulty for a Polish person if a German bomb fell on their head!"

The angry undercurrents in Parliament rose nearer to the surface and it appeared that Chamberlain would be overthrown if he showed any further signs of weakness. It was all turning very ugly.

"Speak up for Britain!" came a shout in Parliament. No one knew who said it first but many took up the cry and repeated it over and over again.

"Hear, Hear!" the members rumbled.

"More talks you say?" came another cry. "Talk, talk, talk. What's the use of talking anymore?"

"A solemn treaty has to be respected! Are we to assume that our pledges are worthless?"

"Honor!" someone called. "It's a matter of honor!"

"Hear, Hear!" came the cry once more.

Chamberlain stood at the dispatch box cringing.

Churchill sat drinking brandy in one of the bars of The House of Commons with General Inskip. In the space of just a few weeks, Chamberlain had set aside his appeasement policy, set up a declaration to lose that no one was really sure what it meant and turned down the other proposal that anybody else cared to make. It seemed that had chosen the most unsuitable and unstable country to offer guarantees to. Poland was not even a country that numbered amongst Britain's usual friends. Its government was authoritarian and its record on anti-Semitism was poor. And, in spite of being told in no

certain terms by its own Chief of Staff that Britain would be in on position to help Poland, Chamberlain had gone ahead and guaranteed precisely that.

“What a strange man he is,” said Churchill. “He falls into traps that he set himself. What lunacy persuaded him to offer this guaranteed to the Poles?”

“Only he can tell you that,” remarked the General. “By the way, “I’ve just discovered something. When I was serving as a captain on July 19<sup>th</sup>, it would seem that I was directly facing Lance Corporal Hitler across the few hundred yards of no-man’s-land.”

Churchill nearly choked on his brandy. “Why in God’s name didn’t you shoot the bastard?”

At No. 10 Downing Street, Chamberlain was in a state that no one had ever seen him before. His nerves had completely gone, along with his policies of appeasement. He sat in his chair and placed his forehead on his desk. He kept it there for ten whole minutes while those around him waited for him to say something. Outside, a noisy group of people were chanting loudly that they would not leave until the Prime Minister gave the Germans an ultimatum. But Chamberlain could not face that the game was up. He could not force himself to utter the final, irrevocable words.

Lord Halifax stood by his side, waiting for him to emerge from his trance. Finally Chamberlain did speak. He was still bent face down on his desk. “The thing that is most frightful, Edward, is the futility of it. After all, the Poles cannot be saved.”

Shouts rose from the streets.

“Really, Prime Minister,” Halifax urges anxiously, “you have to act. You must speak to the nation.”

Chamberlain slowly lifted up his head. His face was ashen. More than anything else he dreaded exchanging his umbrella for a sword. “Very well,” he sighed. “I’ll broadcast to the nation at eleven o’clock.”

Air raid alarm rang all over England immediately after Chamberlain’s radio broadcast, signaling that a state of war now existed between Great Britain and Germany.

Winston Churchill was dressing to go to Parliament for the Prime Minister’s speech. His collar was only half buttoned when his wife walked in. “You know, Clemmie,” he said, “you have to hand it to Hitler. The war’s only been on a few minutes and there’s an air raid already.”

“The Germans are nothing if not punctual, you know,” she replied.

Churchill went to the window and looked up at the sky. There were no bombers coming at the moment. But they would be coming, he was sure of that.

On Sunday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, Karl sat at breakfast with Hitler and Ribbentrop in the War Room. “Let Henderson tell London what he wants Mein Führer,” Ribbentrop said, munching a bread roll. “England won’t fight. Neither will France. We don’t want to let ourselves be carried away by the alarmists or laden nonsense from my office staff before I left for Moscow, especially going on at me in the panic about the prospect of a full scale war. But I put a stop to that. You know what I said? ‘If I hear anyone in my office talking crazy like that,’ I said, ‘I will shoot him myself’. That put a stop to it alright.”

“You never were a man who made friends easily, Joachim,” Karl said.

The British Ambassador entered the Chancellery looking as if he’d had no sleep. He made his way straight to the office of official translator Schmidt. “I have a note here in

which Great Britain declares its intentions toward Germany," he said solemnly. "I'm afraid to have to tell you that a state of war now exists between our two countries." He handed the note to Schmidt, turned and left the Chancellery immediately. He had no intention of waiting around for Hitler's response.

Schmidt ran up the stairs and burst into the room where Hitler was still taking his breakfast with the others. They were startled by his sudden entrance and conversations instantly ceased. Schmidt slowed down and came cautiously towards Hitler's chair, breathing heavily. He slowly read out the British ultimatum. When he had finished, there was complete silence.

Hitler remained as motionless as a statue, gazing fixedly before him. After what seemed like an eternity, he turned to Ribbentrop who had not moved either.

"What now then?" he yelled savagely at Ribbentrop, appearing suddenly to have lost all control. It was the first time in all the years he had known him that Karl had seen Hitler in such an uncertain and agitated state.

## Chapter 18

### Case White

Thousands of pigeons lived in the eaves of the old gothic buildings and belfries of Warsaw's churches. About the five in the morning on Friday, September 1<sup>st</sup>, the pigeons flapped out from their dirty roots, soared up and began to fly in great swarms above the spires. The few people awake at that hour wondered what had roused them. It wasn't long before they knew. Waves of German bombers arrived from the Southwest in the early morning sky.

American Ambassador to Poland Anthony Biddle was woken up by the ominous droning. At first he lay still with his eyes half-opened. He glanced at his clock. Five thirty. Still groggy from sleep he couldn't quite place the strange and unsettling noise.

A thunderous crash of bombs nearby made it perfectly clear to him a moment later. He jumped out of bed. Another bomb hit a home nearby, a third exploded on the grounds of the embassy. He fumbled towards the telephone and dialed Washington. The operator told him the lines to the United States through Berlin had gone down. In a panic he quickly dialed the American Embassy in Paris. That line when through Copenhagen. The phone rang. He reached William Bullit.

"They're attacking!" Biddle cried. "I can't get through to Washington! It's finally happened!"

Bullit called Washington. It was a little before three in the morning on the East Coast. He explained to the operator that it was a most urgent call for the President.

The phone by Roosevelt's bedside rang.

"Mr. President, this is Bill Bullit."

"Yes, Bill."

"I just spoke to Tony Biddle in Warsaw..."

"It's come at last, hasn't it?"

"Yes, Sir."

"God help us all," Roosevelt said. "Thanks, Bill. I have to call Harry and the others now."

He propped himself up on a pillow, lit a cigarette and put in the call to Harry Hopkins.

As soon as he recognized the President's voice, Harry knew what the call was going to be about. Next on Roosevelt's list was the army's George C. Marshall. The President invited him to take the temporary rank of four-star general and take up the post of Chief of Staff. Last of all, Roosevelt made arrangements to hold a press conference later that day.

The President sank back against his pillow and lit another cigarette. The latest poll showed that a full 96 percent of the American people wanted no part of this war.

"Prime Minister, there is an important telephone call for you," said Chamberlain's secretary.

"Who is it?"

"It's Prime Minister Bonnet and he wants most urgently to speak to you."

"Fine. Put him on."

"Have you heard the news today?" asked the French Prime Minister.

"Yes, I have. The German troops have crossed the border into Poland with very little resistance from the Poles."

"What are we going to do?"

"Nothing for the moment. We have a deal with Herr Hitler."

"Yes, I know all about that, but I don't trust him. I have some extremely confidential information to the effect that once Hitler controls Poland, he will attack France and other western countries, including Britain."

"But Monsieur Prime Minister, that is not possible. I have an understanding with Herr Hitler. Central and Eastern Europe are his. But he knows that if he makes the slightest move against France, then Britain will not hesitate to come to your defense."

"But that will be too late, Prime Minister. I'm convinced that our intelligence information is accurate. We need to act now."

"I've put all my efforts into my negotiations with Hitler so that we may prevent a Second World War. I cannot believe that the Führer would be so stupid as to attack us after we have both agreed to his expansionist plans. I have a gentlemen's agreement with Hitler. I know he will honor it."

The French Prime Minister raised his voice, "Don't you see? We have no option but to declare war on Germany. Our only chance is to show Hitler that we all mean business. He means to attack France, I tell you!"

Chamberlain could see that his French counterpart was not going to be persuaded. He needs to do some quick thinking. "Alright, Prime Minister Bonnet," he suggested, "how about this. We declare war formally on Germany over the Polish issue, but we both sit tight and do nothing to help Poland. In the meantime, we make it clear to Hitler that as long as he confines his expansionist plans towards Central and Eastern Europe, then we'll stay out of the conflict. But if he starts to look westward, then we'll fight him tooth and nail."

"Ok. Let's do that. We'll declare war on Germany within the next 48 hours and use diplomatic channels to make the Führer understand that we won't get involved as long as he keeps moving east."

"Agreed. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"No!" Lutek shouted. "I'm *not* going to hide down in the basement with you and Grandma. All Poland is in flames. Papa is fighting at the front and you expect *me* to hide like a coward? No, Mama, I'm a man now and I've made up my mind. I'm going out to fight!"

Ignoring his mother's desperate pleas, Lutek ran out the door and into the street amidst the shrill wailing of air raid sirens.

Seconds later, an enormous blast shook the area like an earthquake and debris rained down everywhere. Olga shut the door of their small shop to stop the choking smoke and dust from coming inside. She grabbed Lukaš by the arm and pulled him down into their basement shelter. Elli was already sitting there in darkness in front of a single candle, praying to God that they would not be hit. Another explosion rocked the house and this time it was so close by that it blew out all the windows. Lukaš buried his face in terror in his Grandma's lap.

Out on the street Lutek hid under an upturned rubbish bin as another bomb exploded nearby. The flames were shooting up from the buildings all around him and thick black smoke rose up in broad columns from the ground to hang over the city in ominous dark clouds. Civilians and soldiers lay dead and wounded in the streets. People were

screaming and running around wildly in panic and fear. Dogs ran around barking in confusion as a water main burst and flooded the street.

Over all the tumult, the sirens wailed like banshees and the loudspeakers monotonously repeated the same words. *'The alarm is on. The alarm is on. The alarm is on, Alarm, alarm...'*

The German Stuka squadrons came again like great flocks of deadly birds. Flying low and fast, they spread out to attack their targets, screaming like banshees as they dived and loosed their deadly bombs.

Another thunder of explosions.

It was early morning on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, and Warsaw was experiencing Hitler's first Blitzkrieg. The Luftwaffe was in absolute command of the skies and the German Panzer divisions were spreading through Poland at a speed never before witnessed in warfare.

It took Lutek two hours to reach the Air Raid Defense Headquarters and Recruitment Office, only to find the doors barred and locked. There was no way of finding his father now. Standing there in the street in the midst of this entire inferno, he realized what a damn fool he was being after all.

Defenseless and defeated, Lutek returned home later that evening, dodging bombs and fires. Olga stood in the door of their shop when he returned home. She embraced him, crying, and checked his body all over to make sure he was not wounded, as he claimed.

"It's crazy," Moshe Weiss had said, only a week before to the rest of the family as they gathered in the kitchen. "He can't do it. It'd be suicide. It's just a lot of hot air, believe me."

Moshe could not conceive of Hitler going to war against Poland when all the Allies had vowed to declare war on him if he did.

Olga frowned, "You think you can predict what the madman is going to do? He's capable of absolutely anything. Every day on the radio we hear news about what's going on at the border. Polish provocation the Germans call it! Just the same as when they invaded Czechoslovakia."

"But Olinka, the German nation is made up of intelligent and cultured people," he said, trying to reassure her. "There is no need to panic. This whole mobilization business is just another part of Hitler's propaganda."

"Oh really! The mobilization of 700,000 French troops *and* the English fleet. Is that propaganda too?" Olga's voice was growing shrill. "And Polish peasants taking all their horses to train stations to sell to the army."

Moshe stared at her.

"I saw it myself. The army officers wait there to buy them up. I saw it with my own eyes! Is that propaganda too?"

"So now they're even mobilizing village horses," Moshe said mockingly. "Even the old horses, the ones that pull the garbage carts? I thought they'd send them off to pasture instead of calling them up to the colors. Think of it, sending those poor old horses off to the battlefield with their sagging knees. Clip-clop, clip-clop and down in the ditch!"

But it was no use trying to make light of the situation. It only made things that much worse.

"How can you make jokes at a time like this!" demanded Olga.



Elli kept her head down as Moshe and Olga became more and more agitated. She sat on her stool with a bowl in her lap and peeled apples with a small kitchen knife. The boys ate their supper in silence, glancing occasionally at their parents' worried faces.

The next day Moshe was called to report to the Nineteenth Infantry Division, summoned, it was said, for a month of practice manoeuvres. Olga burst into tears, at first quietly, then in loud sobs. Moshe went to her side and held her tightly.

"What are we going to do?" she moaned. "We would have been better off staying in Munich. I can't run the business by myself. Why have we come here if you're just going to run off and get yourself killed?"

"Shh! Don't worry. Even if war happens it won't last long. I'll be back home before you know it."

Official pamphlets were distributed instructing those in the line of direct German attack to burn their crops and slaughter their cattle. The rich began to bury their silver, guns and wine in their back yards or put them in ancient hiding places under the floorboards in attics or in hidden cellars.

People hoarded food, antiseptics, bandages, sugar, soap, candles and flour. At night they stole out to dig up potatoes in local fields. The army cut off the sale of all oil, gasoline and naphtha. Store shelves were bare. Trains were jammed with soldiers going to the front or people rushing home from interrupted holidays. They hung out of windows, clung to doorways or rode on the buffers between the cars. The country was in a state of complete upheaval.

Despite the danger, the bustle was curiously exciting to Lutek. The lobbies and restaurants of Warsaw were jammed until five in the morning with masses of totally new sorts of people. There were soldiers, reservists, diplomats, officers, gigolos and courtesans jostling with each other and drinking, whispering and laughing. "We'll be in Berlin in a month," they'd tell each other. "Their tanks will be useless in our fields," Even though bombs were raining from the sky, there was supreme confidence all around in a capital city which hummed with activity.

Elli looked after the home and the boys while Olga worked. She prepared their meals; made sure they did their homework and saw to it that they learned Jewish history and culture.

For Lutek, now fifteen, the move to Poland meant he'd had to grow up faster and take on more responsibilities. His younger brother found himself uprooted to a foreign land where everyone spoke a strange language that he didn't understand. Lukaš clung closely to his brother's shadow.

One the street, Lutek continued to dodge the bombs and the fires as he made his way back to the shop. Along the way he passed the Warsaw Conservatory of Music where he had won a scholarship and was due to begin his studies in a few days' time. The Conservatory had been one of the first buildings to be hit and now lay in gaping, smoldering ruins. Lutek stared at the blackened, charred walls then closed his eyes tightly, trying to shut out the sight of his dreams for a better future lying destroyed in front of them.

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, Britain and France declared war on Germany and Olga and Elli cried in happiness. They hadn't slept for three days as the Luftwaffe pounded incessantly overhead but now a wave of hope and optimism swept through the neighborhood. The war would now quickly come to an end.

But it didn't come to an end. The assault continued relentlessly and by the end of the first week all the power stations and waterworks had been destroyed and one third of the city lay in ruins. The Jewish districts were the most heavily damaged, their fires glowing brightly in the night while the rest of Warsaw was blackened out.

By government order, every shop and restaurant in Warsaw that owned a radio had to keep it on and their doors open so that the entire street could hear the public information broadcasts. Every time German planes were approaching, the regular program was cut off and replaced with the opening bars of Chopin's nocturne. That familiar fragment of music was repeated with sickening frequency. For Olga, each note was burned indelibly into her brain. Never again would she be able to hear the melody without shuddering in horror.

Rumors spread like wildfire through the city. Hundreds of British bombers were bombing Hamburg, Bremen and Hanover. The boy's Grandma heard it in the market square. The French Infantry had taken Strasbourg, Stuttgart, and Mannheim. Olga heard that in food queue, the French and English were soon going to unleash their massive offensives. They would drop bombs on Germany then fly onto Warsaw to refuel before flying back. That was why there was no gasoline. It was being saved for them.

There was no way that Olga or Elli could know that these rumors were entirely untrue. Indeed, the reality of the situation was terrifying.

German Panzer divisions penetrated Polish territory in breakneck speed, spreading even their own commanders. Racing north and east they encountered little resistance. The attack plan had been worked out to the last detail by Chief of Staff, Franz Halder, the man who hated Hitler passionately. It was working out brilliantly.

The Poles had fully expected the attack but had contented themselves with preparations for war reminiscent of the last century, confident that they could contain anything the Germans threw at them. One hundred years behind the times, the Poles were like knights donning white plumed helmets to go out and smite the heathen. Among the men of Moshe's Regiment, the favorite topic of discussion as they marched to their positions was the Battle of Grunewald, when the Poles crushed the Teutonic knights. That was in 1410.

No one envisaged the weight and dazzling speed of the *Wehrmacht*. The sheer power of their armor and artillery supported by the Luftwaffe was a phenomenon which made Polish weapons obsolete ineffective. The first Blitzkrieg spread thought Poland at a speed never before witnessed in warfare.

In twenty four hours the Polish army was effectively finished. In three days the entire division of which Moshe's Regiment formed a part of was shattered. He and a handful of survivors from his regiment struggled back. Every road they passed which led eastward was choked with people fleeing toward Russia away from the Nazi plague. A tiny number of them had automobiles and some rode motorcycles or bicycles or were on horseback. Most of them traveled in horse-drawn carts or on foot. Peasant carts were piled high with sleeping children. There would be one or two cows towed along behind most

carts on long ropes. The refugees shuffled with their bundles, passing through fields and the rough stubble of the late summer harvest, passing by burning villages and wrecked train stations. They fled ever eastward from the rampaging Panzer columns and strafing Luftwaffe. Stukas dived low with their sirens wailing loudly to frighten the straggling columns of people and force them off the roads in a running, galloping ocean of dust.

Though the capital of Warsaw was the main target, Moshe and his fellow soldiers found themselves passing through decimated villages with no military significance. The flimsy houses were blown up and inhabitants who ran out into the streets were machine-gunned. Even the peasants working in fields were gunned down. Even in the Dark Ages, Moshe thought, invaders let the country people live. What was the sense of shooting down little girls still clutching their dolls? It seemed entirely random and without purpose. He reasoned that the Germans had lost their sense of direction or had inaccurate maps. Otherwise there could be no explanation.

Sleeping in bushes and hiding in thickets, Moshe's group made slow but steady progress. One morning they were woken by a tank column advancing through a nearby field. They covered themselves with brush and huddled together as they watched the approaching Panzers, terrified they would either be run over by the tanks or discovered by the accompanying infantry. Suddenly they saw a Polish Cavalry Brigade emerge from the distant wood. The mounted soldiers swung their sabers, leveled their lances and charged at full gallop toward the advancing panzers. Of course, despite their gallantry, they were no match at all for the tanks' cannons and soon the earth was soaked with red blood. Moshe closed his eyes even though the gory spectacle was too far away for him to see the grim details of the carnage. His imagination filled it all in from the horrible screams of men and horses. He didn't open his eyes again until he heard a few shots ring out. The tank officers were dispatching the wounded animals with their side-arms. He wondered what kind of mercy was being dispensed to the cavalrymen.

By September 7<sup>th</sup>, tank divisions were on the outskirts of Warsaw. The Jews fought desperately alongside the Polish army against the overwhelming Nazi Blitzkrieg, knowing that in defeat, their own lot would be worst of all.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Weiss' quarter was hit heavily by incendiary bombs. Total chaos reigned everywhere and thousands were burned to death or buried alive in the rubble. Some of Olga's relatives were amongst the victims.

The next shock came like a bolt from the blue when two days later the Soviet Red Army attacked Poland from the East, seizing one third of its territory. It was not, however, a shock to Hitler. He and Stalin had reached an understanding that Poland would be divided up between them as part of the recent Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact. Obviously, much more than a simple non-aggression had been agreed.

Still waiting for a sign of the Allies, the Weiss family sat glued to the radio, listening to the war reports, as Grandma turned and twisted the knobs to clear the static.

Warsaw surrendered on September 28<sup>th</sup>. The bombing stopped and the world grew silent. The Polish had held out for as long as they could in this war of attrition but the outcome was inevitable. Without international support, without enough food or water to sustain them and without enough ammunition for their weapons, they had little real hope of survival. In those five short days, Warsaw alone had suffered ten thousand dead and was treating fifty thousand wounded with scarcely any of its hospitals still functioning.

Moshe eventually made it back home along with thousands of other battle-weary soldiers. He was exhausted but unharmed.

"Papa, didn't the British and French soldiers come to fight with us?" asked Lukaš. "They said they were going to."

"No son. They didn't come," replied Moshe softly.

Into the chaos marched perfect order. The German High Command entered Warsaw with a victory parade with only Poles of German extraction was allowed to attend. Ignoring his mother's protests, Lutek slipped away to watch the procession from a rooftop.

Rows of tall, blonde, beautiful soldiers in steel helmets goose-stepped down Jerozolimskie Boulevard in shiny black boots, their heels pounding against the cobblestones as they marched. Tanks, trucks, motorcycles and heavy artillery rumbled slowly down the Boulevard behind them.

*"Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil..."*

The crowds cheered wildly as Adolf Hitler himself passed through the streets in a black armored Mercedes Benz, his outstretched hand raised in a victory salute.

Lutec clenched his fists so hard that they began to hurt. He couldn't bear to watch. He loved his native Germany, he'd always felt that he was German himself, yet now the Germans were his enemies. The Nazis whom his family had fled from two years ago were now once again upon them. He ran from the rooftop in a helpless rage.

The old women of the neighborhood continued to meet on the bombed out remains of the old market square, just as they had every day before. Many of them tried to muster some hope about the new occupying forces by reminiscing about their experiences with the German occupiers they'd known in the last war.

"I remember those boys from 1914," said one fishmonger.

"So do I," agreed the lady that sold buttons on Rymarska Street. "They were courteous and disciplined. They treated the Jews with politeness and sympathy."

"You don't understand," argued Elli. "They're different now. Everything is different now. I'm German myself. Why do you think we came here?"

The bombing may have been over in Warsaw but nothing would ever be the same again. The first real contact with the new Nazi occupying troops was a sobering lesson and soon Jews became afraid to show themselves in the streets. Olga and Elli came home with stories of German soldiers grabbing Jewish men in the streets and cutting off their skin. Jews were hunted on the streets, thrown out of food queues, forced out of their homes and businesses and put to every kind of dirty, degrading work imaginable. They suffered daily abuse and many were savagely beaten. Anything and everything was done to inflict as much psychological and physical pain as possible. For the slightest of offenses, whether real or imagined, a Jew could be shot or hanged in public. The Weisses knew it would not be long before it was their turn to meet with misfortune. It was impossible for anyone to escape.

The Polish population themselves, however, were not as badly treated. Some, through open collaboration or just from a newfound sense of spite, took full advantage of the even more precarious situation of their Jewish neighbors. It wasn't long before Poles who did not know a word of German learned to say '*Ein Jude!*' in order to get the Jews removed from in front of them in the food queues.

It was mid-October when Moshe was told he was to prepare for the imminent takeover of the shoe store. A German trustee would become the manager of both the factory and the shop.

Olga cried but Moshi consoled her and himself by explaining that they were relatively well off. According to the terms of the trusteeship, they were still allowed to live in the upstairs quarters.

"But how are we going to make a living?" Olga asked with red eyes. "How are we going to eat?"

"We'll find a way. We still have our health, thanks to God; so we'll find a way," assured Moshe. He turned to his mother for support. "Isn't that right, Mama?"

"Grandma Weiss sat on a chair with her two frightened grandsons on either side of her. She had lived through the trials of the last war and the dreadful hunger it had caused. But now she was seeing a totally new and terrible kind of barbarism. She sat stoically as the eye of her family looked to her to hear her say that it would be all fine.

"Mama? Isn't that so?" Moshe repeated.

"Yes, children, we all still have our health," Elli replied at last.

The Germans issued an endless series of orders forbidding Jews to trade in manufactured goods, leather or textiles and professionals were banned from practicing their occupations. Most Jews quickly found themselves having to improvise, bartering for food and rummaging through garbage cans. A curfew was set up. Jews had to wear white armbands inscribed with a blue Star of David. One decree followed another.

One night, in the dead of winter, there was a sharp knock on the Weiss' door.

"It's them again!" whispered Olga.

"You stay here and I'll go see what they want this time," said Moshe.

He went downstairs to unbolt the front door and soon sharp voices began to rise from below. After half an hour they left and Moshe returned to his bedroom.

"What's happened?" asked Olga anxiously.

"They've confiscated your winter coat because they said it was made of English wool; enemy fabric. Then they confiscated our tea, saying it was Russian tea and they took our soap and cotton tablecloth."

"Why?" Olga was incredulous.

"French soap and American cotton!"

Olga shook her head in disbelief.

"I must report to the police station tomorrow," Moshe said. "I have to pay a huge fine."

They didn't sleep again that night and the next morning, Moshi appeared at the police station. The sergeant asked a string of absurd questions the made him sign a confession to the crimes of being in possession of and concealing enemy goods; acts which amounted to consorting with the enemy. The fine was severe and Moshe was detained for three days.

Meanwhile, Olga and the family locked themselves in the house, going through agonies of fears that he would never return.

In the end he was released unharmed but only after he handed over nearly all of their savings in payment of the fine.

Few people ventured out at all now in the street except to buy food at the ever increasing prices. The Germans were in the habit of seizing all the able-bodied adults they could find for labor. Soon, regardless of price, food became so scarce that people had to wait for hours in line just for a loaf of bread only to be told that there wasn't enough to go around. Hunger set in with the early frosts of autumn.

"Moshe, what on earth are we going to do?" Olga announced as she paced up and down the kitchen wrapped in two sweaters and a shawl. "The money is almost gone and I don't know if we should spend what little we have left on food or coal. We don't have enough for both."

Moshe didn't answer. He hadn't spoken much to anyone for the last few weeks. He was a broken man. Devastated and disillusioned, he had hidden himself away in the bedroom, immersing himself in his books and religious tracts as a means of escape.

Soon there was no food left to put on the table.

"Lukaš," whispered Lutek to his brother in bed one night. "You're coming with me tomorrow. We'll have to get up early."

"What? Where are we going?"

"We're going on a little trip."

Lukaš looked wide-eyed with excitement. For months he had been virtually confined to the house. Olga, finding she was unable to control her willful older son, clung to Lukaš in massive over protection.

"Where are we going, Lutek?" he asked pounding his fists on his pillow in his impatience to know.

"I'll tell you in the morning; after we leave the house."

"Aw, come on, tell me now! Is it going to be dangerous?"

"Yes, Lukaš. Very dangerous."

The next morning the boys rose before the five o'clock curfew, dressed quickly and tiptoed out of the house. Lutek paused for a moment to whisper to his Grandma that they were leaving without giving her time to ask where or why.

Outside, Lutek turned to his brother and said, "We're going out to the country to find some food and bring it back home. Here..." he handed him a small burlap sack. "You carry this; I'll take the other one."

Lukaš' eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"What? Are you nuts?" he exclaimed. "We won't make it half way across town! There are soldiers and police on motorcycles everywhere. Anyway, you know Jews aren't allowed out of Warsaw."

"Fine. Then stay home!" Lutek's tone was sharp.

"No!" There was no way Lukaš was going to pass up this chance of an adventure.

"Well then you're going to listen to me very carefully and do exactly what I say or we'll both get caught." Lutek pulled the Star of David armband off Lukaš' arm.

"The first thing is to take that piece of *schmate* off."

"What are you doing?" Lukaš wriggled and shrieked. "Are you crazy? If they catch either of us without it, we'll be killed!"

Lutek ripped off his own armband and tucked it into his pocket. "We're not Jews. Today we are Christians, remember that."

Lukaš stopped his protestations but Lutek could tell that he was scared. He pulled his cap down over his forehead and looked fixedly downwards at the ground.

They walked briskly through the streets, travelling south and along a route that would ultimately take them to the nearest small farming town.

They'd only gone a few blocks when they saw an old Rabbi on the pavement across the street. A group of German soldiers were walking towards him so, in observation of the new German decree, the Rabbi removed his hat and stepped off the pavement into the gutter. The German soldiers stopped alongside him, smirked at one another and then began kicking and beating him while they continued to joke amongst themselves.

Lukaš was so stunned at this sight, that he became rooted to the spot, unable to move his legs. Lutek grabbed his wrist tightly and pulled him forwards, "Just keep walking," he said. "Come on, as fast as you can. There's nothing either you or I can do. Just keep moving. Remember, we haven't got our armbands on. If they catch us, we're dead!"

Lukaš' little legs broke into an untidy canter as he ran to keep up with his brother, cold sweat running down his back. But the sounds of the mocking and the taunting followed him as he ran. There was no way he could shake it off.

Everywhere people were already lining up for food, pushing and shoving to get something before it was all sold out. As they got out of the city center, the streets once again became quieter. Every now and then they would see a German motor-bike patrol or a police car speeding down the street. They kept their heads down and tried to look as inconspicuous as possible.

After hours of walking they reached the first small farming town, only to find that all the stores were shut and stripped bare. Lutek stopped an old woman as she hurried by and asked why.

"Because all the food has run out, numbskull!" she snapped, continuing on her way without further ceremony.

"What are we going to do now?" cried Lukaš.

"I don't know but we're not going back till we've got something to take back with us!"

They walked out of the town travelling further south and after a mile or so came across a potato field which looked as though it had been harvested some time ago.

"Come on," Lutek made for the field. "We'll dig for leftovers. We might find something, you never know."

They began to dig into the semi-frozen earth with their bare hands looking for anything which the farmer might have missed. Every so often they would find a piece of potato embedded like a fossil in the rock-hard soil. Occasionally they even found the odd small whole potato; an event for great celebration and one which kept them going. But it was a painfully slow process. The spoils were few and far between and Lutek guessed that theirs weren't the first hands to have scabbled about in the dirt of that potato field. They dug for hours, their hands becoming sore, bloody and swollen as, little by little, their sacks filled up.

The sun began to disappear below the horizon and the air became colder.

"I can't dig anymore," whispered Lukaš, shivering as the temperature fell.

"We have to fill the sacks, Lukaš. Then we can go."

"I can't," Lukaš pleaded. He raised his bloody hands for his brother to see. "I can't go on. I'm tired and cold and I want to go home." He began to cry.

Lutek knelt in front of his little brother and placed his hands on his shoulders.

"Listen to me. We must be strong. I took you with me on this special mission because I need you as my partner. Me and you, we're a team. If we don't bring enough food back, then Mama, Papa and Granma will all starve to death. Do you understand?"

Lukaš was just a little kid, thought his brother. He was only eight. Lutek felt close to tears himself. He longed to take Lukaš in his arms and tell him that everything was going to be all right but this was not the time to coddle him. Weakness could so easily turn into vulnerability. They both had to learn to be survivors.

Instead, he softened his tone a little and said, "Let's take a short rest and then we'll head back, ok?"

Lukaš nodded bravely, sniffled and wiped his nose on his sleeve. They rested for a short while but then a sharp chill began to set in so they threw the sacks over their backs and began the four hour trek home. They arrived back just in time for the nine o'clock curfew.

At home, the expected frenzy and scolding was soon stemmed by the production of the much needed food. Both boys were home safely and there would be potatoes for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a whole week.

After they'd all eaten their fill, Elli took her grandsons to one side and tended to their raw hands with warm water and bandages.

"May God have mercy on my children and grandchildren," she muttered to herself.

In the months that followed, the Germans issued decree after decree directed against the Jews. They had a far reaching impact. All religious observances were banned and schools and synagogues were closed. Jews were banned from travelling by train unless they had a special permit and they had to surrender all their sewing machines, pianos, fur coats and jewelry. Then the Germans froze their bank accounts and began to appropriate their business, factories and wholesale stock. There were so many decrees issued that in the end it became virtually impossible *not* to break the law.

Early one morning in April 1940, there was a pounding on the Weiss' door at eight o'clock. Olga opened it to find two German army officers standing on the doorstep.

"Weiss?" asked one, pushing his way past her.

"Yes, that's us," Olga answered in a trembling voice.

Moshe came into the room.

"Get your coat on!" barked one of the officers. Olga's worst fears over the last months were being realized; they had come to take Moshe into a labor detachment. As the two Germans stood impatiently in the doorway, Moshe went to get his new coat and his shoes. He mumbled a quiet prayer to himself as he tied his laces, frightened of what lay in store for him. He feared that it was going to be far worse than just labor. He was pushed disdainfully outside towards a group of other men who were already waiting in the street. Moshe joined the ragged line of weary-looking men and, amid more barking of orders from the German soldiers, they began to move forlornly off down the street.

His detachment was assigned to dig a ditch in the middle of a number of specified streets in the center of Warsaw. Those who were rich were able to buy their way out of the labor squads, either through bribery or by paying others to take their place. Moshe, without the means to do either of these, had no choice but to grit his teeth and labor on.



Lutek and Lukaš meanwhile continued to make regular weekly scavenging trips to the country. Olga and Elli for their part began a clearance sale of their possessions; selling anything they could for cash so that they could buy food at the ever increasing prices.

And then the diseases came. Throughout the winter and spring the number of typhus cases began to soar in the city, where the appalling living conditions were guaranteed to ensure the rapid spreading of epidemics. The German occupiers had ordered the war-damaged buildings, including most of the utilities, were not to be repaired and so large areas of Warsaw remained without the most basic services and facilities. Naturally, the areas which had suffered the greatest damage from the war were the ones which became the most afflicted. These were the Jewish neighborhoods.

The Nazis seized the opportunity to turn the screw even more tightly on the Jews. Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Reich Security Head Office and Protector of Bohemia, ordered that signs be erected to the entrance of all Jewish streets warning of an 'Infected Area'.

However, the danger of typhus and other diseases was really only a pretext used to implement Heydrich's larger plan. Even before Poland had surrendered, he had given orders that all Jews should be concentrated into 'designated districts with the cities'.

On the first of March 1940, Hitler was turning his attention to other matters. He called in General von Falkenhorst.

"Germany must secure her access in the iron ore of Scandinavia. We cannot afford to see British troops installed in Norwegian ports."

"I couldn't agree more, Mein Führer, but we don't have naval supremacy. We would be carrying out any such operation in the face of the vastly superior British fleet."

"I have to take issue with you on that, General. Yes, our naval forces are smaller but we are every bit as strong as the British. A daring raid by us would take the arrogant British by surprise. By the time they realize what was going on, it would be too late for them to do anything about it."

"I take your point, Mein Führer. A surprise offensive would give us an advantage against the British.

"Good. Then go carry out my instructions. We have to be seen as protectors who came to secure Norway against an attack from England. We do not want to be seen as a hostile force. When you leave here you are to meet with Minister Goebbels and discuss propaganda plan that will work to our advantage to bringing the Norwegian people on our side."

A few weeks later, on April 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, the Germans carried out their attack. It was completely successful. The British navy, under Winston Churchill's charge as First Lord of the Admiralty, were taken completely by surprise. They could not prevent the German occupation of the Norwegian ports. A British expeditionary force tried a counterattack but it failed miserably and had to be abandoned due to the lack of air cover. Naval losses were heavy. The British lost the aircraft carrier *Glorious*, two cruisers, nine destroyers and had suffered large casualties. Churchill's own prominent part in the fiasco brought back memories of his disaster at Gallipoli during the First World War. The back room military planners began to complain that Winston Churchill had no grasp at all of strategic planning.

The Norwegian army surrendered to Germany on May 4<sup>th</sup>. In Britain, public confidence in the government had been badly shaken by the failure of the Norwegian

expedition. As many commented, the troops had been sent into the battle without being adequately trained or equipped. The truth of the matter was that an under prepared, half-baked expeditionary force had been dispatched to Norway.

Churchill stood up in the House of Commons on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

"I wish to tell Honorable Members that I take complete responsibility for the failure of this action."

But members of the House were not in a mood to start taking issue with Churchill over anything. Their main interest was in finally forcing out the incompetent Chamberlain.

The storm continued to grow in the House as the Honorable Member Amery rose from his chair to speak. He addressed the Prime Minister directly.

"You have sat too long here for any good that you have been doing. Depart I say and let us be done with you. In the name of God, go!"

Lloyd George joined in the attack. "If the Prime Minister calls for sacrifice," he declared, "let him lead the way. Let him sacrifice the seals of the office."

Chamberlain left the House to a loud chant of 'Go! Go! Go! Go! Go...!' Above this racket, the Labor MPs began to sing *Rule Britannia*.

More dramatic news was received on May 10<sup>th</sup>. The German army had broken through the lightly held defenses of Eastern France and was over running Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. Chamberlain went to the Palace to speak with the King shortly after six o'clock.

"Good evening, Prime Minister."

"Good evening, sir. I am here to tender my resignation. I have been grossly and unfairly treated.

"I see." The King looked tired. He'd been expecting this. Who would you have me send for?"

"Churchill is the man, Your Majesty."

"I greatly regret having to accept your resignation, Mr. Chamberlain."

"It has been a great honor to serve you, Your Majesty.

Once Chamberlain had departed, King George sent for Churchill.

"I suppose you don't know the reason why I sent for you."

"Sir, I simply can't imagine," answered Churchill archly.

The King laughed. "I want to ask you to form a government," he said.

Churchill went to bed that night feeling like he was walking on air. At last he had the authority to oversee the whole of his country's war effort.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, the new Prime Minister made his first address to Parliament.

"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, sweat and tears!" he declared. "You ask me, what is your policy? I will say it is to wage war by sea, by land and air."

## Chapter 19 The Debacle

"It's time to close her up," yawned Hans, the tall guard. His moustached companion strained to make out the hands on his wristwatch in the moonless night. It was quarter past three in the morning. "Hmm, I suppose you're right."

The Diekirch Bridge spanned a deep gorge in an isolated and forested corner of Luxembourg. It didn't see much action even on a busy day at noon, let alone at this hour. The tall guard walked to the control panel at the side; flipped a few switches and the steel gates began to close. Loud metallic clanging disrupted the cool spring night. Even though the gates locked with an electric switch, the second guard went and slipped a chain through the gate and its frame. To him, a good solid padlock was more tangible proof of security than some electric gadget.

With the bridge closed the guards were now free to join the rest of their detachment at the all night café in Fohren that catered to the local Gendarmerie.

"Honestly," Hans grumbled wearily as they walked up the road, "I don't know why they don't let us shut down at midnight."

At the café, the two chose one of the oilcloth-covered tables by the window where they could keep an eye on their post. It would be another couple of hours yet until the six o'clock relief came around. They drank acrid coffee, smoked and talked about nothing in particular to pass the time.

It was not long that they were seated there; Hans's cigarette was only half burned when he saw four men milling around the bridge under the floodlights. The four men looked around, and then made towards the café.

"Hey, look over there," he said to his companion, pointing with his cigarette.

"Strange time to be going for a stroll," the other said, looking over his shoulder.

The four men were dressed in civilian clothes and each one had a yellow scarf protruding from a pocket or tied around his neck. Must be some peculiar new club, thought Hans. "Let's see what this is about," he said, rising to his feet. His companion followed, and the half dozen other Gendarmeries in the café turned their heads lazily to see what was going on.

When the strangers were within five meters, they threw open their overcoats and confronted the pair of startled Gendarmeries with submachine guns.

"Hands up! Both of you!" ordered one who appeared to be the leader. He then motioned to the man on his right to fetch the rest of the guards from the café and bring them outside. The puzzled half dozen were led out with their hands in the air. The four men seemed in a terrible hurry and wasted neither time nor words.

"Line up, all of you! Now whoever has the keys to the gate, step forward," the leader commanded brusquely. The moustached guard stepped forward, his eyes searching the faces of the armed men, afraid of what they were going to do with him.

"You first," the leader pointed at him with the gun, "then the rest in single file. *Marsch!* To the gates! *Schnell!* Hurry up!"

The row of guards trotted uneasily toward the gate. It was evident that these men were not civilians, but commandos in civilian clothes, and from their accent the guards could tell they were German. In fact, they were four of Admiral Canaris' Brandenburgers.

When they reached the gate, the leader ordered the moustached guard to open it.

"But, I can't," he mumbled, blinking rapidly, "once the gate is shut, it can't be open until...it's electronic."

"Bullshit!" snapped the leader. He made the guard show him the switches. It took him no time to assess the situation, and realized that in fact, there was a timer on the locking mechanism. With the Gendarmeries looking on incredulously, the Brandenburgers tried blowing the gates with hand grenades. When that failed, they set up a bomb and within minutes the bridge gates had disintegrated.

The four German commandos then disappeared as quickly as they'd arrived, leaving the Gendarmeries baffled and astonished. When the tall guard recovered enough of his senses to go to the telephone and report the incident, he found the line dead.

At precisely 0535 hours the Gendarmeries still in a state of confusion, heard a low rumbling like the sound of thunder. They listened carefully; the thunder grew louder and louder.

"What in God's name is that?" one of them pointed beyond the bridge into the forest. They strained their eyes at the moving forms in the woods. Then the muzzle of a cannon pierced through the branches. Immediately behind it emerged the shape of a tank.

"Good God!" The guards could not believe his eyes. "Move aside or they'll run us over!" he yelled. The rumbling, creaking machines turned onto the bridge. The helpless men stood at the side of the road as an endless row of tanks thundered over the bridge, then moved west into town. The earth shook and the air filled with the oily smell of exhaust, as dozens upon dozens of German Panzers went past. It was the entire First Panzer Division, in echelon formation. Every item of military hardware the German Army possessed, and a considerable number seized from newly occupied nations.

General von Kaunitz rode in his armored command vehicle at the rear of the column. For "Case Yellow", the invasion of the West, General von Kaunitz had been given command of the XX Panzer Corps once again, the same unit that had proved itself in Poland. But Poland was just an appetizer, he reckoned. Now the *Wehrmacht* would take on the world's superpowers. He tried hard to push that daunting thought from his mind.

The XX Corps was the first thrust, the very tip of the spear that pierced the heart of the enemy. With his radio headset on, von Kaunitz spoke continuously to the forward commanders of three divisions in his Corps. Just before crossing the Luxembourg line, he received word from Army High Command Headquarters that Goering's Luftwaffe had successfully attacked seventy airfields. Since 0315, the Germans had been bombing Belgium and French communication installations, fuel dumps, air bases, rail junctions, road intersections, up to 250 miles into enemy territory. All with the accuracy that bore the mark of meticulous German Intelligence work. Even the Luftwaffe meteorologists had got it right, predicting fine weather.

"All smooth and no resistance here," von Kaunitz reported back to Headquarters. Things were off to a good start.

The hollow ringing of horseshoes on cobblestones sounded everywhere. His horse sensed the excitement and Klaus had to rein him in. The horse drawn artillery was relegated to reserve status in the Western campaign. There was no chance they could keep it up with the breakneck speed of the motorized divisions. Hopefully, they'd stay well out of it.

After delivering Anna safely to Paris, Klaus had managed to get back to Germany with a minimum of questions or fuss. Kristallnacht had caused enough confusion to cover his tracks for him. But the whole affair had sickened him. Hitler was a monster, Klaus was by now convinced, but what could he do? His family, his fiancée, his friends, all expected him to fight for their future. He'd always been everyone's golden-haired hero. He felt trapped.

It hadn't always been like that. After years of training, then studying at the War Academy, Klaus had expected to go on forever delighting the glory of war. Instead, he had sat hoping for the British, or more likely the French, attack that never came. For six months his Battery had been stationed in the village of Eisenschmitt, only a few miles from Luxembourg, and saw only one enemy plane fly overhead. It dropped leaflets asking them to surrender. Who could have guessed that the Western powers who let Poland down so ignominiously after giving her a guarantee? There was one feeble push into the forward zone of the Siegfried Line along the Saar. The French advanced to a depth of five miles and took about twenty unimportant abandoned villages. Here they halted, never to advance again.

It was just as well that the French didn't attack, because neither Klaus nor his regiment was ready. They were still practicing manoeuvres. And it wasn't just Klaus' regiment that was ill prepared; it was the whole of the Western defenses. General Ritter von Leeb, recalled from retirement by a reluctant Führer, commanded the armies posted at Germany's western border. He had the equivalent of thirty one infantry divisions defending against all of Britain and France. Of those, only twelve were up to scratch. The French alone had over 100 divisions, 10,000 guns and 2,500 tanks. Germany infantry units only had enough ammunition for three days of fighting and the entire line had not a single tank. They were in no shape to take on the Allies.

By September 20, 1939, it didn't matter anymore. The Polish army was in ruins, and the full force of the *Wehrmacht* could fall to the West if need be.

Newly arrived reserved troops milled around the Cochem compound, waiting for orders. Their conversation created a din in the Parade Square. Klaus was in the saddle long before the alert was issued at 0500 hours. He checked that the cooks were on time with breakfast and that all the troops were roused from their bunks. Moving out in such a short time was hectic. Klaus darted about, overseeing the movement of cannons and howitzers, crates or ammunition, the field kitchen, the blacksmiths forge wagon and an endless list of details. Major Krieg's office was like a nerve center, bustling with activity as the Lieutenants checked in. The entire Corps was on the move to Trier at the border of Luxembourg.

It was Klaus' job as battalion adjutant to Major Krieg to determine the order of progress for the Batteries, and check that they arrived at the designated times. Klaus' regiment was only a small part of the huge mass of troops to the rear of the handful of Panzer Divisions, a mass that extended beyond Frankfurt. Each unit waited impatiently for their turn to pass through the Ardennes. To move the body of forces through this bottleneck, the General Staff under Halder had produced a detailed plan and timetable. Everything had to run like clockwork.

By 0700 hours, Klaus had each Battery in position. The horses were hooked up to the wagons and gun carriages, and the five mile march on the train station began.

Loading the train took forty five minutes per Battery. It was not a long journey, only twenty or so kilometers, but there was no other alternative, because all the roads into the Ardennes was congested with tanks and mechanized artillery.

The train stopped at Trier and they debarked, a procedure decidedly quicker and easier than boarding. The Panzer Corps crossed the Luxembourg border in the late morning. Klaus received a radio update from Major Krieg at noon. "No enemy troop movements observed on today's route. That's as of 1100 hours. The BEF and the First and Seventh are pouring north, deep into Belgium and Holland!" The Major's voice sounded pleased over the crackling static.

The British Expeditionary Force and the French First and Seventh Armies were the Allies' best. It was obvious they were falling for the *Wehrmacht's* 'Northern Blow Buff', a decoy attack through Northern Belgium and Holland. It was designed to lure the enemy North, while the real attack would come further South and catch them from behind, cutting them off from the rest of the French forces. France had placed most of her troops on the north-eastern Maginot Line, and a minimum number of forces in the Ardennes gap. By fighting from the Maginot stronghold, she thought she could halt the main German attack. But Germany outsmarted France by concentrating its heaviest forces against her Achilles heel; the Ardennes, in a daring offensive strategy.

Germany cut France's forces in two. The gaping hole ripped into her defense line at Sedan was catastrophic.

Klaus' regiment trudged through Luxembourg. It was full of forests, steep hills, sharp turns, streams and gorges; level ground was all but non-existent. The terrain was hard work for the men, and even harder for the horses.

At dusk, camp was set up in a safe location. The troops ate supper and had meetings with their battalion commanders. Klaus and his fellow officers, Lieutenants Lorenz and Seeger, poured over maps each evening to plan the next day's movements, type up reports, and make entries into the Battalion's War Diary.

Klaus was hunched over a map with a ruler when Lorenz and Seeger came into the tent.

"Guess what! General von Kaunitz is already in Neufchâteau!" announced Lorenz. "I just heard it on the Major's radio."

"You're kidding!" Klaus looked down at the map and measured carefully. "That's one hundred kilometers in two days! That means he's clear through Belgium already and practically on the French border!"

"Like a hot knife through butter," Lorenz exclaimed with pride and a twist of envy at the Panzers. "Apparently, his tanks met up with cavalry units today, the Chasseurs Ardennais. Not much of a match if you ask me."

"At this rate, we'll never see any action," complained Seeger.

"Ah, don't worry. There'll be plenty of action yet," said Lorenz.

"At least we've done it again!" Seeger cheered up. "In good German style. It's that old Teutonic spirit come to life again, like the Huns of old, fighting the archenemy." He was pointing prophetically at his two companions. "You wait and see, this will be another great victory, and soon we'll have peace."

"Wait a second," Lorenz countered him with a wave of his pencil. "The Huns, it just so happens, tore through this very same region like a scourge. It was shameful, so don't be

tossing us in the same pile.” Lorenz cut short of mentioning that the Huns also happened to be men of their father’s generation.

“You know what your problem is, Seeger?” snapped Klaus. “You’ve spent too much time in the Hitler Jugend. All those marching songs have softened your brain and made you talk funny.”

Seeger frowned. “You’ll get your medals,” Lorenz slapped him on the back. “I promise I’ll put in a word for you.”

“Yeah, for what? Seeger grunted. “All we’ll be doing is running over these hills camping like a bunch of Boy Scouts while the Panzers get all the medals.”

“I’ll say you did your reports diligently, above and beyond the call of duty,” said Lorenz laughing out loud. “So here, get busy on your Iron Cross,” Lorenz shoved a pile of files under Seeger’s nose.

After they traced out their route for the following day and marked out their objectives, the two officers left Klaus’ tent. It wasn’t late and he didn’t feel tired, so Klaus pulled out a sheet of paper and began to write to his fiancée.

*May 12, 1940*

*Dearest Karin,*

*All the news from the frontlines is of victory. It’s incredible what our troops are achieving. But my unit is nowhere near the action. So far, this war is nothing like I expected it to be.*

*Since you’ve asked me to tell you everything about what it is like as the front, here goes;*

*The cooks and the officers from each Battery rise at 4:30 in the morning, when it’s still dark and everything is wet from the dew. Shortly after, the troops begin to grunt and stir and the camp comes to life. By first light the men are having their breakfast of bread with jam or liverwurst and coffee. By that time all the birds are awake too and filling the forest with their songs. After breakfast the cooks hurry to fill their enormous vats with all the ingredients for a stew. They build a fire underneath, and then get ready to set off on the road with us. And so, all morning we are tortured with the aroma of stew as we march through these woods until lunch. By evening we usually have covered about forty kilometers.*

*It’s a beautiful country and I wish I could enjoy it just as that. But the truth is; I miss you too much my dear. My heart is, at ever, with you.*

*I know I shall see you soon.*

*Love, Klaus*

He only wished he could say what he really felt; that this was a filthy war, led by a power crazed fool, and no good or glory could possibly come of it.

On the morning of the third day, Klaus' battalion passed over the border into Belgium at Surré. His division had not heard the sounds of the battle far ahead, but now the evidence could be seen everywhere. The fields were littered with burnt out tanks, blown up bridges and dead, bloated livestock. Trees were felled across the roads, and they had to be cleared way before the marching column could move forward. Where the bridges were blown, engineering units had to build pontoon crossings. By evening they heard news that the Dutch had surrendered.

On the fifth day, after having covered nearly 200 kilometers, the fatigue was beginning to show on both the men and the horses. The battalion's vet was the most overworked man in the unit. He spent all night tending to the horses, and then had to ride all day. Klaus noticed him sleeping in the saddle most of the time. Next to the vet, the most exhausted were the blacksmiths. The steep hills took their toll on the wheels, and the whole Battery often had to stop and wait until they were repaired.

Fatigue was also affecting von Kaunitz's Panzer Corps, which had been on the go from the first day of the offense. This was not the only reason though. For the previous eight months, during training, most of the men had been having the time of their lives. In hundreds of local establishments they'd made friends with the girls, celebrated each pay day with their favorite diet of fried eggs and chipped potatoes, and got merry on cheap wine and beer. When the time came to move, most of them were already worn out.

But the *Wehrmacht* found no resistance in Luxembourg and scanty resistance in Belgium until they reached the town of Sedan, the crucial hurdle across France. After some stiff fighting at the Meuse River, von Kaunitz's three divisions broke through. Now there was little standing in their way.

Von Kaunitz and his men feared France would be a tougher nut to crack than Poland. But they found the going easier. The roads were better, the bridges were stronger, and local resistance was nonexistent. The French have learned nothing from the German campaign in Poland, thought von Kaunitz. Nothing about the German fighting style or strategy. True, Poland didn't have much armor, so tank battle had been few. Yet the French must have noticed how the *Wehrmacht* concentrated their armored formations in powerful spearheads.

The French did not notice. They speared over their tanks in a piecemeal row all along the front, from Belgium to the Mediterranean, and were prepared to fight another war of slow motion tactics as in 1918. Von Kaunitz's division punched through them like a needle through paper, past the infantry, and straight into the artillery guns behind. The Frenchmen, despite their superior tanks, were left beaten and baffled in the Panzer's wake. Then the motorized infantry swarmed around them to break down any final resistance. Meanwhile, the impatient Panzers pressed on to their next victory

The Germans asserted continuous pressure with a small concentration of Panzer divisions, striking in combination with dive bombers that prevented the enemy from reestablishing viable defense positions. Constant, relentless pressure. Von Kaunitz had first tried the method in Poland. It had worked. It was working again in Belgium and France. His insistence that all his tanks were equipped with radio set was not vindicated. French tanks tactics were often not very good, even when their actual tanks were superior. His Panzers were at all times in constant contact with each other over their radios. The French, by comparison, were like deaf mutes, unable to warn or direct each other. The Panzers out maneuvered them time and time again.



Von Kaunitz's units also encountered British bombers on their advance. But the bombers flew in long lines, squadron after squadron. His forward formations had anti-aircraft guns, and the long, neat lines made for easy targets. It was a massacre.

Obsessed with covering as much ground as possible, von Kaunitz pressed his troops all day, even if it meant going without food. On the fifth day, they hadn't eaten anything for almost 24 hours. Normally, units carried enough food with them for three days and fuel for 200km. Now, that was virtually gone, and so was their drinking water. Worse, they were running out of ammunition. Pumped up and full of élan from the crucial victory at Sedan, they had outdistanced their supply column. It lagged far behind, caught up in traffic jams long the country roads.

"Let's stop here for a breather," von Kaunitz said into the microphone from his command vehicle. The division came to a halt in a shallow valley outside the village of Bouvellemont. One by one, the turret hatches opened and the stiff, grimy men climbed out. Sweat and dust were caked on their skin. Their legs ached from continual sitting or crouching, their eyes ached with continual watching, and their voices croaked with continual shouting over the din of engines.

The commanders dragged their feet to gather round von Kaunitz for a meeting, while the tank crews stretched out on the cool grass. The General spread his Michelin map on the hood of his armored car. The Army was desperately short of military maps and the ones they did have were often inaccurate and outdated. However, ample supplies of Michelin's excellent touring maps could be found in local garages. Thoughtfully, they pointed out all roads, short cuts, filing stations and garage workshops. Poland hadn't been like this.

"Bouvellemont is just a few kilometers ahead," he pointed. To his commanders' disbelief, von Kaunitz was fresh and energetic. "This is our target for today and we *absolutely* have to reach it."

His commanders shifted uneasily, exchanging weary looks. "With all respect, Sir, it's getting dark and the men are tired. Couldn't we take the village in the morning?" one of them pleaded.

"Hauptmann, we have to take the village now in order to cut off the French from the South. Here." He swept a finger across the map. "By morning they could have closed up the gap and it could be too late." There was no response from his men. He explained again the necessity of preventing the enemy from joining forces or reinforcing up ahead of them. They stared back blankly.

For the first time von Kaunitz sensed real opposition from his men. He stiffened his back.

"Gentlemen," he spoke firmly. "We *are* going to take the town and we will take it *tonight*."

There was a wave of grumbles and protests.

"Another couple of hours won't kill anyone," he insisted, but saw he was getting nowhere. He had a real leadership dilemma on his back. He folded up his map, tucked it into a pocket and resolutely straightened his cap.

"Fine, then. If you won't do it, then I will have to take the village by myself!" The General set out in bold strides across the meadow in the direction of Bouvellemont. His astonished commanders were left staring at each other. The signals officers from the command vehicle began to argue with the driver. Von Kaunitz was no more than one

hundred meters away when the officers and tank crews jumped back into their tanks and moved out to join him.

Back in the seat of his command vehicle, triumphant at the success of his stunt, von Kaunitz fastened the radio headset over his ears. As the long columns headed West in the descending darkness, the valley filled with the roar of engines, the creaking protests of steel springs and wheels. Trails of dusts lifted in their wake and the radios buzzed away. There was no sign of the enemy, but their reconnaissance unit had reported that the village was heavily defended.

"Erik?" called the General as he spied the horizon through his binoculars. "There are about twelve tanks moving along the southern edge of town. Looks like Char B's and Somua's. I want you to take C Squadron and cut them off. I'll move north with Willy and B Squadron. Squadron A will support."

Bringing his squadrons' tanks to a long low rise, von Kaunitz paused to let each come into position. Ahead was the enemy column, sitting still, as if totally unaware of the presence of hostile forces. Then the French spotted the turrets. Immediately their armored cars began to goad the still tanks on the excited terriers.

"They've seen us," a voice came over the static from the forward tank. "They're trying to scatter their formation."

"Ok," von Kaunitz shouted, gripping his microphone with a sweaty hand. "Off we go!"

Twelve Panzers leapt forward over the crest of the rise like hounds after a fox and roared down the slope flat out. Willy's Mark III in the lead.

The French tanks opened fire and soon explosions burst out all around the diamond shaped Panzer formations. French armored cars bustled about. Willy sent one of them spinning on its side. A light tank went up in flames. Then a second tank was hurriedly abandoned by its crew, petrol pouring from underneath. A tracer hit it a second time and it blew up in a rush of orange flames and black smoke.

As the Panzers punched forward among the French armor, the enemy column began to scatter and retreat west.

"Cover my right!" A sudden shriek barked over the radio to anyone who would hear. "Oh, God! Get my right!"

Bolt upright in his staff car, the General scanned the field through his binoculars. Willy, in the lead, was caught on two sides between enemy tanks. He had no chance of maneuvering quickly enough to defend himself from both.

No. Two! Move up!" shouted the General into the microphone. "Move up 90°!"

The gunner in No. 2 tank twisted the lever to the right. With a hiss, the turret swung around.

"Right again!" the General shouted, furiously. They were losing precious seconds.

The gunner twisted again and the turret screeched round until he saw the lumbering black Char B1 tank in his viewfinder, its lethal 75mm cannon pointed directly at him. He began to tremble, the palms of his hands sweating. He knew the Char B's armor was so thick that shots from his 37mm would bounce off it like peas. But there was a chance, only *one* chance. 'Quick,' the gunner thought nervously, 'find the ventilation grill before we're blown to atoms'. His eyes strained to make out the tank's surface details in the twilight. Without giving it a second thought, the gunner aimed for the Char B's 'soft spot'.

"Fire, Goddamn it!" rasped von Kaunitz.

The gunner's fingers squeezed. The panzer shook with a great spasm and the cannon recoiled with a deafening thud.

Through his binoculars von Kaunitz saw the enemy tank catch fire. A tongue of flame knocked the turret hatchet and shot skyward, then became a monstrous glowing ball of fire. Another blast as the tank's ammunition exploded and the whole thing burst apart like a crate of firecrackers in a spectacular shower of white hot bits of metal.

He put down his binoculars. "I think it's all clear now, let's move on. Well done, No. 2" The whole encounter lasted no more than half an hour.

By nightfall the men from XX Panzer Corps were installed in Bouvellemont and glad to be a rest. Von Kaunitz took over a small abandoned stone house at the edge of the village. Never in his career had he felt as elated as he did now.

With the main hurdle of Sedan and the Meuse River crossing behind them, the route West was now largely undefended all along the north banks of the Somme. The only allied troops that might have been a threat were already in retreat. Von Kaunitz had seen those miserable men with his own eyes, and had read the POW reports. They had no transport, no anti-tank weapons and no clear orders. Some were so confused they were retreating the wrong way and bumped right into *Wehrmacht*. Their trucks constantly broke down. There were no plans to bring them either fuel or mechanics. Most of the time, they were cut off from Command Headquarters and didn't know what to do. Their horse-drawn artillery units were able to withdraw, feeding on local forage, but their pace was even slower than the marching infantry. The French had practically no regimental officers left, no artillery and no discipline. When attacked, they ran; all 50,000 in disgrace. The army in front of him was falling apart.

Von Kaunitz took a quick bath, wolfed down some sauerkraut and bratwurst the field cook had prepared for him, then reached for his wireless set to report his position back to GHQ.

"Divisions 1, 2 and 10 of the XX Panzer Corps at Bouvellemont as of 1935 hours," he announced triumphantly to General Halder. "All resistance collapsed completely. The 103 Garrison at Bouvellemont abandoned most of its heavy equipment and artillery. We've covered forty miles today. Tomorrow the Corps will make full speed toward the Coast."

General Halder scribbled down every detail. With an uncomfortable cough he now cut in, "I'm afraid, Herr General, that I must order your division to halt all further westerly movement for the time being."

"I beg your pardon?" von Kaunitz was stunned, he thought he had misunderstood. "Please repeat."

Halder anticipated just this response from him. "You have to wait for backup. The supply columns and infantry support regiments are too far behind and we have yet to fully secure the bridgehead back at the Meuse River."

"To hell with what is happening back there. I crossed that river ages ago!" argued von Kaunitz. "What does the bridgehead have to do with me? That's the infantry's job. My job is to keep moving ahead."

"I understand how you feel but your divisions have gone too deep, too fast. There's real danger you could get cut off by the French from the south." Halder tried to reason with von Kaunitz, but he had the bit in his teeth and was growing angry.

"Cut off by the French, my foot! I'm riding a winning crest here, there's no reason to halt. There's every reason to push ahead, keep up the pressure."

"I understand, but the orders are..."

"They're ridiculous orders!" snapped von Kaunitz. "All the more ridiculous because of the reasons. I should wait because orders are mopping up a battle that I already won days ago? What you're asking me to do is throw away victory!" Von Kaunitz tried to think of a new tactic. "A delay will give the French time to reshuffle and block us. Do I need to remind you that we are fighting an enemy that is superior in numbers? In tanks alone, they have 1,000 more than we do."

Halder was silent. This was one of von Kaunitz's strength; cutting to the heart of the matter, through all the crap. It was one of the reasons Halder admired the General so much, even though the sword cut both ways like now. Von Kaunitz sensed he had successfully argued his case. He could hear it in the Chief's tone that he was not himself convinced of the order to halt.

"Alright," Halder sighed finally. "It'll give you another twenty four hours to advance."

Halder replaced receiver and slumped heavily in his chair. His eyes were red from straining over maps and his nerves were frayed. All day long, he and the Commander-in-Chief, General von Brauchitsch, had been reassuring the fitful Führer that the campaign was not only going according to plan, but exceeding it. Hitler had bombarded him with questions that had long been answered. Admiral Canaris was also at Hitler's Headquarters, the *Felsennest*, at the German-Belgian border. He was there to supervise the opening of *Abwehr* offices in the newly captured capitals; Brussels, the Hague and Luxembourg. General Halder had recruited him for support in the war conference that afternoon.

"The French are concerned with stabilizing their own defenses," Canaris confirmed, "not penetrating our flanks, Mein Führer. Aerial reconnaissance shows the French movements you are worried about are actually transport movements."

Hitler did not want to be convinced. He listened stone-faced, sweating profusely.

"My sources in Paris report panic in the capital," Canaris explained further. "French officials are preparing to evacuate the government to Tours. By the time Winston Churchill flew into Paris to see the chaos for himself, officials were already burning their files in the Foreign Office Gardens. The bonfires sent up huge billows of smoke and scraps of charred paper all over the Quai d'Orsay. Prime Minister Reynaud has sacked the Commander-in-Chief, Gamelin, over his fiasco! General Weygand will be taking his pale shortly. In the meantime, no one is really in control."

Adolf Hitler could not be consoled. Every phantom danger preyed on his mind. Despite all the reasoned arguments, Hitler appeared more concerned with securing the Meuse bridgehead than winning the war.

Halder knew he was taking big a risk by allowing von Kaunitz's Panzers to move ahead against the Führer's orders.

"War is a game to be played with a smiling face!" Churchill declared once. But he didn't have much time for smiling now. War had broken out in the West the very day he assumed office. Churchill had barely considered the battle for the first three days; he was too busy shuffling the Cabinet. Reactions to his assumption of power were mixed in all quarters, both at home and overseas. Canada's Prime Minister Mackenzie King immediately cabled his support, but Roosevelt did not. He thought Churchill unreliable, especially when he was under the influence of drink, which was most of the time. And Roosevelt could not forget that Churchill was one of the few men who had ever been rude to him in public.

The horrifying and unexpected crisis in France resulted in a desperate call to Churchill from French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud. "The German Army has smashed through our fortified lines at Sedan!" He implored Churchill to send over ten more RAF fighter squadrons. "With them, at least I can halt the enemy advance," he pleaded. "Past Sedan there are no fortifications and it's wide to Paris."

Churchill tried hard to give France the extra squadrons. But the Air Ministry protested vigorously that Britain herself needed sixty odd squadrons for her own defense, and was already down to thirty nine. Sir Hugh Dowding, Chief of RAF Fighter Command, worried that the new Prime Minister would fritter away their last squadrons in France, and made it plain he was against parting with another single Hurricane. Churchill conceded.

An hour later Reynaud telephoned again. Monstrous tank formations had crossed the Meuse River and were now trampling through their anti-tank defenses. Nothing stood between the Panzers and Paris!

Churchill ordered to France every available plane, but a dour and unpleasant Cabinet meeting defeated his efforts.

Shaken by the day's events, he retired to No. 10 Downing Street. Churchill was in his white silk pajamas and red housecoat when around midnight General Inskip dropped by with an alarming rumor. "Italy is about to ally with Hitler."

"That jackal Mussolini!" Churchill shuffled to pour himself a whiskey.

"Not to mention the blows the BEF is taking," Inskip added glumly. "Lord Gort is clutching at straws over there. Lieutenant-General Barker has suffered a partial nervous breakdown over the whole business, and it wasn't even the BEF that took the full weight of the enemy. Herr Hitler singled out the Dutch, Belgians and French for the main assault."

"It's damned embarrassing," Churchill said, tinkling the ice cubes in his glass.

"The French are losing," Inskip said flatly.

Churchill paced about chewing on his cigar, and then announced, "I have to make an appeal to Roosevelt."

He cabled Washington immediately. "The scene has darkened swiftly. The small countries are simply smashed up one by one, like matchwood, and the chances of Allied Forces wining in France are slight especially with the likely opposition of Italy." He said he feared Hitler would attack Britain soon and asked America to lend 'thirty or forty old destroyers'.

"So long as I am in office," he dictated, conducting energetically with his cigar, "I will never give up. Even if England were burned to the ground, I will move the government, take the fleet to Canada and fight on from there!" To spur Roosevelt on, he warned that if he hesitated too long, "...you may have a completely Nazified Europe with astonishing swiftness." Then he amplified his original request of destroyers; after that he would need aircraft, anti-aircraft guns, ammunition and steel. "We shall go on paying dollars for as long as we can, but I should like to feel reasonably sure that when we can pay no more, you will give us the stuff all the same." He thus ended the message and turned to General Inskip. "There, how does the message sound?"

After sending the cable he snatched a few hours' sleep, but was woken again at 7:00AM with another telephone call from Paris.

"*Nous sommes battus!*" It was Prime Minister Reynaud in a state of extreme agitation. "*Nous sommes battus!* We are beaten!"

He moaned that the Germans were pouring through a fifty-mile breach at Sedan. More British squadrons must be thrown in to put a stop to it. *Nous avons perdu la Bataille! Nous avons perdu la bataille...* he kept repeating 'We have lost the battle!'

"Impossible!" Churchill screamed back into the telephone, his whole body shaking. "That can't happen so fast. All military experience shows that after a time, offensives come to a halt at their own accord. Remember March 21, 1918?"

"But this is not the same."

"This is no time to panic. The invaders must now be at their most vulnerable."

"No," Reynaud muttered. "There's a *torrent* of Panzers coming through."

Wide-awake now, despite only a few hours of rest, Churchill searched for what to say. He had to come up with something. "Well. Well, there's no point in this defeatist talk. Whatever France does, Britain will fight on; alone if necessary! All experience of earlier wars shows that, at this juncture, the enemy's real difficulties are just about to begin, and will increase with each kilometer they advance." It was theory, but it sounded good.

Reynaud was somewhat reassured by the British Prime Minister's staunch attitude. Churchill promised he would urge Parliament to release more squadrons, and also promised to make a trip to Paris immediately to help sustain the French government.

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, sensing the crisis, dozens of waiting photographers snapped furiously as Winston Churchill emerged from No. 10 Downing Street. Scowling, dressed in a somber suit and carrying leather gloves and a walking stick, he uncharacteristically ignored the press and climbed into the waiting black car.

By 5:00PM he was in Paris, being shown into Prime Minister Reynaud's study at the Quai d'Orsay. He found Reynaud slumped in an armchair, the picture of desolation. He was like the captain of a sinking ship, the wind of defeat at his back. The Commander-in-Chief, General Gamelin, was not there, as he had just been sacked. The Minister of Defense and erstwhile Prime Minister Daladier, was also absent. He was barely on speaking terms with Reynaud; a certain woman had come between them. The new Commander-in-Chief, General Weygand, was unable to speak to anyone, because he had not yet arrived from his former post in Beirut.

"This is ridiculous," Churchill stamped his walking stick on the floor in anger, "to think that France is overrun by 120 tanks!"

Reynaud lifted his head and gazed at him absently, then lamented the latest report. "I've just learned that the railroad strikes in Belgium blocked our troop movements to the front."

"Shoot the strikers then!" rasped Churchill, brandishing his fist.

While the archives were burning in the gardens, Churchill moved to the wall map, followed by Reynaud, and saw the offending bulge of German troops in Sedan. He leaned back, with one hand at his hip, the other pointing with his cane. "It can be tied off just as in 1918; right here," he pronounced.

Reynaud shook his head morosely. "We cannot compare 1918 to 1940. The German Army of 1940 has beaten the French Army of 1918," he admitted.

Still inspecting the map, Churchill declined to take the tank situation seriously. "Unless tanks are supported by considerable infantry forces, they aren't any more than the colored flags stuck on this map. They need support and supplies too, and they're too far ahead of both. What we are looking at," he tapped his cane at the bulge of black flags west of Sedan, 'is not a real invasion."

Churchill asked Reynaud about what counterstrikes were planned, which annoyed the French Prime Minister and brought him out of the dejected stupor. "We haven't *anything* to throw at them. That's why I asked for your fighter squadrons to fight off the advance!"

Churchill bit his lip. He doubted the squadrons would make a difference. "We can slow down their advance by bombing the Ruhr." His eyes lit up. "Smash their factories!"

"That's absurd, *absolument absurd*," cried Reynaud. "Damaging the Ruhr won't matter two hoots to them."

They disagreed bitterly. Churchill wanted to protect London and Paris by sending squadrons to bomb the Ruhr; to attack the Germans in the rear. Reynaud scoffed. He wanted the squadrons sent to protect the French infantry, who were now face to face with the Germans. A blistering exchange followed.

"Why can't Britain at least send more ground troops to France?" he asked accusingly. "There are only eight Divisions here now. Eight! And if you can't send more Divisions, why can't you at least send airplanes? Britain's fate is being sealed here too. After France it will be England's turn!"

Churchill drove uneasily to the British Embassy to talk matters over with London, and then dictated a recommendation that the Cabinet release the six squadrons to France.

"It would not look good historically if France's ruin should come about due to our denying their request for a mere six squadrons."

Several hours later, General Iniskip sent a telegram back to the British Embassy in Paris. It had one word – 'ok'.

Half an hour later Churchill drove to Reynaud's apartment bearing the good news. The place was dimly lit, and he saw, under a table in the foyer, a pair of gold ladies' evening sandals. Reynaud emerged and invited him into the *salon*. Mr. Daladier arrived moments later. When Churchill told them that the six squadrons would be coming, Daladier gave Churchill's hand a graceful squeeze. The crisis had evidently taken his mind off the scandals in the foyer.

Since enemy tanks might at any moment roll into Paris, Churchill rose at the crack of dawn and was back in London on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>. He had not missed the significance of that bulge of flags concentrated around the Sedan. He began to make plans with Anthony Eden as to how to safeguard the BEF, even withdrawing them from France by Channel ports if necessary. Naturally, this had to be handled with the greatest secrecy, because Churchill still hoped to maintain the French alliance and keep both them and the Belgians fighting on.

Von Kaunitz slept fitfully that night. He was determined to prove High Command wrong and cover as much ground as humanly possible the next day. Already awake at 0100 hours, he was determined to have every vehicle on the road by 0500 hours. He scarcely surprised his commanders when he stated their task for the day. If they hadn't known him better, they'd have thought it was a joke. The goal was surely further than their last drop of fuel would take them. But, as usual, von Kaunitz's vision prevailed, and they were convinced they would get there with him at the helm.

By evening the XX Corps had advanced another fifty miles to Dercy. Vindicated, General von Kaunitz dutifully reported to Halder his stunning progress and his collection of

hundreds of POWs. Confident that the worry-mongers at High Command would be appeased, he also stated his plans for the next day.

“Orders are that you must hold your position at Dercy,” General Halder commanded.

“Why?” von Kaunitz asked in angry disbelief. “In God’s name, why?” After his successes that day, he hadn’t dreamed that the halt order would still be in effect.”

“Because *those are the orders*, Herr General!”

“Well, they are stupid orders! And as a matter of fact, I have already sent out a dispatch for tomorrow’s deployment.”

“You have *what?*” Halder was furious. The last thing he needed on top of the tug-of-war with the Führer was rank insubordination. “General von Kaunitz,” he said icily, “you will report to me at Headquarters at 0700 tomorrow. *Is that understood?*”

“Loud and clear, Sir!” von Kaunitz snapped back and slammed down the receiver. He believed he knew best how to employ his tanks, and was unwilling to accept guidance from anyone, especially from those who didn’t have the experience of armored operations he did. And no one in High Command did, especially not the Führer.

The faint glow from this desk lamp caught the glint of sweat on General Halder’s forehead. It had been another harrowing day with Hitler, who systematically excluded his Chiefs of the Armed Forces from his military and strategic planning. He would burrow into his underground command post, shut himself in his small cramped room and make all the decisions. He would give the orders only limited information, and not confide his plans to them until the last moment. Halder felt he was fighting far tougher battles with the Führer than the Armies of Britain, France and Belgium combined. In fact, he was certain of it. It had begun after first thing that morning, and as usual, the Commander-in-Chief bore the brunt of Hitler’s wrath.

“Your Generals are hell-bent on losing this war!” he screamed accusingly. “We HAVE TO STOP, and go on the defensive toward the south. We can’t have setbacks.” He was pale, sweaty, gasping and shaking. Relentlessly he harangued them for the third day in a row about the dangers from the south; he raged against moving further west, he fumed about securing the Meuse. On and on he shouted, testing the endurance of all his staff. For Halder, it was constant torture. For Hitler, it was an obsession.

In mid-speech, Hitler would suddenly veer into a lecture on the importance of taking the Lorraine region, with its rich iron-ore reserves, to buttress the home economy.

“The German people should be able to carry on their lives as if no war is going on!” he said. An astute politician, he always had one eye on his popularity at home.

Von Brauchitsch ventured to comment. “Mein Führer, with the war won quickly and decisively, the Lorraine region falls automatically into our hands,” He soon regretted his comment. It only infused Hitler with more venom.

“I need the resources *now*, not sometime down the road,” the Führer hissed through clenched teeth. Hitler gave Halder the impression he was ready to draw back from total success because he feared it jeopardized other half successes. Halder guessed that the Führer foresaw the Army bogged down without victory for years, rather than the days envisaged by the General Staff.

“Mein Führer,” von Brauchitsch suggested gently, “there have been on setback. Securing the Meuse is only a matter of time. We have plenty of reserve troops on their way



to take care of that. The important thing now is to keep our momentum and prevent the enemy from regrouping ahead of us.”

“Rubbish!” he yelled back. “All you ever do is feed me rubbish! Besides, the French will use any weakness against us and then trumpet it to the press to boost their abysmal morale.”

“Propaganda need not worry us,” Halder replied.

“Ahhh!” Hitler roared like an animal, shaking his head and waving his arms about. The Commander-in-Chief recoiled and went pale, then steadied himself by holding onto a chair. There was no point arguing. It was clear to Halder that the Führer did not understand the decisive nature of quick Panzer attacks, the essence of the Blitzkrieg warfare. More worryingly, it was apparent that Hitler was now claiming the right to interfere with Halder’s personal and detailed control of army operations, even down to brigade level. Both Halder and Brauchitsch saw it was useless trying to reason with this unreasonable man. Plain useless.

At 0700 on May 17<sup>th</sup>, von Kaunitz stepped from his light aircraft and strode brusquely into the General Staff Headquarters building. It was a brick schoolhouse commandeered by the *Wehrmacht*. He was ready for a fight and didn’t care much about the consequences any more. He knew he was right and High Command was wrong. As he closed the door to Halder’s office behind him, then stood and saluted, the veins at his temples were bulging.

General Halder immediately sprang to his feet. His brows were knotted over his pince-nez glasses, and he was frustrated to a far greater extent than von Kaunitz could know. He got straight to the point.

“May I remind you, Herr General, that *I* am your superior officer. Your order for deployment yesterday was insubordination. I gave you permission for a twenty four hour advance, and not a minute more.”

“And a good morning to you, General Halder,” von Kaunitz shot back. “As to the order, it is ridiculous.”

Halder’s jaw tensed as he shot an accusing finger, “I’ve had just about enough from you. This isn’t the first time either. You are absolutely the most defiant, bullheaded man I have ever worked with.”

Von Kaunitz now too began to raise his voice. “There wasn’t one General that believed this campaign could work. Not you, not Brauchitsch, not anyone except General Manstein and myself. Fast, bold, continuous strikes, we said. And we were right! You could at least give us some *credit* for that. So why are you messing it up?”

Halder stood in furious silence. Von Kaunitz felt his face heat up. “France only had four armored divisions when we began this campaign. One is already destroyed in the north; the second is in tatters; the third is retreating southwest; and the fourth is struggling. Not a single one is standing in our way! That’s why the orders from your office are asinine!”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Halder exploded.

They both stood staring at each other, stunned at Halder’s admission.

“Then I ask to be relieved of my command right way,” von Kaunitz said calmly.

General Halder was taken aback momentarily but then nodded. “You may hand over your command to the next most senior officer in your Corps.”

With that, von Kaunitz saluted, turned sharply, and then was gone. Halder took a deep breath and picked up the telephone. It rang a few times; von Brauchitsch picked up.

"I just spoke to him," Halder swallowed. "He's resigned."

"And?" the Commander-in-Chief sounded worried. "Did you accept?"

"Yes. It was deliberate insubordination! We can't have that going on, even if he is right," There was nervous silence at the other end.

"What a mess!" von Brauchitsch sighed. "I know how you feel, but he's the Chief's favorite commanding General. If he goes it'll be egg on *our* faces. Besides, we're mid-way through operations." There was more tense silence as the Commander-in-Chief considered their position. "We can't let him leave. We have to persuade him to stay on."

"I won't go running after him," said Halder.

"No. I understand that. Admiral Canaris is still at Headquarters. The two of them are friends. I'll get Canaris to talk to him, persuade him to stay on, you know, iron things out. You don't have to be involved."

Halder relented. It was a good idea. Von Kaunitz's resignation would send the Führer through the roof. "Alright, and see if you can get the Admiral to explain that it really wasn't anything personal between us, it's just impossible here."

"Don't worry, leave it to me."

General von Kaunitz hadn't returned to his command post before there was a message for him from Admiral Canaris. He was to remain there and wait for the Admiral's arrival.

It was early afternoon when the Admiral was shown into von Kaunitz's field tent. After he heard out the General's grievances, Canaris revealed to him that the halt order originated not from Army High Command but from Adolf Hitler himself.

Canaris said, "I understand your position. So do Halder and von Brauchitsch. Your disagreement with Headquarters is a storm in a teacup compared with what is brewing between them and Hitler. They've been at him for two days now to let the forward units proceed, but he won't budge."

Von Kaunitz listened to this with sinking spirits. It was a worrisome thought that someone who did little more than run messages in World War I was now directing the operations of the Germany Army in France.

"What do I do?" von Kaunitz shrugged.

"You've done an outstanding job in this campaign," Canaris said. The Führer likes you, Ewald. I've talked to the Commander-in-Chief. He doesn't want you to resign and has agreed to a compromise. We can call it a 'reconnaissance in force'. An advance under a different name." Canaris paused for emphasis. "Your Headquarters must stay where it is, of course."

Von Kaunitz understood. "Of course," he said with a snort. "Headquarters stays here. I think I can manage that."

"I thought so," Canaris smiled back pointedly. "I think that will suit everyone just fine."

Von Kaunitz laughed ironically. "Listen to us. Just over a year ago we were sitting in your office holding back on a war with Poland because we were afraid it would drag us into a war with the West. Now we're fighting the West and we're pushing to move ahead. Life is crazy, isn't it?"

Canaris nodded. All those hopes of toppling Hitler were now shattered, run afoul of the Führer's success. The fall of Denmark, then Norway, and now France, meant that their chances of eliminating him had diminished daily. Germany's successes were not comforting to these men.

"You realize the war with France is essentially won already," said von Kaunitz.

"Yes, I know."

"But even with France down, there's still Britain to go. That's why this news of Hitler's meddling in operations worries me. I'm a General and war is my job, but I don't enjoy death. This confrontation with England will not be easy; it could be one hell of a long, drawn out bloody struggle. The Channel is the largest tank trap of them all. This last thing the Army needs is an amateur dabbler sticking his fingers into things. Adolf Hitler may be good at making speech and politicking; I'll give him that, but he's not a professional soldier. If this is a sign of things to come, we're in very serious trouble."

"And I think that's exactly where we're headed," said Canaris evenly, "more meddling. He feels nothing but contempt for von Brauchitsch and it's getting to be the same for Halder now too. Anything they say just sets him off in the opposite direction. It's nasty. As for Britain, Hitler is really aiming for a settlement with them."

"What do you mean?" von Kaunitz was astonished at this news. It didn't sound like the Führer to want to settle with anyone.

"He's hoping," explained Canaris, "that after this blow to France, the obstinate British will mediate on the downfall of their ally and make peace."

"That's hardly likely. Hasn't anyone listed to what Churchill says? His words are anything but conciliatory."

Canarias shrugged, "Hitler refuses to accept what *anyone* says. He has his own ideas. He's convinced Britain will come to terms with him simply because *he* thinks accepting his terms is a wise move."

"He's mistaken," von Kaunitz shook his head.

"Mistaken and stubborn," agreed Canaris.

"Do you suppose there is some way to negotiate a peace?" the General asked with a twinge of hope.

"I believe there is," Canaris replied confidently, as if he'd already given it a lot of thought. "Churchill, and many in Britain, thinks in terms of their Empire. Hitler has scarcely set foot outside Austria and Germany. He thinks only in terms of the Continent; Europe, more specifically. Churchill can only be moved into action if his Empire is threatened; here we have the key. For the sake of the Empire, Churchill might be spurred into all kinds of action. If Hitler really wants to grab Britain's attention, he should hit the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Suez. A strike there and we have the greatest chance of bringing them to the table and hammering out a peace."

"Have you told Hitler this?" von Kaunitz said.

"Dozens of times."

"And?"

"He won't listen. Like I said, he has his own ideas." Canaris went to the window and stood with his hands in his pockets staring outside.

"You know Ewald, perhaps a century will go by before the world understands the tragedy of our position. If Hitler wins this menagerie, it will bring about the ruin of the Germany you and I love; the one we want to endure. The Nazi hacks will see to that. If

Hitler is defeated, it will be the end of Germany as we know it too. And the end of us, who failed to frustrate his plans. On the other hand, even if we succeed in bringing him down, I can assure you it will not only be his downfall but ours as well. Our enemies abroad will give us no credit for trying to stop him. No one will ever talk about us." He laughed cynically, turning back to look von Kaunitz straight in the eyes. "So, whatever we do, we are destroyed. It's like a Greek tragedy."

Early the next morning, von Kaunitz sent out his 'reconnaissance in force', which was the entire Corps under orders of strict radio silence. He ordered them to advance until the last drop of fuel. A telephone wire was laid from his command vehicle back to Corps Headquarters. That way he could communicate with his staff without the wireless radio, and his orders could not be monitored by High Command. They would never know where he was. Canaris wasn't head of Intelligence for nothing!

By the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, General Halder had finally managed to persuade Hitler that the way to the Channel was clear and safe for movement. The Führer allowed von Kaunitz's Panzer divisions to move ahead. It was a great relief to the General Staff, but the days of screaming and blaming had left their mark, and the atmosphere at the *Felsenest* was icy.

*May 19, 1940*

*Dear Karin,*

*Yesterday we arrived at Osternerée, in a beautiful park on the estate of the Belgian King. We are still far from the front, and will fall further behind every day. France will soon be taken without any of us having fired a shot.*

*Today is the first day the whole division had been allowed a complete rest. The troops are bathing, washing their clothes, or writing letters. Most are catching up on sleep and nursing their sore feet. We are finally out of the Ardennes, and the going will be easier from now on.*

*I miss you terribly, and I wonder when this battle will end. When will I be back in your arms, and what will Germany be then?*

*Love, Klaus*

On the misty morning of May 21<sup>st</sup>, a travel-stained von Kaunitz drove into Abbeville and gazed out across the Channel. The salty sea air was moist and balmy. This was truly a remarkable day, the realization of a dream. The XX Panzer Corps, army units of his own creation, had performed a feat unique in military history. With scarcely a pause, his spearhead tank force had found its way through the intricate Ardennes, breached fortified rivers and cut in two a major portion of the enemy's best troops; an enemy that was considered the strongest in Europe as they cut a swathe across France. What enemy troops remained lay broken in his wake. The rest of the Channel ports stood ripe for seizing.

General Ewald von Kaunitz stood now at the pinnacle of his career. At negligible cost, and by the employment of a mere three divisions, his XX Panzer Corps had thrown the

Anglo-French Allies into chaos. They'd accomplished in eleven days what the entire German Army had failed to achieve in four years of bloody battle prior to 1918.

He radioed High Command Headquarters for further instructions. "What do you mean you don't know? We're wasting time! My frontline men have been sitting here since yesterday! Not the South flank *still!*"

Not far away from von Kaunitz's idling Panzers, France's General Weygand landed in a tiny airfield near St. Omer, just ahead of the German line. Weygand was the new Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in France. He was a small, dapper man with high cheekbones and a sparse moustache. With his liking for riding breeches, enormous boots and brass spurs he was not far from resembling Puss-in-Boots. Having just arrived into the chaos from his post in Beirut, he knew nothing of the German army he faced, and scarcely more about the three Allied armies he now commanded.

The only thing that could be done at this dismal stage, with the Allied forces leapfrogging from one to the next, was to plan a full-bloodied counterattack. The British, French and Belgians would have to push back in unison, southward, against the German buildup. The launching point would be Dunkirk, a port and fortress on the Channel.

Weygand resolved to travel north to get a firm grip on the ground situation before talking to the respective countries' Generals. With the land route blocked by the enemy, he bravely crammed his seventy-three year old bones into a bomber and flew across the militarized zone.

He was standing on the tarmac before the propellers stopped spinning. The RAF used this airfield at St. Omer for refueling, and he expected to see it full of planes. Instead, it was abandoned. He made for the hangar in a half trot and found a lone French Private.

"Where are all the RAF planes?" Weygand demanded.

"They've all pissed off!" the Private cursed with total disregard to the Supreme Commander's rank. "Without a word to us."

Weygand looked around the empty airfield in disbelief.

"I'm wondering what anyone wants me to do with all this fuel?" cried the Private. "Do I set it on fire, or what?"

Weygand flagged down a passing army truck. "Where is the nearest telephone?" He asked the driver impatiently.

"I'll take you to the café, Sir," replied the soldier.

While Weygand's staff officer tried to get a line to some, any, headquarters, the General ordered an omelet. The situation was inexplicable, and more critical than he had imagined. He had to organize joint action immediately. First Belgian HQ was contacted and, and after some effort, the British. A joint meeting was set up in Ypres, Belgium for 3:30PM.

Weygand arrived at Ypres later that afternoon. King Leopold and several Belgian officers greeted him. Lord Gort of the BEF was not yet present. General Weygand waited until after 9:00PM and Lord Gort still had not arrived. He couldn't wait any longer and returned to Paris, irked.

Severe though the blow at Sedan had been to the French, its effect on the BEF was traumatic. Lord Gort was caught scrambling to evacuate. His units became unhinged and swept towards the sea, leaving behind food stores, weapons, communications networks and morale. On orders, he drew up a preliminary plan for the evacuation of the BEF. Thirty six hours later before Weygand's visit to the Ypres, Gort presented his scheme to his GHQ; a

move toward Dunkirk, establishing all they could of the BEF, beginning with non-essential or non-combatants, and abandoning all stores and equipment.

When Lord Gort spoke to the Belgian King, who updated him on Weygand's counterattack notions, he just nodded politely. One way or another, the BEF was going home. On Monday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, the day after Gort's GHQ meeting and a day before Weygand's trip to Ypres, Churchill directed the Admiralty to assemble a large number of vessels in readiness.

What Weygand soon discovered was that the three Allied armies were fighting the Germans with very different objectives. The Belgians were fighting to defend Belgium and thought they should surrender if that proved impossible. The French wanted to counterattack south into France and surrender only if the offensive failed. The British refused to think about surrender, but planned to get away to England. The war *was* still on after all. The Belgians *were* still fighting, two thirds of the gigantic French Army was not yet engaged in the conflict, and the vast majority of French territory was still untouched by war.

On May 21<sup>st</sup>, Klaus' division finally entered France. His frustration with this war was growing. Now that they were in France, evidence of battle was more frequent; the smell of burned powder and gasoline, the sight of dead cattle and other livestock, victims of bullets, mortar and artillery shells and bombs. The bloated carcasses lay bloody, their legs sticking up grotesquely and flies buzzing round. Abandoned cows bawled in the fields, waiting to be milked. So, to Klaus, the smell of combat became an amalgam of rotting flesh, smoke and gasoline. Most of the human inhabitants of these areas had fled long ago. The odd few stragglers peered out at them with terrified eyes from ruined and crumbling homes. Along the roads, columns of French motorized vehicles were reduced to twisted burning wrecks.

As Klaus' division approached the town of Sedan, they saw the first dead soldiers. They lay where they had fallen a few days before. Their limbs too were in grotesque poses, their eyes and mouths gaping. Klaus' troops passed in silence. It was the first time they'd seen death on the battlefield, and with this sight, the war took on a new reality.

Along the road to Cheveuges the evidence of destruction was worse; burned out tanks, abandoned vehicles and refuges. As Klaus' division was horse-drawn, they did not go into cities, but stayed on country roads. The rural people fled in panic when they heard the sounds of battle.

What was at first a stream gradually became a flood. Hundreds of thousands of refugees clogged the roads in a honking, shouting, ear-splitting cavalcade. Old women on foot clutched vast bundles. The rich passed in glossy chauffeur-driven coupés. Cyclists had their bikes draped from handlebars to mudguards with belongings. Peasant children rode in milk carts drawn by dogs, their older brothers and sisters driving chickens or pigs alongside them. A fat man peddling an ice cream tricycle had his wife and two daughters jammed into the refrigerator compartment. Young women tottered along on high-heeled shoes broken down from wear. Whole families were pushing wheelbarrows piled high with their possessions. Some even took their mattresses as meager protection against the swooping fighter planes. It was obvious that most had been caught by surprise. All were headed they knew not where.

Klaus knew the Blitzkrieg was like a passing tornado. He told the people to go back into their homes, that the battle had passed and there was nothing left to fear. They looked

back at him either dazed or horrified, as if he were a monster. He could not blame them. He was, after all, the invader.

Long before dawn on Wednesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, Churchill was in his 'Flamingo' flying to France yet again. He would meet with the Allied Forces' Commander-in-Chief, General Weygand, who had been sending him stiffly worded messages over the past few days 'inviting the RAF to initiate bombing operations'. The six squadrons had never appeared. The RAF could not comply because it was too occupied bombing targets in the Ruhr, or saving planes for the defense of England itself.

Weygand received Churchill in the General's Map Room at Vincennes. He was optimistic. Altogether there were 40 Divisions; French, Belgian and British north of the German line. He refused to hear of retreats, and demanded again a full-blooded offensive southward to meet up with French forces that would move north from below. The Germans would be broken up in the 'sandwich'.

Churchill grunted frequent approval during the explanations, but Weygand wanted more than those noises. He'd had serious doubts about the British since the aborted meeting with Lord Gort, and the non-arrival of the RAF. He asked for a firm and precise commitment. Churchill promised British support once again, and the Commander-in-Chief drafted a formal agreement called the Weygand Plan. So long as British forces were there, they must strike. Both the General and Churchill initialed it to seal their pledge. The BEF would launch a counteroffensive the next day.

By five o'clock in the evening, Churchill was back in London in discussion with this War Cabinet, where the BEF's involvement in the Weygand Plan was promptly squashed.

The hourly news trickling in from France was a study in black. War Room maps saw the little flags of the German Panzers steadily moving west. Frustrated Churchill telephoned Reynaud to demand the Weygand Plan be executed immediately by the French. Almost in the same breath he added that, given the present situation of the Panzers, wouldn't it be better to beat a retreat to the Channel ports?

Taken aback, Prime Minister Reynaud replied, "The Plan is already underway, and as a matter of fact, our forces have already moved up. Where, Monsieur Churchill, are *your* forces?"

There was coughing and sputtering at the other end while Churchill considered how best to steer his way around this question. Churchill reassured the French Prime Minister that they were fighting vigorously, that communications with the BEF were difficult and he did not know their exact position. Then he hastened to end the conversation.

Amidst the confusion and duplicity, Lord Gort had abandoned his half of the bargain and was already retreating to Dunkirk.

At 11:32AM on May 24<sup>th</sup>, while vitriolic complaints were flying from Paris to London about the BEF and its lack of action, Lord Gort received a message. It was a German message intercepted and decoded by his radio operator. The German Panzers had been ordered to halt outside Dunkirk. Lord Gort read the note and then tossed it in the wastepaper basket. It made no difference to his plans.

Von Kaunitz, flushed with his magnificent feat, waited impatiently all day for his orders from Headquarters. He was itching to deliver the final blow to the enemy, now amassing under his nose at Dunkirk. Finally, at 6:10PM, Thursday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the signal light

flickered on his radio receiver. He pounced on the instrument. The voice on the other end sounded like it was coming from a tin can.

“Orders are for your Corps to halt and close up. The terrain around there is not suitable for armored vehicles. The ground’s too soft. The final attack will come from the Luftwaffe.”

The General’s head was spinning.

“Hello? Do you read?”

Von Kaunitz burst out, “What is the meaning of this insane order? There is nothing wrong with the terrain. Why don’t you let me go in there and finish them off? Wouldn’t that be logical? Are we building golden bridges for the British?” he slammed down the receiver, disgusted.

Chafing at the bit, von Kaunitz hastened out into the evening sunshine and looked for someone to complain to. He found General Keitel peacefully puffing a cigar.

“The war is already won, Ewald,” Keitel tried to soothe von Kaunitz’s ruffled feathers. “Why waste tanks doing what the Luftwaffe can do more economically?”

Von Kaunitz was appalled and shouted, “*Nich lösbar!* It won’t work. Any commander worth his salt has to know it doesn’t work that way. This is a task for ground forces!”

“It’s the Führer’s decision,” Keitel paled. “Watch what you say.”

“Well that explains it, then!” he growled, then turned and stormed off. There was no point talking to Keitel, he would go along with any of Hitler’s idiocies. He should have known better than to talk to *him*. It just didn’t make sense. Why these stupid halts?

The answer was locked somewhere in the psyche of one man. The Führer.

From his vantage point on top of the hill overlooking Dunkirk, he could see the concentrating enemy forces. There were thousands of them, on foot, in tanks, jeeps and every other sort of vehicle. They were a mass of ant-like forms, all pouring onto the beach from every visible road. This was a beaten enemy if he ever saw one. Von Kaunitz turned away abruptly and stomped furiously back to his tent. He bumped into his orderly on the way.

“Sir?”

“I’m not in for anyone!” he barked, and disappeared behind the canvas flap.

At 11 the next morning, Hitler paid a surprise visit to Charleville, the General Staff Headquarter in the Ardennes. The black open Mercedes purred quietly through the cobbled streets. He sat stiffly in the back with General Keitel, his favorite yes-man. His adjutant Kurt kept the chauffeur company in the front.

Knowing Hitler’s fanaticisms, the staff scuttled like guilty schoolboys to put a good face on things when they heard the Führer was en route. Orderlies piled Cointreau bottles hastily into the filing cabinets and flung windows wide open to waft out tobacco fumes.

The car pulled up to the old creeper-covered townhouse. It stopped next to General von Brauchitsch and Halder, who stood outside in nervous anticipation. Hitler emerged from the car and walked past them without a word.

“It’s going to be another one of those days,” mutter Halder as they followed the Führer and his retinue outside.

In the Command Room, von Brauchitsch explained the current situation of the various divisions as he flicked a pointer over the big operations map. The Führer nodded silently at intervals, then asked, what did von Brauchitsch intend to do with the Panzers now that they were halted?



The Commander-in-Chief was puzzled. Surely the Führer realized the armor could not sit idle? That would be a waste of both equipment and manpower. Von Brauchitsch had transferred them to Army Group B twelve hours ago, in preparation for the final action planned at Dunkirk.

In the chill silence that followed, every man knew that something was wrong. Hitler finally snapped, "That order will be cancelled."

Halder was mortified for von Brauchitsch. He could not fathom why the Führer would cancel the order. He thought he's better say something and support his boss.

"Mein Führer, the Panzer Divisions are only fifteen miles from Dunkirk. We are in a position now where we can wrap up the campaign in a few days. I think it would be a better idea to allow them to go in and finish off the job."

Hitler raised his head and looked sternly at Halder. "No. We have done right to halt the tanks. Not only have they outrun themselves, but Flanders, as you ought to know, is crisscrossed with a multitude of waterways and is unsuitable for tank warfare. I know because I served in Flanders during the war. Besides, the decisive battle must not be fought on Flemish soil, but in Northern France."

Everyone in the Command Room exchanged puzzled looks. Where this business about Flemish soil came from no one seemed to know. Halder thought it was hiding some other motive, but held his breath. The Führer, conscious that he now had an audience continued effusively. "The other very sensible reason to halt is because there is a second half of the campaign to consider too." Evidently, he thought his Generals had not considered this. "Supposing the BEF launches a counteroffensive from the north, while the Panzers are bogged down in the marshes around Dunkirk? The BEF could wipe out our whole forces!"

Halder shot a knowing look at von Brauchitsch; the flank again!

"The BEF are a broken reed. They are unlikely to launch a counterattack," Halder said.

Hitler ignored him. "For those reasons, Gentlemen, the Luftwaffe will now have the task of delivering the enemy its final blow!" Hitler made a fist, and in a studied gesture, struck down an invisible foe.

His speech finished, he called the session over. As those gathered were filing out, Hitler called von Brauchitsch to stay behind. After shooing everyone away from the nasty scene that was about to take place, Halder returned to the Command Room to listen in behind the closed door. At first he heard only pacing, which he attributed to the Führer. Then the dam broke.

"By what right did you transfer the Panzers without consulting me?" Hitler roared, despite the fact that, as Commander-in-Chief, it was von Brauchitsch's job to direct forces. "You had no business! When I said halt the Panzers, I meant HALT!"

Von Brauchitsch bore the tongue-lashing in silence.

Hitler thundered away until he was purple-face and spent, then left slamming the door behind him. When the Führer was out of sight, Halder crept into the Command Room.

Von Brauchitsch grabbed the arm of a chair and slumped into it heavily. A sensitive and dignified aristocrat of the old school, he could never bring himself to talk back. "He's going to lose us this war," he said, clutching his stomach. "I think I'm going to be sick. I can't take this sort of thing much longer."

Halder handed him a glass of water from the side table with trembling hands. "The way you let him push you around, it serves you right," he whispered tersely, angry about the whole situation. "Why don't you hand in your resignation? While you're at it, mine too."

"We can't do that," said the tortured von Brauchitsch, unbuttoning his collar. "Whatever happens, there is our loyalty to the Army. You mustn't dream of resigning. You're the only man I can trust. What would I do without you?"

Paul Reynaud, Winston Churchill, and Adolf Hitler shared the same view. They all wished to stop the further progress of von Kaunitz's Panzers.

For days, while the British and French regrouped around Dunkirk, protests from the German Field Commanders raged like a forest fire, stoked by von Kaunitz. The only explanation they received was that an advance was impossible because of ground conditions. This only provoked them further. All of them were on the spot and could judge the terrain with their own eyes better than Headquarters, one hundred kilometers away. But Headquarters would not budge.

Von Kaunitz became a frustrated spectator of the battle as it unfolded. The Luftwaffe began its assault. Waterworks were blown up, buildings were reduced to rubble, hundreds of civilians were killed, and the local oil tankards were set on fire. The sky darkened, and the sea was edged with a thick black sludge. The heavy dark petroleum smoke hung low, obscuring visibility on the Luftwaffe's bombing runs. The RAF did not sit idly by; it immediately began engaging the German planes, and fierce air battles raged overhead. Then the rain moved in and the bombers could barely see anything at all. Their aim of 'finishing things off' was defeated. Both sides racked up casualties in aerial dogfights.

Meanwhile, the number of ships coming to and from the harbor at dusk multiplied. British Navy ships dropped off supplies to the beleaguered men, then loaded up as many troops as they could hold before slipping away.

Sunday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, Churchill's son Randolph lazed in an armchair in this father's bedroom nursing a whiskey and soda. Dressed only in a vest and underpants, Churchill leaned over the sink in the bathroom shaving.

"I don't see how you can beat the Germans," said Randolph.

Churchill popped his head out of the bathroom doors; eyes wide open. "I shall drag in the United States!" he exclaimed, then resumed sweeping the lather from his face. "You know, Randolph," Churchill called out from the bathroom, "there's only one thing worse than fighting a war with Allies. It's fighting a war without them."

"Have the Americans replied to your cable yet?"

"As a matter of fact, they have. Our Ambassador in Washington spoke to Roosevelt, and the President indicated to him that if we really were in danger, the US would come in."

"Wouldn't you say we're in danger now?" Randolph emptied his glass. "And what exactly does 'come in' mean?"

"It's only the first step, Randolph. You can't expect it all at once," replied Churchill impatiently.

"And the destroyers?" asked Randolph.

"That has to be approved by Congress."

"And?"

"They're hostile to the idea."

"I don't think the Americans want to fight, Dad."

“Hmm. Maybe so. We’ll just have to *make* them want to.” Churchill wiped his rosy face with a warmed towel.

So far the war was going very badly for Churchill. The French were whining that the British Generals were ‘always making for harbor’. The BEF accused the French troops of incompetence and ‘never attacking’. Churchill’s own Cabinet was full of doves who reined him in. Weygand said that the British might as well retreat, because they’d already wrecked his Plan.

Churchill donned his tuxedo. He was about to have dinner with the hapless Prime Minister Reynaud, who had just arrive in London.

Neville Chamberlain picked Reynaud up in this limousine and the two rode together to No. 10 Downing Street. Churchill welcomed them in the drawing room. He had hardly finished shaking hands before Reynaud announced, “I must tell you that we are considering a peace conference mediated by Mussolini.”

Reynaud had already mentioned this to Chamberlain, who liked the idea. The former Prime Minister was known for favoring treaties. “I think it’s a grand idea!” he said, monitoring with this spindly hands. “What matters now is not defeating the Germans so much as safeguarding the Empire. And I, for one, trust Mussolini and the Italians. What do you say, Winston?”

Churchill scoffed. “For starters we all know what became of the last peace treaty Mussolini sponsored,” he answered, referring to the infamous Munich Agreement. “Not to mention the fact that the Italians are Fascists, allied with Germany,” he added.

In a cloud of cigar smoke, Churchill went on. “Herr Hitler may offer France decent terms, but I am convinced he would show no mercy to us. He would chip away at our Empire, taking who knows what; Somaliland, Kenya, Uganda. *No*. That sort of thing we can never accept. We must carry on the fight. Nations which go down fighting; rise again,” he waved his cigar for emphasis, “but those which surrender are ruined. We have only to fight on to conquer. Even if one of us is struck down, the other must not abandon the struggle. The other must not put down his arms until his wounded friend is on his feet again.”

Churchill’s words fell on barren soil. “All I can say,” shrugged Reynaud, “is that if the Germans offer us conditions that are advantageous, we will give them serious considerations.”

“No! Britain and France must display stout hearts,” Churchill shook his head, “for this is what will attract American support and that is what we need now.”

Reynaud raised one eyebrow and looked directly at Churchill. “If you want to fight, Monsieur Churchill, then where are the RAF Squadrons you promised me? We haven’t seen them yet.”

The damned Squadrons again! “Monsieur Reynaud, I can assure you of our absolute commitment to victory. The RAF, as you know, are doing considerable damage to the industrialized Ruhr.”

Reynaud was not interested in what was going on in the Ruhr. He was interested in France.

They were now between appetizers and the main course. Churchill excused himself from the table and slipped into the next room. Closing the door behind him, he dialed the number for Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for War.

“Anthony? Winston here. Terribly sorry to bother you at this hour. Reynaud is teetering on surrender. I’m doing my best to keep him in the game, and give the evacuation

the special 'go ahead'. We're going to do it like this: the BEF should think of nothing but its own safety now. Then Navy will provide the fleet and the RAF will give them air cover. On, and uh...don't forget to tell Gort that nothing of this should be mentioned to the French or Belgians. Absolute silence, you understand? Just get on with the job." He replaced the receiver. Yes, that was vital. Their allies must not suspect. The French were on standby in the Mediterranean against possible attacks by Mussolini, who has threatening Suez. He wanted them to say there. Satisfied, Churchill returned to the dinner table. As far as Reynaud was concerned, the bridgehead around Dunkirk was to be held with no further thought of retreat. And Churchill never mentioned otherwise.

Lord Gort received the message less than an hour later. The plan he had finalized a few days back, working against the clock on a diet of whisky and chocolate was adopted without delay. Full scale British evacuation would begin.

### **The Debacle – Part Two**

It was nearly midnight when Admiral Canaris came into Hitler's Headquarters. Hitler was in a late conference with General Halder. Halder's eyes were sunken and bloodshot; he looked up from his desk, surprised to see the Intelligence Chief at this late hour.

"What is it, Herr Admiral?" asked Hitler.

Canaris handed the Führer a note. "The latest interception from London to Commander Gort at Dunkirk. It's an order for the British to make preparations to pull out, and without notifying their partners."

Hitler smirked at the British trickery, and then the smile melted from his face.

It meant the BEF was escaping!

Halder, his worst fear now coming true, fidgeting nervously with the files on his desk. It confirmed what the Field Generals had been shouting about for the past five days.

"Aerial reconnaissance sighted thirteen warships and nine troop transporters in Dunkirk harbor. The embarkation has already begun," concluded Canaris. "They are deserting the field of battle en masse."

Hitler began to pace around the room, one hand on his chin, the other supporting his elbow. He never expected this. He hated it when someone outsmarted him. This was unthinkable! Wasn't he the one who always warned that once the British got a toehold anywhere, it was almost impossible to dislodge them? He was convinced that the British would fight to the last man. Now he knew he should have gone with Halder and von Brauchitsch's advice days ago. It was infuriating.

"Give orders to the ground units to move on Dunkirk," he barked abruptly. "At first light," he added as he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

"So, we're back to where we were two days ago," sighed Halder.

"Minus the advantage," Canaris observed.

"What a debacle," spat Halder.

After days of being rooted to the spot while the enemy concentrated their numbers, the ground troops knew their job wasn't going to be easy. Tens of thousands of Allied troops retreating from Belgium and France were making a last desperate attempt to bolster the town's defenses. The converging roads were choked with truck columns fifteen miles long, making the roads impassable. It was exactly what von Kaunitz knew would happen.

The Panzer Divisions met with stiff resistance. Civilians had by now weighed in too. Closing up the local dykes, they deliberately flooded hundreds of acres in an effort to hold off the German army's advances.

A few hours after the resumed offensives, von Kaunitz learned that his eldest son, Alfred, had been wounded in combat. His unit, fighting in one of the Panzer Divisions of Army Group B, had been advancing steadily. An industrial alcohol manufacturer had opened the faucets of his ten enormous still and sent two million gallons of raw spirits gushing across the already flooded land. It wasn't long before an artillery shell transformed the whole areas into a raging sea of flames; a gigantic 'Planter's Punch'. Two of the forward tanks were trapped in the inferno and blew up. Von Kaunitz's son, in the third tank, managed to escape before his vehicle blew up as well. He suffered only burns and was said to be doing fine. His brother Günther had survived all his encounters unhurt.

The incident angered von Kaunitz because it was unnecessary. If they had captured the BEF earlier, their own casualties would have been fewer. And only their capture would induce the English to make peace with Germany. Von Kaunitz wasn't alone in these frustrating thoughts. Everyone on the frontline knew they'd been dropped in it by their own glorious leader.

Lifting the binoculars to his eyes, he focused on the cruiser just arriving at the pier. It was a treacherous run through the sandbars, running a gauntlet of bombers, especially during low tide. He watched day after day as the number of ships scuttling across the Straits of Dover multiplied. Now there were as many as 800 every 24 hours. Thousands of trapped enemy troops were escaping from under their noses. It wasn't occurring only at night any more, nor were they only Navy ships. There were pleasure crafts, tugs, barges; everything that could float braved the bomb attacks around the clock, taking troops from the embattled beaches to England.

Von Kaunitz scanned along the queue of soldiers and stopped at the foot of the pier. There was a fierce commotion. It looked like a riot was going on. Men were pushing and shoving; some looked like they were pointing guns at each other.

He watched closely for a few moments, focusing and refocusing.

"You see something, Sir?" asked his orderly.

"I'm not sure. It looks like a brawl down there."

"I wouldn't be surprised, Sir," said the orderly with pity in his voice. "All those men and just a few ships. It's been days now; I'm sure they're running out of food and water. Being crammed like sardines is bound to set tempers off."

"See if we can get a scout team up close. I want to know what's going on."

"Right away, Sir," The orderly turned on his heels and left.

Three Brandenburger commandos disguised in BEF uniforms trotted silently along the road northeast of the town of Graveline. Doubled over, they darted uneasily from one hedgerow to the next, clutching their Tommy guns.

They had ample reason to be fearful. All around them the battle was in full flare. The sloping ground echoed the deadly hammering of machinegun fire, and the whizzing whoosh of mortars. Saplings toppled, sending shredded leaves drifting like green snow. The stink of cordite was horrible, and there was coughing, crouching British soldiers everywhere. The Germans had crossed into the enemy's territory and were moving deeper into that zone bound for the beaches of Dunkirk.

On the ridge above them, the last men of a French division were tumbling from trucks, a khaki-clad emergency force waiting to take up positions to stem the German flood. “*Dépêchez, dépêchez!* There’s no time to lose. The attack is coming!” they heard a French officer say. As special *Abwehr* agents, they were fluent in both English and French.

Suddenly, heavy formations of bombers darkened the sky. Fire came raining down, and from the town came the smothering roar of toppling buildings. The docks and quays were soon rubble. A thousand men, women and children lay dead. When the raid passed, the Nazis scrambled back to their feet and went on.

Brief glimpses of sea told the German soldiers they were reaching the tops of the dunes. They crouched between some dense hawthorns to survey what lay ahead before moving any further. Aside from the beaches, which lay open to the roaring northeastern winds the sole embarkation points the port now offer were the East and West Moles. These gangways were originally designed to protect the port from the swirl of the tide, and not for berthing ships. It is the season known to locals as High Water Springs, surging three-knot tides raced between the piles. It was nearly impossible to bring a craft alongside the Moles.

The three disguised men easily passed the last of the French rearguard circling the town of Dunkirk. Wild looking French soldiers crouching behind matchstick barricades of farm carts, pianos, children’s tricycles and tea cartons packed with sand. The gunner had long abandoned their heavy artillery and now stood watch with a shotgun and two cartridges each. What were they going to do when the Germans came? Bite them?

Beyond the French perimeter, the three commandos had to pass through a final obstacle, a short bridge manned by guards. The officers at this checkpoint sifted the incoming troops. The Germans could barely hear one of the officers over the howling wind.

“Right, join your divisions over there. You’re all going together, but not without your tickets. Division’s got the tickets.”

Linking up to a tank crew unit, the three walked briskly across the checkpoint. From here on they were clear to the beaches. Like three drops in an ocean of enemy soldiers, they were swept into the massive tide of Allied misery. They were not prepared for what they saw.

Deadbeats, filthy and unshaven were the hordes that had made a headlong retreat from Belgium and France. Hundreds of miles had been abandoned in panic. At each resting point the officers had issued the same grim warning: *‘Stragglers and wounded must be left behind. The Germans are on our heels!’*

Every now and again, the three commandos overhead snippets of conversations; the bitter, demoralized talk of a defeated army. Treachery was rampant, and suspicion was rife. The enemy could be anyone.

“’Twas in a town near Armentière,” said one British soldier who had lost all his equipment except for the water bottle slung across his chest, “a Yorkshire Chaplin ’ad to get the bona fides off two Jesuit priests was an ’asty quiz in Latin. Commander was convinced they were German spies, he was. ’Ad then earmarked for the firing squad.”

“By gawd, yer can’t no longer tell friend from foe,” griped his companion.

Further along they saw other surprises. White pillow cases flapping from the bayonets of Belgian soldiers, a Belgian General halted in his car by the roadside, calmly taking off his uniform and changing into a sports coat and flannel trousers; tokens of the Belgian surrender the troops knew nothing about. Bitter battles against German tank

gunners disguised in French uniforms; civilian snipers picked off the unwary; parachutists plummeting from the sky dressed as nuns; and a new phrase denoted treachery trembled on every lip – *'The Fifth Column'*.

The trio kept moving, ever closer to the beach, until soft sand gave way under their boots. The congestion of troops was overwhelming. Before long the fighter-bomber Stukas were overhead again. This surprised no one. With the clear weather it could only be expected. Limping on tired feet, they ran as fast as they could to any shelter they could find. All sturdy shelter was taken by the medics and the wounded. The Nazis had to huddle with a half dozen others in a smothering foxhole as an inferno of flames engulfed the harbor.

Anti-aircraft guns chattered away on all sides. Perhaps they would keep the planes away from the port itself. But then the planes swooped low, making the air vibrate with their shrill screams. They watched the bombers skim over the coastline, and the men unable to find shelter, bowing beneath them like grass in a strong wind. They passed over two ships, which cast off their moorings to find less of a target. Six bombs fell simultaneously from six planes swooping over the Moles. Two fell in the water, where columns of grey-white water geyser a hundred feet high, destroying an already mangled pier. A third scattered debris on the beach, while the last three opened craters in front of a line of men. Bodies flew into the air. The cries of the wounded rose as the six bombers disappeared.

There were now some forty planes overhead, and others were coming across the Channel – the RAF. One Stuka exploded in the air. But no one in the foxhole paid it any attention. There were no cheers.

The ships had drawn away from the shore, but the men waiting in the queues to embark remained in their places so they wouldn't lose them. After a seemingly endless symphony of explosions, the plane formations turned in the sky and were gone. When they were certain all was clear, the Nazi crawled like terrorized animals out of their cover.

The allied troops were pushed to the brink of madness. There had been days of bombing with nowhere to hide. They were backed against the sea. Groups of men were deserted by their officers, who had got away on ships long before. They prowled like hoodlums in ugly moods. From defeat, shame and despair sprang a savage anarchy.

The food dumps Gort had established in Dunkirk had been for the fighting men holding the perimeter. But for the tens of thousands that crammed the fog-bound beaches there was nothing. One artillery unit shared a tin of beans, getting three baked beans apiece, with one extra for the one who found the tin. Elsewhere, a hundred men fought like wolves over a loaf of bread. They were starving, and anything the jaws could chew was fair game.

To most, however, thirst was the most severe torment. For four days there had been no water. Cracked lips were coated with sand. Men roamed blindly, seeking anything to relieve parched, dust-dry throats. They sucked pebbles, scavenged rainwater from the gutters with their helmets. They drank deeply from lavatory cisterns. The French Navy unloaded petro cans filled with water. That lasted five minutes. One group of soldiers raided a hotel cellar. Their celebration made a ghastly scene. British and Senegalese soldiers slumped together against vast casks of cider, rum, whiskey, Benedictine and brandy; all singing, weeping, shouting and vomiting.

The commandos turned away in disgust and trotted ahead to the crowd at the foot of the pier. Rifle fire cracked sharply, and a bullet whined past one of the German's ears. A

snarling, trigger-tense mob, rifles at the ready, were shouting and pushing at the foot of the pier a hundred yards ahead. The French Warship *Intrépide* was approaching the harbor under a heavy pall of smoke. It picked its way between the numerous sunken wrecks lodged in the sandbars.

Over the din of the mob came a shout from a Military Policeman. "Organize in groups of fifty! No man is to embark without his arms and his ticket!"

A roar of furious shouts drowned out his voice. "*C'est un bateau Français! Pourquoi seulement les Anglais?* Bastards! Throw them all into the sea! Let's get on board. To hell with your orders!" The Frenchmen, with only wine to fill their water bottles, were furious and determined.

The policeman produced a pistol and fired into the air. The furor subsided only marginally.

"This is purely a British operation," he said in atrocious French.

"Then why are French ships coming too, eh?" shouted a French soldier. There was another surge of angry shouts and fists in the air.

"Draw!" ordered the military policeman.

A row of MPs fixed their bayonets and faced the unruly crowd of French soldiers.

"Now, let's start this again," repeated the Chief MP, brandishing his pistol.

The only ones allowed to past the barrage of bayonets were BEF troops holding their allotted tickets. One by one, dazed and grimly British soldiers stumbled through the French mob and into the sea. The warship was unable to pull up to the mangled pier, so soldiers had to wade out into chest-deep waters to a rowboat that would ferry them out to the *Intrépide*. In less than half an hour, about six hundred men were onboard. The French mob was forced to stand and watch.

When the ticketholders were aboard, there were still many places unfilled. The commanding officer sent out a search party to find the remaining men. A lance Corporal marched through the ruined streets of Dunkirk playing a set of bagpipes as a summons to any surviving men from his Scottish division.

After the last of the Highlanders were aboard, there remained a handful of spaces. In a show of magnanimity, the MP announced that three French officers could be taken. Only one was found among the angry mob. When told he was free to board, he angrily declined.

The MP thought the French officer did not understand. He repeated the offer as if he were speaking to a child. "*Marchez to le dinghy and sailez to Ungleterre.*" The Frenchman erupted in a flow of curses, still standing his ground. The policeman was getting impatient. *Allez vous, bloody vite!*" he screamed.

The officer refused, eyeing the surf like a cat contemplating a bath.

In exasperation, the MP came close to shooting the Frenchman on the spot, but walked away, cursing the 'bloody frogs' in his cockney accent instead. After a wave from a flag the *Intrépide* set off, steaming stern first out of the harbor at a steady 25 knots.

When the French Admiral in charge of Dunkirk's defense learned that the BEF was escaping he went immediately to Lord Gort in a fit of white rage. He was shocked, he said, not so much that the British were not allowing their French partners equal treatment, but that the British were evacuating in the first place. Dunkirk must be defended, and the evacuation had already cleared out one third of the BEF!

The burly Lord Gort sat behind a scrubbed trestle table while the French Admiral leaned across it yelling until he was red-faced. The interpreter strained to keep pace. Gort



sat, arms folded and eyes fixed on the agitated Commander. The French really are rather excitable, thought Gort. Then the Admiral accused him of cowardice. That finally made the monosyllabic Gort indignant. He took out Eden's telegram and read it aloud with the aid of the interpreter. "We are evacuating precisely because Dunkirk cannot be defended."

The French Admiral was horrified. It was unthinkable. The Belgians had already pulled out; the enemy was pressing in, and now this!

"If everyone takes off," retorted the sour looking Gort, "who would hold back the Germans during embarkation? My orders are to evacuate my BEF, not the entire French Army. Besides, every Frenchman taken across the Channel means one less Englishman getting across."

The interpreter cut off mid-sentence, choking on the words. It made no difference. The Frenchman understood well enough. Now tempers flared so hotly that the interpreter, who'd been sitting on the side until now, slipped out unnoticed.

"What do you know of the situation anyway?" demanded Gort. "All you do is sit in your bunker." Then he accused the Frenchman of having the confidence and aggressiveness of a rhinoceros, with a similar lack of vision.

"Are you, or are you not, going to walk out on us?" demanded the French Admiral.

"Yes, I am!" boomed back Gort. "This war is as good as lost as far as I'm concerned.

"Lost because all you English Generals know how to do is make for the ports rather than fight."

"We've fought a great deal."

"Fought? The British will only fight to the last Frenchman!" The Admiral stormed out to cable General Weygand.

Churchill found himself again in France for a War Council with Prime Minister Reynaud and the Allied Commander-in-Chief. This time the mood was frigid. The tightly guarded secret of the BEF's evacuation was blown.

Fearing a ghastly international scandal, Churchill reckoned his best defense, under the circumstances, was offense. With eyes aflame and cheeks ablaze, he declared in emphatic tones, "Our inflexible resolve is to continue to do whatever the French wants."

At this General Weygand let out a cynical grunt. How many times had he given orders for an offensive, only to see them disregarded by British field forces?

"Let us face facts," said Weygand in frosty tones. "Monsieur Churchill, the war is already lost for France." He blamed the British for that, with their pathetic expeditionary force of eight Divisions and an air force that mainly stayed home. "But what is the most *désagréable*, *Monsieur le Prime Minister*, is that you have been playing a double game with us," Weygand accused.

Straightening up and squaring his shoulders, Churchill speechified. "Nothing can relieve us of our duty to defend the world caused to which we have pledged ourselves. All is not lost! We hope to build a new BEF from St. Nazaire! If we remain free to fight, still be able to fight, we will be in a position to help you, whatever comes. That is why we are saving our troops." Then he boasted, "By noon yesterday, we had saved 165,000 men in total from Dunkirk! It is these soldiers, gentlemen that will save us in the perilous days to come."

"And how many of these men were from *our* forces!" asked Reynaud.

Churchill did not have the figure at his fingertips and sent out from the information. He received a reply with surprising promptness from the Admiralty.

His pallid skin flushed when he read the Admiralty's tally. With visible embarrassment, he read the total. "150,000 British, 15,000 French."

General Weygand gasped and leapt to his feet. "You mean you are leaving the French behind?"

Reynaud put on his glasses and inspected the note. Of the 220,000 British, 150,000 had already been evacuated, whereas of the 200,000 Frenchmen, only 15,000 had been taken off. "Such statistics Monsieur Churchill," said Reynaud "could provoke an extreme reaction in this country. You produce fine speeches, but make promises you cannot keep." There was acid in his tone. "And this piece of paper is proof that our alliance has been *une debacle* from the start."

It was a mortifying comment for Churchill. For lack of a better idea, Churchill shrugged. "We are companions in misfortune, Monsieur *Le General*. There is nothing to be gained from recriminations. I will do everything in the world to help you, but it really is not our fault that the French troops found themselves unfavorably placed from the point of view of the evacuations. They were there by orders of their own commanders."

Churchill winced as Reynaud roared. "It was your commanders who promised them support!"

"I refuse to accept that the British deliberately left Frenchmen behind!" Churchill responded. He ordered his secretary to take down a directive as proof of Britain's (belated) commitment, the BEF "will hold to rearguard to the last, while the French have the right of way." The order was cabled immediately to BEF Headquarters.

But Reynaud wanted the evacuated troops to be sent straight back to defend the remainder of France. The hope was that the German invasion could be isolated to the northeastern regions of France. He also asked for more guns, planes and tanks. And what of the RAF bombers? The fate of France *and* Britain hung in the balance.

Churchill's response was not encouraging. Any aid would of necessity be small. Britain needed to defend herself, and reequipping the BEF would take time. As for the RAF, he would have to confer.

"Yet," he added, "If the Germans could be held until autumn, the United States is sure to come to our assistance. Even if President Roosevelt won't declare war, he will give us powerful aid."

Under direct orders from Churchill, Lord Gort was to return to England. He was far too valuable an officer to risk losing to the enemy. Before departing, Lord Gort appointed Major-General Alexander to take his place. This done, Gort lost no time breaking the news of Churchill's latest cable to the French Admiral. The British would take over the defense of the perimeter, and the French would be free to sail.

The French Admiral recognized fighting talk when he heard it. He shook Lord Gort's hand, and then called for champagne. "We must toast. This is not only talking as an ally, this is *acting* like one," he declared. They drank and finished the bottle calling for more. It had been a hard week.

After all that champagne, Lord Gort had no time to brief Major-General Alexander before his ship left harbor. He made it aboard only barely in time. His Headquarters, where Churchill's cable was sent, now no longer existed. Thus vanished all knowledge of the BEF's new orders.

Soon after Gort left Dunkirk, the French Admiral made a trip to Bastion, Alexander's new Headquarters. To the Major-General's astonishment, the French Admiral greeted him

with effusive warmth. He expressed his appreciation of Britain's gallant gesture of defending the perimeter while the French were allowed to evacuate.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," said Alexander. "I've had no such instructions. My whole idea is to get my men out of here as fast as possible!"

The French Admiral stood frozen. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

So, nothing changed. The British departed, and the French were left to hold back the Germans, and die.

Churchill ordered that evacuation operations should stop on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. When he was told that there were still more than 70,000 French troops on the beaches of Dunkirk, he relented, but briefly. Three days later the evacuations were called off for good.

Among the last to get away from the beaches were some of the remnants of an army disbanded when Hitler marched into Prague, the French Foreign Legion, the Czech army formed of escapees of the Nazi invasion.

Sitting in the sand with a grenade in one hand was Jan Kubis. Two weeks before, he had saved his patrol from capture by the Germans. Hiding in bushes, he had beaten them off single-handedly with a shower of grenades while his unit got away under a bridge. This had won him the Czechoslovakian War Cross. Next to him sat his friend, Josef Gaböik, a sniper. The two watched as a small fishing boat that would take them to England appeared on the horizon.

Several miles behind them, General von Kaunitz sat fiddling with the knobs of his short-wave radio. Prime Minister Churchill was scheduled to make a speech on BBC radio, and he was trying to get the signal. All he could get was hissing and crackling with an occasional burst of words. The speech was already under way. One of the General's orderlies asked if he could be of help, but he brushed him off impatiently. He twisted the antenna around, but it made no difference. Finally, he took the set outside and walked around until at last, he reached a spot where he caught a decent signal.

"...that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangement are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone..."

Static. "Damn!" he cursed. The signal was lost and he had to shift until he got it again.

"...will defend to the death their native soil; we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end and, we shall fight in France. We shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidences and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost maybe, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."

Von Kaunitz switched off the set. A heavy feeling descended over him. Though he did not understand every word, he understood well enough to know Churchill's intentions. There would be no peace negotiations; that was for sure.

A fine grey rain fell steadily over the gloomy beach. Von Kaunitz rose early and walked down to the water's edge. Dunkirk was silent and abandoned. The only sounds were the lapping of waves and the patter of rain.

By now, the last French stragglers were rounded up and gone. The beach was littered with old boots, bicycles, tents, helmets and every sort of personal belonging. Military paraphernalia lay imbedded in the sand, burned out or wrecked. There were a few bodies, too, but very few, considering the number of soldiers who had been trapped there.

He walked back through the town and found its streets and roads clogged with abandoned charred vehicles. There were tanks, field guns, machine guns, rifles; every sort of weapons strewn about haphazardly, all burned out or blown up. He realized he was looking at the bulk of Britain's war machinery. Across the Channel lay a nation who now had little means of defending itself. The soldiers escaped, yes, but they left behind the tools that made them soldiers.

Von Kaunitz rushed back to the camp and took a special train to the *Felsennest*, Hitler's Headquarters. When he was ushered into the conference room, he found the Führer with Field Marshall Goering and his deputy, General Milch.

"Our bombers," Goering declared, congratulating himself, "caused so much destruction that only fishing boats got through. The British were so frantic that they could not make a proper job of it. Let's hope the Tommies can swim!" Goering laughed. In a flashing white uniform, he looked fatter than ever.

Hitler noticed von Kaunitz and turned to him with a tight smile that revealed no teeth. "Ah! There's my star General! Come and join us, I'm in *such* a good mood."

Von Kaunitz had difficulty hiding his rage. It was extraordinary that this enormous blunder was not now being sharply condemned. They were actually celebrating this folly! He asked whether any of them had seen Dunkirk in the last 24 hours. They all replied that they had not. "Mein Führer, I've come from a visit to the beaches. It appears that 350,000 men got away on the 'fishing boats' Herr Field Marshall was referring to."

Goering drilled the General with his eyes, but von Kaunitz kept talking.

"The entire British Army has got clean away to the other side. They left behind their equipment and escaped." Von Kaunitz bit his lips before blurting out that the whole damn thing was a fiasco for the Germans. "But this is a serious blow to the British too."

Hitler smiled. The facts bounced off him. He was lost in megalomania, and felt very near immortal. The past few days, deep in his bunkered world, he had spent pondering future glories.

Von Kaunitz went on to itemize all that was amassed at Dunkirk.

"Well, what do you suggest?" Hitler shrugged,

"I suggest that this very day all air units should move up to the Channel Coast and Britain should be invaded immediately."

Goering began to look uncomfortable in his white uniform but the Führer listened serenely. Von Kaunitz went on. "We ought to capture as many airfields as possible, immediately. We have a nearly certain chance of success with minimal bloodshed."

General Milch was obviously of the same opinion. "We have several hundred transport aircraft, Mein Führer, all available for immediate use. Our troops can fan out across southern England and head for London, capturing the government and Royal family in one sweep."

“With no army and no central government, Great Britain would collapse,” added von Kaunitz. It was a gamble, he acknowledged, but he was confident it could be done. It would be the quickest and easiest way to end this war.

Hitler listened but did not respond; his brows were furrowed in thought.

“Aerial reconnaissance shows one piece of artillery defending two miles of British coastline in some places,” said Milch. “Now is the time to press ahead.”

“If we leave Britain in peace for three or four weeks it will be too late.” Von Kaunitz was fired with an urgency brought on by his son’s needless injuries. “We can be certain the British will be working around the clock to replace all they’ve lost. We can settle this right now. They’re in the palm of our hands.”

Hitler paced the room relentlessly, hands locked behind his back, contemplating the General’s suggestion. He never was keen on conquering Britain, only neutralizing her hostility so he could plunder the continent as he pleased. He admired the British Empire; it was like a Catholic Church, a source of stability in the world. Besides, he had to save his strength for Russia. *That* was more important. Britain was not an urgent danger. The German Armed Forces must be made ready to crush Soviet Russia very soon.

“No, no, no,” he said finally, shaking his head. “We’ll only invade England if it’s necessary, and I know it won’t be. We are the same, the English and Germans. She should rule the seas and her colonies, and I shall rule Europe.” He stopped his pacing for a moment, and then pointed angrily with a finger, “If I can get that obstinate little fat man to see it my way.” Then he turned to his listeners, shrugging, “Who knows? One day we may even make *our* troops available to the British Government to help put down *their* colonial uprising!”

General von Kaunitz stood gaping at Hitler’s suggestions.

“Yes, my friend,” continued the jubilant Führer, oblivious of von Kaunitz’s response, “your divisions will now turn south. We must take the Lorraine. That is our most pressing objective at the moment.”

Von Kaunitz left the Führer’s Headquarters, his head spinning. The commander who was responsible for staggering German victory was now sent, not to hurl himself at the heart of France, but to capture some hills!

*June 5, 1940*

*Dearest Karin,*

*Our units received an unexpected message yesterday that we aren’t to move west any more. We are to turn south. The enemy to the north is already defeated! It shouldn’t be long before you and I can be together again.*

*Our battalion has a new member as of yesterday. We were making our way along one of the country roads when I saw a scruffy little mutt slinking alongside my horse. Many animals have been left behind by panicked civilians; cows, pigs, dogs, cats, even birds in cages. We milked some of the cattle but there are legions of them; way too many for our needs. Anyway, this mutt tagged along with us all day, hitching a ride on a gun carriage when his feet got too sore. Last night when I was writing my reports, he snuck into my tent and sat right in front of my desk, staring at me until I paid him some attention.*

*As soon as I spoke to him his tail thumped away. He's all skin and bones; some sort of a terrier-cross, and he's very friendly. I gave him a biscuit from my pack and I think he's adopted me. He spent the night at the foot of my bed and set out with us this morning. I've decided to call him Kaiser.*

*Tomorrow we take Aisne and then move down to the Village of Vailly. They are the last strongholds before our breakthrough to Paris.*

*The men are holding up. Lorenz is a good friend to me. Seeger, on the other hand, well, Seeger is a tough one. I'm longing for a walk in the park with you my dear, or a meal in a restaurant. I hope it's soon.*

*Love, Klaus*

Loud blasts rang out from the other side of the Somme River. It was their first French heavy artillery barrage. Klaus quickly rallied his men and they returned fire. The duel between the two sides continued for hours. The German gun crews, pumped with adrenaline and fear, hurled shell after shell at the French.

And then there was quiet.

Klaus ran from one Battery to the next, determining the casualties. He found half a dozen fatalities. Considering the beating they'd taken, Klaus thought they had fared quite well.

It wasn't until morning that the French hit back again. As soon as their artillery opened, Klaus' unit struck back. The amount of dirt and debris flying seemed more the enemy guns could muster. Sure enough, Klaus saw that enemy planes were making strafing runs on them. Klaus ran to the Major's Headquarters and had the few anti-aircraft guns they possessed turned on the bombers.

In the evening, their patrol returned with four prisoners. Interrogation revealed that the enemy fire was coming from French Colonial divisions; Senegalese infantrymen, and two North African Regiments, one from Morocco and the other from Algeria.

The next day Klaus was up at 5AM. The bodies of the dead had to be buried before the battalion moved out that morning. Klaus had found a church with a cemetery close by. They were near so many towns and places that bore the names of the great battles of the last war; The Somme, Verdun, Soissons, The Marne. During the brief service, Klaus noticed the hundreds of gravestones dating from 1914 to 1918. Their battalion was only burying half a dozen. Modern warfare, thought Klaus, caused fewer casualties; this didn't make him feel any better.

Their dead buried, they harnessed up the horses and moved out. They were on their way to Vailly.

At noon a desperate call came from the infantry Commander. His units had been at the Vailly barricades when a sudden and unexpected barrage of fire hailed down on them from every window and rooftop. Enemy forces were still hidden all over the village, and they needed artillery backup immediately.

Klaus shouted orders for a big gun to move up to the frontline. The *Kanoniers* maneuvered furiously to fire into the narrow streets. Meanwhile, the infantry swarmed down alleys and into doorways, their bayonets fixed.

The cannons and howitzers pounded away. The enemy returned with rumbling and crackling fire. Houses collapsed in clouds of dust. Men hung onto their wildly rearing

horses, only ten paces behind the recoiling guns. It took all the power they could muster to keep the animals from stampeding.

"Fire!" Klaus shouted again and again at the top of his lungs. He rode around the back of the barricades and up a shed where the Commander of the infantry was crouching with this field telephone. The Commander pointed to a house several blocks away. Before he could speak, the path Klaus had walked to the shed was torn up in a series of explosions. The enemy had seen him.

"That's where we figure they're firing from," the Infantry Commander shouted over the roar of artillery fire. "See if you can take it out."

He couldn't go back to his men by the same route. Klaus dismounted and tied his horse to a post by the shed. He would dart back to his gun crews on foot. "Cove me," Klaus shouted. The Commander motioned with his hand. An infantry soldier moved up, pointed his machine gun round the corner on the shed, and then yelled, "Ok, go!" He started firing.

Klaus bent low and made a dash for it. He had to make it across the main street and over the barricades. It was about twenty meters. A torrent of bullets whizzed around him. Heart thumping and lungs heaving, he pounded over the cobbles as fast as he could run. From behind the barricades he could see his men watching. Fifteen yards. Ten yards. Bullets ricocheted everywhere.

Then, a searing pain burned in his thigh and he fell to the ground. More bullets and wild shouting but he could not make out the words.

"Come in! This way! Move! Move! Move! *Hurry!*"

He tried in agony to crawl forward. Inch by inch, dragging his legs behind him, he pushed himself along. He was an open target for any sniper who chose to pick him off.

The shouts grew louder and hoarser. His bleeding fingers dug into the cobbles, but the pain in his leg fought against him. With every passing second he grew weaker. He clenched his teeth, sweat pouring down his face, and kept trying.

With his helmet thrust low and over his forehead all he could see were a pair of boots thudding towards him. He felt himself being lifted into the air. The ground and sky were spinning. Then he was dangling over someone's shoulder. Within seconds, he was over the barricades and looking at the owner of those boots. It was Lieutenant Florian.

"What are you trying to do?" Florian asked kneeling over Klaus. "Get yourself killed?"

Klaus' wound healed quickly. The bullet passed through the muscle in his thigh without hitting bone. He was sent back to Leipzig for convalescence. At the end of June, he was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. Since he was not restricted to the hospital, and Karin's home was only twenty minutes away by streetcar, Klaus set out to pay her a surprise visit. The familiar green and beige streetcars of Leipzig made him feel at home. He slowly climbed the stairs to her second floor apartment. When she opened the door and saw him, she burst into tears.

He spent the days in Leipzig resting, going to restaurants and movies with Karin, and walking in the park. The doctor examined Klaus after three months and released him to return to duty. He had three days to report to his Regiment in Altenburg. Karin went with him to the train station to bid him goodbye. He hated leaving her; he was more in love with her than ever. He was longing to tell her of his doubts about this war, his hatred for Nazism,

his sense of impending doom, but that would mean changing his whole character in her eyes. It would take time; it would have to wait.

"You are to report to your old battalion in France," announced the Colonel in charge of administration of Altenburg. "Only now, you will report as Oberleutenant, in charge of First Battery."

The Colonel smiled. Klaus was torn between delight and despair. Promoted in rank and responsibility as well. Wasn't that what he'd always wanted?"

"Congratulations!" he said extending his hand.

"Thank you, Sir." Klaus shook his Colonel's hand.

Klaus arrived in Paris on September 15<sup>th</sup>. He stayed there for three days before joining his old battalion in Soissons, a town in the Champagne region northeast of Paris. On his first night back, Major Krieg invited him to dinner.

"You missed the Victory Parade after the armistice," said the Major, pouring Klaus a glass of red wine.

"Yes," Klaus could imagine the wild enthusiasm of the soldiers.

"It was a real sight. All our men marching through the Arc de Triomphe and down the Champs Elysées. All the champagne!" added the Major. "Every officer got a bottle!" The Major raised his filled glass. "Congratulations on your new rank, Oberleutenant Schoon!"

"Thank you, Sir." They took a sip of the wine.

"Lorenz and Seeger got a promotion too. They've been assigned to the Second and Fifth Batteries. Many officers got promoted. General von Brauchitsch was awarded the title Field Marshall, so was General Reichenau, von Leeb, von Bock and Keitel."

"Keitel?" I didn't think he was in the field."

"He wasn't, but the Führer was feeling generous, I suppose."

"What about Lieutenant Florian?"

The Major put down his glass uncomfortably. "I'm afraid he didn't get anything."

Klaus looked puzzled. "But he saved my life!"

The Major shrugged, "I did my best. He's been assigned as your Lieutenant, though. So you'll be working together."

"I would have thought..." Klaus frowned and shook his head. "He risked his life to save me, under heavy enemy fire."

The Major closed the subject with a wave of his hand. "The General Staff are preparing for Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Britain, as we speak. Until this gets underway, our Corps is stationed here. Each unit is assigned an area of administrative responsibility in the occupied zone. Every Battery is posted to a different village in our region. Yours is Vinay. Oberleutenants Lorenz and Seeger are in neighboring towns. I'm based here in Soissons, and you'll report to me weekly." Klaus nodded. Operation Sea Lion. This war was going to last longer than anyone had imagined.

Lieutenant Florian reported to Klaus early the next morning. "Good to see you back, Sir," he smiled, clicking his heels to attention.

Klaus returned the smile. "At ease." Klaus scanned Florian's uniform for an Iron Cross, a badge, a ribbon, something; anything that acknowledged Florian's act of bravery. There was nothing. He stood and offered the man his hand.

"Florian, I want to thank you. I wouldn't have made it if it weren't for you."



Florian swallowed uncomfortably, his eyes dark and serious. His memory of the award ceremony was still bitter. So many of his fellow soldiers had received medals, many for trivial deeds.

"It was nothing, Sir," he replied trying to sound casual. "Just doing my duty."

"Maybe so, but I owe you my life. I'm proud to have you as my Lieutenant."

Florian hadn't been expecting this show of gratitude, and his expression relaxed. He smiled and said, "There's someone else who'll be happy to see you back, Sir," said Florian.

"Who's that?"

Florian went to the door, opened it and whistled. Kaiser came bounding into the office.

"Kaiser!" Klaus exclaimed, and the little dog leapt into his arms.

"He's been trailing along with us the whole time," said Florian. "Made himself popular with all the fellows."

Klaus rubbed the dog's ears while the animal wiggled with delight. "I guess we'll have to put you through infantry training like all the rest," said Klaus to Kaiser before putting him down on the floor.

"Now, let's go on with this move to Vinay, shall we?"

Klaus had no idea what to expect from the people of Vinay. He was very apprehensive about this occupation business, and wished he could talk about it with Lorenz and Seeger, but there was no time. The Battery set out right after reveille. Klaus rode in the lead with Florian. Kaiser rode on a gun carriage.

When they marched into the village, the people were waiting their arrival. Klaus halted his men, dismounted, and handed the reins to his orderly. An older man with a cane approached Klaus. He was short, portly and wore a formal black suit.

"Monsieur DuBois, Mayor of Vinay," the man introduced himself.

"Oberleutenant Schoon. *La guerre est finie our vous*," Klaus spoke softly in his stilted French. "I am assigned by the German Army to administer your village." He went on to say that he would need a place for his headquarters, housing for his troops and stables for his horses.

Monsieur DuBois was very accommodating. He told Klaus he had already been fully instructed to prepare for his arrival. He led the Battery to a château nearby, on the Marne River. The owner had fled the country when the fighting drew near. The château had stables for the horses, and outbuildings for troops and equipment.

Monsieur DuBois showed Klaus the brand new Buick in the garage and the château's extensive wine cellar.

"Please help yourself. The owner will not be back."

Klaus declined the offer with thanks, but the Mayor insisted. Finally they agreed on a token price of one franc per bottle of wine. For the Buick, Klaus would obtain army license plates form military Headquarters.

It was an excellent site. Klaus thanked Monsieur DuBois and invited him to dinner that same evening. The Mayor accepted in his gracious manner, and left to allow them to settle in.

The château had a classic Louis XIV façade and twenty rooms, all opulently furnished. The floors were covered in expensive rugs, making the sound of walking practically inaudible. Every bedroom had its own bath and a double bed! In Germany, twin

beds were *de rigueur*, so this caused much snickering among the men about the 'sultry French lifestyle'.

Klaus set himself up in two rooms, one his bedroom, the other an office. He delegated the rest to his officers. The troops bunked in the stables.

Mayor DuBois sent word that he would like to entertain the Germans that night at his house instead. "His house?" Klaus repeated, amused. "Ok." Perhaps it was a show of goodwill, perhaps he wanted to remind them of his status, or perhaps he didn't trust German Army cooking.

Klaus, Florian, and three other officers arrived at the Mayor's home at seven o'clock. They Mayor showed them in. He was a quiet, dignified man, and made them feel most welcome.

"Monsieur DuBois," Klaus began, wishing to dispel any possible tensions, "I am not here to replace you. I would like you to continue handling civil matters. All shops should reopen, and life should go on as normal. All I ask are a few simple things."

The Mayor eyed him carefully, waiting for the other shoe to drop. It didn't. Klaus continued, "The villagers must surrender their firearms to my headquarters tomorrow. Travel outside the village is restricted. However, if someone has legitimate needs, I will issue a *laissez-passer* for each on an individual basis. Our troops will pay for all our requirements in genuine currency, based on the official fixed rate of exchange. You may reassure your people, Monsieur DuBois; that so long as law and order are maintained no one needs to fear us. I give you my personal guarantee."

The Mayor nodded and smiled, and they all breathed a little easier.

Monsieur DuBois brought out several bottles of exquisite red wine. They dined on champagne escargots in herbed butter, Beouf Bourguignon, butter lettuce salad, and crêpes filled with vanilla poached pears and Chantilly cream. Klaus was now certain that the Mayor had feared having to endure a German Army meal. DuBois promised that his townspeople would deal honestly with the German soldiers. He was a compliant, somewhat reserved man. But who could expect him to be ecstatic, Klaus thought. The man's country had, after all, been just overrun. Klaus had to admit that being assigned such an agreeable French town was a stroke of good luck.

*October 12, 1940*

*My Dearest Karin,*

*I am surprised at how well the French people live. I hate to admit it, but much better than we Germans. At home everything is rationed. I scarcely have to tell you that food, clothing, gasoline. I can't think of many things here that are not, except for pasta, perhaps. Not here. Virtually everything can be bought without ration cards, and most food from the local farmers. I've gone to a tailor and ordered a new uniform, including two new pairs of riding breeches, and a pair of the finest riding boots; all made to measure, without any ration cards. They actually have the leather too. I'm starting to feel rather guilty about all this when I consider what you have to do without back home.*

*The other officers and I exercise our horses everyday with long rides through the local forests. They are a wilderness of magnificent stately chestnut trees and lush tall ferns.*

*Where there are no forests, there are vineyards. Besides food, wine is one of the principal joys of life here. In our free time, Lorenz and I have been exploring this world of viniculture. I am learning a good deal about the art of winemaking, and also about champagne and cognacs. So far I have learned about the 'robe of wine', it's 'flesh' and 'fabric' and of course, the 'bouquet'. You will be very impressed with me! When our Battery arrived in Vinay it was grape harvest time. People were stomping grapes in the same way they have for hundreds of years. The smell of fermenting grapes is musty and pervades the air. When the winemaking work comes to a showdown next month, the season for truffle hunting begins. Some people are already for this.*

*Vinay is a small town. There is only one restaurant/bar, frequented largely by an old dog like Kaiser torments, and twenty-seven pigeons. Like the locals, we often visit the patisserie and stuff ourselves with éclairs, petite fours and gâteau St. Honoré. The French really know how to live!*

*I love it here because it doesn't feel like war. I miss you and wish you could be here to enjoy all of this with me. One day when the war is over we will come back here together, and I will show you all these wonders. Until then, I think of you always, every day.*

*Love, Klaus*

The Battery resumed its peacetime schedule of training and manoeuvres. The troops had to be kept fit and occupied. The upcoming invasion of England was always in the back of Klaus' mind. They had to keep their skills sharp. He knew horse-drawn artillery would not be involved in an amphibious attack, but it was certain they would be called in once the beachheads were established on the English coast. Reports from the Luftwaffe bombing missions had been declaring victories all through the end of summer and into autumn. The invasion could take place at any time. But then, confusing information came through. The army had ordered seventeen divisions to disband, and had sent another eighteen on leave.

If Klaus hadn't missed Karin so much, his posting at Vinay would have been idyllic. There were no instances of resistance or sabotage, although he heard reports of that sort of thing occurring in Seeger's village. Lorenz suspected it was because of Seeger's brutish and uncompromising ways, and Klaus agreed.

At Klaus' château Headquarters, they ate brie, puff pastries, fois gras and every sort of delicacy the Army cooks, who were now in their element, could come up with. They drank the château's exquisite wines, and Klaus particularly enjoyed a 1929 Chamberlain. Once a month, Major Krieg hosted a dinner for all the officers under his command. On weekends, Klaus and Lorenz went pheasant hunting along the Marne River with the shotguns confiscated from the local populations. On these hunts, they passed historic villages with beautiful large medieval castles and many fine restaurants. Every second or third weekend, he and Lorenz took the Buick to Paris where it was much admired by the local girls. The troops often went to the capital too. It was short ride away and the fare was free for German soldiers.

In Paris there was an endless array of things to do. Klaus and Lorenz explored the various *quartiers*, the Château de Versailles, the Bois de Boulogne Gardens, and the Eiffel Tower. In the evening, there was the 'Lido', which had reopened after the armistice with a new show. Their favorite place to drink was the bar *Le Cavalier*, close to Le Champs Elysées, where they soon became regulars. Few other German soldiers went there. Klaus tried to avoid the types of watering holes Seeger frequented. It was embarrassing to him when drunken soldiers sang Nazi songs, pounding the tables and falling off their chairs. Once, when a fight had nearly broken out, he called in the military police and had the place cleared. For eating, he and Lorenz plumped for the charm of *Le Coq Hardi*. Others moved on to the *Miami* or to *Madame Ko-Ko's*, where they often picked up bellyache, scabies and venereal disease, the result of strange food, strange beds and stranger women.

Klaus and Lorenz discovered a jazz cellar called the 'New Orleans' where prohibited black American music was played into the early morning hours, as well as the new music called 'Swing'. Hitler detested Jazz and Swing was equally suspect. He outlawed them both, and Paris was inundated with the music of Wagner. In the underground nightlife, however, jazz flourished. Klaus' favorite was "In the Mood" by Glen Miller.

The Führer established an exchange rate highly favorable to the resident Germans, and Klaus used his war pay to buy things not available at home. He bought Karin silk stockings, fine fabrics, and lace. From Parisian salesgirls, he learned about fine perfumes, and what was *en vogue* or *démodé*. He purchased the latest scents; Chantilly by Houbigant, Cordon Noir by Coty, and Sleeping by Schiaparelli. For his mother he bought leather gloves and a fine wool coat.

Throughout the winter, Klaus built up a collection of fine wines and cognacs. In the local vineyards of Champagne and other regions, he bought rare bottles that would never even come on the market. His collection of Burgundies, Champagnes, Cognacs and Armagnacs, some in mouth-blown glass with handwritten labels, was growing to nearly 1,000 bottles.

Toward the end of March, Klaus reported to Major Krieg as usual.

"There is good news for you," announced the Major. "You have a seventeen day furlough coming."

Klaus was delighted. He and Karin had been writing letters back and forth for so long. They'd even planned that on his next furlough they would meet at Lake Constance for a holiday.

"Enjoy yourself, Oberleutenant," the Major smiled and shook Klaus' hand, "and make sure you refresh yourself. When you return, the Division will move to East Prussia.

Klaus nodded at the Major, puzzled. Didn't a state of war still exist in Britain? Why East Prussia? But at the moment, with his furlough the priority, he didn't spend much time pounding the last whimsical designs of the Army.

## Chapter 20 Across the Ocean

It was early afternoon on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1940 and Winston Churchill was sitting at his desk. He carefully flicked the ash from a large cigar with one hand while tapping impatiently on the desk with the other, the ring on his fourth finger making a sharp, staccato sound as it hit the wooden surface repeatedly. He picked up the telephone.

“Tell the chauffeur to wait,” he shouted angrily into the receiver.

The door opened and Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary came slowly into the room.

“Good afternoon, Prime Minister,” he began.

“Those damn French!” Churchill bellowed.

“Indeed so, Prime Minister. I’ve just been informed that our worst fears have been realized. It’s my melancholy duty to tell you that France has capitulated at twelve forty today.”

Churchill took a thin gold watch attached to a massive gold linked chain from his waistcoat pocket. It was ten past one.

“Bah,” he growled. “We shall do better without the French than with them.” By now a cascade of ash stains has collected down the front of his waistcoat.

Halifax cleared his throat, “Err, Prime Minister, I have to tell you frankly that some members of the Cabinet are showing clear signs of discontent regarding the conduct of the war.” He scrutinized the Prime Minister’s face carefully for a sign of a reaction. “I believe there might be a window of opportunity opening to allow us to negotiate with Hitler, therefore...”

Churchill rose scowling from his chair and cut him off in mid-sentence. “We are going to fight Hitler,” he said, thumping the desk with his fist to emphasize the point, “until he is well and truly finished and that is that.”

“Prime Minister, have you read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*?”

“What? What’s that got to do with anything? Why should I want to read such trash?”

“In it,” Lord Halifax continued, “he declares his admiration of Great Britain. He admires the professionalism of the British soldier and the efficiency of the British Empire. He professes his desire to live in peaceful harmony with us. He wishes our empire to flourish in exchange for our yielding domination of the Eurasian land mass to Germany.”

“You really are naïve, Halifax,” retorted Churchill. “The world is a very small place. There is no room in it for two competing empires. It is our duty to ensure that it is the *British Empire* which will prevail. And the only way we can ensure that is through the destruction of Hitler and his mighty army. If we don’t use every means possible, Hitler will succeed eventually in taking over our colonies throughout the Empire.

The crowds, all carefully selected German speakers and Germany sympathizers, were cheering wildly.

Heydrich continued to fume. “Look at Neurath! Standing up next to the Führer!”

“I have decided to appoint Baron Konstantin von Neurath as Reichsprotector of the provinces of Bohemia and Moravia,” the Führer continued. He’d announced it to his staff at the banquet the previous night. “To pacify the West. To keep them off our backs. They know he’s a peace-loving man. They’ll feel less threatened when they learn he’s in charge.”

Heydrich felt like the carpet had been pulled out from underneath him.

Driven by his burning sense of ambition, he had worked night and day for eight years to expand the strength and influence of the SS. As the day of the invasion dawned, Heydrich planned that he would emerge from Himmler's shadow to become Protector of the new territory. It would be his first step in becoming a major figure in shaping the destiny of the New Europe.

I do all the dirty work, he thought bitterly to himself. Squashing all political opposition in Czechoslovakia, and what do I get in return? His eyes drilled into Neurath contemptuously.

The position should have been his by right. He'd even constructed an acceptable speech in anticipation of the appointment. It was still lying folded up in his pocket. The Führer had taken that worn out old fool out of cold storage and made *him* Protector.

"Damn you Neurath! I'll get you for this," he muttered. "Make no mistake about it. I'm going to get you!"

He pushed his way through the cheering crowds and left the square.

Heydrich entered the office of the Czechoslovak Intelligence to find it completely cleared out and abandoned. The filing cabinets were empty and not a single piece of paper remained. In the courtyard an immense pile of ashes and charred remains of paper was already covered by a layer of snow. There was no trace of its Chief, General Frantisék Moravec. "Those lousy Czechs have put one over us," Heydrich grumbled. "Someone's tipped them off."

From his temporary headquarters in the Hradshin Castle, Heydrich sent forth his bloodhounds to search for the enemies of National Socialism.

He carefully exploited Schellenberger's ambitions to further his own interests. His deputy was given a more prominent role than he'd had before. Heydrich began to put together a scheme which would ferret out the spies who had betrayed the Reich and also spin a web of treachery which would ensnare and bring down Neurath.

Over the next week Schellenberger avoided speaking to his boss unless it was absolutely necessary. Experience had taught him that it was wise to avoid the man when he was in one of his vitriolic moods.

Instead he buried himself in his work. He was silently nursing his own disappointment. He hoped that with Heydrich's promotion to Protector, he would be awarded for his months of groundwork with the position of State Secretary. But it was not to be.

Heydrich knew all about his deputy's ambition. He had an instinctive awareness of the foibles and weaknesses of others. From the start they inhabited a devious mutually dependent relationship much like Heydrich's own relationship with Himmler.

A week after the occupation, Schellenberger was already busy reviewing the transcripts and case reports of the 1600 arrested made so far by the Gestapo. The fruits of his *Action Groups*. The telephone on his desk rang. He picked up the receiver.

"It's been a long week," sighed Heydrich. I'm tired. How about going out for some dinner and then maybe we can go places?"

Schellenberger knew what his boss meant by going places. He wasn't averse to having a bit of fun himself but dreaded accompanying Heydrich on his epic binges in the red light district. He could be dangerously unpredictable when drunk and even downright

depraved. No prostitute would ever go with him twice despite his high-ranking status. He would abandon himself completely and lose every ounce of judgment.

"Well, I don't know," he said. "I need to get on with these reports..."

"Nonsense, you can do those tomorrow. I insist."

There was no refusing. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad tonight after all. Heydrich seemed to be over the worst of his mood now.

"Ok."

They had dinner at the Golden Pear, a small restaurant tucked away in the old streets below the Castle. Unusual for Heydrich, the conversation did not center on work. Tonight there was no shoptalk. Instead he talked incessantly about his other passion; his new stunt plane, its three-bladed propellers, its variable pitch and the latest in new technology, methanol fuel injection to counter stalling during steep climbs.

It was a subject of no interest at all to Schellenberger. He listened in silence.

When they'd finished their dinner Heydrich wiped his mouth with his napkin and winked across the table to his deputy.

"The ladies are waiting for us," he grinned.

They made their way to a seedy bar in the Zizkov district.

The place was dark and filled with smoke. Heydrich picked a table in a far corner. The barman greeted him as a regular. A young prostitute with bright red lips and long painted nails was sitting at the bar. When she set eyes on Heydrich, her face froze. Then, as if stung by a wasp, she jumped up, snatched her handbag and disappeared.

Schellenberger's eyes followed her for a moment before turning back to Heydrich. Heydrich showed no response.

"Two dark ales," Heydrich called to the barman as he sat down. Schellenberger bristled. He would have preferred a brandy. It was bad enough having to submit to Heydrich's domineering ways at work without having to put up with it in his free time as well. But once again, he bit his lip and said nothing.

"Cheers!" Heydrich raised his mug and they both took a drink. Then a strange silence descended. Schellenberger saw Heydrich's back stiffened and his expression change, turning almost reptilian. His eyes burned into those of his deputy.

"Well, now that we're nice and comfortable," Heydrich's voice was icy and malevolent, "maybe you should tell me about the fun you had the day after I left you at Fehmarn."

Something was very wrong. Schellenberger answered with trepidation. "Lake Plöner is as pretty as they say..."

"Don't try to make a fool out of *me*. I put a lethal dose of poison in your ale. It will kill you in six hours.

Schellenberger glanced at his half empty mug. A hallow feeling hit the pit of his stomach.

"However," Heydrich paused for effect. He gave his companion an icy smile before continuing. "If you tell me the truth, the whole and absolute truth, whatever it is, about your excursion with my wife that day on Lake Plöner after I left, then I'll give you the antidote."

Schellenberger looked at him in disbelief.

"I want the truth. Do you understand me? The *truth!*"

Was this some sort of sinister frame up? He knew only too well how *anything* he said could and would be used against him. Schellenberger's heart began to beat wildly. Trying hard to control himself, he spoke in as calm a voice as he could muster.

"After the conference you will remember that it was *you* who suggested I stay on because I still had another day's leave. It was also *you* who suggested I talk to your wife."

"That's right," said Heydrich stretching out his arms across the back of the chair. "What I want to know is what exactly went on between you and Lina after I left."

"But..."

"I want the *truth*."

"*Nothing* happened! I went to see Lina and we had coffee."

"What did you talk about?"

"Music. The symphony program, I think."

"I see." Heydrich was listening attentively. His face was as expressionless as ever, impossible to read. He must look like that when he interrogated his victims, thought Schellenberger. "After coffee you both went to Lake Plöner. Why are you hiding that? Surely you must know you were being watched the whole time."

"No, I didn't know, but I can't say I'm surprised!" He was growing angry now. "Anyway, I've nothing to hide. What do you think I did? Did your spy also tell you that we went swimming? Did he tell you that afterwards we played volleyball with some other bathers?"

Schellenberger was incensed. He felt he wasn't far off throwing the rest of his tainted ale into Heydrich's face.

Heydrich gave him a mirthless smile. "What you have said is correct. I telephoned Lina who gave me the same story and the information given to me by the officer is identical.

Schellenberger let out a huge sigh of relief.

But Heydrich hadn't finished yet. "When did you leave Fehmarn?" he pressed.

"I checked out of the hotel at about eight the next morning. I arrive in Berlin before noon and went to my office to lock up the dossiers from the conference in the safe. Is that *all* you want to know?" His tone was sarcastic.

"Well, I suppose I believe you but I would like your word of honor that you will never attempt a similar escapade with Lina again."

"Under the circumstances, that amounts to blackmail," Schellenberger retorted. "First give me the antidote, and then I'll give you my work of honor. As a former naval officer, do you think it honorable to do otherwise?"

Heydrich winced at the reference to his honor and still more to the reminder of his unhappy career with the navy. He regarded Schellenberger impassively for a long time before gesturing at last to the barman. He hurried over and presented Schellenberger with another full glass of dark ale which presumably contained the antidote. He drank it in one gulp with a grimace. It was even bitterer tasting than the first glass.

Schellenberger gave his word of honor and added a few more excuses and explanations for good measure.

"No more apologies." Heydrich's expression cracked almost into a smile and he ordered another round of the dreaded dark ale.

It was the morning of July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1939 and President Edvard Benec stared out gloomily out of his window in the small London flat which Chamberlain's government had



provide for his use. Great Britain had agreed to grant him asylum on the condition that he did not involve himself in any kind of political activity. He was therefore safely away from the Nazis but completely prevented from continuing to service his own people.

There was a ring on the doorbell and there stood Benec's close friend and ally Frank Moravec.

Moravec's Czechoslovak Intelligence had been working in close cooperation for several years with the British Special Intelligence Service. Because of this historical connection the SIS had recognized the Czechoslovak Intelligence organization from the outset. They continued to do so despite the Foreign Office's refusal to recognize Benec as a leader of a government-in-exile or even as a representative of his people.

"I've given some thought to our dilemma Frank," said Benec. "I'm not going to roll over and give up just because the British have told me to. I'm going to lie low for a while. It won't be long before they come to their senses and see it's in her own best interests to recognize our government.

"Hmm." Moravec sounded less than convinced. "I'm not sure it will happen quite like that, not without our providing them with good reason."

"You're quite right. That's why I've come to see you. Our Intelligence has been valuable to the allies before and we'll show them we can be just as valuable now. Not just to Britain, but to France, the United States and even the Soviet Union."

"With all due respect, Mr. President, our plan may be a good one, but what you suggest is easier said than done. For a start, our radio contacts with Czechoslovakia are very precarious. I lose contact with whole regions every time the Germans discover one of our radios. Even the main transmitter at Karpal only gets on the air intermittently. To avoid being detected they only transmit when there's something really urgent to communicate. The fact of the matter is that the screws are tightening around what's left of our network at home and information is becoming very scrappy."

"But surely we can draw on our agents from around the rest of Europe."

"Yes. They do give us some valuable information but we've lost the jewel in our Intelligence crown. Felix is gone.

Benec was now even more morose than before. He had banked on his friend to help him accomplish his plan. He had not realized the extent of the Czech Intelligence Service's weakness.

"Look Frank, do whatever you can." He let out a deep sigh of exasperation. "I don't have to tell you there'll be a war as sure as the sun rises in the east. And the Germans will lose in the bloody end because they have a lunatic leading them. If we fail to keep our government on an even keel now, I'll tell you what will happen. One of two things. Either those communist jackals at home will take charge when everything's over or the country will be carved up between Germany, Poland and the Soviets. We'll be wiped off the map!"

"I'll do what I can," said the General.

Despite his best efforts Moravec was able to obtain only scant information from this network. His days began at six o'clock in the morning at the Woldingham radio center and often ended in the small hours of the next morning. He kept up the pressure on his agents across the whole of the European continent. He analyzed their information and compared it with what he learned from the SIS. Yet the most enormous efforts yielded only a few small drops of valuable information.

To make their task even more difficult, Moravec learned in late August that Polish Intelligence had handed over an extraordinary piece of intelligence to the British SIS. It was a copy of Germany's Enigma code machine plus keys to its daily settings and the *bomba*, a mechanical computer which could decode its ciphers in under two hours. To his amazement, he discovered that Polish Intelligence had been using the Enigma machine to monitor top secret German military and SS communications since 1932!

However, to maintain security, the Germans periodically made changes to the encoding machine. Each time this required huge efforts on the part of the Polish mathematicians to crack the code once again. In December 1938, the Germans added two more wheels to the original three rotors. The Polish mathematical wizards went to work again but it was now a race against time to solve the code before war broke out. The two additional wheels vastly increased the number of possible permutations. They soon realized that they wouldn't be able to solve it in time without additional help. That's when they handed it all over to the British.

The news was a hard blow to Moravec and the Czechs in exile. With the Poles now firmly established at the center of Intelligence activity, he found himself and his own network relegated to the sidelines.

It was two weeks after the fall of Poland when Moravec was in Woldingham talking on the radio to one of his agents in Turkey. An aide brought a letter through. He opened it and read:

*Dear Uncle,*

*I think I'm in love. I have met a girl named Lore and she's the most beautiful girl I've ever known. We went on a picnic last Sunday. I hope she'll say yes when I ask her to go to the cinema with me.*

*Yours truly,  
Felix*

Moravec's hands were shaking by the time he'd finished reading the letter. He hurried from the transmitter room and went to find his code specialist who would chemically treat the paper so as to show up any writing there might be in secret ink. He paced about impatiently as his colleagues carefully placed the piece of paper in a tray filled with a pungent smelling liquid. Sure enough, between the widely spaced lines of Felix's letter, new words gradually began to appear.

*Germany preparing to attack Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland. Date tentatively set as November 12...*

Felix's message continued to give brief indications of the direction of the proposed thrusts, the numbers of German armored and mechanized divisions involved and even the names of the divisional commanders.

Felix had come through for them at last! Now Moravec had some hope of putting Benec and his provisional government onto a better footing.

Over the weeks and months that followed Felix sent a string of love letters to his 'Dear Uncle' in London keeping him up to date about the unfolding events of his romance. Between the lines, in secret ink, were the latest German military mobilization and directives from the Chancellery.

Like dominoes, the countries of Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland all fell before the night of the *Wehrmacht*.

Benec reaped the benefits of the sterling work of his Intelligence Service and in December, he finally succeeded in achieving one of his aims. The Allies recognized him as the representative of the Czechoslovak people. It was a nominal gesture to the formal President, though leaving him still far behind the Poles, who were the heroes of the day and had an officially recognized government-in-exile. Nevertheless, it was a first step.

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Moravec received another longwinded letter from his 'nephew'.

*Dear Uncle,*

*I spent most of Easter with my Lore. We are beginning to think of getting married. She is so pretty. I'm so much in love with her. As to her family...*

Moravec could not believe the message that came up between the lines.

*Main German attack on France to be launched in the center through the Ardennes, panzer units to cross river Meuse north of Sedan headed toward the Channel. A diversionary attack by the right wing to draw the Allied armies into Belgium, genuine attack force heading west to entrap them. Mass production of new Stuka bomber model with methanol injection, incendiary bombs, and 10,100 lbs. explosive bombs. The bombing of England next. If softening by air is successful, to be followed by Operation Sea Lion, surface invasion of England.*

President Benec took this information to the British and the French. But no matter how earnestly he urged the French to mobilize their defenses, they doubted the reliability of the information and declined to do so. They argued that the line of attack described by Felix was far too risky for the Germans and therefore they decided to disregard it.

The German attack on France went entirely according to plan. Actually, it went even better than that. Their advance was once again rapid and devastating. Tank divisions seized from the Czechs tore deep into French territory. Czechoslovak planes flew overhead and dropped Czech made bombs on French towns and cities.

As Felix predicted, France was quickly overrun and paralyzed.

The British, who had by April cracked the new Enigma codes, were listening in on German communications from the front. They realized by May 20<sup>th</sup> that the battle for France was lost. Sending any more troops to the front would amount to just throwing them away. Churchill ordered the evacuation of British forces at Dunkirk and three hundred and forty thousand men were saved.

France capitulated to the Germans on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1940. To underline their humiliation, the French was made to sign the surrender document in the same Wagon-Lit of the Orient Express where Marshall Foch had signed the German Armistice in 1918.

On July 21<sup>st</sup>, Britain's new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill recognized Benec as the head of the Czech government-in-exile.

All summer Felix wrote to his 'Uncle' about the developing German plans for the invasion of England. The plans were still in a state of constant flux and the details were changed weekly. But by July the first daytime air raids began on ports, industrial installations, military objectives and bridges. Whenever the weather was favorable, waves of German bombers protected by hundreds of fighter planes surged over England. At Bletchley Park, some fifty miles northwest of London, dozens of men and women worked furiously around the clock listening in to secret German Enigma communications. The loud rumbling of the new generation English *bombe* machine accelerated the speed of deciphering. Bespectacled men in offices read the intercepted messages while armed guards stood outside their doors. The code-breakers puzzled over the mumbo-jumbo of letter groupings, scribbling complex equations incomprehensible to all but the most skilled equations incomprehensible to all but the most skilled mathematicians. They toiled for hour after hour without interruption. When finally satisfied with their solution, they would hand the decoded text to their political masters.

By the time air attacks began, Britain had another powerful secret weapon in the arsenal of defense. Radar. Stretching along the southern and eastern coasts of the Isle of Wight to north of the Tees was a chain of radar stations able to detect the precise course and speed of approaching German aircraft.

The combination of Enigma information and radar deployment allowed the desperately outnumbered RAF to intercept and shot down the massive Luftwaffe attacks with unerring accuracy.

Something smelled wrong. Heydrich had been watching the progress of the air war over Britain closely. In the beginning everything seemed to be going fine. The bombers were hitting their targets with a fairly good degree of accuracy, despite substantial losses of planes and men from anti-aircraft fire and the RAF. To curb these losses the Luftwaffe had to switch their bombing missions from daytime to nighttime and employ a radio guidance system for navigation. The change did succeed in diminishing losses, but, as Heydrich observed, it also diminished bombing accuracy. But still the RAF had an uncanny ability of finding German bomber squadrons in the night, even under heavy cloud cover. He sensed the British were onto something. He didn't know what exactly but was determined to find out.

In late October, Heydrich decided to go to the Vannes Luftwaffe Base in occupied France to do some surreptitious investigation. He called the Base Commander and informed him he was coming out to his base to study the radio beam systems. Few people ever saw Heydrich's face because, unlike the more flamboyant Goebbels and Goering, he rarely went to Nazi social functions. He instructed the Base Commander to keep his arrival to himself. He did not wish to be recognized.

The first mission to return to Vannes after Heydrich's arrival was from Liverpool. The reconnaissance photos taken the next day showed that half the targets had been

missed. Now Heydrich was certain he was onto something. Were the British now deflecting the bombers somehow from their targets? If so, how did they know what the targets were? Perhaps they had inside information, perhaps there was an enemy agent working somewhere inside the Luftwaffe itself. Or had they broken the Enigma codes? No. That was impossible. The Enigma codes were unbreakable. And yet...?

Then there was the puzzling problem of how the RAF fighters seemed to know the precise location and formation of incoming Luftwaffe raids. Did they have some kind of special detection system?

The sun streamed through the tall windows of the briefing room. A coffee urn rested on the side table flanked by bottles of cognac and schnapps. An original oil painting of Adolf Hitler hung above the table, a reminder to every pilot that he should give his all to the Fatherland.

Heydrich entered the empty room, poured himself some coffee and sat down to watch a squadron of Messerschmitt 109s take off and fly away in tight formation.

It was a marvelous thing to be a flier he thought. It was more than being a soldier. Fliers did things ordinary people couldn't do. They were different. He knew the feeling well. When he pulled his own plane high above the clouds he felt he could spit on everything down below him. It was a good feeling.

The fliers' battle was more personal than the battle of soldiers on the ground he thought. Many people considered fliers to be conceited and arrogant. So what? Why shouldn't they be? They were doing something that most men couldn't or wouldn't attempt. And there was another thing no one could deny. It was dangerous. They lived a more dangerous life than everybody else, so they had every right in the world to feel superior.

The Messerschmitt 109s disappeared and he went to find an easy chair to read up on the operation of the night flight guidance system XGer@t, the most sophisticated bombing and guidance system in the world. The room was quiet except for the sound of two voices coming from the Base Commander's office down the hall. From the tone of the voices he could tell that it was a heated discussion.

"I've received a call from bomber command," he heard the Base Commander say. "They're complaining our fighter escorts are straying too far away. It's making their men downright nervous. They're too vulnerable to Spitfire attack if you guys are so far away."

"Oh, for God's sake! How many times..." The other voice sounded like that of Langer, the fighter squadron C.O.

"The Heinkel bombers are unarmed. You're there to protect them."

"You know as well as I do Commandant, that if our fighter planes are forced to fly at 23,000 feet alongside the bombers *and* at their slow speed, then we can't fly straight. The Messerschmitt is a fighter plane. It is built for speed. We have to weave around just to keep up enough speed to stop us falling like stones from the sky."

"I know. I know..." sighed the Base Commander.

"If they want us to stay close why don't we fly at a lower altitude?"

"Too dangerous; flak fire. I realize it's frustrating Langer, but we have a clear order from Field Marshall Goering."

"But he hasn't flown a plane in over twenty years! We're not flying World War I antiques!"

"He's been told all about the problems but he insists."

“The way we’re conducting our escort missions is contrary to the basic function of fighter aircrafts,” said Langer in exasperation. “It doesn’t make proper use of the machine. But I’ve given it some thought and I have a proposal.”

“Ok. Go ahead.”

The roar of a fighters squadron taking off drowned out what Langer was saying. So he was right. There was more to this than meet the eyes, thought Heydrich. Things always were more complex than they appeared. The roar of engines faded away now. Langer was still talking.

“...aside from the speed and altitude problem, having us all massed together like that makes us sitting ducks waiting to be shot down by the RAF. And believe me they find us; usually half way across the Channel or on our approach to the coastline. I don’t know how they know where to find us but they always do. One minute there’s a clear blue sky and the next there’s dozens of them in our face, swarming all around us. And here’s where I come to my point. Where are our fighters? Sitting on our asses, all nicely bunched up in tight formation so they can mow us all down? They have the advantage of surprise, initiative and superior altitude. Our losses, both fighters and bombers, are much higher than what they should be. It’s downright embarrassing that the RAF is shooting us up so successfully when we’re the ones who are the seasoned pilots and they’re the rookies. Christ! More than half the men at this base were in the Condor Legion in Spain. Almost everyone has had combat experience in Poland, France and the Low Countries.”

“You think I enjoy sitting here at this base, waiting for each mission to return, wondering how many of my men are not going to come back! And all because of some stupid orders!” The Commander was becoming quite angry himself.

Langer softened his tone a little. He knew he had the Commander’s sympathy.

A group of boisterous pilots entering the briefing room drowned out the rest of the conversation. But Heydrich had heard enough. It had reinforced his old prejudices about the military establishment. At the top they were all a bunch of incompetent idiots, their minds too inflexible to learn new ways. Especially Goering. He spent more time wondering what new uniform to parade around in than giving good field direction. Soon, thought Heydrich slyly, the Reich would need a new and stronger hand on the rudder.

More than that, having heard Langer’s combat observations, Heydrich was no certain that the British had access to some sort of German Intelligence or had an early warning system for air raids. Possibly both. He had to find out more.

Heydrich tossed the one inch thick *Pilots Radio Beam Operations Handbook* on the side table and went to observe the briefing session for the next mission.

For the previous forty eight hours in Bletchley Park a fury of activity had overtaken all those who were working to decipher the latest Enigma intercepts on *Night Hawk*. Over the past weeks a great deal of information had been obtained via Enigma traffic about a new guidance system that was about to be introduced. There were also sketchy references to a forthcoming massive Luftwaffe attack. Despite the profusion of information, two critical pieces of the puzzle were still missing only hours before the planes destined for England were due to take off from Vannes. Where were the target and what was the frequency of the radio guidance beam being used that night? Without this knowledge it was impossible to set the radio jamming devices accurately and so deflect the bombers and minimize damage. The mathematicians scribbled furiously, the *bombe* machines rumbled

and scores of red-eyed cryptographers worked desperately to crack the code in time. The seconds ticked by as last minute calculations were made. The British were still guessing.

Then half an hour before the Luftwaffe took off from Vannes, they broke the code.

It was past midnight and Heydrich was still typing. He wanted to get the report on his findings in Vannes to the Führer as soon as possible. The significance of the enemy possessing the key to the Enigma machine was mind boggling. The Germans used it to transmit every single one of their orders, every top secret piece of information, every field command, and every communication with headquarters. *Everything*.

'The enemy has the means to know all our operations as soon as we give the orders'. He pounded away at the keys, 'The success of our operations, the number of casualties incurred and the amount of material lost is entirely...'

He stopped in mind sentence. Where would this report get him? More precisely, how much to his advantage would it be to reveal his findings at this point in time? The *Wehrmacht* would simply change their codes. It was as simple as changing the locks on your house. Perhaps Goering would be persuaded to change flight tactics. And then what? He would get a pat on the back for a job well done and that would be that.

That wasn't good enough.

This information was the most precious he'd ever come across. It was staggering; it's worth was almost immeasurable. He would not throw it away.

Heydrich pulled half the typed report out of the typewriter and tore it up. He would wait for the right moment. He had to get something. Something really big in return for this. Yes, he would wait.

He turned off the light. Tomorrow he would resume his efforts against Neurath in Prague instead.

Despite unprecedented bombing of their cities, the British people remained resolute and defiant. The country was united as never before. Men and women toiled in factories till they had to be ordered home with exhaustion. Their island had not been invaded for a thousand years and they were not going to let it happen now.

The fierce resistance put up by the British and the failure of the Luftwaffe to knock out armament production or affect civilian morale convinced Adolf Hitler to put off indefinitely the planned invasion, Operation Sea Lion. Even though the bombing raids continued, the code breakers knew that the invasion plan had failed. Field Marshall Goering remained totally stunned at his failure to achieve supremacy of the skies over Britain.

But despite this setback the German war machine remained unstoppable. For nearly two years, country over country in Europe fell like dominoes. France, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg all yielded to the Reich. Hitler, by turns petulant and charismatic was now totally convinced of his own infallibility. His tanks continued to rumble forward.

In February 1941, Moravec opened yet another one of Felix's letters. He assumed it would be another piece of information regarding the latest modifications of Luftwaffe aircraft. But when he got the letter back from his code specialists he jumped from his chair and called out to his secretary with unrestrained glee.

"Yes! Ha! Yes!" he shouted. "Call the President. Tell him I'm coming over to see him right away."

Moravec sped through the streets of London in his Austin saloon and came to a screeching halt outside Benec's house. He raced up the steps and knocked sharply on the door. The President's wife opened it in alarm.

"General. Come in. Come in. We heard you wanted to see my husband urgently."

"Yes, great news!" said Moravec. Benec appeared behind his wife and invited him into his study.

"What is it?"

"We've just got a letter from Felix. Here, read it for yourself," he handed the letter to Benec. The President read it eagerly.

*Operation Barbarossa. The invasion of the USSR is planned for June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941 and will be conducted on three main offensive thrusts.*

1. *To the north against Leningrad;*
  2. *Through White Russia against Moscow;*
  3. *To the South through the Ukraine to Kiev*
- One hundred and fifty five divisions are to be deployed.*

The letter went on to describe battle orders, mobilization plans and details of tank deployment.

Benec sat down at this desk after reading the letter and Moravec noticed an expression of satisfaction on his face that he had not seen since the outbreak of war.

"You know Frank; this is both wonderful *and* terrible news. Wonderful because it means that Germany will commit suicide over this. Terrible because it will be the worst bloodbath in history!"

Benec took the news to Winston Churchill straight away. The Prime Minister poured himself a whisky.

"Are you sure the Soviets will be able to hold out? Don't forget that Stalin's just finished his purges. One way or another, he's got rid of thirty thousand of his officers!"

"They'll hold out all right." Benec tried hard to sound confident though deep down he was worried too. "They're certain to suffer early losses but in the end the Soviets will prevail. The Kremlin is not well known for lying down and giving in."

The Prime Minister found small consolation in Benec's reassurances. Instead he reached for another whisky. "I'll send an envoy to inform Stalin of this right away," he said.

The envoy returned some days later and Benec went to pay a visit to Churchill at No. 10 Downing Street. The secretary led Benec up the wide stairway and took him into the Prime Minister's office. Churchill's cluttered room smelled of old books, leather and cigars. The Prime Minister was behind his desk rattling a scotch on the rocks when Benec walked in.

"Hello, Benec. You're just in time for the first round," he called. A wide grin lit up his flushed jowl face. "Please, have a seat." He rose from his desk and walked to the side table where he poured Benec a drink. A warm breeze stirred the curtains and brought in a waft of cool evening air.



“Well, I suppose you want to know what Stalin had to say,” he said handling the tumbler to Benec. Churchill sat down heavily in his armchair and puffed at the stump of his cigar. “He was not exactly ecstatic to hear the news, Edvard.”

Benec stared at Churchill in astonishment.

“Are you serious?”

“Quite serious,” he growled. “He told our envoy that the West concerns itself too much in the affairs of the East. He says that if there are any differences between himself and Herr Hitler, then they will solve the problem peacefully between themselves.”

Benec grunted. “So what does he think all the German divisions bunched up at his borders are there for?”

“It was something he didn’t wish to discuss,” said Churchill fiddling with the thick gold chain across his belly.

Benec shook his head sadly. Stalin’s amazing smugness was simply staggering.

“We should have stopped him sooner.” Churchill ground his cigar stub into a shiny brass jar of sand and lit a new one, puffing clouds of blue smoke as he got it burning. “We could have stopped him years ago when we could; he was nothing more today than a ragged tramp muttering to himself in a squalid hostel. But now it’s not so easy.” Churchill was still not convinced that the Soviets would be able to withstand the might of a full-scale German onslaught.

“If Germany does attack the Soviet Union,” asked Benec tactfully, “will England help Russia?”

Churchill gazed enigmatically over his half-moon glasses. Benec wondered if he’d guessed correctly. He’d suspected that the Allied might be tempted to let the Russians bleed to death under the German onslaught. It might represent a very convenient way of ensuring the complete liquidation of Communism in Europe.

“No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have.” Churchill said, “And I won’t take a back a single word I’ve said. But nothing will turn me aside from my single, irrevocable purpose, to destroy Hitler and every vestige of the Nazi regime. Any enemy who fights him can be sure of receiving our aid. Russia’s danger is Britain’s danger.”

Benec went away from the meeting feeling just a little relieved.

What was the German soldier thinking on that hot, muggy, dusty day of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1942? Certainly he was smug, certainly he was confident. Certainly he was supremely arrogant. He was part of a superlative army which had swept through Western Europe. France had been prostrated and England humbled. The vast lands of Russia would now easily crumble before their onslaught.

Operation Barbarossa had not been brought together on a whim or in a day. The frontline was 1300 miles long. It was the longest in the history of warfare and it stretched from East Prussia on the Baltic down through occupied Poland to Romania on the Black Sea. Germany had put together the largest striking force ever assembled.

Russia is a land of extremes. A land where the sun never sets. When it is dusk in the West it is already dawn on the Eastern shores. It is a land which stretches half way around the world from East to West. It stretches from the Arctic Circle to the borders of India. It occupies a total of nine million square miles and has a population of 193 million people.

Russia measured her military might in an order of similar magnitude. She had sixteen million men in uniform an air force as large as the rest of Europe's put together.

But the Germans were neither frightened nor fooled. Hitler told his Generals that they only had to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure would come falling down. Stalin's unrelenting purges of the 1930s had resulted in the execution or imprisonment of almost every officer from Marshall down to company commander. Their army was virtually leaderless.

At dawn on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, when the first guns started firing, it came as a huge shock to Stalin. The rest of Europe looked on in astonishment at Russia's lack of preparedness. For how could an army of 16 million be assembled on his borders without him having appeared to notice it? But Stalin, who had held Hitler's coat while he bloodied his nose in the West, had never expected the German dictator to turn on him.

By noon on the first day, 1200 airplanes were destroyed as they say on their airfields. The great panzer divisions raced in and found they were advancing as fast as their vehicles could travel. It was even easier than the invasion of Poland.

They were soon to destroy more divisions, inflict more casualties and take more prisoners than any army in history. The freshly dug Russian trenches served little more purpose than to provide graves for the men who dug them. Though the Russians had rockets and tanks, they had no one left who knew how to man them. They had pilots flying with as little as 15 hours air training. Soon Stalin was turning his slave labor camps upside down in a search for officers. Any officer would do; anyone who had a loud enough voice to shout a command.

Early in the fighting it became clear that this would be a war fought entirely without compassion or any sense of soldierly honor. In the choking kerosene and cordite fumes, in the flesh numbing cold, it was turning into a war which would soak the earth with the lifeblood of nameless millions. A war which would tear out the soul of everyone caught up in those terrible, inhuman events.

The German *Wehrmacht* did not enter the Soviet Union alone. Behind each division were action groups dispatched on special assignment to liquidate communist leaders, gypsies, other undesirables, but above all Jews. These units, by now highly organized and numbering 3,000 men, were Heydrich's Einsatzgruppen. They were answerable only to him.

It was with a grim resignation that Churchill, Benec and Moravec received the catastrophic news reports from the eastern front.

Within three weeks the German armies were a stone's throw away from Kiev in the south and Leningrad in the north. The central arm of the advance had covered 450 miles in their march towards Moscow. Soon, reports of over half a million Russian prisoners being taken began to filter back. Then news came that seventy Soviet divisions had been trapped.

The first three weeks saw terrible Russian casualties amounting to nothing less than massacres. The Russians never said how many died. Probably they didn't even know.

The reports from Felix were no more encouraging. Hitler was so confident of victory that he ordered the armament industries to shift from producing army assault weapons and vehicles to the renewed production of submarines and aircraft. It would appear that Hitler was about to turn his attentions back to his earlier plan of invading Britain.

Benec's Czech government-in-exile was officially recognized by the Soviet Union in August 1941 but it was a stroke of dubious good fortune. Pressure was now applied on Benec to organize sabotage at home to disrupt the ever-growing Czech armament industry. Both Russia and Britain had suffered from Czech made bombs falling on them. The Soviets had been overcome by Czech manufactured tanks. But the President knew that such sabotage would mean fearful reprisals for his people at home. However, the allied pressure on him to act grew daily and one day he even had to suffer the indignity of being called a Nazi sympathizer by a hot-headed British General.

But he did not wish to have the blood of his own people on his hands. If he ordered acts of sabotage, would it make any real difference? Would his people have died in vain? What should he do? For weeks he labored on in the grip of a painful indecision.

In Berlin, Heydrich's file on Konstantin von Neurath continued to grow with each passing month. Neurath, a bureaucrat rather than a politician, was content to leave the everyday running of the Czech territory in the hands of Czech officials. This left the path wide open for Heydrich's ceaseless intrigues to frame Neurath as a bumbling incompetent whose softness allowed the Czechs to plot against the Reich. His plans were taking form.

Every case in Neurath's file was carefully put together by Schellenberger. His reports magnified the scale of every demonstration, no matter how peaceful it may have been. He created a persuasive account of growing public disturbances. He exaggerated the threat of the Czech resistance and fabricated incidents of sabotage. All of these were being allowed to happen through Neurath's weakness and incompetence.

In August 1941, Gestapo agents destroyed a massive fuel dump and dynamited a German children's home. Both attacks were claimed to be acts of sabotage and blamed on the home resistance. Neurath's grip on the protectorate looked shakier and shakier.

Schellenberger applied himself assiduously to his task in the mistaken belief that he would succeed the discredited Neurath. Heydrich encouraged him fully in this belief. If they were successful, Heydrich said, Schellenberger would get the Protectorate while he himself would get a promotion to the East.

And so Schellenberger worked like one possessed. What he didn't know was that he was merely a pawn in the ruthless Heydrich's plan to secure the Protectorate for himself.

By late August, Heydrich felt he had enough ammunition and bombarded Himmler with the documented shortcoming of Neurath. He asked repeatedly for his superior to present his case to the Führer. Himmler promised that he would but deliberately held back from doing so. He was not about to let the most valuable and more fearsome subordinate off the leash.

It didn't take Heydrich long to work out for himself the reasons that lay behind Himmler's reluctance. He therefore decided to try a different route and in a stunning about turn, set about befriending his long-term adversary and Commander of the German Armed Forces, Hermann Goering. The Reichsmarshal was known to be Hitler's closest friend.

The unlikely alliance was based on a complex set of ulterior motives on both sides.

Goering was anxious to see the powerful combination of Himmler and Heydrich broken up. Also, by tying Heydrich up in the administration of Bohemia and Moravia, there would be less time for the notorious schemer to wreak havoc on Berlin.

And so, armed with Heydrich's bulging file on Neurath, Goering presented a convincing case to Hitler that the Protectorate was on the verge of open revolt. He was able to produce no less than 114 incidents of subversion in just that month.

Hitler inspected the file casually, noticing Schellenberger's initials on each report submitted.

"I agree. Something must be done," said Hitler. "I'll have lunch with Schellenberger tomorrow and we'll discuss this further."

Schellenberger woke early on the morning of September 20<sup>th</sup>. He tossed and turned nervously for a while then decided it would be better to get up. After putting some water on to boil for coffee he went for a shave and gathered his thoughts for the task ahead while he worked the soap into a fine lather. As the razor slid deftly over his skin he reviewed all the points in each of the cases he had compiled against Neurath. He sat down and drank his coffee and the clock ticked audibly as he gestured and moved his lips silently in reply to imaginary questions. At nine thirty precisely he put on his jacket and left his room.

The way to the Chancellery was lined with a river of fluttering red flags adorned with black swastikas. Eight SS guards stood prominently to attention outside the main entrance of the building as he arrived. He showed his pass and was escorted up the stairs, his heart pounding in anticipation. The Führer had invited him to the Chancellery for a reason. He had no doubt at all he would be walking away from the building as the new Reichsprotector of Bohemia-Moravia.

A blue uniformed officer took his name and led him down the long corridor towards the Führer's office. SS guards stood to attention at every door, creating a sea of black and silver uniforms, black boots, broad shoulders, blonde hair, white teeth and blue eyes.

The Führer greeted him with a handshake and invited him to sit down. Hitler wore his plain grey field coat and black trousers, his outfit of choice since the outbreak of war. Schellenberger noticed he looked tired. His complexion was pasty and his blue eyes were bulging and puffy. He had the remote, glassy-eyed stare of a zealot.

But when the Führer began to speak, his tone was quite relaxed. He asked questions about the situation in the Protectorate since 1939 and how it had all unfolded. Schellenberger launched into his well-rehearsed account of events and Hitler paid close attention as his visitor presented his evidence. The meeting was clearly proceeding quite well.

Once the Führer was satisfied with the validity of Schellenberger's testimony, he extended an invitation for his guest to join him for lunch.

"And after lunch we shall be joined by General Heydrich for brief discussion. I must commend you, Herr Schellenberger, on the thorough work you have done in the Protectorate."

Schellenberger's mouth went completely dry and he ate his lunch with difficulty as Hitler reminisced extravagantly about Czechoslovakia. He seemed to be enjoying himself as he waved his arms around and spoke at length about the importance of Czech industry to the war economy. But Schellenberger took in little of what the Führer was saying. He was still stunned by the revelation that Heydrich was on his way. He had not told his superior about the meeting with the Führer, so how had he known?

The servants cleared the table and a beaming Heydrich strode in with a thick dossier nestling under his arm. He briskly summarized the situation and described in business-like fashion the structure of the Czech home resistance and its fabricated links to Benec.

Schellenberger listened aghast as Heydrich succinctly and crisply briefed a fascinated Hitler. This was a masterly display and one in marked contrast to Schellenberger's rather long-winded and detailed previous presentation. Heydrich condemned Neurath and proposed a new approach designed to preserve the integrity of the Reich. He would crush the Czech resistance and increase industrial production.

The Führer was clearly impressed with Heydrich's grasp of the situation in the Protectorate. "General Heydrich," he announced, "I would like you to make immediate preparations to take up the office of the Reichsprotector of Bohemia-Moravia. What the Czech needs is a man with an iron heart." He had already received lengthy representations from Hermann Goering lobbying in favor of the SS man.

Schellenberger didn't see Heydrich's reaction. He couldn't bring himself to raise his eyes and look at him. He felt totally humiliated. He realized for the first time that Heydrich had carefully orchestrated everything which had happened. He had been outmaneuvered, outranked and reduced to the status of a mere messenger. He had been duped by someone for whom conspiracy and double dealing was second nature. He should have known better. To add insult to injury, Heydrich went on to request that the Führer install Schellenberger as the new State Secretary of the Protectorate. Hitler approved with a casual, almost absentminded, wave of his hand.

Zofie sat at the kitchen table coloring in her notebook. Lotte and half a dozen of her friends from the village sat in the next room on low wooden stools. All of them were preparing goose-down on their laps. This was a painstaking job that involved pulling the soft down =from the goose quill to make pillows and eiderdowns. It was also an opportunity for the village women to get together and share the latest gossip.

Zofie finished coloring in her third picture and sighed. She was bored. She'd already finished all her chores and her sister Jasmina had gone into town with their father for the day. She had absolutely nothing to do.

She wandered into the next room and watched the women laughing and talking. They were surrounded by a flurry of fuzzy white feathers and hardly seemed to notice her presence. Suddenly she had an idea! She would go to Mr. NemeÖek's and look at his new kittens. She went over to ask her mother's permission.

"Well alright. But take him a piece of apple strudel if you're going. It's by the oven. But remember not to stay too long. I'm sure he's got work to do."

Zofie was already skipping out of the door before Lotte had finished. She reached his house and called out but there was no answer. She called out but no one seemed to be home. Anxious to see the kittens, she left the strudel on the windowsill and sent in search of them.

The great barn was piled high with hay. Once it had been full of cows but now Mr. NemeÖek only kept one to give him milk for his table. The afternoon sun seeped through the cracks of the barn walls and lay in bright golden patches on the hay. It was quiet inside and Zofie looked carefully, listening for the soft mewing of new kittens.

"Ch...ch...ch...ch," she called softly. Nothing stirred. She walked towards Mr. NemeÖek's tool bench where he made all his rakes and brooms. All the tools were laid out

neatly in a row, gleaming in the sun as it streamed in through the window. Then Zofie noticed something at the end of the bench covered in a cloth hood. She lifted the cover and peered inquisitively at the peculiar contraption underneath. It was a black box with all sorts of knobs and dials with festoons of wires coming out from it. She reached out to touch one of the buttons just as Mr. Nemešek came into the barn.

Zofie spun round and clasped her hands behind her back. A frightened, guilty look came over her face. The old man smiled broadly and wiped his brow with his sleeve.

"Don't be afraid, child. That's nothing but a gadget."

Zofie's expression softened into a smile and she sighed in relief. "I came to see the kittens. I bought you some strudel but I couldn't find you anywhere."

"I was out in the fields tending to the bees."

She nodded and looked again at the strange contraption. "What is it for, that gadget?"

"It's err...it's a radio, Zofie. A bit like my old phonograph, only err sort of different..."

"Oh," she said. "Where are the kittens then?" Her eyes widened with excitement.

Mr. Nemešek went towards the other side of the barn. "They were over here by the mangers the other day but I think the mother cat's probably moved them. Let's have a look."

After some searching they found the litter. Zofie petted the five new kittens and stroked their soft fuzzy fur. She dangled a string for them to chase and laughed as they scampered after her. The old farmer sat on a crate nearby and smiled as he watched them play.

"Look!" Zofie scooped up a ginger and white kitten and cradled it in her arms. She rubbed its small head with her finger. "Isn't this one pretty. It's the prettiest of them all."

"Yes, that one has very handsome markings."

Zofie's face suddenly became quite serious. "Oh, Mr. Nemešek," she said softly, "please could I have this one. Please? Look, it really likes me and I'd take very good care of it. I'll call it Ginger. Please. *Please!*"

"Alright! Alright! If your parents agree then it's yours. But not till it's weaned from its mother."

"Oh, thank you so much," she declared in delight. She sprang up, still clutching the kitten in her arms.

"Careful now," laughed the old man, "don't knock the wits out of it."

Zofie gently stroked the kittens from head to tail then put it back among the others.

The Czech press agency announced that ReichsProtector Neurath was taking an extended leave for reasons of failing health. In his absence Reinhard Heydrich would carry out his functions.

Heydrich arrived in Prague on September 27<sup>th</sup> and the State became the mirror of the new ruler. On the same day, the black flag of the SS was hoisted over the Hradshin Castle and martial law was proclaimed. The Gestapo was sent into action and SS terror burst like a scourge upon the Czech people. The first of thousands of arrests and executions began starting with those suspected of being involved with the resistance. Heydrich ordered the conversion of the old fortress of Terezin into a concentration camp for all those who seemed not to be totally in agreement with Nazi reforms. The Czechs were to be shown who was boss.

A few days later Heydrich called a secret meeting in the Nerinin Palace. Among the invited guests were local Nazi officials and other important German nationals from within the Protectorate's administration.

Heydrich's speech was succinct and to the point. He left his listeners in no doubt whatsoever that things were about to change in the Protectorate.

"The Führer told me before my departure for Prague that wherever he sees the fatherland's interests endangered, he will send an SS leader to uphold the Unity of the Reich. From the Führer's word's gentlemen, you will see what I have to do here." He went on to outline his two main aims.

"First it is imperative to mobilize the economy behind the German war effort. Czech production is a crucial element of the war effort while German production is suffering increasingly from the Allied bombing. Meanwhile, the Protectorate is humming with subversive activities directed by the Benec government in London. This must be wiped out. The Czech resistance must be rooted out to the last man. Removing the sabotage will lead to greater productivity. The workers in industry and agriculture will be induced to increase productivity, and in exchange for a new twelve hour day they will receive more food rations, more clothing, shoes, and tobacco and will be paid higher wages. For those who choose not to understand there will be severe consequences. It is not necessary for the Czechs to love us. All that we require is that they fear and obey us."

A slight buzz of conversation began as Heydrich paused to take a drink of water. He held up a hand to quell it before continuing.

"The entire Western area of the Protectorate will one day become totally German. However, I must stress that until the war is over this aim is to be treated with the utmost secrecy. The Czechs have nothing to expect here and have no right even to be here. This area is in the heart of the Reich and must ultimately be completely Germanized. This will entail the separation of the inferior blood from the good racial elements. Our medical experts estimate that the ratio of inferior races to good Aryans is three to two. Into which group each individual falls will be determined by our genetic scientists. Racially unsuitable individuals will be liquidated. The rest will be Germanized. Heil Hitler!"

"Listen Jasmina, he's purring," Zofie tickled the kitten behind the ears. The two girls hovered over the kitten that was curled up in their bed. After considerable resistance, Lotte finally gave in and agreed to let the kittens stay and sleep with them.

Lotte was putting away the dishes in the kitchen when there was a loud bang at the door. She wiped her hands on a tea towel and nervously opened the door. Three men in dark boots and long black leather coats pushed their way in.

"Who are they?" whispered Jasmina hearing the muffled voices through the door.

"I don't know," replied Zofie.

The girls strained their ears to hear what was going on but couldn't make anything out. Zofie slid down from the bed and tiptoed to the door.

"Where are you going?" Jasmina asked anxiously.

"Nowhere. I'm just going to see who it is."

"No. Stay here and be quiet!"

"Shh. I'm just looking." Zofie turned the handle and slowly opened the bathroom door. She looked cautiously down the hallway through the crack. Three mean faced men

were asking Lotte something in German and a short animated discussion was taking place where Lotte was shaking her head and protesting she knew nothing.

Then one of the three men spotted Zofie peering from the doorway and nudged the one who was obviously in charge. He came down the hall and pulled Zofie out into the kitchen.

"No, please. She's just a child," pleaded Lotte.

"Shut up!" shouted the man.

Zofie stood there in her flannel nightgown looking up at the ominous looking men who were towering over her. She was terrified.

Their leader knelt down on one knee so that he was her level.

"Do you know who we are?" he asked, softening his voice.

"No," Zofie stammered. Her eyes darted from the man to her mother looking for some sort of clue that would tell her what to do.

"We're the German Secret Police. The Gestapo. We have to kill people who don't tell us the truth."

"Please...!" Lotte interjected.

"She can go back to bed as soon as she answers our questions," the man growled.

He began a series of questions asking if anyone had said anything bad about a man named Hitler or about a club called the Nazis. Zofie thought it all seemed rather stupid to be pulling people out of their beds at night and scare them over such silly sounding things. But deep down she knew that they were being very serious about it.

"Do you know if anyone in the village has a transmitter?"

Zofie wrinkled her brow. She didn't know what a transmitter was.

"You know; a transmitter. Like a radio."

"Oh," Zofie nodded. That was easy enough. "Yes, Mr. NemeÖek had a radio *and* a phonograph." She looked at her mother but couldn't tell from her mother's expression whether she had given the right answer or not. She thought she had. Mr. NemeÖek did say it was sort of like a radio, but now she was afraid this wasn't the right answer. But it was the truth and the man said he would kill anyone who didn't tell the truth.

The man stood in front of Zofie for a few moments studying her face. It was frozen in terror.

Was it the wrong answer, thought Zofie. Is he going to think I lied to him and kill us all?

Then, without another word, he turned on his heel and motioned to his colleagues to follow him out the door.

Lotte took her silently by the hand and led her back to her room. Zofie crawled into her bed and her mother held her hand for a long time until finally she calmed down enough to sleep.

On October 4<sup>th</sup>, Kamil received a message from Felix requesting an urgent meeting.

He walked to their usual café rendezvous on the busy tree lined St. Wenceslaus Square. Music and laughter filtered onto the street. He entered the café and sat in their usual corner. He ordered a beer and noticed a new sign posted on the wall asking customers to '*kindly refrain from discussing politics*'. He smiled cynically.

Felix arrived at the appointed time and joined Kamil at his table. In edgy tones he related the essence of Heydrich's secret speech.



“I want to tell you in person, right away, so you can let your people in London know as soon as possible. I have a bad feeling Kamil. Things are about to get very ugly. Very ugly indeed.” Felix finished his beer, slipped Kamil a note detailing the latest developments in the rocket program and, as inconspicuously as he came, he disappeared again.

Kamil hurried to the station so that he could catch the last commuter train back to Leòaky. On his arrival, he decided to go to Mr. Nemeòek’s first before going home.

It was getting dark and the old man’s lights were out so Kamil went straight to the barn. He switched on the single light bulb, took off his jacket and hung it on the nail in the wall before sitting down in front of the transmitter.

Reading from sketchy notes made from his conversation with Felix, Kamil began to transmit. Suddenly, part way through his dispatch, he heard the sound of car doors slamming shut and German voices shouting. He listened carefully. They’d seen the light and were coming towards the barn!

In a fit of mad panic Kamil grabbed his jacket and ran out of the barn through the back door. He kept on running until he was in the woods beyond Nemeòek’s barn.

The Germans entered the barn and found the light still burning and the transmitter on. One of the soldiers picked up a scribbled note from the bench.

Moments later, there was a loud pounding on Mr. Nemeòek’s door.

## Chapter 21 The Ghetto

*Oh Rosh Hashanah it is written,  
And in Yom Kippur it is sealed;  
Who shall live and who shall die,  
Who shall perish by fire and who by water,  
Who by hunger and who by thirst,  
Who by earthquake and who by stoning,  
Who shall be at peace and who shall be tormented,  
Who shall be poor and who shall be rich,  
Who shall be humbled and who shall exalted.*

It was the morning of October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1940 and a buzz of activity filled the streets. The sidewalks were full of jostling crowds and the air was filled with the sound of voices raised in heated conversations.

Lutek ran downstairs and out into the street.

"What's going on?" he asked an old man who was standing in the crowd.

"Relocation!"

"What?" Lutek asked.

"The man pointed to a notice that had suddenly appeared on the billboard across the street. 'From now on, Jews are to live in specially designated areas only'.

Lutek's expression turned to one of disbelief.

"Don't you get it?" snapped an angry old woman. "They're creating a Ghetto; it's the Middle Ages all over again!"

Lutek pushed his way through the crowd to read the notice for himself. There it was, in cruel black and white. He ran home with the news.

Olga flew into an immediate panic.

"I knew it!" she shrieked, covering her head with her hands. "It's a holy day again, Yom Kippur. I knew something like this would happen. Last year they bombed us day and night and now this year they've decided to throw us out of our homes!"

Moshe paced rapidly around the room, talking to himself and ignoring everyone else.

"They can't do it! They just can't! It's positively medieval. This is the twentieth century, it just can't be happening!"

Non-Jews living within the area designated for the *Ghetto* were expelled from their homes and Jews living outside it were herded in. Thirty days were allowed for the completion of the exchange.

Although the typhus epidemic of the spring had occurred throughout the whole of the Warsaw population, it was now used as an excuse to create confined quarters for the Jews. Typhus control was an urgent necessity, proclaimed the Nazi authorities.

Like a hundred and fifty thousand others, the Weisses began to feverishly pack their already meager possessions in preparation for the move.

But what should they take? What should they leave behind?

Moshe spent the days scouring the new district for an apartment but day after day he returned home empty handed. Places for only 80,000 people had been created by the departing Poles and vacant accommodation was in very short supply.

Finally, a week before the deadline, Moshe managed to find a ground floor flat on Wronia Street. Elli took it upon herself to organize the proper packing of each bundle. She tried her best to calm Olga's nerves and reassure Moshe. The trauma and anxiety of it all had transformed her son into a nervous wreck and she'd hardly been able to get a word out of him for weeks. Lukaš was doubled over most of the time amongst all the commotion with an excruciating stomach ache and Lutek was his Grandma's only real help. Like her, he possessed a strong practical streak.

By eleven o'clock all their possessions were wrapped in sacks and loaded onto a wagon. Up went their kitchen goods, furniture, clothing, dishes, bedding, Moshe's books, foodstuffs and large bags of flour. Lutek gave a little pull of the reins and the horses set off down the street at a slow walk. They joined the seemingly endless convoy of the thousands of other carts, wagons, trailers and weary people on foot, weighed down with heavy bags and bundles.

But the day after they'd settled, Wronia Street was re-designated as being outside the boundary of the *Ghetto*. In a terrible and frenzied scramble, they had no choice but once again to pack up and look for somewhere else.

In the end they had to move four times that week as the boundaries constantly changed. Finally they settled in a tiny attic on Ostrowska Street, one of the very poorest streets in the quarter. The five of them were crammed into a single room without heat, running water or toilet facilities. The only furniture they had been able to take was a table, four chairs and a few small beds which meant that the boys had to sleep on straw mattresses. Yet they were still grateful because they were better off than those who had to live in tool sheds, storage rooms, musty basements and stairwells.

The German created a governing body of sorts for the ghetto called the *Judenrat* whose purpose was to implement German orders within the ghetto. They also had the responsibility of furnishing labor battalions, maintaining public order and attending to the sanitation and medical services. To achieve this, it was allowed to levy taxes. The *Judenrat* was in an unenviable position from the outset. Its officials couldn't satisfy the Germans whose demands were always impossible and they were seen as traitors by their own people who saw them as cowardly puppets of the Nazi occupying forces.

At first, movement to and from the ghetto was allowed with permits issued by the *Judenrat*. The walls were guarded on the outside by the German guards with submachine guns and dogs. They patrolled the perimeter at one hundred foot intervals while on the inside Polish police and Jewish police appointed by the *Judenrat* set up their patrols. The number of people pouring into the ghetto grew steadily every day as Jews from all parts of Warsaw kept on arriving, until the population grew to almost four hundred thousand in an area that once had housed less than a quarter of that.

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, dreaded news struck the inhabitants of the ghetto like a thunderbolt. It was to be sealed off. It was to become a prison city. It was the day that the hunger started as food entering the gates dwindled away to a trickle.

Elli did her best to stay strong and remain positive. "We've been uprooted our property's been taken, we've been humiliated, herded about like cattle and crammed into the tiniest of spaces," she'd say, "but God has managed to see to it that we are all still

together. We're going to come through this, everybody! We shall hold out until we are liberated!"

Meanwhile Moshe continued to work in the forced labor squads. His unit was now putting up a ten foot high wall topped with barbed wire where the preparatory ditches used to be. He realized for the first time that the plans for sealing off the ghetto must have been drawn up months ago.

The *Judenrat* appointed new laborers to fulfill the German requirements and Moshe was now entitled to be relieved of his heavy work. But he stayed on. He needed the money even if it was only four zlotys a day. And there was always a wealthier individual pressed into rotation that was more than happy to let Moshe take his place for an additional payment on top. However, Moshe was not really up to constant heavy manual labor and the grueling construction work was taking its toll on his health. He'd been coming home exhausted ever since the first week, but now he was coming home with head injuries which caused him terrible headaches. Whenever Olga asked him what happened, he would give some excuse or another that he'd slipped in the mud or banged his head on some timber.

Lutek noticed how his father was becoming more and more withdrawn and unwilling to talk about his day. Moshe threw himself further into his reading. Since their move into the ghetto, he tried to spend all his free time searching the literature to find historical precedents to this present ghetto existence, trying to come to some kind of spiritual understanding of life and his duty in these grave and unfathomable times.

"Have you found anything yet, Papa?" asked Lukaš one day.

"I'm not sure, my boy."

"How do you mean?"

"We'll, during the Middle Ages our enemies wanted to destroy our *spiritual* life, our religion; they wanted to convert us all to Christianity. So, in the past, our duty was quite clear, to sacrifice our lives for the sake to our beliefs. But now..."

Yes, Papa."

"Well, the Nazis have no wish to convert us. They simply aim to kill us. So..."

Lukaš was struggling hard to try to follow what his father was trying to say.

"So *what* Papa?" he asked.

"Well, now it's our duty just to survive I suppose."

After the *Ghetto* was sealed the Weisses were no longer able to access their savings account to make the small withdrawals that had previously been allowed. Moshe's fourteen zloty per week were not even enough to take care of his own needs, let alone those of his family and prices for everything were still soaring in the ghetto. One kilo of potatoes cost 95 zlotys, one kilo of bread was 4 zlotys and a ton of coal cost a massive 1000 zlotys.

Olga learned through a friend about a place where she could buy wool which had been smuggled in from the outside.

"I'll come with you. Maybe we can find something for me to do as well," said Elli.

They set out together and Olga took a pair of Moshe's silver cufflinks and two new leather belts to use as barter. They knocked on the door of a seedy basement where they'd been told that a woman named Masha lived. An old woman stuck her head out of a window.

"What do you want?" she grumbled.

"I'm Olga Weiss, and this is my mother-in-law. We've come to buy some wool."

“Oh yes, yes! I remember.” Her tone softened. “I’ve been expecting you. Please come in.” She led them inside her dark, damp room where the only furniture was a table, one chair and a bench.

“Please sit down.”

“I’m interested in buying some wool. I don’t have any cash, but I’ve brought these belts and this...” Olga produced the silver cufflinks in her small leather box.

The old woman snatched them quickly from Olga and inspected them closely.

“I can give you the wool for two sweaters,” said Masha.

Olga was outraged and her face became flushed in anger.

“But, those cufflinks are real silver. They’re worth much more than that,” she protested.

“Mrs. Weiss, I don’t have to tell you how times have changed. I have to pay top prices on the Polish side, and then I have to pay the guards something as well to look the other way when it comes through.”

After considerable haggling, Olga persuaded the woman to give her enough wool for four sweaters in exchange for the cufflinks and enough for one more in exchange for the belts. She went behind the curtained area, pulled out several brown paper packages and handed them over. Olga inspected the wool carefully then gave the belts and cufflinks in exchange.

“You seem to know a lot about the ways of the ghetto. Can you think of anything that my mother-in-law might be able to turn her hand to?” asked Olga.

“I don’t knit,” said Elli, “but I sew and embroider. Might that be any use in the ghetto?”

The old woman thought about it for a moment. “There isn’t much demand for new dresses or fancy cushions these days,” she said, “but everyone has to wear an armband. Why don’t you give that a try and see how it goes?”

“Why not?” said Elli. She bought a small length of white cotton and some blue thread with the few zlotys she had brought with her.

They were about to leave when the old woman put a hand on Olga’s arm. “Let me give you some advice,” she said. “You can sell a sweater at the moment for around 30 zlotys. That’s the going rate now, but if you wait till the first frosts hit the air, you’ll be able to get 40 for them. Don’t sell yourself short.”

Elli worked diligently for days despite the arthritis in her fingers and made several dozen armbands of various different qualities. Paper ones with the Star of David stenciled on were fifty groszy; linen ones with hand embroidery in deep blue silk were two zloty. Healthcare workers wore white armbands with a red star and the Jewish Police wore yellow armbands with a blue star. In the ghetto, the quality of the armband became a symbol of one’s status.

She kept herself busy sewing from the first light of day until at night when the electricity was cut off and they fell into darkness. Her eyes weren’t good enough to work by candlelight even if they’d had enough money to spare for candles at 24 zlotys per kilo.

When it came to choosing somewhere to set up her stance, Elli searched a dozen blocks until in the end, she decided on the corner of Geisa Street and Zanenhofa Boulevard. It was a busy intersection where both the *Judenrat* and Post Office were situated. She set up a rickety folding table next to the newsstand and parked herself on a small stool. Hours passed, hundreds of people walked by, but she failed to make a single sale. She sat lost

amongst the crowd for two days until Lukaš happened to pass by and noticed her sitting forlornly in the mass of people in the street. Instinctively, he went over to her table and snatched up a handful of armbands. He put half a dozen on each arm, one on his head and began to shout into the crowds of passerby as they approached his Grandma's tiny stall.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" he cried. "Get your armbands here! Don't be caught without one. Wear one that's clean and new. Don't give them reason to stop you! Hey, Mister, look at your armband, it's all tattered and dirty. We've got just the one for you, at a price that's just right for you!"

By evening his voice was hoarse but they'd sold nine armbands. Elli was delighted.

Olga meanwhile spent her days at home knitting busily. She finished the first sweater in a week but, remembering Masha's advice, waited before taking it to the Geisa Street Bazaar. Instead she occupied herself with making socks, hats, scarves and mittens. From the little profit that she made from these she was able to buy a little food and some more wool.

Since there was no school, the boys spent their days exploring the ghetto together, crawling through the bombed and burnt out buildings to see what they could find.

"Hey, look at that!" Lukaš pointed to a blackened building at the end of the road leading off Geisa Street. It had a huge gaping hole in its side and every one of the apartments in its three u-shaped blocks showed heavy bomb damage. They had obviously once been very luxurious and high class. Traces of ornate wrought iron work and decorative mouldings could still be made out here and there on some of the crumbling exterior walls.

"Let's go and check it out," he said and was on his way. Lutek followed close behind.

As they approached they began to make out some of the details of the interior. They could see the remnants of marble in the foyer, velvet wallpaper on a portion of a wall and a shattered chandelier hanging obliquely from a ceiling. The entire front of the building had been blown off, exposing the inside walls of the apartments.

"Hey, don't go in there," cried Lutek. "The whole place is likely to come down on your head."

"Aw, come on, don't be such a chicken," Lukaš shouted over his shoulder. He began climbing over the rubble.

Lutek was left with no choice but to follow his brother. They stepped over piles of shattered bricks, fallen plaster, twisted metal, smashed furniture and broken crockery as they made their way inside.

"Look there was even a lift." Lukaš pointed to a mangled cage at the bottom of the shaft.

At the far end of the building they found a door that led to a private courtyard which in turn led into an alleyway to the next street. They looked up and noticed a small terrace on the second floor.

"I want to take a look in there," Lukaš pointed upwards.

Lutek shook his head. "And how are you going to do that? All the stairs have been bombed out."

His brother paced around looking for an alternative route up.

"Come on, this way," he shouted at last. He was already climbing onto the roof of a small shed from which he was then able to step into a first floor landing somehow.

"Stay close to the wall," ordered Lutek, following on behind. They crept along the corridor avoiding the edge until they reached a stairway. The stairs leading to the second

floor were still intact so they climbed them carefully and discovered the remains of an apartment. Only half the floor and the back wall were left. The rest of the internal structure lay in a heap of rubble on the ground.

"Look, there's a door," said Lutek.

They made their way gingerly towards it and Lutek carefully grasped the knob, turning it and slowly opened the door. They were both shocked at what they saw. A perfectly intact sitting room leading to the terrace they'd seen from below.

"Wow!" I told you!" Lukaš' eyes were wide with delight. They went inside and closed the door behind them.

"But why isn't this room wrecked too?"

"It looks like the far corner of the building stood up the best. This study seems to be the only room left," said Lutek in wonderment.

Lukaš ran to the French doors, opened them and was soon on the terrace peering down at the courtyard below. Lutek began to look around the room. Two large oil paintings hung askew on the wall. The first was a seascape of cresting ocean waves and the other was a still life picturing a Venetian goblet, some flowers and a violin, all set on a polished wooden table. The back wall of the room was full of books; Polish literature, Russian poetry, books on travel, everything. Voltaire's *Candide* laid open, faced down on a side table.

"I wonder who lived here?" said Lukaš coming back in from the terrace.

"I don't know." Lutek opened a few books to see if any of them were signed with the owner's name but none were.

Lukaš flopped down on the large plumb colored couch and ran his finger over the velvety fabric. Lutek went to sit behind the large desk. He found some pens, an inkwell, a few stamps from 1939, a pair of scissors, three or four sheet of paper and a beautiful millefiori paperweight. But there was not a single letter or postcard to identify who the apartment's owner might have been.

"It's so quiet here," said Lutek, sitting back at the desk and looking across to the terrace from where the sun was pouring into the room

"Why don't we all move in here? It's much nicer than our place," said Lukaš.

"It's too unsafe. Besides, how would Grandma climb up the shed and through the window?"

"Yes, I suppose you're right. And it's even smaller than our place. But let's not tell anyone about it, eh? It'll be our secret place, just for us." Lukaš was very excited.

His brother smiled. "That sounds like a great idea. Yes, our secret place away from everybody else."

"You won't tell a soul," insisted Lukaš. "Promise me, Lutek!"

"I promise."

The dark rainy days of autumn froze into a glistening frosty winter. More and more people were deported and refugees from the surrounding towns flooded into the ghetto. Increasing food shortages drove prices up even further and thickened the winter chill. Even more of the Weiss' money went into burning fuel for the small cooking stove they'd bought. Coal was costing a small fortune and even with the little extra income they had, they were forced to sell off more and more of their possessions for fuel and food. Thousands of families had to break up their furniture to make wood for the stove. Banisters from

stairways, wooden door frames and window frames slowly began to disappear as the city was locked into sub-zero temperatures. Worst off were the thousands of homeless refugees who had to endure the cold and hunger in frozen warehouses and sheds.

It was the night of Hanukah. Moshe came home after dark as usual with yet another new gash on his head. Sharp lines of pain were etched on his face. Olga tended to his wound and worried anew over his worsening condition.

Elli brought out the antique silver lamp she had managed to keep hidden from the guards. She lit the first flame and said quietly to Lukaš, "Do you remember the story of the miracle in the Temple? They found a lamp among the ruins that contained only enough oil to burn for one day, yet it burned for eight."

"Grandma, why doesn't God give us a miracle now? How much is this going to go on?" He looked at her earnestly, willing her to give him an answer. But deep down he knew there wasn't one. Elli gently stoked his hair.

"God willing, one day things will be better, but..." she paused, not sure how much to say to her grandson, "before things get better, they are probably going to get a lot worse." Silently she was hoping the rumors she'd heard that they were all going to be deported to Madagascar would turn out to be true.

Their evening meal consisted of the usual watery cabbage soup. Olga ladled it into bowls while Grandma sliced the clay-like substance which passed for bread and spread a layer of clear beetroot marmalade over it. There was barely enough to go around.

Olga nudged her mother-in-law. "Give Moshe another piece. I don't need very much for my knitting."

They ate in silence. When they'd finished, Olga cleared her throat and turned to speak to Moshe, "I was talking to Mrs. Czernakow today and she told me that if you like, she can talk to her husband and he can see if you can have a job with the Jewish Police."

Adam Czernakow was the chairman of the *Judenrat* who were in charge of the Jewish Police. They were made up mostly of professionals who were unable to find work in their own field. The majority of them were lawyers and nominally they were responsible for 'maintaining law and order', and in fact, it was the law of the jungle which prevailed.

"No! Never! Olga, never in a million years!" Moshe's listless expression suddenly became animated. "The Jewish Police are nothing but a bunch of scoundrels. They're a total disgrace to their race. They're just sniveling, cowardly puppets of their German masters!"

"But Moshe, you won't have to work so hard and you'll make better money. If you go on like this, they'll kill you. Just look at yourself Moshe," she pleaded.

"Olga, do you know what they're like, what they do? They extort bribes from poor beggars who they catch smuggling food; oh and by the way, those are the honest ones. The dishonest ones don't bother with any of that. They just steal everything you've got and beat up into the bargain. Olga, it's completely out of the question."

As the winter wore on, Olga's once erect posture began to droop and the shadows under her cheekbones deepened. The freezing temperatures did not let up and all over the ghetto the water supplies and the sewage systems froze solid. Already thin at the start of the winter, Elli and Olga were now perilously near starvation after months of undernourishment. Their bones had begun to show clearly through the little flesh they had left and their hands and feet were badly swollen. As for Moshe, he continued to speak very little, immersing himself instead in his reading and studying by lamplight every evening.



Lutek lay awake night after night thinking of what he could do to help. Tossing and turning from side to side on his straw mattress one night, an idea suddenly struck him. His violin! Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He pulled it out from under his mattress and opened the case in the darkness. He ran his fingers carefully over the strings and the polished wood. That was it! He would play his violin for a living. He didn't know where or how yet, but he was certain he would find away. They had to survive! They just *had* to!

For the next few weeks Lutek practiced day and night. He hadn't picked up the instrument for over a year, since the war began. Once his confidence had returned a little, he set out to find a job in one of the nightclubs and restaurants that curiously still existed in bizarre abundance in certain parts of the ghetto.

As Lutek crisscrossed unfamiliar streets, he was amazed at the social contrasts he saw. Before tonight, he had only heard about this from his Grandmother's complaints in the evenings after her day among the public. It wasn't the old style of differences that used to exist between the working classes and the middle classes. It was a much more fundamental difference than that; one between those who had enough to eat and those who were slowly starving to death.

For block after block, there were crowds of freezing beggars dying of hunger. Most of them were recently arrived refugees from other towns. They came already destitute into a city that could no longer provide anything for them. There was no accommodation, no food and not even any sanitation. Their deterioration was rapid and terrible as one by one they succumbed to lice, hunger and disease.

Lutek finally came to one of the main boulevards of the ghetto, Leszno Street. It alone boasted twenty restaurants and in every window he could see displays of wines, appetizing hors d'oeuvres and all kinds of tempting delicacies.

Lutek looked on in wonderment. Why didn't the desperate hordes of starving beggars simply smash the windows and help themselves? Nothing made sense any more.

He knocked on the door of every bar and restaurant in turn, offering his services. Everywhere he was turned away. He carried on to Lelazna Street, to Siena Street, to the Café de Arts, La Plendide, Stuka's Caviar Shop, Palermo's and finally the Negresco. Absolutely everyone one of these restaurants and clubs was expensively decorated with abundant food and wine of the finest quality imaginable. They served real coffee, freshly-made cakes, scented mousses, sugared almonds and a dazzling range of savory dishes.

Who on earth could afford to come here?

It was late afternoon and Lutek was tired and discouraged. He came to a cabaret named La Fourchette on the corner of Leszno Street and Solna Street. Outside was a billboard advertising nighttime entertainment. 'Operettas performed by the famous Bergs!'

The name was familiar. They were a family of well-known opera singers from Berlin.

He took a deep breath, straightened his shoulders and opened the front door. Inside he found a grand theatre dining club in the late Victorian style with red plush seating, marble brass fixtures and crystal chandeliers. A lively and elegant establishment before the war, it now stood in decadent contrast to its squalid surroundings. He hesitated for a moment in the doorway.

"What can I do for you?" A barman came towards him.

"I'm looking for the owner. I play the violin and I was wondering if he could give me a job."

The man disappeared behind a dark wooden door. A few moments later he returned.

“Come this way.”

Lutek followed him down a short corridor onto a cluttered office. Behind the old oak desk, the potbellied proprietor, Felix Grossman was sitting in a cloud of cigarette smoke.

“What can I do for you?” he asked gruffly.

“My name is Lutek Weiss and I play the violin. I had a scholarship to the Warsaw Music Conservatory before the war. I would like to play in your theatre cabaret.”

“Let’s hear you play then,” said Felix reclining back in his chair, peering almost disdainfully at Lutek.

Lutek took his violin and bow out of the case, propped the instrument against his shoulder and played a Ragtime number by Scott Joplin which had been very popular before the war.

When he’d finished he lowered his violin and searched Grossman’s blank face for a glimmer of approval. He saw none.

“What about something classical? Grossman asked.

“What would you like to hear? Just name it!” Lutek had a broad repertoire.

After hearing a few more pieces, Felix’s manner became visually more relaxed and, halfway through a movement from a Vivaldi concerto, he held up his hand to stop Lutek playing.

“You’re hired,” he said. “You start tomorrow. I’ll give 20 zlotys per week. Be here at 4:00 to meet the musicians. We open at 5:00; the Operetta begins at 8:00. It’s the *Marriage of Figaro*.”

“Thank you, Mr. Grossman.” Lutek was hardly able to conceal his delight. “Thank you so much. You have no idea what this means to me.”

Felix nodded at him impatiently, stood up and gestured for Lutek to leave.

At home of course, everyone was thrilled with the news of Lutek’s new job. The extra money would make a big difference and the work was not at all risky or dangerous.

The next day, Lutek arrived at the appointed time to rehearse with the other musicians. He’d been practicing the score for hours at home the night before but was still feeling extremely nervous. He went in through the front door and stood in the foyer scanning the empty club. There was no one in yet except for a young girl about his own age. She was carefully folding napkins into fan shapes on the tables and glanced at him casually as she heard the door open.

“We’re not open yet,” she called to him.

“Yes, I know,” replied Lutek, approaching her. “It’s my first day here. I’m playing in the ensemble.”

“Oh.” She noticed his violin case and shrugged.

As Lutek came closer he suddenly realized how beautiful she was. She had dark wavy hair and brown, almond-shaped eyes. Her skin seemed to have an almost translucent quality and Lutek found himself momentarily transfixed. He stood watching her until eventually she became aware of his gaze and turned around. Their eyes met for a moment.

“Do you mind if I wait here by the piano and warm up before the others arrive?” he said, looking away shyly.

“No.” She shrugged again and carried on setting the tables.

Lutek took out his violin and adjusted the strings. He played a few chords then began the overture to that night's performance.

The girl stopped folding the napkins and turned to listen.

"That was really good," she said. Her tone seemed to be not quite so distant as it had been before.

"Thank you," he smiled, seeing that he'd caught her attention.

"What's your name?"

"Lutek."

"I'm Nacia."

"How long have you been working here?"

"Oh, only about a month now. I got taken on here along with my parents."

"What do they do?"

"They sing in the show."

"Your parents are the Bergs? They used to be really famous back in Germany."

"Yes, we used to live in Munich."

"We're from Berlin. We were deported here two months ago. Do you perform with your parents?"

Nacia laughed. "No, my parents tried to teach me to sing, but I'm not much of a performer. I got this job because we needed the money and anyway the pay's good, especially the tips. And I'm in the warmth here and you can get a bit to eat from the kitchen. Besides, it lets me escape from the chaos outside, at least for a while."

"I know," Lutek agreed with a shudder. "I was lucky to get this job myself. I went to over a dozen places and they all turned me away." He looked around the room. "Tell me, Nacia, with all the shortages and the poverty and the war, who has the money to come to a place like *this*?"

"Ah, that's easy," she laughed. "The new aristocracy of the Underworld. The smugglers and I mean *big time* smugglers. Mr. Grossman says they bring in eighty per cent of the ghetto's food and that without them we'd all starve. They come here to eat, drink and forget that they risk their lives every day. They spend 500 to 1,000 zlotys per night. Then besides them, there are other restaurateurs, the grocers, the bankers, and the heads of the Jewish Police."

Lutek could scarcely believe what he was hearing. All this going on while thousands around them were collapsing through starvation.

"Is smuggling really that profitable?" he asked incredulously.

"You better believe it!"

The door opened and three men came in carrying instrument cases. Lutek introduced himself and they got down to the business of rehearsing for the evening's performance.

That night, just as Lutek was leaving, Nacia discreetly pressed a small newspaper package into his hand.

"Shh! The chef gives us all something to take home, but don't let Felix see it," she whispered.

He tucked the package into his jacket pocket and left through the side door. Even though he had an official pass from his employer allowing him to be on the street after the curfew, he knew that it only lent him a limited measure of safety. The streets could be

raided at any time and the guards would shoot at anything that moved. Or the Jewish Police could drag him off to the Pawiak Prison where he would only be released for a fee.

As soon as he was outside in the frosty air of the alleyway, he opened the parcel. Inside he found small potatoes and a piece of sausage, still warm from the kitchen. In the faint moonlight he saw some writing in red ink among the greasy stains on the newspaper. He looked more closely, his eyes slowly adjusting to the light. It read simply, *I start at 3:00*. Lutek smiled to himself and folded the package back up.

Moving through the shadows, he turned off Leszno Street onto Karmelicka Street. Suddenly something hit him hard in the stomach. He stopped dead in his tracks but realized it was just a small boy who had bumped into him as he was running around the corner. Lutek could just about make out his shape in the darkness and was shocked to see the tattered rags he was wearing. The boy extended a thin dirty blackened hand.

"Please, Mister, some food. *Hot rachmunes*, have pity," he muttered through chattered teeth. It was mid-January and he was standing in short trousers with no shoes; just rags wrapped around his feet tied with string. From under his cap two big eyes bulged from a thin triangular face.

Lutek looked carefully at the young street urchin. In the darkness he seemed to bear a striking resemblance to his younger brother, Lukaš.

He reached into his pocket for some money but felt the newspaper package instead. He took it out and gave it to the boy who took it slowly, gingerly. He looked astonished to have received anything at all.

The next day Lutek wove and zigzagged his way across the six blocks from his home to the La Fourchette to try to make it for three o'clock when Nacia started her shift. He felt an intense sense of growing excitement at the prospect of seeing her again. When he arrived she was already there. She turned to him with a wide, welcoming smile as he came in through the door.

"Thanks for the package," he said.

"It was nothing. Listen, I've got a joke for you. Horowitz comes to the Other World.."

"Who's Horowitz?"

"Hitler! Don't you know anything? Everyone here calls him that. Anyway, Horowitz comes to the Other World and sees Jesus in Paradise. 'Hey, what's a Jew doing here without an armband?' he says. 'You'd better let him be,' answers St. Peter. 'He's the boss' son'"

They chatted on for an hour while she worked until the musicians came in at four.

That night, as he left the club, he saw the street urchin again and once more he gave a morsel from Nacia's package. The boy thanked Lutek profusely and disappeared once again into the shadows.

Day after day, Lutek and Nacia met before the show. Every day he was filled with a keen sense of anticipation at the thought of seeing her. The sight of Nacia made the long and tortuous trip through the ghetto streets seem like nothing. During the show he would watch her from the musicians' corner as she served customers, his eyes following her as she went back and forth. As if by some magic spell, his world was filled with a newfound excitement and sense of meaning. During the few short hours he spent with Nacia each day, he could push the grim reality of life in the ghetto out of his mind for a few precious moments and pretend that everything was normal.

Every night after the show Lutek met the urchin, who had now started to wait for him in the narrow alley. Every night he gave him food from his package and every night the boy would immediately vanish back into the shadows. He had begun to feel a strange affection for this child even though they hadn't exchanged a word since their first meeting.

Lutek's contribution to the family's coffers initially made a real difference, but soon fresh waves of refugees began to arrive again. Seventy two thousand people from surrounding towns were crammed into the ghetto during February causing more food shortages and driving up the prices yet again. The Weiss family was back to where they had been before. The sack of flour they had brought with them was now empty and the atmosphere at home was once again desperate as their condition deteriorated even further.

As the population swelled, typhus and tuberculosis erupted again, compounding the already high mortality rate from hunger. The contrast of high life led by the exiles to the decrepit beggars grew ever more pronounced.

"Shame on them!" Grandma would snarl disdainfully at the converted Jew.

"What is it? What happened?"

"Oh, God! I can't take it anymore I'm going crazy. Damn race and religion!" He crumpled into a chair, trembling from hunger and nervous exhaustion.

"I'll bring you some hot tea and some bread with cheese. You need to eat something or you'll not make it through tonight." Nacia disappeared and came back a few minutes later with a tray.

Lutek ate in frantic gulps and after a while began to relax.

"I've got good news," said Nacia. "Starting tomorrow, I'll be working four hours a day with my Aunt at the hospital. I've been waiting for this chance since we first got here."

"What does she do?" asked Lutek.

"She's a doctor. It's what I want to be too. I want to study medicine once the war is over and we get out of here."

She paused for a moment and searched Lutek's eyes sadly. "Do you think we will ever get out of here?"

"Don't talk like that Nacia," said Lutek. He gently took her hand. "We have to get out of here. We have to survive."

She gave him a wistful little smile and he tightened his hold on her hand.

"I'm happy for you, Nacia, about the hospital."

"Thanks," smiled again. "I'm going to try hard to learn as much as I possibly can from my Aunt."

That night Lutek did not see the street urchin. He was nearly home when something made him stop and go back. He retraced his steps all the way back to the Karmelicka, the area where the boy was usually to be found but was nowhere in sight. Lutek searched the alleys and courtyards and was about to give up when he heard whimpering from a dark doorway. There was a boy sitting hunched up on the ground. As he approached, the boy lifted his head. Two enormous sunken eyes looked up at Lutek from under the brim of his cap.

"What's the matter?" whispered Lutek. In the whole of two months it was the first time he had spoken to him.

The boy began to cry convulsively. "My parents...they died of typhus."

"Do you have any other family to go to? An aunt, an uncle or a cousin?" asked Lutek.

The boy shook his head and looked away again.

“But where are you going to live now?”

The boy shrugged then lowered his head again. Lutek could see the bones pressing through the thin material of his flimsy shirt. He wanted to take him home and look after him but he knew his mother would protest. They hadn't enough room for themselves or enough food and then there was the danger that he might bring typhus with him. The terror of typhus and the quarantine it would bring down on them all was dreadful. No, it was impossible.

“Have you tried the orphanage? Dr. Korczak would take you in. I'll take you there tomorrow,” Lutek offered.

The boy made no reply.

Lutek handed the parcel over and the boy took it, but this time almost reluctantly. Lutek noticed for the first time that his hands and feet were swollen. Starvation. He would get the boy to Dr. Korczak's orphanage first thing in the morning. After telling the boy he would look for him the next day, he left for home.

The next morning Lutek set out in search of the street urchin. He searched all along Karmelicka and the entire block but he was nowhere to be found. No one had seen him that day.

Lutek went out every morning after that, desperately trying to find the boy. A strange panic gripped him. He was determined to save this scrawny phantom whose name he didn't even know.

Eventually he tried the orphanage. Perhaps the boy had gone there by himself. He knocked on the door and a tall, large-boned woman in a blue uniform answered. She was evidently the matron.

“What can we do for you, son?” she said pleasantly.

“I'm looking for a boy, about six years old.” Lutek felt stupid. He didn't even know the boy's name.

“Come in. I'll show you to Dr. Korczak. Maybe he can help you.”

Lutek followed the woman through the large hall which in former times had been used for dancing. Dr. Korczak, the orphanage director, was sorting through supplies in the storage room. He was a tall, kind looking man with rimless glasses and a small, trimmed beard.

The matron explained briefly why Lutek was there. “What's the child's name?” asked Dr. Korczak.

“I don't know. He's not a relation of mine or anything. I just know him from the street, that's all. He's about six. His parents died of typhus recently and he said he hadn't any other relations and he'd nowhere to stay. I promised I'd help him but now he's disappeared.”

Korczak removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

“No one fitting that description had been taken in here, I'm afraid. We haven't taken any new orphans in for three weeks because we're already so overcrowded. He may have visited our soup kitchen perhaps, but there's no way of knowing for sure.”

Lutek leaned against the wall and sighed.

“I know. It's heartbreaking,” said Korczak in a comforting voice. “Until now, starvation and squalor have only hit the truly improvised. But typhus is much more democratic, it's a no respecter of class or position, it affects everyone equally. The only ones

who seem to have some resistance are children. It's a tragedy with so many young adults dying; an enormous number of youngsters are becoming orphaned. We can't cope with it in here anymore. We can only accommodate two hundred children. It's terrible, I know, but we've no choice but to leave all the other thousands to their fate on the street. I'm sorry son."

Lutek left the orphanage in a wretched mood. He couldn't stop himself feeling responsible for the boy.

A week later he was roaming the streets in the morning just as the ghetto was waking from its slumber when he noticed something resembling a pile of rags in the middle of Karmelicka Street. He approached with a growing feeling of dread. There on the dirty cobbles lay the sprawled out swollen body of the young street urchin. He was lying on his side, his face frozen in a terrible last gasp; his eyes staring into eternity. His arms were stretching out in front of him to a piece of bread which someone must have thrown down to him. He'd obviously become too weak to reach it.

Lutek bent down to touch his hand then recoiled.

It was stone cold. Stiff.

"Where were you? I looked everywhere for you!" he sobbed out loud, wiping tears from his eyes on his sleeve. "Why didn't you come to me? Why?"

A few passersby stopped to watch. A man came over to Lutek and handed him a newspaper. Lutek unfolded it and placed it over the boy's lifeless head. Nameless and with no family, the urchin would be taken off to be buried anonymously somewhere in a mass grave.

Lutek was overcome with a devastating sense of guilt. Through the boy's eyes, death was already turning its cold gaze onto him and his family. His guilt and pain turned into anger. He made a silent vow that he would never again allow the scourge of starvation to claim the lives of those whom he loved. He would never be late again!

He turned away and ran. Everything in the ghetto was still closed. He fled aimlessly, with no idea of where he was running, until he finally stopped, exhausted and out of breath. He was outside Gogolewski's Cake Shop and the owner was just starting to open up. He went inside and sat down, his brain still in turmoil. All he could see was the image of the dead boy who looked so much like his brother. He thought of his mother and grandmother who were now showing signs of hunger and failing health too. And his father was still coming home and sitting for hours holding his head in agony. All for the sake of the pittance and bits of food he brought home with him. Death and dying were all around him.

## Chapter 22

### The Czech Connection

As night fell, a convoy of cars approached Prague and sped through its empty streets to Hradshin Palace. Hitler's bodyguards were in position at the gates and presented arms to the Führer alighted from his car and entered the Palace.

He made straight for the great banquet hall lit by countless candles, opened the great glass doors and walked out onto the balcony. It was a calm night and the snow was still falling. The capital was plunged into a deathly silence. Its lights were dimmed and the air was bitterly cold.

Hitler shivered and reentered the banquet hall. He shut the glass doors behind him and strode briskly over to the large table heaped with food.

Adolf Hitler had made his triumphant entry into Prague!

Although a teetotaler and a vegetarian, he broke his abstinence to celebrate his conquest and drained a glass of Pilsner beer while nibbling on Prague ham. That night he slept in the Hradshin Castle, the ancient seat of the Bohemian Kings above the River Vltava.

The next morning, still basking in glory, Hitler addressed the crowds. Baron von Neurath stood at his side.

"For a thousand years the provinces of Bohemia and Moravia formed part of the land of the German people. Czechoslovakia has shown its total inability to survive as a nation and has now fallen into complete dissolution. The Reich is resolved to intervene decisively so as to rebuild the foundations of order in a new, strong Central Europe."

At the back of the crowded square Reinhard Heydrich stood motionless, fury etched into his face. All his long work and careful planning had come to nothing.

Damn Neurath! He pursed his lips tightly together.

He didn't even hear the rest of Hitler's speech despite the Führer's unique ability as an orator to drive his audiences to hysteria.

"They bomb us day and night and now this year they've decided to throw us out of our homes!"

Moshe paced rapidly around the room, talking to himself and ignoring everyone else.

"They can't do it. They just can't! It's positively medieval. This is the twentieth century, it just can't be happening!"

Non-Jews living within the area designated for the *Ghetto* were expelled from their homes and Jews living outside it were herded in. Thirty days were allowed for the completion of the exchange.

Although the typhus epidemic of the spring had occurred throughout the whole of the Warsaw population, it was now used as an excuse to create confined quarters for the Jews. Typhus control was an urgent necessity, proclaimed the Nazi authorities.

Like a hundred and fifty thousand others, the Weisses began to feverishly pack their already meager possessions in preparation for the move.

But what should they take? What should they leave behind?



Moshe spent the days scouring the new district for an apartment but day after day he returned home empty handed. Places for only 80,000 people had been created by the departing Poles and vacant accommodation was in very short supply.

Finally, a week before the deadline, Moshe managed to find a ground floor flat on Wronia Street. Elli took it upon herself to organize the proper packing of each bundle. She tried her best to calm Olga's nerves and reassure Moshe. The trauma and anxiety of it all had transformed her son into a nervous wreck and she'd hardly been able to get a word out of him for weeks. Lukaš was doubled over most of the time amongst all the commotion with an excruciating stomach ache and Lutek was his Grandma's only real help. Like her, he possessed a strong practical streak.

By eleven o'clock all their possessions were wrapped in sacks and loaded onto a wagon. Up went their kitchen goods, furniture, clothing, dishes, bedding, Moshe's books, foodstuffs and large bags of flour. Lutek gave a little pull of the reins and the horses set off down the street at a slow walk. They joined the seemingly endless convoy of the thousands of other carts, wagons, trailers and weary people on foot, weighed down with heavy bags and bundles.

But the day after they'd settled, Wronia Street was re-designated as being outside the boundary of the *Ghetto*. In a terrible and frenzied scramble, they had no choice but once again to pack up and look for somewhere else.

In the end they had to move four times that week as the boundaries constantly changed. Finally they settled in a tiny attic on Ostrowska Street, one of the very poorest streets in the quarter. The five of them were crammed into a single room without heat, running water or toilet facilities. The only furniture they had been able to take was a table, four chairs and a few small beds which meant that the boys had to sleep on straw mattresses. Yet they were still grateful because they were better off than those who had to live in tool sheds, storage rooms, musty basements and stairwells.

The German created a governing body of sorts for the ghetto called the *Judenrat* whose purpose was to implement German orders within the ghetto. They also had the responsibility of furnishing labor battalions, maintaining public order and attending to the sanitation and medical services. To achieve this, it was allowed to levy taxes. The *Judenrat* was in an unenviable position from the outset. Its officials couldn't satisfy the Germans whose demands were always impossible and they were seen as traitors by their own people who saw them as cowardly puppets of the Nazi occupying forces.

At first, movement to and from the ghetto was allowed with permits issued by the *Judenrat*. The walls were guarded on the outside by the German guards with submachine guns and dogs. They patrolled the perimeter at one hundred foot intervals while on the inside Polish police and Jewish police appointed by the *Judenrat* set up their patrols. The number of people pouring into the ghetto grew steadily every day as Jews from all parts of Warsaw kept on arriving, until the population grew to almost four hundred thousand in an area that once had housed less than a quarter of that.

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, dreaded news struck the inhabitants of the ghetto like a thunderbolt. It was to be sealed off. It was to become a prison city. It was the day that the hunger started as food entering the gates dwindled away to a trickle.

Elli did her best to stay strong and remain positive. "We've been uprooted our property's been taken, we've been humiliated, herded about like cattle and crammed into the tiniest of spaces," she'd say, "but God has managed to see to it that we are all still

together. We're going to come through this, everybody! We shall hold out until we are liberated!"

Meanwhile Moshe continued to work in the forced labor squads. His unit was now putting up a ten foot high wall topped with barbed wire where the preparatory ditches used to be. He realized for the first time that the plans for sealing off the ghetto must have been drawn up months ago.

The *Judenrat* appointed new laborers to fulfill the German requirements and Moshe was now entitled to be relieved of his heavy work. But he stayed on. He needed the money even if it was only four zlotys a day. And there was always a wealthier individual pressed into rotation that was more than happy to let Moshe take his place for an additional payment on top. However, Moshe was not really up to constant heavy manual labor and the grueling construction work was taking its toll on his health. He'd been coming home exhausted ever since the first week, but now he was coming home with head injuries which caused him terrible headaches. Whenever Olga asked him what happened, he would give some excuse or another that he'd slipped in the mud or banged his head on some timber.

Lutek noticed how his father was becoming more and more withdrawn and unwilling to talk about his day. Moshe threw himself further into his reading. Since their move into the ghetto, he tried to spend all his free time searching the literature to find historical precedents to this present ghetto existence, trying to come to some kind of spiritual understanding of life and his duty in these grave and unfathomable times.

"Have you found anything yet, Papa?" asked Lukaš one day.

"I'm not sure, my boy."

"How do you mean?"

"We'll, during the Middle Ages our enemies wanted to destroy our *spiritual* life, our religion; they wanted to convert us all to Christianity. So, in the past, our duty was quite clear, to sacrifice our lives for the sake to our beliefs. But now..."

Yes, Papa."

"Well, the Nazis have no wish to convert us. They simply aim to kill us. So..."

Lukaš was struggling hard to try to follow what his father was trying to say.

"So *what* Papa?" he asked.

"Well, now it's our duty just to survive I suppose."

After the *Ghetto* was sealed the Weisses were no longer able to access their savings account to make the small withdrawals that had previously been allowed. Moshe's fourteen zloty per week were not even enough to take care of his own needs, let alone those of his family and prices for everything were still soaring in the ghetto. One kilo of potatoes cost 95 zlotys, one kilo of bread was 4 zlotys and a ton of coal cost a massive 1000 zlotys.

Olga learned through a friend about a place where she could buy wool which had been smuggled in from the outside.

"I'll come with you. Maybe we can find something for me to do as well," said Elli.

They set out together and Olga took a pair of Moshe's silver cufflinks and two new leather belts to use as barter. They knocked on the door of a seedy basement where they'd been told that a woman named Masha lived. An old woman stuck her head out of a window.

"What do you want?" she grumbled.

"I'm Olga Weiss, and this is my mother-in-law. We've come to buy some wool."

"Oh yes, yes! I remember." Her tone softened. "I've been expecting you. Please come in." She led them inside her dark, damp room where the only furniture was a table, one chair and a bench.

"Please sit down."

"I'm interested in buying some wool. I don't have any cash, but I've brought these belts and this..." Olga produced the silver cufflinks in her small leather box.

The old woman snatched them quickly from Olga and inspected them closely.

"I can give you the wool for two sweaters," said Masha.

Olga was outraged and her face became flushed in anger.

"But, those cufflinks are real silver. They're worth much more than that," she protested.

"Mrs. Weiss, I don't have to tell you how times have changed. I have to pay top prices on the Polish side, and then I have to pay the guards something as well to look the other way when it comes through."

After considerable haggling, Olga persuaded the woman to give her enough wool for four sweaters in exchange for the cufflinks and enough for one more in exchange for the belts. She went behind the curtained area, pulled out several brown paper packages and handed them over. Olga inspected the wool carefully then gave the belts and cufflinks in exchange.

"You seem to know a lot about the ways of the ghetto. Can you think of anything that my mother-in-law might be able to turn her hand to?" asked Olga.

"I don't knit," said Elli, "but I sew and embroider. Might that be any use in the ghetto?"

The old woman thought about it for a moment. "There isn't much demand for new dresses or fancy cushions these days," she said, "but everyone has to wear an armband. Why don't you give that a try and see how it goes?"

"Why not?" said Elli. She bought a small length of white cotton and some blue thread with the few zlotys she had brought with her.

They were about to leave when the old woman put a hand on Olga's arm. "Let me give you some advice," she said. "You can sell a sweater at the moment for around 30 zlotys. That's the going rate now, but if you wait till the first frosts hit the air, you'll be able to get 40 for them. Don't sell yourself short."

Elli worked diligently for days despite the arthritis in her fingers and made several dozen armbands of various different qualities. Paper ones with the Star of David stenciled on were fifty groszy; linen ones with hand embroidery in deep blue silk were two zloty. Healthcare workers wore white armbands with a red star and the Jewish Police wore yellow armbands with a blue star. In the ghetto, the quality of the armband became a symbol of one's status.

She kept herself busy sewing from the first light of day until at night when the electricity was cut off and they fell into darkness. Her eyes weren't good enough to work by candlelight even if they'd had enough money to spare for candles at 24 zlotys per kilo.

When it came to choosing somewhere to set up her stance, Elli searched a dozen blocks until in the end, she decided on the corner of Geisa Street and Zanenhofa Boulevard. It was a busy intersection where both the *Judenrat* and Post Office were situated. She set up a rickety folding table next to the newsstand and parked herself on a small stool. Hours passed, hundreds of people walked by, but she failed to make a single sale. She sat lost

amongst the crowd for two days until Lukaš happened to pass by and noticed her sitting forlornly in the mass of people in the street. Instinctively, he went over to her table and snatched up a handful of armbands. He put half a dozen on each arm, one on his head and began to shout into the crowds of passerby as they approached his Grandma's tiny stall.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" he cried. "Get your armbands here! Don't be caught without one. Wear one that's clean and new. Don't give them reason to stop you! Hey, Mister, look at your armband, it's all tattered and dirty. We've got just the one for you, at a price that's just right for you!"

By evening his voice was hoarse but they'd sold nine armbands. Elli was delighted.

Olga meanwhile spent her days at home knitting busily. She finished the first sweater in a week but, remembering Masha's advice, waited before taking it to the Geisa Street Bazaar. Instead she occupied herself with making socks, hats, scarves and mittens. From the little profit that she made from these she was able to buy a little food and some more wool.

Since there was no school, the boys spent their days exploring the ghetto together, crawling through the bombed and burnt out buildings to see what they could find.

"Hey, look at that!" Lukaš pointed to a blackened building at the end of the road leading off Geisa Street. It had a huge gaping hole in its side and every one of the apartments in its three u-shaped blocks showed heavy bomb damage. They had obviously once been very luxurious and high class. Traces of ornate wrought iron work and decorative mouldings could still be made out here and there on some of the crumbling exterior walls.

"Let's go and check it out," he said and was on his way. Lutek followed close behind.

As they approached they began to make out some of the details of the interior. They could see the remnants of marble in the foyer, velvet wallpaper on a portion of a wall and a shattered chandelier hanging obliquely from a ceiling. The entire front of the building had been blown off, exposing the inside walls of the apartments.

"Hey, don't go in there," cried Lutek. "The whole place is likely to come down on your head."

"Aw, come on, don't be such a chicken," Lukaš shouted over his shoulder. He began climbing over the rubble.

Lutek was left with no choice but to follow his brother. They stepped over piles of shattered bricks, fallen plaster, twisted metal, smashed furniture and broken crockery as they made their way inside.

"Look there was even a lift." Lukaš pointed to a mangled cage at the bottom of the shaft.

At the far end of the building they found a door that led to a private courtyard which in turn led into an alleyway to the next street. They looked up and noticed a small terrace on the second floor.

"I want to take a look in there," Lukaš pointed upwards.

Lutek shook his head. "And how are you going to do that? All the stairs have been bombed out."

His brother paced around looking for an alternative route up.

"Come on, this way," he shouted at last. He was already climbing onto the roof of a small shed from which he was then able to step into a first floor landing somehow.

"Stay close to the wall," ordered Lutek, following on behind. They crept along the corridor avoiding the edge until they reached a stairway. The stairs leading to the second

floor were still intact so they climbed them carefully and discovered the remains of an apartment. Only half the floor and the back wall were left. The rest of the internal structure lay in a heap of rubble on the ground.

"Look, there's a door," said Lutek.

They made their way gingerly towards it and Lutek carefully grasped the knob, turning it and slowly opened the door. They were both shocked at what they saw. A perfectly intact sitting room leading to the terrace they'd seen from below.

"Wow!" I told you!" Lukaš' eyes were wide with delight. They went inside and closed the door behind them.

"But why isn't this room wrecked too?"

"It looks like the far corner of the building stood up the best. This study seems to be the only room left," said Lutek in wonderment.

Lukaš ran to the French doors, opened them and was soon on the terrace peering down at the courtyard below. Lutek began to look around the room. Two large oil paintings hung askew on the wall. The first was a seascape of cresting ocean waves and the other was a still life picturing a Venetian goblet, some flowers and a violin, all set on a polished wooden table. The back wall of the room was full of books; Polish literature, Russian poetry, books on travel, everything. Voltaire's *Candide* laid open, faced down on a side table.

"I wonder who lived here?" said Lukaš coming back in from the terrace.

"I don't know." Lutek opened a few books to see if any of them were signed with the owner's name but none were.

Lukaš flopped down on the large plumb colored couch and ran his finger over the velvety fabric. Lutek went to sit behind the large desk. He found some pens, an inkwell, a few stamps from 1939, a pair of scissors, three or four sheet of paper and a beautiful millefiori paperweight. But there was not a single letter or postcard to identify who the apartment's owner might have been.

"It's so quiet here," said Lutek, sitting back at the desk and looking across to the terrace from where the sun was pouring into the room

"Why don't we all move in here? It's much nicer than our place," said Lukaš.

"It's too unsafe. Besides, how would Grandma climb up the shed and through the window?"

"Yes, I suppose you're right. And it's even smaller than our place. But let's not tell anyone about it, eh? It'll be our secret place, just for us." Lukaš was very excited.

His brother smiled. "That sounds like a great idea. Yes, our secret place away from everybody else."

"You won't tell a soul," insisted Lukaš. "Promise me, Lutek!"

"I promise."

The dark rainy days of autumn froze into a glistening frosty winter. More and more people were deported and refugees from the surrounding towns flooded into the ghetto. Increasing food shortages drove prices up even further and thickened the winter chill. Even more of the Weiss' money went into burning fuel for the small cooking stove they'd bought. Coal was costing a small fortune and even with the little extra income they had, they were forced to sell off more and more of their possessions for fuel and food. Thousands of families had to break up their furniture to make wood for the stove. Banisters from

stairways, wooden door frames and window frames slowly began to disappear as the city was locked into sub-zero temperatures. Worst off were the thousands of homeless refugees who had to endure the cold and hunger in frozen warehouses and sheds.

It was the night of Hanukah. Moshe came home after dark as usual with yet another new gash on his head. Sharp lines of pain were etched on his face. Olga tended to his wound and worried anew over his worsening condition.

Elli brought out the antique silver lamp she had managed to keep hidden from the guards. She lit the first flame and said quietly to Lukaš, "Do you remember the story of the miracle in the Temple? They found a lamp among the ruins that contained only enough oil to burn for one day, yet it burned for eight."

"Grandma, why doesn't God give us a miracle now? How much is this going to go on?" He looked at her earnestly, willing her to give him an answer. But deep down he knew there wasn't one. Elli gently stoked his hair.

"God willing, one day things will be better, but..." she paused, not sure how much to say to her grandson, "before things get better, they are probably going to get a lot worse." Silently she was hoping the rumors she'd heard that they were all going to be deported to Madagascar would turn out to be true.

Their evening meal consisted of the usual watery cabbage soup. Olga ladled it into bowls while Grandma sliced the clay-like substance which passed for bread and spread a layer of clear beetroot marmalade over it. There was barely enough to go around.

Olga nudged her mother-in-law. "Give Moshe another piece. I don't need very much for my knitting."

They ate in silence. When they'd finished, Olga cleared her throat and turned to speak to Moshe, "I was talking to Mrs. Czernakow today and she told me that if you like, she can talk to her husband and he can see if you can have a job with the Jewish Police."

Adam Czernakow was the chairman of the *Judenrat* who were in charge of the Jewish Police. They were made up mostly of professionals who were unable to find work in their own field. The majority of them were lawyers and nominally they were responsible for 'maintaining law and order', and in fact, it was the law of the jungle which prevailed.

"No! Never! Olga, never in a million years!" Moshe's listless expression suddenly became animated. "The Jewish Police are nothing but a bunch of scoundrels. They're a total disgrace to their race. They're just sniveling, cowardly puppets of their German masters!"

"But Moshe, you won't have to work so hard and you'll make better money. If you go on like this, they'll kill you. Just look at yourself Moshe," she pleaded.

"Olga, do you know what they're like, what they do? They extort bribes from poor beggars who they catch smuggling food; oh and by the way, those are the honest ones. The dishonest ones don't bother with any of that. They just steal everything you've got and beat up into the bargain. Olga, it's completely out of the question."

As the winter wore on, Olga's once erect posture began to droop and the shadows under her cheekbones deepened. The freezing temperatures did not let up and all over the ghetto the water supplies and the sewage systems froze solid. Already thin at the start of the winter, Elli and Olga were now perilously near starvation after months of undernourishment. Their bones had begun to show clearly through the little flesh they had left and their hands and feet were badly swollen. As for Moshe, he continued to speak very little, immersing himself instead in his reading and studying by lamplight every evening.

Lutek lay awake night after night thinking of what he could do to help. Tossing and turning from side to side on his straw mattress one night, an idea suddenly struck him. His violin! Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He pulled it out from under his mattress and opened the case in the darkness. He ran his fingers carefully over the strings and the polished wood. That was it! He would play his violin for a living. He didn't know where or how yet, but he was certain he would find away. They had to survive! They just *had* to!

For the next few weeks Lutek practiced day and night. He hadn't picked up the instrument for over a year, since the war began. Once his confidence had returned a little, he set out to find a job in one of the nightclubs and restaurants that curiously still existed in bizarre abundance in certain parts of the ghetto.

As Lutek crisscrossed unfamiliar streets, he was amazed at the social contrasts he saw. Before tonight, he had only heard about this from his Grandmother's complaints in the evenings after her day among the public. It wasn't the old style of differences that used to exist between the working classes and the middle classes. It was a much more fundamental difference than that; one between those who had enough to eat and those who were slowly starving to death.

For block after block, there were crowds of freezing beggars dying of hunger. Most of them were recently arrived refugees from other towns. They came already destitute into a city that could no longer provide anything for them. There was no accommodation, no food and not even any sanitation. Their deterioration was rapid and terrible as one by one they succumbed to lice, hunger and disease.

Lutek finally came to one of the main boulevards of the ghetto, Leszno Street. It alone boasted twenty restaurants and in every window he could see displays of wines, appetizing hors d'oeuvres and all kinds of tempting delicacies.

Lutek looked on in wonderment. Why didn't the desperate hordes of starving beggars simply smash the windows and help themselves? Nothing made sense any more.

He knocked on the door of every bar and restaurant in turn, offering his services. Everywhere he was turned away. He carried on to Lelazna Street, to Siena Street, to the Café de Arts, La Plendide, Stuka's Caviar Shop, Palermo's and finally the Negresco. Absolutely everyone one of these restaurants and clubs was expensively decorated with abundant food and wine of the finest quality imaginable. They served real coffee, freshly-made cakes, scented mousses, sugared almonds and a dazzling range of savory dishes.

Who on earth could afford to come here?

It was late afternoon and Lutek was tired and discouraged. He came to a cabaret named La Fourchette on the corner of Leszno Street and Solna Street. Outside was a billboard advertising nighttime entertainment. 'Operettas performed by the famous Bergs!'

The name was familiar. They were a family of well-known opera singers from Berlin.

He took a deep breath, straightened his shoulders and opened the front door. Inside he found a grand theatre dining club in the late Victorian style with red plush seating, marble brass fixtures and crystal chandeliers. A lively and elegant establishment before the war, it now stood in decadent contrast to its squalid surroundings. He hesitated for a moment in the doorway.

"What can I do for you?" A barman came towards him.

"I'm looking for the owner. I play the violin and I was wondering if he could give me a job."

The man disappeared behind a dark wooden door. A few moments later he returned.

“Come this way.”

Lutek followed him down a short corridor onto a cluttered office. Behind the old oak desk, the potbellied proprietor, Felix Grossman was sitting in a cloud of cigarette smoke.

“What can I do for you?” he asked gruffly.

“My name is Lutek Weiss and I play the violin. I had a scholarship to the Warsaw Music Conservatory before the war. I would like to play in your theatre cabaret.”

“Let’s hear you play then,” said Felix reclining back in his chair, peering almost disdainfully at Lutek.

Lutek took his violin and bow out of the case, propped the instrument against his shoulder and played a Ragtime number by Scott Joplin which had been very popular before the war.

When he’d finished he lowered his violin and searched Grossman’s blank face for a glimmer of approval. He saw none.

“What about something classical? Grossman asked.

“What would you like to hear? Just name it!” Lutek had a broad repertoire.

After hearing a few more pieces, Felix’s manner became visually more relaxed and, halfway through a movement from a Vivaldi concerto, he held up his hand to stop Lutek playing.

“You’re hired,” he said. “You start tomorrow. I’ll give 20 zlotys per week. Be here at 4:00 to meet the musicians. We open at 5:00; the Operetta begins at 8:00. It’s the *Marriage of Figaro*.”

“Thank you, Mr. Grossman.” Lutek was hardly able to conceal his delight. “Thank you so much. You have no idea what this means to me.”

Felix nodded at him impatiently, stood up and gestured for Lutek to leave.

At home of course, everyone was thrilled with the news of Lutek’s new job. The extra money would make a big difference and the work was not at all risky or dangerous.

The next day, Lutek arrived at the appointed time to rehearse with the other musicians. He’d been practicing the score for hours at home the night before but was still feeling extremely nervous. He went in through the front door and stood in the foyer scanning the empty club. There was no one in yet except for a young girl about his own age. She was carefully folding napkins into fan shapes on the tables and glanced at him casually as she heard the door open.

“We’re not open yet,” she called to him.

“Yes, I know,” replied Lutek, approaching her. “It’s my first day here. I’m playing in the ensemble.”

“Oh.” She noticed his violin case and shrugged.

As Lutek came closer he suddenly realized how beautiful she was. She had dark wavy hair and brown, almond-shaped eyes. Her skin seemed to have an almost translucent quality and Lutek found himself momentarily transfixed. He stood watching her until eventually she became aware of his gaze and turned around. Their eyes met for a moment.

“Do you mind if I wait here by the piano and warm up before the others arrive?” he said, looking away shyly.

“No.” She shrugged again and carried on setting the tables.



Lutek took out his violin and adjusted the strings. He played a few chords then began the overture to that night's performance.

The girl stopped folding the napkins and turned to listen.

"That was really good," she said. Her tone seemed to be not quite so distant as it had been before.

"Thank you," he smiled, seeing that he'd caught her attention.

"What's your name?"

"Lutek."

"I'm Nacia."

"How long have you been working here?"

"Oh, only about a month now. I got taken on here along with my parents."

"What do they do?"

"They sing in the show."

"Your parents are the Bergs? They used to be really famous back in Germany."

"Yes, we used to live in Munich."

"We're from Berlin. We were deported here two months ago. Do you perform with your parents?"

Nacia laughed. "No, my parents tried to teach me to sing, but I'm not much of a performer. I got this job because we needed the money and anyway the pay's good, especially the tips. And I'm in the warmth here and you can get a bit to eat from the kitchen. Besides, it lets me escape from the chaos outside, at least for a while."

"I know," Lutek agreed with a shudder. "I was lucky to get this job myself. I went to over a dozen places and they all turned me away." He looked around the room. "Tell me, Nacia, with all the shortages and the poverty and the war, who has the money to come to a place like *this*?"

"Ah, that's easy," she laughed. "The new aristocracy of the Underworld. The smugglers and I mean *big time* smugglers. Mr. Grossman says they bring in eighty per cent of the ghetto's food and that without them we'd all starve. They come here to eat, drink and forget that they risk their lives every day. They spend 500 to 1,000 zlotys per night. Then besides them, there are other restaurateurs, the grocers, the bankers, and the heads of the Jewish Police."

Lutek could scarcely believe what he was hearing. All this going on while thousands around them were collapsing through starvation.

"Is smuggling really that profitable?" he asked incredulously.

"You better believe it!"

The door opened and three men came in carrying instrument cases. Lutek introduced himself and they got down to the business of rehearsing for the evening's performance.

That night, just as Lutek was leaving, Nacia discreetly pressed a small newspaper package into his hand.

"Shh! The chef gives us all something to take home, but don't let Felix see it," she whispered.

He tucked the package into his jacket pocket and left through the side door. Even though he had an official pass from his employer allowing him to be on the street after the curfew, he knew that it only lent him a limited measure of safety. The streets could be

raided at any time and the guards would shoot at anything that moved. Or the Jewish Police could drag him off to the Pawiak Prison where he would only be released for a fee.

As soon as he was outside in the frosty air of the alleyway, he opened the parcel. Inside he found small potatoes and a piece of sausage, still warm from the kitchen. In the faint moonlight he saw some writing in red ink among the greasy stains on the newspaper. He looked more closely, his eyes slowly adjusting to the light. It read simply, *I start at 3:00*. Lutek smiled to himself and folded the package back up.

Moving through the shadows, he turned off Leszno Street onto Karmelicka Street. Suddenly something hit him hard in the stomach. He stopped dead in his tracks but realized it was just a small boy who had bumped into him as he was running around the corner. Lutek could just about make out his shape in the darkness and was shocked to see the tattered rags he was wearing. The boy extended a thin dirty blackened hand.

"Please, Mister, some food. *Hot rachmunes*, have pity," he muttered through chattered teeth. It was mid-January and he was standing in short trousers with no shoes; just rags wrapped around his feet tied with string. From under his cap two big eyes bulged from a thin triangular face.

Lutek looked carefully at the young street urchin. In the darkness he seemed to bear a striking resemblance to his younger brother, Lukaš.

He reached into his pocket for some money but felt the newspaper package instead. He took it out and gave it to the boy who took it slowly, gingerly. He looked astonished to have received anything at all.

The next day Lutek wove and zigzagged his way across the six blocks from his home to the La Fourchette to try to make it for three o'clock when Nacia started her shift. He felt an intense sense of growing excitement at the prospect of seeing her again. When he arrived she was already there. She turned to him with a wide, welcoming smile as he came in through the door.

"Thanks for the package," he said.

"It was nothing. Listen, I've got a joke for you. Horowitz comes to the Other World.."

"Who's Horowitz?"

"Hitler! Don't you know anything? Everyone here calls him that. Anyway, Horowitz comes to the Other World and sees Jesus in Paradise. 'Hey, what's a Jew doing here without an armband?' he says. 'You'd better let him be,' answers St. Peter. 'He's the boss' son'"

They chatted on for an hour while she worked until the musicians came in at four.

That night, as he left the club, he saw the street urchin again and once more he gave a morsel from Nacia's package. The boy thanked Lutek profusely and disappeared once again into the shadows.

Day after day, Lutek and Nacia met before the show. Every day he was filled with a keen sense of anticipation at the thought of seeing her. The sight of Nacia made the long and tortuous trip through the ghetto streets seem like nothing. During the show he would watch her from the musicians' corner as she served customers, his eyes following her as she went back and forth. As if by some magic spell, his world was filled with a newfound excitement and sense of meaning. During the few short hours he spent with Nacia each day, he could push the grim reality of life in the ghetto out of his mind for a few precious moments and pretend that everything was normal.

Every night after the show Lutek met the urchin, who had now started to wait for him in the narrow alley. Every night he gave him food from his package and every night the boy would immediately vanish back into the shadows. He had begun to feel a strange affection for this child even though they hadn't exchanged a word since their first meeting.

Lutek's contribution to the family's coffers initially made a real difference, but soon fresh waves of refugees began to arrive again. Seventy two thousand people from surrounding towns were crammed into the ghetto during February causing more food shortages and driving up the prices yet again. The Weiss family was back to where they had been before. The sack of flour they had brought with them was now empty and the atmosphere at home was once again desperate as their condition deteriorated even further.

As the population swelled, typhus and tuberculosis erupted again, compounding the already high mortality rate from hunger. The contrast of high life led by the exiles to the decrepit beggars grew ever more pronounced.

"Shame on them!" Grandma would snarl disdainfully at the converted Jew.

"What is it? What happened?"

"Oh, God! I can't take it anymore I'm going crazy. Damn race and religion!" He crumpled into a chair, trembling from hunger and nervous exhaustion.

"I'll bring you some hot tea and some bread with cheese. You need to eat something or you'll not make it through tonight." Nacia disappeared and came back a few minutes later with a tray.

Lutek ate in frantic gulps and after a while began to relax.

"I've got good news," said Nacia. "Starting tomorrow, I'll be working four hours a day with my Aunt at the hospital. I've been waiting for this chance since we first got here."

"What does she do?" asked Lutek.

"She's a doctor. It's what I want to be too. I want to study medicine once the war is over and we get out of here."

She paused for a moment and searched Lutek's eyes sadly. "Do you think we will ever get out of here?"

"Don't talk like that Nacia," said Lutek. He gently took her hand. "We have to get out of here. We have to survive."

She gave him a wistful little smile and he tightened his hold on her hand.

"I'm happy for you, Nacia, about the hospital."

"Thanks," smiled again. "I'm going to try hard to learn as much as I possibly can from my Aunt."

That night Lutek did not see the street urchin. He was nearly home when something made him stop and go back. He retraced his steps all the way back to the Karmelicka, the area where the boy was usually to be found but was nowhere in sight. Lutek searched the alleys and courtyards and was about to give up when he heard whimpering from a dark doorway. There was a boy sitting hunched up on the ground. As he approached, the boy lifted his head. Two enormous sunken eyes looked up at Lutek from under the brim of his cap.

"What's the matter?" whispered Lutek. In the whole of two months it was the first time he had spoken to him.

The boy began to cry convulsively. "My parents...they died of typhus."

"Do you have any other family to go to? An aunt, an uncle or a cousin?" asked Lutek.

The boy shook his head and looked away again.

"But where are you going to live now?"

The boy shrugged then lowered his head again. Lutek could see the bones pressing through the thin material of his flimsy shirt. He wanted to take him home and look after him but he knew his mother would protest. They hadn't enough room for themselves or enough food and then there was the danger that he might bring typhus with him. The terror of typhus and the quarantine it would bring down on them all was dreadful. No, it was impossible.

"Have you tried the orphanage? Dr. Korczak would take you in. I'll take you there tomorrow," Lutek offered.

The boy made no reply.

Lutek handed the parcel over and the boy took it, but this time almost reluctantly. Lutek noticed for the first time that his hands and feet were swollen. Starvation. He would get the boy to Dr. Korczak's orphanage first thing in the morning. After telling the boy he would look for him the next day, he left for home.

The next morning Lutek set out in search of the street urchin. He searched all along Karmelicka and the entire block but he was nowhere to be found. No one had seen him that day.

Lutek went out every morning after that, desperately trying to find the boy. A strange panic gripped him. He was determined to save this scrawny phantom whose name he didn't even know.

Eventually he tried the orphanage. Perhaps the boy had gone there by himself. He knocked on the door and a tall, large-boned woman in a blue uniform answered. She was evidently the matron.

"What can we do for you, son?" she said pleasantly.

"I'm looking for a boy, about six years old." Lutek felt stupid. He didn't even know the boy's name.

"Come in. I'll show you to Dr. Korczak. Maybe he can help you."

Lutek followed the woman through the large hall which in former times had been used for dancing. Dr. Korczak, the orphanage director, was sorting through supplies in the storage room. He was a tall, kind looking man with rimless glasses and a small, trimmed beard.

The matron explained briefly why Lutek was there. "What's the child's name?" asked Dr. Korczak.

"I don't know. He's not a relation of mine or anything. I just know him from the street, that's all. He's about six. His parents died of typhus recently and he said he hadn't any other relations and he'd nowhere to stay. I promised I'd help him but now he's disappeared."

Korczak removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"No one fitting that description had been taken in here, I'm afraid. We haven't taken any new orphans in for three weeks because we're already so overcrowded. He may have visited our soup kitchen perhaps, but there's no way of knowing for sure.

Lutek leaned against the wall and sighed.

"I know. It's heartbreaking," said Korczak in a comforting voice. "Until now, starvation and squalor have only hit the truly improvised. But typhus is much more democratic, it's a no respecter of class or position, it affects everyone equally. The only ones

who seem to have some resistance are children. It's a tragedy with so many young adults dying; an enormous number of youngsters are becoming orphaned. We can't cope with it in here anymore. We can only accommodate two hundred children. It's terrible, I know, but we've no choice but to leave all the other thousands to their fate on the street. I'm sorry son."

Lutek left the orphanage in a wretched mood. He couldn't stop himself feeling responsible for the boy.

A week later he was roaming the streets in the morning just as the ghetto was waking from its slumber when he noticed something resembling a pile of rags in the middle of Karmelicka Street. He approached with a growing feeling of dread. There on the dirty cobbles lay the sprawled out swollen body of the young street urchin. He was lying on his side, his face frozen in a terrible last gasp; his eyes staring into eternity. His arms were stretching out in front of him to a piece of bread which someone must have thrown down to him. He'd obviously become too weak to reach it.

Lutek bent down to touch his hand then recoiled.

It was stone cold. Stiff.

"Where were you? I looked everywhere for you!" he sobbed out loud, wiping tears from his eyes on his sleeve. "Why didn't you come to me? Why?"

A few passersby stopped to watch. A man came over to Lutek and handed him a newspaper. Lutek unfolded it and placed it over the boy's lifeless head. Nameless and with no family, the urchin would be taken off to be buried anonymously somewhere in a mass grave.

Lutek was overcome with a devastating sense of guilt. Through the boy's eyes, death was already turning its cold gaze onto him and his family. His guilt and pain turned into anger. He made a silent vow that he would never again allow the scourge of starvation to claim the lives of those whom he loved. He would never be late again!

He turned away and ran. Everything in the ghetto was still closed. He fled aimlessly, with no idea of where he was running, until he finally stopped, exhausted and out of breath. He was outside Gogolewski's Cake Shop and the owner was just starting to open up. He went inside and sat down, his brain still in turmoil. All he could see was the image of the dead boy who looked so much like his brother. He thought of his mother and grandmother who were now showing signs of hunger and failing health too. And his father was still coming home and sitting for hours holding his head in agony. All for the sake of the pittance and bits of food he brought home with him. Death and dying were all around him.

## Chapter 23 The Smugglers

Coming home late from the club one night Lutek had an idea. He let himself in quietly, checked that everyone was asleep the crept over to nudge his brother.

"Huh? What...?" Lukaš stirred sleepily.

"Wake up," Lutek shook his arm. "Listen to me."

"Now what?" Lukaš turned over reluctantly on his straw mattress to listen.

"We can't go on much longer like this "Lukaš; we'll all die of starvation.

"Come on, Lutek. You didn't wake me up to tell me that did you? You're just hungry and dreaming of food. Lie on your stomach, it helps..."

"No. I'm serious. We have to do something. You know the cemetery down the street? It's a good place to get over to the other side."

"What? Are you nuts? Lutek, that's crazy!"

"Everything in the ghetto is crazy, so what's so different about this?"

"What's different is that if we get caught we're dead meat. And how are we going to get *into* the cemetery in the first place? Haven't you seen the guards?" Lukaš was no wide awake.

"The guards have to change shifts at certain times. If we don't do something soon, all of us will be going to the cemetery...in coffins."

There was silence for a few moments as Lutek's words sank in. Then suddenly Lukaš' expression changed to one of childlike enthusiasm.

It'd be like a movie wouldn't it? Good guys and bad guys; cops and robbers?"

"Kind of," Lutek smiled. "We'll start tomorrow. I've a day off from the club tomorrow."

Lukaš hardly slept for the rest of the night. His mind was full of visions of food, sacks and sacks of food...

"Stop here," said Lutek. "We have to wait for the change of guards." It was almost three o'clock in the afternoon on Monday in late April, one of the club's dark days. Lutek obediently pressed himself against the wall behind his brother in the shaded alcove.

"It's vital our timing is right," continued Lutek, though he knew too well that the conditions in the crowded lawless streets were such that precision timing could not be guaranteed.

They waited, in growing anticipation for over half an hour. Then four motorcycles roared toward the gate.

"That's the next shift. Be sharp and stay right behind me," Lutek ordered; crouching down ready to sprint.

The boys darted into the milling crowd and while the new guards were taking their posts and the morning shift was mounting the motorcycles, they darted into the bushes next to the wall. They climbed through the thin sticks, up and over the wall. Inside the cemetery, they quickly followed the narrow paths, past a myriad of gravestones, some old and worn, others glistening white. It was deserted because it is restricted from access all times except for burials.

"Remember this route," Lutek said sternly. Something in his voice filled Lukaš with fear. Wouldn't he always be there to lead him?

They reached the Western Wall at the far end and were pacing back and forth, examining the best way to get over.

"Hey, look over here; it's perfect!" shouted Lukaš excited. He jumped and reached for a branch and pulled himself up into the tree, higher and higher. Before long he was perched on the high branch looking over the top of the wall.

"Right here, Lutek! From here we can step onto the monuments on the other side."

Lutek climbed up the tree to have a look for himself. On the south-west side, the wall separated the Jewish cemetery from the Evangelical cemetery on the Aryan side whose gravestones butted right up against the wall.

"Let me go first" Lutek pushed past his brother to make sure no guards were in sight.

Lutek jumped down onto the gravestone. From there it was only another jump to the ground.

Lukaš followed him when he got the 'clear' signal but hit the ground with a thud on his behind.

"Ouch!"

Lutek laughed, "It's ok the first time, but you have to just the distance better next time. Come on now. We can't dally here."

Lukaš dusted himself off and followed. No one was in sight so they made their way toward the Kiercelak Market. Without armbands they passed as Polish Christians.

When they reached the Market, Lutek took the small amount of money he saved from his wages at La Fourchette out of his shoe. Posing as merchant helpers they quickly purchased vegetables, sugar and two loaves of bread.

"It's all half the price of what we have to pay inside," remarked Lutek. "Just one more shop and we have to turn back. We'll get some smoked meat. All the rest we'll keep for ourselves, the meat I can sell for a big profit. We'll get some for ourselves next time."

After purchasing the meat, Lutek was growing nervous and wanted to head back.

"But we can carry more, and you still have a bit of money left," argued Lukaš.

"I know, but something's giving me the creeps. Let's get out of here."

They swung the loaded sacks onto their backs and headed back to the cemetery.

"I'll go first, then you hand me your sack, then I'll help you up," said Lutek.

He climbed up first, rested his load on the top of the wall and helped Lukaš make it over. When they were inside, Lutek made some shrubs.

"It'll be about five now. We'll wait here until eleven o'clock when the guards change shifts again. It'll be safer then, plus darker, even if it's past curfew."

Sitting in the bushes they took one of the loaves of bread, some cheese and devoured it. Compared to the clay and sawdust enriched bread in the ghetto, their meal was like a feast.

"It's spooky," Lukaš said softly, watching the trees sway and rustle in the wind. I'm scared.

"Scared?" What are you scared of?"

"I don't know. Listen."

"That's nothing."

Lukaš didn't say any more but moved closer to Lutek.

"Where are we going to say we were? We aren't going back till past curfew and we're going to get in trouble."

"Let me do the talking, don't say anything. Most important, don't tell anyone about this route. It's a secret and it's our route. We don't want word getting out and others spoiling it for us."

"No, I won't."

"Not a living soul, promise."

"I promise."

As eleven o'clock approached, they followed the paths toward the gate to wait for the changing of the guards. At exactly eleven, the motorcycles came roaring down Okopwa Street again. While the guards were briefly distracted, the two boys climbed over the wall and disappeared into the ghetto streets. They made it home at quarter past eleven.

It was a simple plan. It was also very dangerous.

Lutek sold the smoked meat the next day and made a five hundred zloty profit. It paid for the trip plus that week they were better than they had been in over a year.

From that night on, Lutek and Lukaš were in and out of the ghetto several times a week. They joined the ranks of thousands of others who climbed the walls, jumping trolleys, snuck through gates, did anything to bring food to their families. The stakes were high. Not a day passed without news of someone, even youngsters being beaten, shot or disappearing forever into Gestapo Headquarters. At the club, Lutek began to feel an odd sort of kindred with the black marketers, even though he nowhere approached their ranks. They smuggled goods by the truckloads.

The impact on the family was immediate and great. Olga and Grandma's health improved rapidly with the better nourishment over the summer months. With the extra cash, they were also able to purchase more wool and thread to do their handiwork.

With the cash Lutek now made, his father no longer needed to go to the work brigades and the family was relieved of worrying about him.

Lukaš took any extra turnips or carrot and set up shop next to Grandma by the newsstand. He found an old chair with the seat missing put a plank of wood over it and laid his goods out. Soon there appeared, along with the two or three potatoes, a button someone lost, an old bent fork, string, sometime even a nice shiny pebble that to Lukaš' young mind thought someone would want to purchase. The two of them became a daily sight at the newsstand, hawking all sorts of items. Lukaš enjoyed the wheeling and dealing and enthusiastically counted his change every evening. First, he arranged the coins in neat little stacks, then he stowed it away in an old pickle jar.

"Remember how we sold your dried mushrooms the summer we went to Lezaky?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I wish we had some now. We could have yummy mushroom sauce on dumplings."

"Hmmm. We haven't had that in years now."

"Do you think Pepík would remember me?" Lukaš looked sad.

"I'm certain of it, Lukaš. Animals never forget."

A tear fell from Lukaš' eye. "Grandma, we had such a good time there. I wish we were there now. I wish we stayed. I want to go to the creek and catch rock lobsters and pick berries with you. Heck, I'd pick cherries for the miserable neighbors."

Grandma's eyes too welled with tears, weeping for the lives of her children, which would never be the same again.



On August 25<sup>th</sup>, the first British bombs fell on Berlin. A wave of optimism swept the ghetto that at least the tide of war would change and Germany would fall. Everyone was looking to the day of liberation. People were flocking to the newsstand, gladly paying 10 zloty extra for copy of the German newspapers showing the destruction of German cities by Allied bombing.

"I'll meet you at the hospital after you finished and we'll go to Gogolewski's," said Lutek to Nacia.

"Gogolewski's! That's the cake shop!" she exclaimed wide-eyed.

"I know."

"But..." the extravagance was unimaginable.

"No buts. We'll go have a nice cake, and have a good time."

"How can you afford it?"

"I can afford it...now."

"Lutec, I worried about you. It's so risky. If they catch you," she shook her head, not even wanting to think about it.

The next day, Lutec met her at the steps of the hospital at noon. They walked the cake shop, hand in hand, fighting their way through the crowds. Nacia couldn't decide what she wanted from the myriads of sweets to choose from. In the end, she had a raspberry soda and hazelnut cream cake.

"Listen to this. Why shouldn't the Germans bomb London and the English bomb Berlin?" she asked taking a forkful of whipped cream. "All that flying back and forth is just a waste of gas. The Germans ought to bomb Berlin and the English, London."

They both laughed out loud.

"Oh! I've another one. If Germany wins the war, a quarter of Jews will die. If the English wins, three quarters of the Jews will die," she paused grinning.

"Ok, why?" he smiled.

"Because that's how long it will take for the English to win."

"Oh, that's bad!" Lutec groaned, stifling a laugh.

"You know, it's really sad at the hospital," Nacia said now very serious. "We have no supplies or medication to treat the patients with, not even any food for them. And it's so overcrowded there are two and three patients to a bed."

"I don't know how you do it, Nacia. I can't take being around sick people. It gets to me too much."

"It gets to me too, but when you see that you can help someone, make them better, it's a great feeling. Aunt Rachel has given me some science books to study. She says that when I turn seventeen, she'll get me enrolled in the medical school."

"Medical school? Here?" Lutec was shocked.

"Yes. They've just formed a program among the doctors, but it's very hush hush. I would take one course at a time until the war is over, then I can continue my studies properly."

Just then a young boy in rags wondered in. With aimless eyes he gravitated to their table. His head was shaved and covered with a dozen small open sores. He stood by their table, silently looking at their dessert, then at them with yellow glazed imploring eyes.

Nacia and Lutec looked at each other and put their forks down, both sick to their stomach.

The owner began to shout at the young boy, shooing him away.

“Go on! I told you not to come in here and bother my customers! Go on! Scram!”

“No, it’s alright. He’s not bothering us,” said Lutek to the owner, who was no more but continued to glare at the boy.

“Here, do you want to finish it?” Lutek asked, pushing their half-eaten cakes towards him. The boy took the fork and awkwardly scooped up the remainders into his mouth. He finished their sodas, whispering a barely audible, ‘*thank you*’ and left in the same yellow-eyed gaze he came in with.

“Lutek, I feel sick. Let’s go.”

“Me too. It’s almost time we were going to the club anyway.” As much as they had looked forward to their treat, they ended up not enjoying it in the end.

In the dressing room of the Club, Lili Berg was ironing her costume for the evening’s performance. She had to take in almost every one of them because they were all too loose. She was not feeling well again today, the cough was making her tired, and with the weakness in her arms and legs she could barely stand.

“Here’s your tea, Lili,” said one of the kitchen helpers. “Are you feeling alright?”

“Yes, I’ll be fine. Just a little tired,” Lili replied.

She hadn’t told Elias, her husband. Most of the time she had not been feeling well. He would only worry and there wasn’t anything to be done about it anyway. Lili took a sip of tea then continued ironing. All of a sudden the violent coughing spasm seized her again. Her chest ached as it tried to rid itself of the offending matter. She finally collapsed in the chair, coughing into a white handkerchief that was now stained red with blood.

Just then Elias walked in joyfully, he had just received the musical score for the new Operetta.

“Oh dear God, Lili! What’s the matter? What happened?”

“I don’t feel well, Elias. I’m weak. I won’t be able to perform tonight.”

Elias was speechless. Now not only worried about his wife but also the prospect of losing their job at La Fourchette. There were plenty of performers who would eagerly take their place. He knelt down next to his wife, straightening her body in the chair. She was feverish and pale with flushed red cheeks.

“Dear God, you can’t be sick. No, you can’t! What are we going to do?” he fretted over her, wiping her forehead.

When the sound of Nacia’s voice reached the dressing room, Elias darted out.

“Nacia, darling, your mother is terribly sick,” his face was frightened.

Nacia ran into the dressing room to her mother’s side. Lili was now resting quietly with only an occasional weak cough, but her body was totally exhausted.

“Mama, what happened?”

“Just a cough,” Lili answered in a faint voice.

“Nacia, you have to take your mother’s place tonight and sing with me,” said Elias to his daughter solemnly.

“Me? Papa, I can’t! I can’t sing. You know that and besides I haven’t rehearsed it,” Nacia pleaded.

“Sweetheart, I know how you feel but we have no choice. If the show is cancelled, if we show any sign of weakness, Mr. Grossman will toss us out and find someone else. Nacia, you have to. Besides, your voice is not as bad as you think.” He held the score sheets and held them to his daughter. “You have a few hours. We’ll practice together.”

“You can do it, Nacia,” said Lutek who was standing in the doorway. “You already know the words, you hear them every night. You have a fine voice. You can do it. I’ll set the tables for you while you rehearse with your father.”

She looked back and forth between her father’s face and Lutek frantically.

Without a word, she took the musical score.

The show went on as usual that night. Nacia’s performance went smoothly, even to her own surprise. Mr. Grossman never knew about the incident and the other waitresses covered for her absence.

Lili, at Elias’ and Nacia’s insistence, went to see her sister Rachel at the hospital the next day. There it was learned that Lili had tuberculosis.

“It’s going to be harder for you to sing and perform, Lili.”

“But, Rachel, I have to go on. We have to work or we’ll starve,” Lili protested.

Lili continued to perform. Occasionally, when she was too ill or weak, Nacia stepped in for her mother.

Olga, we have to prepare the room in the back shed,” Grandma said suddenly one morning late September, shaking her wake.

“God have mercy!” Olga exclaimed and ran to the children’s bed.

Lutek was stretched out on his soaking sheets, his cheeks flushed, eyes glazed, semiconscious.

“I heard him moaning all night, like he was in pain,” said Lukaš.

They moved Lutek to the tool shed behind the building. It was the secret place for typhus victims in their building so that everyone would not have to undergo the dreaded ‘*disinfection*’ or worse, be quarantined.

The disinfection required the victim of the family and neighbors to bathhouses for delousing. Meanwhile, the apartments were deloused while the people were in the baths. Most came back with their heads shaved and more ill from the process than they were before. When they returned home, they found that the disinfection crew had stolen all of their belongings. It was usually a death-dealing blow to all involved.

When a building was to be quarantined, all the inhabitants were to be isolated for a minimum of two weeks. All the doors were locked and guards were posted to prevent anything or anyone from entering or leaving. This included food; therefore the residents were forced to starve for the two to three weeks. Since most were starving already and had no stores of food, the quarantine often meant death.

Grandma and Olga tended to Lutek day and night; occasionally Moshe and Lukaš came down. Lutek was asleep or semiconscious most of the time.

Nacia began to worry when he did not show up at La Fourchette the first night. But when he didn’t show up for three days, she feared something had happened to him on one of his trips over the wall. She went to ask his family.

Moshe took her to the shed where Grandma was sitting by Lutek’s side.

“Mrs. Weiss, I’ve been so worried.”

“He has typhus. I’m afraid it’s very bad. He’s hardly ever conscious and hallucinates all the time.”

Nacia took Lutek’s hand. He was asleep, breathing heavily, his body covered in sweat. She stayed with him for several hours, talking quietly to Grandma, then left. Day after day, she came to pay a visit. His condition didn’t get better, if anything, it got worse

and he was getting very thin. Their small store of food was now gone. It had been days since Lutek fell ill.

To make matters worse, the food rations in the ghetto had been reduced again, driving prices higher yet again. Then on October 5<sup>th</sup>, a decree was announced that there would be the death penalty for anyone leaving the ghetto without permission. Lukaš listened to the news stone-faced.

Lukaš came down to the shed one morning and found his Grandmother crying and praying over Lutek's unconscious body.

"What is it, Grandma? Why are you crying?"

"Oh, Lukaš, I'm so afraid, for Lutek, if he doesn't get well, we'll all starve."

Lukaš sat silently. Thinking.

With the wad of money from Lutek's matters firmly tucked in his show, Lukaš set out toward the cemetery. He waited in the alcove for the three o'clock changing of the guard just as they had so many times before. Soon he was in the cemetery running toward their tree. It was strange doing the run on his own. He wasn't so much afraid but there was the uneasy feeling of being alone.

Perched on top of the wall, Lukaš checked all directions carefully to make sure there were no guards in sight. It was clear. With his heart pounding but in steely determination, he jumped down from the wall to the Aryan side.

It was nearly midnight before he returned home, laden with food and proud of himself. His mother was in the shed. Grandma was still awake, sitting by the window, waiting for him to return. She hugged him when he came in.

"Lukaš, thank God you're safe."

Lukaš saw the distress in her tear-filled eyes.

"Your Mama, Papa and I and now even Lutek depend on you to provide for us. As much as it torments us to know that it puts you boys in danger we can't stop you or forbid you. All I ask is that you remember when you take these risks to provide for all of us, that your life is the most precious thing in the world to us."

Lukaš sat on the floor and crossed his arms in her lap. She stroked his hair. Great! He thought to himself, to help his family stay alive he had to torture them with worry.

"Grandma?"

"Hmm..."

"I've been thinking, do you think it's sacrilege to run through the cemetery at night?" his eyes were downcast.

"No, I don't think it is. To stay alive, God allows for many things."

Lutek was ill for four weeks. Nacia brought her Aunt Rachel to come have a look at him.

"I'm afraid, it's critical now. He'd developed kidney disease as a complication to typhoid."

"Oh, no God! What are we going to do? There must be something we can do, Doctor!" Olga shrieked almost hysterically. Nacia and the rest of the family listened in shock to her diagnosis.

"What can we do?" repeated Nacia, trembling.

"I'm afraid the medication he needs is not available in the ghetto, not even in the hospital," Rachel answered sadly.

"Tell me what you need. Write a prescription and I'll get it," Lukaš said in a loud voice that startled everyone.

"I don't think you'll be able to find it, even on the Aryan side."

"I will. We *have* to save Lutek! Write me the prescription," Lukaš insisted.

Rachel wrote it out and handed the paper to Lukaš.

"He'll need it soon if he's to survive; within a day or two."

Lukaš took all the money he could collect at home and made for the Aryan side that same afternoon. Instead of going to the market, he made towards their old neighborhood. He went straight to their pharmacy.

"I need this. It's an emergency," he said handing over the crumpled prescription. "My brother is very, very ill."

The pharmacist eyed him carefully. "Aren't you the Weiss boy?" he asked at last with a smile.

"Yes," replied Lukaš.

"I barely recognize you. How's your family?"

"Ok, except for my brother. Like I said, he's very sick."

The pharmacist looked at the prescription and shook his head again.

"I'm sorry. I haven't seen this stuff for over a year."

"But I *have* to get it or my brother will die. I have to. It's an emergency!" Lukaš shouted in desperation.

"Ok. Ok. Let me make a few phone calls and we'll see what I can come up with. Come in and sit in the back for a while.

He called every other pharmacy in the city but without any luck. Undaunted, he tried a few of his colleagues who were working in the hospitals. Finally, he managed to track down what Lukaš needed in Lofiwka, an institution for the mentally ill.

"But you have to wait until tomorrow to get it. They've already closed today. It's past five o'clock."

"Tomorrow? Tomorrow might be too late! The doctor said he needed it within a day or two," Lukaš insisted.

"I know, son. I know how badly you need it, but there isn't anything else we can do. You'll have it first thing in the morning."

The pharmacist's voice softened. "You can sleep here on the couch in my office if you like."

Lukaš had no other option but to accept the situation. "Ok. Thank you," he said.

The next day, the pharmacist drove out to the Lofiwka with Lukaš. He left Lukaš to wait in the car and went in to collect the medication.

"Here it is." He handed the boy a brown paper bag.

"How much is it?" Lukaš pulled out a wad of money.

"Put it away. They owe me a favor anyway."

Lukaš looked at him in disbelief, still clutching the money.

"No, I mean it, really. Just tell me where to drop you off. You must get this to your brother. He needs it urgently."

"Err, thanks. At the Kierelak Market, please." Lukaš had learned that he could trust the pharmacist, but not quite so much that he was willing to divulge his secret route.

Twenty minutes later they were at the market and Lukaš was suddenly feeling the necessity for haste.

"Thank you very much. I can't tell you how much we all owe you," said Lukaš stepping out of the car.

"It's nothing. Take care of yourself, child."

They shook hands briefly then Lukaš was swallowed up into the crowds of the marketplace. He ran through the narrow streets which marked out his usual route and was about to turn the corner when he heard the sound of marching boots. With his heart pounding, he pressed himself into the shadow of a doorway, hoping that whoever lived there would not choose that moment to come out. The rhythmic sound of boots thudding on the pavement grew louder and louder as they drew nearer. Lukaš held his breath. It must be a patrol. He was going to get caught, he was sure of it. He shut his eyes and his heart began to beat wildly. He thought he was going to pass out.

The marching built to a deafening crescendo but then, just as Lukaš prepared himself to face imminent capture, it started to recede again into the distance. The patrol moved away down the street. Breathing a deep sigh of relief, Lukaš moved on.

He reached the Evangelical Cemetery to find two German guards inside with rifles and dogs standing ten yards from where his usual route would take him. They were smoking and sharing a joke or two. Absolutely everything seemed to be going wrong with his journey back.

He wondered how he was going to kill time without looking conspicuous, while he waited for them to move off. He suddenly became aware of his ragged appearance. He couldn't afford to be seen in public looking like this. He retreated a few paces and walked around the block, trying to appear as calm as natural as possible. He realized then how much he hated being on the "other side." He preferred the familiarity and relative safety of the ghetto. On the Aryan streets he felt like a target, like he had a big sign about him saying '*catch me, I'm a Jew!*' He shivered.

Eventually the guards moved away and Lukaš made a dash for it. He sprinted for the wall and scrambled over it as quickly as he could. He still had just enough time to sneak across at the three o'clock changing of the guards.

"Got it!" he announced as he opened the door to the shed.

"Lukaš, thank God!" His mother pulled him to her and held him tightly.

Lukaš continued to provide for the family while Lutek regained his strength. It was two weeks before he was strong enough to be up and about. The first snowfall came early that year in mid-November as Lutek went back to play at the Club. He was extremely relieved to find that Grossman had kept his position open for him. He'd fully expected to find someone else in his place when he returned.

"We've kept putting in a good word for you," Elias said. "Grossman agreed to be patient." They headed towards a soda bar but at every pace they were jostled by the crowds of people on the congested streets. Nacia came to a halt in a doorway.

"Lutec, I can't stand it anymore. I just can't take it all the time; all these people, everywhere, always!"

Lutec pulled her gently towards him and shielded her from the passing crowds with his own body. She was holding her head and trembling.

"Come on, I know somewhere we can go." He took her by the hand and started cutting his way through the crowd, pulling her behind him.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"You'll see."

Lutek turned onto Geisa Street and made towards the short dead end street where the hideout was. He led her across the rubble towards the rear courtyard.

"Careful, now. Don't twist your ankle. Follow me up the shed, but make sure no one see us."

"Where on earth are we going, Lutek?" asked Nacia in puzzlement.

"We're almost there. You'll love it."

He climbed onto the roof of the shed then pulled her up against him. She followed him down the corridor and up the last flight of stairs.

"But there's nothing here," she said in disappointment.

Lutek didn't say a word but went instead to remove the pile of debris he and Lukaš piled against the door to their secret room to conceal it in case anyone made it up the stairway. Once the planks of the wood were cleared, Lutek grasped the doorknob and said, "Come here and close your eyes."

Nacia moved up to stand next to him and shut her eyes.

"No peeking."

She laughed and covered her eyes with her hands. "Ok. I'm not peeking."

Lutek opened the door. "Now you can look."

Nacia opened her eyes and stared in astonishment. She was speechless. Stepping forward carefully, she entered the room. Her hand brushed across the backs of books, the velvet of the sofa before she went through the glass door and out onto the terrace,

"How did you find this place?"

"By accident. I found it one day when I was exploring with my brother. We use it sometimes on our trips back from the other side or when we just feel like a little peace and quiet. For a few precious hours, we feel like normal people."

"It's unbelievable!"

Lutek came up behind Nacia and wrapped his arms around her. Together, they looked out over the rooftops of the patio.

"I wonder how much longer we'll be stuck before we're liberated," she said.

Lutek did not answer.

"There's so much I want to do and I'm stuck here like a prisoner. It really gets to me sometimes."

"What's the first thing you're going to do once you're free?"

"I don't know what the first thing will be, but at some point I want to study medicine. How about you?"

"I want to be a concert violinist. I want to study music."

She smiled. A light northern breeze gusted against the balcony.

"It's cold, let's go back in." She turned to go inside. Lutek followed close behind and shut the door.

"Nacia, I have something for you."

"Something for me?" She twirled round in surprise.

"Yes." He pulled out a small white cardboard box and held it out in front of him for Nacia to take. She opened it excitedly with fumbling fingers and gasped when she saw what

was inside. A gold locket on a delicate golden chain. She stood staring at it in astonishment. Gold jewelry was a luxury she could scarcely imagine in the ghetto.

“Nacia, I love you,” he said softly.

She turned her face upwards and smiled tenderly. “I love you too,” she answered.

They stood together for a long time, silently clasping each other’s hands. She nestled her head against Lutek’s shoulder and he felt the warmth of her body pressing tightly against his. He began to gently kiss her cheek, then her eyes, then her nose, and then he moved his lips down to kiss her neck. A shiver of excitement ran simultaneously through both their bodies as they moved slowly towards the couch. He gently undid the buttons of her dress and moved his hands slowly across her breasts. Her skin was warm and soft to his touch.

With their lips melting together, he pulled her down onto the couch and she threw her arms around him. They began to make love, slowly at first, then with wild abandon as they consumed each other with a desperate passion.

They lay wrapped tightly in each other’s arms, hot, exhausted and sweaty, until late into the night.



## **Chapter 24 Anthropoid**

Karl entered Prague's old Town Square with a strong feeling he was being followed. He looked around him. The Square wasn't busy but it was still difficult to be absolutely certain that there was nobody watching him. The medieval arcades and five storey buildings which flanked the square could be hiding a hundred eyes. He made his way from the Powder Tower and walked diagonally through the open space over the cobblestones. From the corner of his eyes he glanced to the left at the people sitting outside a café. There was a hum of talk and a little half-hearted singing as he passed the brightly lit entrance. A lanky young man leaned against the wall smoking a cigarette. Karl walked on, still moving diagonally so as to pass him at a measured distance of twenty yards.

Clap, clap, clap went his heels on the cobblestones.

A flower girl selling carnations and roses stood in the middle of the square. He stopped in front of her and pretended to inspect the blooms while surveying his surroundings.

He bought a small bunch and left down PaŃiska Street. He put a block and a half behind him. If he was being tailed by someone then they would have to show themselves in the street or risk losing him. He had to be sure.

As Karl began to cross the street, he deliberately dropped his keys at the pavement's edge. He knelt down to pick them up and, as he did so, he stole another backward look. Two men stopped dead in their tracks behind him.

It was a trap.

Moments later he was looking straight into the cold blue eyes of two Gestapo agents.

Four massive guards armed with pistols and clubs appeared from nowhere and dragged him off. He was thrown into a bare room in the bowels of the Gestapo Headquarters at the PeŃek Palace.

The heavy door banged shut. There was the sound of a bolt being thrown back and then the room became deathly quiet.

Karl sat down gingerly on the single chair but with his hands manacled painfully behind his back, it was impossible to be comfortable. He sat and waited.

He didn't know how long he waited. It seemed like forever. The room was dark except for a single lamp overhead which cast down a narrow circle of cold light. The hollow silence of the basement labyrinth was oppressive. He knew it was filled with the mute anguish of broken men, alone and desperate like himself.

Then a loudly resonating banging jolted him alert. He sat up stiffly. His mouth was bone dry. Slamming doors, rattling keys and the slowly raising crescendo of approaching heavy boots echoed through the cavernous corridors.

The room's metal door swung open. Reinhard Heydrich walked in. The door slammed shut again.

Karl looked into his cold metallic eyes. A chilled seemed to fall upon the room.

"So!" Heydrich said. His lips formed a mocking half smile. "If it isn't Karl Becker? You know I never usually get personally involved in the...how shall I say...the hands-on-work of individual cases. I leave that to others. But with you, Herr, Becker, I have decided to make an exception." Heydrich's expression shifted into a wide smile of sheer malice.

Karl was silent. His eyes followed the black-clad figure before him as he paced around the dingy room.

"I must say, you threw us all off the scent for quite a while with that innocent act of yours. Quite convincing." He paused for a moment. "Perhaps you'll be interested to know what we found last night in a small town somewhere. Yes? I'll tell you. Last night some of my officers found a radio transmitter in a little town called LeOaky and you would *not believe* what we found next to it. Dispatches still uncoded, which were about to be sent to London. Yes, London! And do you know what was in the dispatches? Economic plans for the Protectorate, details of the Reich's secret V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub> production, our radical cleansing program; aren't you shocked, Herr Becker? And do you know, all over the documents we found *'Felix states...Felix confirms...According to Felix...etc., etc...'*"

Beads of sweat began to form on Karl's forehead. Heydrich leaned forward and placed his face six inches away from Karl's.

"Some treasonous German rat gave all our vital information to the Czech resistance so that it could be passed on to London!" He was shouting now.

"And the rat's name is Felix."

Karl sat on his chair trying not to betray any emotion.

Heydrich began to pace slowly around the room, his hands behind his back. "So I began to wonder to myself, who could this Felix be? I thought and thought and I narrowed it down to only three people who had access to this level of classified information. One, State Secretary, Ulrich Schellenberger. Two, Chief of Gestapo Pannwitz." He paused again then turned to bang his fist hard down upon the table. "And three, you!"

Heydrich leaned across the table contemptuously. "Both State Secretary Schellenberger and Chief Pannwitz are not even in the Protectorate at the moment. So do you know what I think? I think Felix is you."

Heydrich thrust his face an inch or two from Karl's once more and held his gaze for a long time while Karl struggled to maintain his composure. Then suddenly, without a word, Heydrich turned on his heels and walked out.

The surly guards came for Karl and took him out of the room. He was thrown unceremoniously into a damp, unlit cell. In the absence of any light to see by, his other senses were assailed by the odors of wet concrete, carbolic acid and human excrement. He lay prostrate in the blackness, trying to avoid contact with the dried up sweat and filth which formed a hardened crust over the thin straw filled pallet.

Karl knew only too well what was in store for him. He trembled both in fear and from the cold as he lay on the bunk. He was frightened beyond any fear he had ever known. He visualized black clubs smashing down on his head, men kicking at his ribs and then throwing water on his unconscious body to revive him for more of the same. He wanted to believe he had courage, he wanted to believe it very much but he was still afraid.

With steadily mounting terror, he waited for the moment that he knew was coming. He was desperate to face the reality of it, because worse even than the fear of death to him was the fear of prolonged and unendurable pain. His imaginings grew to abominable proportions as weird and monstrous images of torture sprang into his mind. Medieval scenes of Christian martyrdom, the witch hunts of the Inquisition, Byzantine murals, depictions of purgatory, even images from familiar fairy tales he'd never before thought of before as being in the slightest way cruel. It was a grotesque parade of depravity and sadism.

He made a determined effort to shut it all out. He knew that he would lose control if he didn't Karl forced himself instead to relive the happy times in his life. He was with Elsie now, in the *Tiergarten* again, the notes of the piano on that day of his party before the war.

Yes, there were many good things to remember and to live for. He gritted his teeth.

As the first grey light from the window broke through the darkness a strange calm came over him. He was no longer afraid. He had resolved to face whatever lay ahead.

But to Karl's immense surprise and relief, he was not tortured at all during the rest of his interrogations. Heydrich had felt himself to be in a slightly vulnerable position himself regarding Karl's capture. If he was mistreated, some feathers could very easily get ruffled in Berlin. Goering, Himmler and Canaris were very influential with the Führer and it wasn't worth the risk. Karl entered into a battle of wits with his interrogators. He began to swamp them with large quantities of contradictory information.

For weeks he duped them, coming up day after day with outrageous new bluffs. His talents as an actor, his shrewdness, his imagination and the ease with which he affected stupidity one minute and seemed to take charge the next, kept the SS interrogators confused and muddled.

By successfully keeping one step ahead of them the whole time, he managed to avoid admitting anything.

Edvard Benes drove slowly north along the winding roads of Scotland towards Commus Darrah near Mallaig in the mystic heaths of the Highlands. It was a long drive but he was grateful for the time alone so he could sort his thoughts out before talking to General Moravec.

Since they began this task together two years ago, he had been in the habit of making certain decisions in consultation with his Chief of Intelligence only. He knew that his ministers resented this. But it was a matter of pragmatics. Successful politics requires good intelligence and without that nothing much of use gets done. And when the chips were down, Frank Moravec was his only real asset.

It was almost four in the afternoon when he arrived in the commando training center hidden in the brooding, primeval landscape. The British Special Operations Executive had allowed them to lease the facility since late summer to train their agents. He stopped his car at the gate and produced his papers.

"I'm here to see the General."

"Ah, yes, Sir," said the guard after scrutinizing his papers. "He's expecting you."

Benes drove through into the enclosed compound, parked his car and entered the old stone mansion. Coats of Arms dating back to the Middle Ages hung around the large entrance hall. Under the previous owner he would have been greeted by liveried servants. Now, however, things were rather different. A lone guard inside the doorway saluted him as he went past.

The General hastened down the large stone staircase to greet his visitor.

"Good evening, Mr. President. How was the drive?"

"Find, Frank. Fine."

Moravec led the way to a smaller, more comfortable room with a large stone fireplace. The windows overlooked the training grounds of the compound on one side and the high bluffs below on the other. It was a wild, bleak country with scoured grey rock and

cold blue water, with light green bracken and pine made crooked from the never ceasing rain. The dark, cloudy sky seemed low enough to touch.

"How are the boys coming along?" asked Benes.

"All the reports so far are very positive. The training program is designed like a set of sieves with each step a closer mesh than the one before. Pretty standard. First they go through basic instructions in physical fitness, pistol training, and map reading and so on at Leamington. We give them plenty of freedom so we can weed out any who have problems with alcohol or womanizing. After six weeks at Leamington the ones who are left come here and then we don't mess around. Another third to a half of them won't make it on from here.

"What do you do with them?"

"Paramilitary training. Using rifles, machine guns, how to strip and load them in complete darkness; unarmed combat, silent, killing, elementary sabotage. Here we push them to the limits of their physical and mental endurance to make sure they won't crack in the field."

Moravec approached the window and sat on the ledge next to Benes. He looked out over the obstacle course below where half a dozen men were rock climbing, spurring on by the insistent shouting of the drill sergeant.

"The ones that make it through here go on to Manchester for parachute training at RAF Wilmslow."

"How many are ready for assignments now?"

"About a dozen."

Benes turned away from the window and sank heavily into the armchair by the fire. "Any news of Felix?"

"No, not yet, I'm afraid." Moravec's tone became immediately more serious as the conversation turned to the situation at the Protectorate.

"What about Kamil and the rest of our boys back home?"

"Kamil contacted me through a transmitter in Moravia. The Karpar radio was discovered. It was in an old man's barn. They tortured him to death trying to get information out of him."

"Did he talk?"

Moravec shook his head. "He didn't know anything. The home resistance is taking a bad beating. I don't know how much longer they can hold out at this rate. Kamil's highest on the Gestapo hit list. It's only been days since Heydrich took over and already over a thousand of our people have been arrested. Cars drive out daily from the Pankrac Prison to the shooting range at Kobylisy, or to the airport at Ruŕyn where execution squads are waiting. Dozens of red notices are posted every day on street corners announcing the latest executions.

Moravec went around to the other side of his desk and pulled out a paper from the top drawer.

"This came yesterday." He read the list of the latest executions. "General Bily, General Vojta, Horácek, Dolezal, Sara, Balaban..." It was a long, long list. Many were dear friends to both of them. Military officers, ordinary workers, craftsmen, apprentices, students, intellectual, bankers, jewelers.

"Stop!" Benes raised his hand and rubbed it over his eyes. It was all too awful to hear. "Heydrich is killing our best men. He's obliterating the entire resistance!"

Moravec nodded sadly.

“You understand, Frank, that should your unit become involved in an operation in the near future, my name cannot be connected to it.”

Moravec nodded. He understood Benes perfectly.

“When, Mr. President?”

“As soon as possible. You and I have done our best since the war began to promote resistance at home but just enough to avoid provoking serious retaliation. You know better than anyone how I advocated restraint at the beginning so as to avoid bloodshed. But the circumstances before us today are very different to those of two years ago. Heydrich seems to have his task well in hand with his firing squads, his hangings, and his beheadings. Our backs are to the wall and we’re at the brink of a terrible massacre. It’s time to act.” Benes took off his glasses. His face was lined and weary from years of anguish and struggle.

“Mr. President, my men are ready and willing to carry out your orders, but it’s my duty to inform you the cost of the operation you suggest will be very high.”

“I know it will cost lives but it’s necessary for the greater good. Our duty is not to whine or complain but to act. At home our people are doing all they can. It’s our turn now to do what we can to help them from the outside.

Six weeks passed by.

Every day Elsie waited in the office for Karl to call. Every night she waited by the phone in her flat or sat by the window, hoping to see him walk down the street. When week after week went by without any word from him she began to fear the worst. She could hardly bear to eat and for most of the time she was very near to collapsing. At night she found relief in a few restless hours of sleep. She would wake in the middle of the night shrieking; her heart pounding with visions of Karl standing blindfolded against a wall, crumpling to the ground, his body riddled with bullets.

Every time the phone rang or the door opened she leapt to her feet, only to sink down wearily again when it wasn’t him. She imagined she saw Karl in the street a dozen times every day. She was near to breaking point.

It was the fifty second day.

She washed, put on a dressing gown and went to sit by the window.

A car went by every now and then. A group of children, people carrying groceries home; everything seemed to pass by so slowly these days. Her mother used to say that times always goes by the slowest for those who wait.

A black car swung around the corner and drove towards her building.

An official car!

Her heart began to race. The car drove out of view.

Please stop! Please! Please!

There was a knock on the door then a key was slipped into the lock and the door opened!

“Karl!”

He trudged in with leaden steps and took off his hat. She threw herself into his arms and buried her head in his chest. After so many agonizing weeks she could scarcely believe it was him. She clung tightly to him for many minutes.

Finally, she pulled away a little and dared to look at him. He was much thinner than he was and looked weary but otherwise he seemed alright. It was then, for the first time, that she allowed herself to break down into a flood of tears.

"Elsie," he said almost whispering. "It's ok. Don't cry. I'm ok."

After what he seemed like endless weeks at the PeÖek Palace, Karl had been released with profound apologies. The evidence against him was purely circumstantial and he'd skillfully managed to dodge all of the questions. Much to Heydrich's intense irritation, they were prevented from employing the more rigorous interrogation methods that were routinely used against prisoners of lesser prominence. The news of Karl was arrested caused an uproar in Berlin. No one believed in the slightest that he was a traitor. Karl Becker was above reproach. Ultimately, Heydrich was left to choice but to bow to the growing storm of pressure from Himmler, Goering, Admiral Canaris and General Halder to have him released.

It was past midnight on New Year's Eve 1941 when a lone Halifax bomber rumbled south-eastward over France towards Germany. The captain was cursing his luck. New Year's Eve! Like this mission was so urgent that it couldn't wait another day.

Over Darmstadt, the pilot noticed he was being trailed by two German night fighters.

"Hold on back there, chaps. Two bandits on my tail." The pilot did what he could but the Halifax was heavily loaded with fuel for the long flight and evasive action was difficult.

The two lone passengers in the cargo bay held on fiercely as the plane made sudden, rocky maneuvers to try to shake off their pursuers.

Moravec's selection of the two commandos who would undertake this special mission had been difficult. The requirements for the task were rigorous. Each candidate had to be at the peak of their mental and physical fitness, be technical experts and be able to work with total efficiency with his partner. A tall order.

But there was one more quality, above all others, that was required. If the candidate had fulfilled all the other requirements, then Moravec posed him the most critical question. *'If necessary, are you willing to die for your country?'*

Jan Kubis and Josef GabÖik were the men who were now hanging on in the cargo selection of the Halifax. They were the ones who would carry out Operation Anthropoid.

Kubis was twenty-eight, tall, thin and with dark hair and dark brooding eyes. He was quiet, composed, highly intelligent and disciplined. His specialism was explosive.

GabÖik was in many respects the exact opposite. He was much shorter with fair hair and blue eyes and was stocky and powerful. He possessed an outgoing personality and an occasional quick temper. He was an outstanding marksman, the best at Mallaig.

Both were strong-willed men who were absolutely determined to survive their mission.

At twenty more minutes of roller coaster flight, the Halifax bomber began its descent to 500ft.

"Can you make out any landmarks?" The pilot asked his navigator. "It's all covered in snow. I can't make out a thing."

"I can't either." The pilot and navigator exchanged a puzzled look. "What do we do?"

The pilot glanced at his fuel meter. "We've haven't got enough fuel to mess about and I'm not going to risk getting shot at again. We'll just have to drop them as near to the target zone as we can."

It was past two in the morning when Jan opened the hatch in the side of the Halifax. Seconds later both commandoes were plummeting through the icy black air while the bombers droned away above them.

Josef tugged at his parachute string and instantly his free fall became quiet, rocking slow descent. He saw Jan's chute open and made a thumbs up sign.

Kubis looked down at the approaching ground. Moravec's words rang in his ears.

*'After the drop you will be completely on your own. Assistance from the home resistance is explicitly against my orders. How you execute the operation is ultimately up to you. There is no escape plan. You must remain hidden till you are killed, captured or liberated. No escape plan. Killed, captured or liberated.'*

Dogs in the village below barked at the low flying airplane as it roared by. In the darkness of his room a farmer put on his slippers and threw a coat over his shoulders to see what was going on.

"Where are you going?" his wife called after him.

"I'm going to check the rabbits."

She turned over and went back to sleep. Once outside, the farmer took his ladder and leaned it up against the wall of his house. He climbed up onto the roof so he could get a better look. On the ground below, his dog paced up and down nervously, wondering what the commotion was all about.

It was a glorious winter night. The air was crisp and fragrant from burning wood. Deep snow covered the ground and above his head, the moon shone brightly amongst thousands of stars.

The rumbling of the engines was more distant now.

He scanned the skies. Then he saw them. Two white parachutes floated quietly down and disappeared behind the graveyard outside the village. He climbed back down the ladder and returned to bed, being careful not to waken his wife.

The next morning the farmer set out with his dog. Just beyond the graveyard he found two hollows in the snow where the two parachutists had landed. Heading away were two sets of footprints.

"Lojzo, find them," he ordered his dog.

The dog perked up his ears then put his nose to the ground and was away. The farmer followed. A hundred yards away the dog began to dig at a mound of packed snow.

"What you got there?" the farmer knelt down to see what he was digging and pulled out a mass of white silk fabric. The farmer pulled back.

"This is no good, Lojzo. This smells of trouble with the Gestapo."

He looked around anxiously to see if anyone had noticed them. If anyone had seen them, he'd say it was the dog that'd sniffed it out while they were walking. But how would he explain not reporting it.

"Blast!" he swore. How could he report it? He'd be a pretty rotten patriot to turn in his fellow countrymen. Everyone had heard of the runners. Czech soldiers who'd escaped and fought with the Allies were being sent back to help the home resistance. The men in the tavern said it had been going on for months now. Brave lads, they had agreed.

"Come on, let's go," he grunted to his dog and they were off on the trail again. They were soon at the abandoned quarry partially overgrown with shrubs and small trees. He

moved slowly down the slope. Ten yards ahead his dog came to an abrupt stop, body frozen, waiting for his master's instructions.

Then the farmer saw them. There was a tense moment as eight eyes stared at one another apprehensively. The tall stranger was holding a map; the other had his hand in his pocket. He was obviously holding a pistol.

"Good morning boys," began the farmer.

"Good morning," they said. An awkward silence followed. The dog stood motionless by his master's side, poised for action.

The farmer calmly lit a cigarette and held out the packet towards the two strangers. They declined.

"What are you boys doing here?"

"We're surveyors," the shorter one said. "We've come to see about working the quarry again."

The farmer smiled. They could try that line on someone else but not on him. But he was still keenly aware of the pistol in the shorter one's pocket.

"Look fellas, I've come to help you. I saw you come down last night and this morning I found your parachutes. You didn't do a very good job in hiding them. Lojzo found them right away."

For a few seconds the parachutists said nothing, and then the taller one with the map asked, "Where exactly are we?"

About twenty miles from Prague.

They looked at each other in alarm. They were supposed to have been dropped at Plzeň!

"Don't worry. I'll help you," said the farmer.

Josef had hurt his left foot badly during the landing and couldn't walk without help. They decided to stay in the quarry for few days until the swelling around his ankle went down.

The farmer kept a watchful eye on them for the next few days. He said nothing to his wife, but sneaked the parachutists as much food as he could each day.

A week went by and still Josef's foot had not improved.

One day when the farmer returned to the village from the quarry he saw a German car on his street and overheard some men in long black coats shouting at each other. He could only make out a few words of what they were saying but the little he could hear filled him with apprehension. He ran back in terror across the fields to the quarry.

"There are Germans in town," he said breathlessly. "You have to get out of here!"

"What do they want?"

"I don't know," he said impatiently. "Something about transmitters. It's always something stupid. But it's dangerous. Things could get very nasty. You must go hide in the woods for now and tonight. I'll find a way to get you to Prague."

Kubis and Gaböik made their way to Prague by train early the next morning. The farmer gave them an address of a shopkeeper who could be trusted and who could give them lodgings. They were happier now to be in a large city as they felt safer and less conspicuous among the crowds than they would have been in a smaller village prone to gossip.

But when they came into Prague they realized they had no valid papers. With the constantly changing bureaucracy in the protectorate, London had been unaware of the



latest changes of documents. They laid low. A couple of weeks passed and Josef's foot was still not healed. The shopkeeper arranged for him to see a doctor; both to heal his foot and also to procure some papers which would legitimize them being out of work.

"Hmm," grunted the doctor as he examined the swollen, blue foot. "How did it happen?"

"A work accident."

"And where do you work?"

"I work abroad."

"Well, it doesn't seem to be broken, but we'll need to do some more tests."

"Do you think that's really necessary?" said Josef with a start. "If it's not broken, it will heal on its own, won't it?"

The doctor looked him straight in the eyes. Josef returned his gaze, betraying no emotion. The doctor shrugged and wrote out a prescription for poultices.

"I need your help," Josef said suddenly.

"My help?"

"Yes. As I am from aboard. Actually, there are two of us, me and a friend. We have identity cards but we need work permits stating that we have employment, but that we're unable to work due to disability.

There, he said it. Just like that.

The doctor hesitated. There was something decidedly odd about this patient. He thought carefully about Josef's request. It was a game where the stakes were high. He could lose his life if this went wrong. These were dangerous times. But what if he refused? He thought about it for a long time then finally, without another word, he nodded and began to writing. He gave Josef two cards certifying that Josef GabÖik and Jan Kubis were ill and unfit to work.

With these papers, Jan and Josef could now move freely about town without worries of spot-checks on the street. They could now begin to carry out his mission.

*Journal Entry – February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942*

*Frank has sent three urgent messages to Kamil asking him if he has been in contact with Felix. So far there has been no reply. We don't know whether Felix is alive or dead, whether he's been imprisoned or free. It's imperative that we regain contact if we possibly can. This is of the highest priority. Absolutely everything depends on it. And why is there no news from Kamil?*

*No news either from the Anthropoid mission. I'm completely in the dark.*

*Edvard Benes*

Jan and Josef hadn't been with the shopkeeper long before friends and neighbor began to ask questions. They decided it best to move and found a room with a fitter's family.

Josef's foot was still an impediment but they had already begun to work out different strategies to achieve their objectives. Plans that would allow them to escape and survive.

Jan and Josef often vanished for days from the fitter's place and nobody knew where they went. When they returned they were usually dirty, covered in mud and exhausted. Then they slept for long periods, sometimes as much as fourteen hours.

The longer they spent in the Protectorate, the more acutely they began to realize the tightness of Heydrich's grip on the people. In the months since Heydrich's appointment, Czech workers had been bribed with better rations, improved working conditions, insurance and pension schemes and holidays in Reich resorts. At the same time he pounded away at the intelligentsia and suspected members of the resistance, both of whom suffered grievous losses. Heydrich's black tentacles penetrated into the deepest recesses of Czech society. But worst of all was the pervading and constant stress under which everyone lived. The fear of anonymous denunciation divided friends, neighbors and even families. It was enough to be accused of listening to Allied radio broadcasts, making jokes about the Führer, or hoarding rationed food. These offenses meant death, or if you were lucky, being sent to the concentration camp which Heydrich had created – *Terezin*.

By rewarding information, the Gestapo successfully engineered and nurtured the very worst elements of human nature.

Yet, despite all his efforts, Heydrich's undercover men kept recording that there was a key agent still working from somewhere within Prague. Moreover, this agent had links to the West, probably London. Time and time again the Gestapo had monitored signals emanating from Prague, but in the medieval old town was its half-timbered houses and narrow cobbled streets, the agent had always managed to escape detection.

Heydrich knew in his bones that it was Karl Becker up to his ticks again, but he needed more than just a hunch. He needs to catch him at it. The knowledge that Karl was still evading the best of his men angered the thin-faced Heydrich to distraction. Determined not to be outwitted, he formed a special squad, designated the Traitor-X group, consisting of Gestapo, police officials and SS men from his own staff. Their sole function was to catch Karl red-handed and root out his network.

Jan and Josef spent many more weeks collecting information upon which they could then plan a detailed course of action.

"Josef, at the rate we're going, we're never going to get this job done," Jan signed as they lay on their bunks in their dingy room. "We *still* haven't got a plan that's foolproof. You can barely walk and I've a pretty strong feeling we outstayed our welcome in this house some time ago."

Josef didn't answer.

"Even if we survived all of this, the war isn't going to end this year, or next year, according to Moravec and Benes. God knows how long we're going to have to live on the run."

"There's no point in talking like that!" said Josef impatiently. "It isn't going to get us anywhere. We've got a job to do and we're going to do it. *And* we're going to live to tell the tale. And that's that."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right. Just do it and don't think about it," said Jan gloomily.

Josef lay awake until he heard rhythmic breathing of his partner which told him he was asleep. Was Jan cracking under the pressure? He mustn't be! He needed Jan's steadiness to keep from breaking down himself. He'd been having the same gloomy thoughts for week now as well.

*Journal Entry – February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1942*

*Spoke to Frank today about the Anthropoid Operation. He's very worried. He'd always said that at least ten days must pass before we can reasonably expect to hear news from a drop. But it's been six weeks now! What happened? I know Frank doesn't want to breach security by having the home resistance step in to look for them. But we'll probably have to take the risk all the same. If they've been killed or captured, a replacement team will have to be found. The Anthropoid Operation is far too important to cancel.*

*Edvard Benes*

"Hey, Jan!" cried Josef chewing on a bread roll. "Take a look at this."

He pushed a copy of a newspaper across the table and his fingers pointed to a small advertisement.

*Lost: an old garnet ring with initials JK & JG  
At U Fleku beer hall 28.2.42  
Information, c/o this paper*

"Those are our initials! It's for us!" exclaimed Jan. To all but the Anthropoid team it would appear to be a regular advertisement. But to them it was a clear indication that the resistance was trying to contact them. They were to meet at the address given in the newspaper.

Kamil went to the U Fleku beer hall with a fair degree of trepidation. He'd evaded Heydrich's dragnet so far and had a nasty suspicion that whoever showed up might be a German plant sent to infiltrate his organization. For all he knew, the two lost parachutists could be long dead. When he analyzed the situation he didn't much care for it. He seriously considered pulling out but in the end, he reluctantly decided he had to take the risk.

Kamil waited over a mug of beer in the boisterous old beer hall. People were coming and going all the time but somehow he knew that he would recognize his contacts. After twenty minutes, Jan walked in alone. Kamil noticed him immediately, but remained seated, observing his movements. He'd expected two men. A few moments of hesitation followed as Jan scanned the room. Kamil watched, invisible in the crowd, still considering the wisdom of this meeting. Finally he got up.

"Did you lose a garnet ring?" asked Kamil.

"Yes," the stranger sounded relieved.

"Well, if you come with me, I'll give it to you." Kamil led the way out towards a nearby flat maintained by the resistance. Jan followed but without exchanging any more words until they were inside.

"Just in case you have any ideas, I'd like to point out that this house is heavily guarded!" Kamil's tone was sharp.

Jan showed no reaction.

"Where have you come from?" Kamil had to discover whether this man was genuine or just another infiltrator.

"I can't tell you."

Things were not going well.

"Why not?"

"Our mission is a secret."

"When did you arrive?"

"Over two months ago."

"Where have you stayed?"

Kamil listened to Jan's story of his and Josef's movements since they'd arrived and the explanations of why Josef wasn't there. He didn't much care for this man or what he'd heard of his partner. It seemed unlikely to him that Moravec would send men who'd behaved as careless as they obviously had. But then he realized that London had no idea how closely the Gestapo controlled the country and how cautious everyone had to be.

Kamil did all he could to trip up his companion. He peppered him with rapid questions but Jan remained relaxed and composed. Kamil slowly had to come round to the idea that Jan was one of Moravec's Czech parachutists after all.

"But what is your mission?" asked Kamil again. He had not been told.

"I can't tell you. It's classified."

He was beginning to get on Kamil's nerves again.

"You must understand my position. All I can tell you is the code name – Anthropoid."

"Anthropoid," mused Kamil. Moravec studied philosophy at Charles University and was proficient in Greek, Latin and several other languages. Anthropoid, Greek for man. Likely to be a code name devised by Moravec. Anthropoid? Of man, about man.

"Have you been sent from London to kill Heydrich?" Kamil decided to stop beating about the bush.

Jan's face blanched and he looked startled. "How did you know?"

"I can't tell you, it's classified," smiled Kamil.

This revelation brought a new sense of mutual trust. The fact that something was going to be done to eliminate Heydrich and the pestilence of terror and oppression he brought, was an inspiration.

"We need your help," said Jan.

Kamil agreed to take charge of finding new lodgings, as it was becoming more and more difficult for them to find safe refuge. Recently, they'd had to change quarters every few days or so.

"We'll get you better documents too. The ones you're carrying don't have the right stamps and they're in the wrong ink. Even the stupidest German would notice that."

Kamil said they'd need to get a new set of photographs taken so he could obtain what was necessary; identity cards, police declaration forms, ration cards and new work papers.

"One more thing," added Jan. "We have a transmitter, but it broke on landing. It's useless to us as it is, but maybe you have the parts to fix it."

"A transmitter! God, we could use one of those. We haven't had one since the Germans knocked out Karpar last October."

Kamil and Jan left the beer hall and went their separate ways, arranging to meet again the following day. In the meantime, Kamil set about making arrangements and

managed to find a parachutists shelter with a railway man's family. Jan introduced him to Josef.

The day after that, Karl put them in touch with a clockmaker who worked at the Hradshin Castle. He took them to meet him at a town center pub called the Three Cats.

"Hold on a minute," protested the clockmaker. "You forgot that I have a wife and a little girl. What you're asking me do is far too risky!"

"Well, think it over," said Josef. "You're in a position to help us a great deal and no one's going to suspect you. All we want to know is when Heydrich reaches the Castle and who's with him. Then we need to know when he leaves in the evening. If you hear of any special functions or events which are out of the ordinary, that'll help too."

"Oh, I don't know," the clockmaker shuddered. "It all smells of the graveyard."

Jan leaned forward and looked earnestly at the man. "Look, you don't have to say anything to anyone, not even at home. All you have to do is tell us where he goes. And we're not asking you to do anything at all after that. We won't involve you in any way."

The clockmaker sighed deeply. When it came down to it, he knew he couldn't shirk his obligations to his country. "Oh, alright."

Jan and Josef smiled in relief. "Just jot down a brief note of the times in an envelope and drop it off at this address. Just tap on the window and hand over the note. No need to say anything," said Josef.

After the meeting with the clockmaker, the parachutists returned to their room at the railway man's flat. Josef turned on the solitary light over the table and spread out a detailed map of the city of Prague and its environs. Every day for weeks, they had gone out in the direction of Panenské Běňany where Heydrich lived twenty kilometers outside the city. They were familiar by now with every turn of the road, every alley, every ditch, every building, every clump of trees; everything between his home and his office at the Castle.

"The way I see it, we only have two options," Josef said. "First, we can attack him on his private train here just outside the main railroad station," he pointed to a spot on the map. "We can find out from the railway man when he's scheduled to leave. From this bridge we could throw a bomb into his compartments."

Jan considered the idea for a moment, and then shook his head. "

"I don't know. It's too iffy. We'd be relying on someone else's say-so about what compartment he's in and there'd be too many people around. No good."

"Ok. Plan two." Josef switched to the second map of the region just outside Prague where Heydrich lived. "The road to Panenské Běňany. We've been up and down it a million times. We could find our way blindfolded. We could run a strong cable across the road just before his car approaches. It'll force him to stop and we'll take him by surprise."

"Well, that might work, but it'll be suicide. It's a flat terrain for miles around, there's nowhere at all to hide. Even if we could get our hands on a getaway car, the chances of a roadblock sealing us in are...," he shuddered. "I don't even want to think about it."

"By the time anyone raises the alarm, we'll be long gone," argued Josef.

Jan shook his head. "No. It's too risky. Look here, I've been giving it some thought too. How about right here?" Jan pulled out the first map again.

"But that's right in the middle of the city!" Josef said incredulously.

"Exactly!"

*Journal Entry – March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1942*

*Great news from home! Now we know why Kamil has been off the air. He had no transmitter at all. Not even the one in Moravia. He's also managed to contact the Anthropoid team. They've had a rough time of it and Josef is still limping. The boys handed over the Libuse transmitter to Kamil and the backlog of information from Felix is coming in fast and furious now. Hitler's armed forces have virtually ground to a halt. The campaign in Russia has completely depleted their fuel reserves. The situation is so critical that he plans a southward thrust through the Caucasus Mountains to the oil fields of Baku and Grozny at first thaw. He has to be blocked.*

*I talked to Frank about sending more parachute groups into the Protectorate with transmitters to reestablish the communication network we've lost.*

*Frank agrees and will send a team out by the end of the month. He's chosen Adolf Opaika, Ivan KolaŔik and Karel Ňurda. The first two are fin men, but I didn't care much for Ňurda. He seemed rather shifty to me, but I guess Frank knows what he's doing so I won't say anything.*

*Edvard Benes*

Karl resumed his work for the United Steel Works after his release from prison. He still travelled frequently and spent a large portion of time in Bohemia-Moravia since over one third of all arms produced in the occupied territories were manufactured there. Only now it was much more difficult for him to meet with Kamil. Not only was Kamil being sought vigorously by the Gestapo and had to be very careful, but Heydrich was still having Karl watched. The Reichsprotector knew very well that he was guilty but still did not have enough evidence to prove this conclusively to Berlin. So he let him loose on a long line, waiting for any small indiscretion or moment of carelessness when he could reel him in again.

Karl closed one bedroom door noisily. He opened and closed a few drawers loudly then lay on top of the bed fully clothed. He turned off the light. The burly Gestapo agent assigned to keep tabs on him remained on the couch in the living room. Karl waited for the regular sounds of his snoring to begin. It didn't usually take any longer than half an hour. He peered at this watch in darkness. Quarter to ten.

Soon the snores began. Karl waited. At first they were quiet then gradually built up until they were loud and full throated.

Slowly, carefully, he got up from his bed and stepped noiselessly across his bedroom floor to the window. He turned the handle and opened it. The hinges made no sound as he oiled them regularly and meticulously. He climbed down the trellis and was onto the sidewalk in moments. He looked around. There was no one in sight. He hurried up the street, taking care to make sure he was not being followed.

Kamil was waiting for him in the Dutch Mill Restaurant.

Reproductions of Dutch masters hung on the walls. It was the favorite haunt of German officers and city officials, making it a prime location for clandestine appointments. No one would think of looking for them there.

Karl sat down opposite Kamil. Tension showed clearly on both their faces. Kami reached towards the radio that each booth provided for their customers' use. He twisted the knob until he found a station that would drown out their conversation.

"Where've you been these last weeks?" whispered Kamil. "Is everything ok?"

"No, everything isn't ok. Things are looking bad. A couple of weeks ago, Heydrich sent me an invitation to a routine conference on the economy. It was a setup. When I showed up, they hauled me off to Gestapo Headquarters for another questioning. This is getting very serious, my friend. They're onto you too. They're asking too many questions about my contacts with the underground."

"How did you get out in one piece again?"

"I said I've been deliberately infiltrating hostile groups so I can gather information on industrial groups so I can gather information on industrial sabotage. They know it's a cock and bull story. I've had a gorilla sleeping in my flat ever since. But they half bought the story because it's exactly the sort of thing that *they* would do." Karl's tone became more acerbic.

Suddenly Kamil felt the walls of his own world closing in on him.

"I need your help, Kamil. I have to get out of the country but the borders are all closed to me now."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Switzerland. Turkey. Some neutral country until I can figure out what my next move should be."

"How soon?"

"Yesterday."

"Ok. I'll contact a few people and see what the best route might be. I have to see about some documents for someone tomorrow afternoon. How about I meet you at noon? I'll have a plan ready for you then."

"Where?"

"At the usual spot by the park, at the OÖechovice tram stop."

Karl's anxiety eased a little at the prospect of escape. He pulled a few folded sheets of paper from his breast pocket and placed them casually on the table. He began to speak rapidly in a monotone.

"I've put together some information on the V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub> missile projects I mentioned to you before. Some of the parts are manufactured here but the central factory is in Peenemunde on the Baltic. The important thing is that they don't have a shadow factory anywhere else. All the research assembly and scientists from the coast of France and Belgium is aimed at England. I'm hearing talk of up to a thousand launches per day until Britain crumbles. Timing – late '43 or thereabouts. But take out the plant at Peenemunde and *kaput*. The details are inside."

Kamil slipped the documents into his pocket and threw a few paper bills on the table. They got up to leave.

From the far corner of the restaurant, the cold, blue eyes of Reinhard Heydrich followed them as they walked out the door.

Karl was waiting by the OÖechovice tram stop across from the park. He read a newspaper as he stood among the other people waiting in line.

It was exactly noon when Kamil appeared from a side street. He was wearing a long trench coat and carried a briefcase. He walked towards the tram stop and, as if bumping into an old friend by chance, stopped to greet Karl. Karl folded his newspaper, shook Kamil's hand warmly then stepped out of the queue to chat. Kamil took out a silver cigarette case and offered Karl a cigarette. He pulled one out. Kamil did the same then they realized they had no matches. Kamil handed the cigarette case to Karl, searching his pockets with his free hand and produced the matches. They spoke of the weather and the latest movies.

From the corner of his eye, Kamil noticed two men staring at them from across the street. He kept talking as if he hadn't noticed them but then he spotted there were two more ten yards away to his left and another two to his right.

"Don't look around," he said, taking a last puff of his cigarette before throwing it to the ground. "We're surrounded."

The bell of an approaching tram drowned out his last words as the Gestapo agents began to close in. In a movement that looked like he was reaching for his glasses, he pulled out a revolver out of his trench coat and began to shoot. Then everything happened in a flash.

"Run!" he shouted to Karl. "I'll cover you. Run!"

People began scream and scatter in all directions when they heard the shots. The Gestapo agents began to return fire but couldn't make Kamil out clearly amid the mêlée of people. The tram sounded its bell again as people ran in panic across the tracks. Kamil emptied his revolver, pulled out another and began firing again, now edging his way toward the advancing tram.

Amidst the chaos, Karl slipped through a shop in an alleyway at the back. He ran as fast as he could away from the sound of gunfire, clutching the cigarette case that held his escape plans tightly in his hand.

Kamil ran behind the tram and managed to climb aboard as it approached the Dusty Bridge. He held onto the handrail with one hand while still holding onto his briefcase with the other. Two men brandishing pistols ran after the tram. Shots echoed in all directions.

Then, like bolts of molten lead, two bullets penetrated Kamil's calf and lower thigh. In shock and agony, his grip weakened and he fell to the road. His briefcase broke open spilling its contents all over the ground.

As he tried to raise himself, he saw the two men closing in. He lifted his right hand to his head and pulled the trigger.

Karl's chest felt like it was being gripped in a vice but he continued to run. He was sure the Gestapo would have their men all over the neighborhood by now watching for him.

Suddenly he noticed a narrow alley. He slowed down to a walk now to catch his breath, still terrified that Heydrich's men would come bursting out of hidden corners at any moment. But there was not a soul in sight. The narrow lane was totally in shadow with high walls on both side and dark cubbyhole like doorways which looked like they dated back hundreds of years. Karl walked slowly now. He passed an old woman sitting on a three-legged stool in one of the doorways eating a piece of bread. She looked at Karl curiously as he passed but said '*Dobry den*' politely to him. He wished her the same and went quickly on.

As soon as he felt it was safe, Karl stopped and opened the silver cigarette case with trembling fingers. He took out a folded note from inside. It read:



*Stay at the safe house on 137 Masarky Quay, apt. 306. Mrs. Fialova, the landlady, can be trusted. Here is the key.*

*Contact the forester Slansky in Nepomuky at tel 27153. I told him everything.*

*Good luck.*

Sure enough, the key to the apartment was tucked inside the case.

Karl continued on his way again, wondering if he could get all the way to Masarky Quay through the side streets. He was still pondering over this when he got to the end of the lane. A man in a hat and raincoat stood in his path and raised his hand to stop Karl from going any further.

"I'm sorry," he said, "no one is to leave this neighborhood."

*Think now. Think.* Karl said to himself. He approached the man and said, "I know, I know but they've got the guy. I've come from the spot where they got him just now."

The man in the raincoat thought for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and lowered his arm. Ok, alright then. Come on past," he said.

Masarky Quay lay on the other side of the river and now Karl suddenly had a clear picture of the route that had eluded him in his panic a few minutes earlier. He could walk there but it would take at least half an hour in the crowded streets. He decided it would be better to take the tram.

He walked over to the island in the middle of the road. The trams were ding-donging by without stopping, completely jam-packed, but then three came in quick succession and he managed to get on the last one. He stood on the rear step, his heart still pounding in his chest, but he was still alive. The tram swayed and lurched on down the street.

In the grand hall of the presidential office in the Hradshin Castle the clockmaker was busy adjusting the antique clock when he heard two voices approaching. The Czech domestic staff at the Castle had been allowed to stay on after the Nazi occupation. They were totally ignored by their new overlords who treated them like part of the furniture.

The door opened and Heydrich walked in with Schellenberger. They went straight to the desk and Schellenberger emptied the contents of the large bag onto it. A multitude of papers and pieces of a broken briefcase cascaded down.

"Ha!" Heydrich smirked as he picked through the contents. "Well, well! What do we have here?" He lifted up two photographs. "Who are these men?"

"We don't know," replied Schellenberger, "there's no clue to their identity but we believe Kamil was trying to procure false documents for them."

"I see. More parachutists, I presume?" His tone was indignant.

"Probably."

"And where there are parachutists, there's usually a transmitter." Heydrich's tone became angrier. "Here, take these pictures. I want every police station in the Protectorate to post copies of them on their walls. Every police officer in the country is to be familiar with these faces and be on the lookout for them. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Sir. Perfectly clear."

"And Karl Becker?" The Reichsprotector began to drum his fingers on the desktop.

"Sorry, Sir. He escaped during all the mess."

"I want him found," said Heydrich coldly. "I'm going to see the Führer the day after tomorrow and I don't want there to be any loose ends."

"Yes, Sir."

"And when you find the traitor, shoot first and ask questions later. Becker's been passing on Germany's most vital secrets to our enemies for too many years. He's the biggest traitor in our country's history! It must stop! *He* must be stopped. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Good. Now what's the latest on the break-in at our Foreign Office in Berlin?"

"Nothing definite yet, but it appears that a priest is implicated in the affair."

"His name?"

"A Father Andreas Rampp. From Warmsried."

"I knew it!" Heydrich pounded his fist on the desk.

Just then the clock began to chime vigorously. The clockmaker pounced on it and managed to make it stop.

"Begging your pardon, sirs. I..I'm just making an adjustment and...and..." he could scarcely speak for nerves.

Heydrich waved him away with a dismissive movement of his hand.

"It won't happen again," the clockmaker assured. He resumed his work, trying very hard again to become invisible.

"Now listen," Heydrich continued to Schellenberger, "after my meeting with the Führer, I'm putting you in charge of dealing with Becker and this Rampp character. They've both got to go. I've more important matters to take care of myself and I'm not interested in the ins and outs of why or how when they're guilty. Just see to it. Do you get my meaning?"

Yes, Sir."

That day, at the end of his shift, the clockmaker hurried to the window with his envelope. All the rumors around the Castle was that Heydrich was leaving Prague for a meeting with the Führer on May 27<sup>th</sup> and that he didn't expect to return to Bohemia-Moravia.

The next morning, Klein the chauffeur took Heydrich's suitcase and loaded it into a waiting car.

Heydrich thrust some documents into his briefcase, snapped it shut then looked around the room to make sure he hadn't forgotten anything. He'd accomplished a lot in his short stay in the Protectorate, he thought fondly to himself. It was certain that the Führer planned to give him the coveted position of Reichskommissar for all the occupied territories.

The sound of his children's shouts filtered in as they ran among the enormous trees in the park around the mansion. It was a bright and clear May morning. The sun illuminated the leaves and the grass of the lawns, drying off the morning dew.

Outside the great gates of the park, the grinding of soldiers' boots sounded on the gravel path. The sound of geese and the clucking of hens could be heard from the village nearby, but the streets themselves were deserted. The people had vanished behind their doors and closed their windows. They knew that Heydrich would be driving by soon.

Heydrich decided to delay his trip to the airport slightly so he could spend a few moments longer with his family at the estate. He walked into the park.

"Heider! Silke!" he called. "Klaus! Klaus!"

"Daddy!" Silke came running into the houses.

"Where is everyone?" he asked his daughter. "Where's your mother?"

"She's outside in the garden. Herbert's been showing us all how to load a revolver."

He took her hand and they walked outside. The chauffeur came to attention as they passed by, but Heydrich took no notice.

Lina was on the lawn, looking closely at the ancient trees. Her belly was large with their fourth child.

"Those trees are totally useless," she said as he approached. "We should cut them all down and plant fruit trees instead."

"Don't worry about that now," he said. "Where are Klaus and Heider? Come on, let's have breakfast."

At that moment the two boys came running up. Klaus was wearing leather shorts and the dagger of the Hitler Youth shone in his belt.

"Why do we have to move, Daddy?" asked Heider at the breakfast table.

"Because I'm going to get a promotion. We'll still keep this place so you can come and visit, but for most of the time, we'll be living in Paris."

There was more protest around the table from the children and Heydrich tried to reassure them that better things were to come. But the children remained miserable.

The clock above the gatehouse struck ten o'clock. On most days he would be at the Castle by now.

He pushed away his newspaper, quickly finished his breakfast and stood up.

The chauffeur brought the Mercedes to the porch and stood at ease by the side of the car. Its paintwork gleamed in the sun and the sunroof was pulled back.

"Ok, everyone. Give Daddy a big hug now. I have to go."

"Ready, Sir?" the chauffeur clicked his heels.

"Let's go." Heydrich stepped into the front passenger seat.

Lina and the three children waved as the car drove down the long drive.

The park gates opened and the car glided smoothly out. The sentry sprang to attention and the car turned left onto the main road. Heydrich put his briefcase on his lap.

After they left their flat that morning, Josef and Jan walked quickly. The weather was fine and the sky cloudless so the neighbors had been surprised when Josef asked if he could borrow a trench coat.

People were hurrying to work. The two men boarded a streetcar and sat separately. Josef read a newspaper with his battered briefcase between his knees while Jan looked out the window. Neither spoke.

For weeks they had taken this exact route and knew every step and every movement they had to carry out.

The streetcar jerked and crawled as it made its way slowly through the streets. Jan looked at his watch. They had to travel across most of the city. They got out at the Ziòkov stop and walked to the garage where their bicycles were stored. After exchanging a few words with the car mechanic they rode away as if heading to work.

They passed the Bulkova hospital as they made their way towards the Liben suburb. Nurses were arriving for the morning shift, sweaters over their white uniforms. It was almost nine o'clock.

In a short while they arrived at the crossroads at Hole-ovice where the main road from Panenské Brezany forked off. To the left it sloped away to the district of Liben. To the right it made a sharp turn around a wooden green and carried on down to the Vltava and the Castle. Heydrich always took the right turn.

They stopped their bicycles near the turn and leaned them against the lamppost. They scanned the pathway which wrapped around the wooden green. Everything looked normal. Across the street, people were waiting in line for the streetcar.

Wordlessly, Josef knelt down as if adjusting something in his briefcase. Using the coat as a cover he moved away the grass he had stuffed his briefcase with and began to assemble the stun gun. Since the war began, many people bred rabbits for food and collected vegetation from parks as feed for them. The grass was there to disguise and hide the weapons in the event of a superficial check that morning on the tram.

Josef flicked away the bits of grass that were getting caught in between his fingers. He deftly screwed the three pieces together in swift, sure motions; assembling weapons blindfolded was standard training at Mallaig. Lastly, he loaded it. He looked around to check that they weren't drawing any attention. No. People were coming and going and taking no notice of them at all.

The sten now assembled, Josef nodded to Jan who was standing casually a few paces from him. Then he crossed the street to the other side with the gun concealed under his coat.

With Josef in position, Jan withdrew into the greenery. Under cover of the shrubbery he pulled out the grenades from his pockets. Squatting there in the shade he reflected that he was unlikely to need them. Josef was a crack shot. But, just in case.

There were countless eventualities that could affect their plan. But each of them had been thoroughly worked out. Heydrich might have an escort that day, possibly in another car. If that happened Jan would deal with the second car. But if Heydrich was travelling alone, he was only there as a backup.

He envied Josef in a way. Not that he held it against him or anything, but he still would have liked to have been in his place, the one to strike the final blow.

Jan got back into his position by the side of the road now, leaning against the lamppost. Watching. Waiting.

Cars went by. Streetcars stopped. People got on and off. The streetcars trundled off again.

Time passed. He glanced at this watch again. And again. Nothing.

The longer they loitered there the more suspicious they were liable to become. He darted a quick questioning look to Josef across the street. They shrugged. Heydrich should have come by long ago, but what could they do? All they could do was wait.

Both knew it was their last opportunity of getting Heydrich after nearly six months fraught with complications. It was now or never.

More time passed. The tension was becoming unbearable.

Jan crossed the road. "What if they took another road?"

"He couldn't have. He *has* to stop at the Castle first, they're expecting him. *Then* he'll head out to the airport. It's Ok, get back to your position," said Josef.

Jan returned to his post and tried to look as casual as possible. He remembered the newspaper and pulled it out, pretending to read it. The newsprint began to dampen with the sweat of his hands.

Three more streetcars came and went. More cars. More people.

His patience was running thin.

How would all this turn out? He and Josef talked about it just last night. They knew they were taking an enormous risk but they also knew they wanted to get out of this alive.

If Heydrich came with an escort today, they were certain to die. If not. Afterwards, they would have to make their getaway on their bicycles and pedal hard, hard, and hard. Would Josef's ankle hold out under the strain?

But Josef was a crack shot. At Mallaig he was the best. When Josef was down there would be no one left alive in the car. He glanced at his watch for the umpteenth time. It was after ten. Why was Heydrich late?

The sweat began to run down his brow. The waiting continued.

Ten past ten.

It was Josef who crossed the road this time. "What do you think's going on?"

"He'll be coming over that hill any minute! Get back to your place, now!" Jan's nerves were raw.

"And what if he doesn't come?" asked Josef, his eyes wide with alarm.

"He'll come. He has to."

Josef sighed and moved back across the street.

Heydrich's car meandered through the village road, climbed a hill, and then plunged into the forest.

The road was straight now, and empty.

"Step on it, we're late!" Heydrich's voice was sharp.

Klein nodded obediently and stepped on the gas. The trees along the road sped by, merging together in a blur. At this speed he could barely read the names of the villages on the signposts. Sperling, Zdib, Unter-babern. Clumsy German versions of the Czech names. Houses, trees, the sky above, all raced by in a continuous line.

Heydrich adored speed.

The prospect of his flight to Berlin pleased him. He allowed himself a smug grin as he thought of the revelations he was about to bring to the Führer later that day. Everything Heydrich had set out to do in the Protectorate had been accomplished in eight short months. The resistance was crushed. The factories were churning out tanks, airplanes and munitions at their maximum output. Terezin, the *'model camp'* he had set up was operating very nicely now as well.

Yet there was nothing extraordinary about all this. The Führer expected no less. He expected nothing less of himself. No, his real achievements were much more important. *He, Heydrich*, had identified the two most cataclysmic sources of Intelligence leaks from the Reich to the enemy that there had ever been.

The Secret Police knew for a long time that there was a major crack in the Nazi higher circles, someone had access to the Reich's secret military dispositions and battle plans. This most despised traitor, working under the code names of Felix and Agent 999 was none other than their cherished Karl Becker. Still at large, but trapped in Bohemia-Moravia, Heydrich was confident that it was only a matter of days before his men would catch him. How many German setbacks was Becker responsible for? The Führer was sure to be astounded.

The second Intelligence leak that Heydrich knew about was that the Allies had cracked the vital Enigma code, the code used by all the German armed forces. He had been carefully collecting evidence about the scale of the problem over recent months, only he knew the true extent of the Allies' knowledge of the code. Now he was ready to present his findings to the Führer. It would be perfect timing.

Heydrich had made the SS his own personal tool for the purpose at some future time of replacing the whole apparatus of the government with his own organization. With the Führer's health failing, Heydrich reckoned he wouldn't last much longer. With the position of Reichskommissar of all the occupied territories, he, Reinhard Heydrich, would command a greater area than the German occupied itself. Yes, the title of Führer itself would be his, soon. Very soon.

Although out of necessity a few others were aware of the Karl Becker case, men like Schellenberger and Himmler. Heydrich had told no one of his discovery about Enigma. That was his trump card with Hitler, his ticket to the promotion of Kommissar.

Klein drove silently, his eyes fixed on the road. Heydrich watched the passing countryside; the hedgerows were full of spring blossom. A few petals were beginning to fall on the ground causing a covering which looked a little like snow. They drove through a succession of small villages. A few old women sitting in front of their houses got up and vanished indoors as they saw the approach of the dark Mercedes decked out with the swastika flags. Here and there pedestrians would step into the road but at the last minute they'd change their minds and stop to let the speeding car go by.

Soon the fields and woods gave way to little gardens and cheerful flower boxes. The houses were closer together now. They were getting closer to town. Below them, the haze and spires of the city came into view.

Another streetcar went by. Some people passed in front of Jan as he stood reading his paper.

Ten twenty nine.

Then at last the roar of the speeding Mercedes could be heard from over the hilltop. They recognized the sound of his engine before the vehicle came into view.

Josef stood bolt upright. "He's coming!" he shouted across the street.

Jan's stomach heaved. Stay calm, he told himself.

The Mercedes coupe appeared at the top of the hill and raced towards them.

"She hasn't got a hat!" shouted Josef. It was their code which meant that Heydrich was travelling without an escort.

The chauffeur now began to break before the sharp bend ahead and shifted down to second gear.

Jan's eyes flashed from Josef to the approaching car. His fear disappeared. His whole world suddenly now consisted of the shrinking triangle between himself, Josef and the Mercedes.

A streetcar rumbled towards them. Just in time to be caught in the crossfire, thought Jan.

Suddenly Josef ran out in the middle of the road. Klein automatically gripped the wheel and threw on the brakes. Josef flung aside his trench coat and swung the gun forward. He aimed it straight at Heydrich. The car was still coming towards them; three yards, two yards...

Josef could see Heydrich's pale face and glassy eyes behind the crosshairs of his stun gun.

He pressed the trigger.

Nothing happened.

The Mercedes moved on.

"Josef!" Jan shouted in horror.

The events that followed seemed to happen in slow motion.

Heydrich sees that the man on the road has a gun and stands up, reaching for the pistol in his shoulder holster. He barks an order to Klein to stop the car. He wants to shoot the gunman himself.

Josef, recovering from the shock of this gun jamming on him, throws down the useless weapon and runs.

Jan reaches into the briefcase, grips the grenade and hurls it at the car.

It soars through the air.

The car is still moving under its own momentum. Heydrich is standing up, shouting something to Klein.

The grenade explodes.

Smoke and dust fill the air, obscuring the scene. The car lurches violently to the side and slams into the gutter. Its engine smokes and hisses.

Heydrich, his glassy eyes bulging expressionlessly, crawls from the car, staggers a few steps, then collapses.

Before the dust from the explosion had settled, Jan was on his bicycle and riding off down the road toward the city center. In minutes, he reached the safe house Kamil had provided for them for this occasion. He barely noticed the shrapnel wound over his eyes and the blood pouring over his face. He was too upset that the assassination had failed to notice the pain.

Klein leaned over the injured Heydrich.

"Get the bastard!" Heydrich gasped, pointing his pistol in the direction that Josef had fled.

The chauffeur ran after the gunman as fast as his heavy frame would carry him.

At the top of the hill, Josef turned off into a side street and ran into the first shop he came across, a butcher's. He couldn't have made a worse choice. The owner was a Nazi sympathizer and seeing Josef bursting in brandishing a pistol, he ran out into the street to find Klein in hot pursuit.

"In there!" he yelled.

Klein rushed into the shop after Josef with his pistol drawn.

The shop didn't have a back door. Josef found himself trapped. The only way out was back through the front door again. He turned back and collided with Klein in the doorway. In the confusion which followed, Josef shot the chauffeur in the thigh. Klein went down heavily. Leaping over the fallen body, Josef disappeared into the streets where he casually hopped onto a streetcar into town and headed for the safe house.

While he was on the streetcar, he realized he left behind his gun, the trench coat and bicycle at the scene of the shooting.

With only one thing on his mind, Heydrich staggered to the back seat of the car. He was looking for his briefcase. He looked in and saw the grenade had totally destroyed it, scattering its contents into thousands of charred and shredded fragments.

His vision was greying now and the blood was draining from his face. With the last of his strength he groped his way back, and then slumped, like a heaving giant lizard, over the bonnet of the car.



## Chapter 25

### Lukaš

"The rickshaw is much safer Grandma," insisted Lutek.

"But it costs too much and what's more, I don't like it," she protested. "It always seems such hard work for the poor man who has to peddle it."

"You can hardly walk more than two blocks now. It's a long way to the Club and the sidewalks are full of ice and snow. I'd have to carry you the whole way and..." he smiled playfully, "you wouldn't want me to break my back! Besides, the rickshaw man has to make a living too."

"Oh, alright then!" Elli sighed, admitting defeat. Her advancing age and worsening arthritis were beginning to severely restrict her movement. Even so, in the early January of 1942, when the Ghetto was completely frozen over, she remained determined to go out.

The day before, a German decree had been issued announcing the closing of all Jewish bookshops, So, not only were the streets obstructed with ice and snow, but now they were also full of all the vendors selling their books. Throngs of authors were being sold by the basketful; even forbidden works by Lenin, Marx and outright anti-Nazi, anti-Hitler writings were out in the open. Foreign language books, especially those written in English, were especially popular, since everyone who could was studying in preparation for leaving the country after the war. Moshe went out early to get the best pickings.

Lutek and Elli's rickshaw bumped and rattled down Karmelicka the turned onto Leszno. A dizzy melody of all kinds of music came to them from every direction; a cantor of singing in Hebrew, a Bach violin concerto around the corner, Klezmer folk music down the street and above all the chaos a funeral march. All the people on the sidewalks seemed to be shouting, trying to make themselves heard over the din of the music. Most of them were hawking the last vestiges of their possessions; old clothes, wobbly furniture, bed coverings, half rotten cabbages, candlesticks...

The babble steadily mounted and the crush of the crowd grew more and more intense until they could barely move. At one corner they came to a complete standstill. There, a few feet away from them, stood a woman holding a bundle of tattered, dirty rags, begging for food.

"When are we going to be there?" said Elli, turning away. She was beginning to feel faint.

"Soon, Grandma, soon."

There were hoards of beggars everywhere in this district and there were a startling number of children amongst them. Grandma watched them from their passing rickshaw in silent anger and despair. Young children of three or four wandered the frozen sidewalks, their bare knees turning purple from the cold, wailing that they had nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep. There were countless numbers of them, everywhere the eye could see, among the unbridled chaos of the streets.

Elli hadn't seen such depravation before. Her corner of Geisa Street was across the road from the *Judenrat*, and also quite near the dreaded Jewish Police Pawiak Prison. The truly destitute avoided frequenting that area for fear of being picked up by the police on some trumped up charge or other. Consequently, she'd seen relatively little of these extremes of the suffering at first hand. She'd only heard about it from others. The signs on Karmelicka and Leszno left her deeply troubled.

The rickshaw stopped. "Here, take my hand." Lutek helped her through the front doors of the Club. It was early afternoon and La Fourchette was still empty.

Elli blinked and looked around her in amazement. "I haven't been in a place like this for twenty years or more; since before your grandfather died."

"Hello, Mrs. Weiss," chirped Nacia coming in from the kitchen, a tea towel draped over her arm.

"Hello, my dear."

"I've been trying to get Grandma to come here for months. Trust her to pick a day like today, of course..." Lutek led her to a table in the far corner. "Well, do you believe me now?"

"It's unbelievable," she said, gazing at the ornate crystal chandeliers.

"Shall I bring you some hot tea and something to eat?" asked Nacia.

"Just some tea, please Nacia. I haven't much of an appetite."

As Nacia brought through a pot of steaming tea, the front door opened again. A huge obese man strode in and sat down heavily at a table by the window. Despite the cold, his coat was hanging open because he plainly couldn't fasten it up over his enormous, bulging stomach. Nacia hurried over to wait on him.

"Who on earth is that?" whispered Elli, eyeing the man in amazement.

"That's Alexander Bramson. He's one of the top men in the *'Thirteen'*," answered Lutek.

Elli peered at him critically as he settled himself at this table and spread out his newspaper.

"He's a real slime ball, but he's very powerful," Lutek added. "He's just opened the Hotel Britannia Club a few blocks away. They took in ten thousand zloty on their first day. Bills run up to 500 zloty there on a regular basis."

Bramson placed his order and Nacia scurried about him, anxiously tending to his every whim. She filled his table with food and returned to Elli and Lutek's table, keeping one eye on him as he stuffed and gorged himself. Bramson was an unbelievable sight, stuffing himself with enough food for four while reading his newspaper, completely oblivious to the world outside.

"How do the *Thirteen* make their money?" Elli asked.

"Blackmail, extortion, big-time smuggling," replied Lutek.

As they were talking, a gaunt, emaciated woman with vacant, sunken eyes staggered past the window outside. She noticed Bramson's table laden with steaming food on various dishes and stopped in her tracks. She stared longingly through the window for a while then disappeared from view. A few moments later, she reappeared inside and stumbled over to Bramson, imploring him to spare her some food. Bramson growled an indignant refusal.

"But please," she knelt before him. "I have two small children and we haven't eaten in two days."

Bramson carried on eating, trying to ignore her but she persisted. Nacia kept herself in check. Bramson was a valued customer and Mr. Grossman had warned all the staff that he must always be kept happy, whatever the circumstances. "Please mister, just a scrap. You won't miss a scrap."

Suddenly Bramson slammed down his newspaper and bellowed at her. "That's the limit. Just because you haven't got enough to eat yourself, you can't bear to see anyone else eat in peace either!"

He rose to his feet and looked around, searching for someone to come to his aid. Lutek stood up and went over to the woman's side. Bramson gestured with his hand for her to be thrown out then sat down again, returning to his meal.

Lutec led the woman back out to the street where he placed some coins in her hand, as much to relieve his own distress as hers.

Elli returned home by rickshaw just as the Club began to fill up. She got back to find Moshe sitting at the table engrossed in a book. He had picked up several volumes at the street sale, Lloyd George's *Memoirs*, a few First World War novels and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

"You're early."

Elli sighed as she hung her coat on the nail in the wall.

"I couldn't bear to watch what was going on any longer."

She explained what she'd seen that day. The wretchedness of the poverty stricken masses. The callousness of the few who had money.

"God knows how much suffering we've all seen but, today's upset me more than I can say. People fall and stumble on the street but not a single person stops to lend them a helping hand. The worst of it is the sight of all those poor lost children wandering like animals in the street without either parents or homes. And every day I see women come to the newsstand wearing their expensive shoes and fancy new dresses with waxy peroxide hair and powdered cheeks. And then we hear there's no money for orphans and no room for them anywhere. Shame on us all! What does it say about us as people that we allow these things to happen?"

"You're right Mama, It isn't right. It isn't right at all but it's not up to us in the end, is it? It's up to the *Judenrat*."

The *Judenrat*! Elli wanted to beat those apologies for Jews with their own fists. Cynically abandoning their origins to rise through society, they were better off now than they'd ever been, even before the war. They controlled the ghetto with a self-seeking contempt of all who lived there.

"Ah Moshe! The *Judenrat* won't force the wealthy to give to the poor. Every day I listen to them making their announcements on those wretched loud speakers of theirs; '*Equal treatment for all!*' That's their slogan. All it means is that they collect equal amounts of taxes from everyone irrespective of whether they're rich or poor. Just last week they gave out extra bread rations. But who did they give it to? To the police, the *Judenrat* members and the workers. And where did this extra ration come from? From the poor whose own ration they cut to provide it."

"Mama, I know how upset you are. It upsets me too, but what can either of us do?"

"I don't know," she looked intently out of the window, "I don't know, but there has to be something."

They sat for a while, each preoccupied with their own thoughts. Then Grandma turned away from the window and came to sit at the table across from her son.

"Moshe, there's a story in the Talmud. I'm sure you remember it. It's about the teacher Nahun."

Moshe nodded.

"He was the great teacher who was blind and had no arms or legs. He was covered with boils all over his body but he was so liked by his students that they offered to take him out of his squalid shack and put him in a better dwelling. Seeing his terrible state, one of his

students asked *'How is it that this has befallen you?'* Nahun explained how many years before; he travelled with three mules laden with possessions when he met a poor man begging for food. Nahun told the beggar to wait until he had finished unpacking and then he would give him something. But he was so slow in unloading the food that, in the meantime, the beggar died from starvation. Nahun was devastated and cried *'May my eyes that failed to see this man's needs become blind, and may my hands and feet that acted so slowly be severed from my body'*. And so it happened. I've been thinking, Moshe. We have it bad these days, but there are others who are faring even worse and hunger cannot wait while we decide what we are going to do about it. We have to act. And we have to do it now. It's our duty!"

At six o'clock all the children in the orphanage were filing into the Great Hall, taking their seats at the long tables set out for dinner. When all were seated and the hubbub subsided, Dr. Korczak called for their attention.

"Boys and girls, today I have some wonderful news for all of us," the doctor extended his arms to introduce Elli, Elias and Lutek, standing to his right.

"These kind people have offered to put on a musical performance right here in our orphanage and all of you can help to put on the show."

There were cheers and a roar of excited chatter.

"The musical will be Hansel and Gretel. Tomorrow, Mr. Berg will come to hold an audition. One lucky girl will be chosen to play Gretel and one boy chosen to play Hansel. Then we'll need fourteen children to sing in the chorus. Everyone else will have equal important tasks. We need to build sets, make posters, put them up around town and there are lots of other important jobs to do as well. We'll sell tickets to raise money for the soup kitchen and buy food for the orphanage. We might even manage the odd treat or two.

A small boy raised his hand.

"Yes, Joshua."

"What kind of treat? Will we get chocolate?"

"Yes, maybe even a little chocolate, Joshua. But first boys and girls, He paused and looked around the room, "we have to make sure the children on the street without homes have something to eat too."

A buzz of activity filled the orphanage. Most of the children had never seen anything like a play or a musical before. Every child was busy building sets, making costumes or painting scenic decorations on the walls, doing their best to be innovative with their very limited means.

Elli came every day to oversee their progress and to lend a hand. Dr. Korczak played his part by pursuing a vigorous ticket sales campaign sale amongst the local population. He was very successful and they decided to stage three performances.

"All we need now is a stage curtain and we're all set," said Elias, triumphantly eyeing the sets the children had constructed.

"Maybe I can make a curtain from some of your sheets," said Grandma.

Elias grimaced. He knew how tattered all the sheets were. They would look terrible.

Lutec and Lukaš had been listening to the conversation. "I know where we can borrow a nice curtain," piped up Lukaš.

"Where?" asked Lutec and Grandma in unison.

"It's a secret. Come on, I'll show you. Let's go," he pulled his brother by the sleeve.

“Where?” repeated Lutek when they were outside.  
 “At the hideout, of course!” exclaimed Lukaš.

Nacia had just finished her rounds with Aunt Rachel at the hospital and was going home for a few hours before her shift at La Fourchette. As she approached the turnoff to the hideout, she changed her mind. She would go there for a few hours instead and read a book in peace and quiet.

Nacia scurried down the dead-end street and climbed up the treacherous icy route to the third floor. Once inside the room she lit the small corner stove with some sawdust which Lutek had bought for fuel. It smothered rather than burned but at least it took the cold bite out of the air.

She flipped through a few books from the bookcase then decided on an adventure story set in Kenya. Anything from far away appealed to her. She pulled the armchair close to the stove and settled down, covering herself with her coat.

Nacia had only read a few pages when she heard voices coming from below. It was Lutek and Lukaš. A few moments later the door opened and the two of them came inside.

Lukaš stopped in the doorway and stared at Nacia wide-eyed in astonishment. He shot an angry look at his brother and stormed out, scrambling back down the icy rubble into the street. Lutek followed after him.

“You promised!” shouted Lukaš. “You said it was a secret, just our secret and no one else’s.”

“Don’t worry, she won’t tell anyone. I haven’t told anyone else.”

“That’s not the point! It was supposed to be *ours*; besides, she’s a *girl*!”

“Don’t you like Nacia?”

Lukaš didn’t answer. He folded his arms in front of him.

“I’m going to tell Grandma about this.”

“Tell her what? About Nacia? That I like her? She already knows.”

“I bet you kissed her there!” Lukaš blurted out accusingly. “It makes me sick!” He made a face as if about to retch.

Lutek tried to hold back a smile.

“Ok. Look, you’re right. I did promise to keep it a secret and I should have asked you first. I’m sorry. So let me ask you now. Can I please invite her to come to our place again?”

Lukaš had softened now, but he wasn’t going to be seen to be won over so easily.

“I’ll have to think about it,” he grumbled.

“She does bring you sweets sometimes.”

“Well, ok then. But next time she plans to come you have to tell me first! We’re supposed to be a team!”

“Deal. We *are* a team,” Lutek smiled. He patted his brother on the back.

Lukaš smiled back at Lutek for a moment then quickly turned his face away.

On the afternoon of the performance all the orphanage children donned their makeshift costumes. Everybody was to be dressed as a character from the show. Most of them gingerbread boys and girls, others Hansel or Gretel and a few were dressed as the witch. They were arranging the audience chairs in neat rows in front of the stage while Nacia and her father were making last minute checks on the props. Elli sat in the orphanage kitchen by the stove warming herself in preparation for the performance. Her illness was

sapping her strength more and more. She desperately wanted to do more, but everything she did was becoming a terrible exertion.

At four o'clock the audience began to arrive for the show. Elli and Dr. Korczak welcomed everyone at the door, standing discreetly behind a large, well-positioned donations box.

Lukaš had been detailed to show the audience to their chairs. He was dressed as a clown with white chalk all over his face and was selling off sweets he'd bought on their last trip to the other side. He was making quite a tidy profit.

Once everyone was seated, Grandma Weiss stepped onto the stage and gestured for the audience to be quiet so that the show could begin.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls...Once upon a time there was a humble broom maker who lived with his wife and their two children, Hansel and Gretel, in a small cottage in the woods. Times were hard, food was scarce and prices very high. So, one day the broom maker and his wife left the children to go to town to sell their brooms and buy some precious food for the family. Hansel and Gretel were left by themselves at home to do their chores."

Elli stepped off the stage and the curtain taken from the hideout was drawn aside. A wave of whispers and giggles passed through all the orphanage children in the audience as they recognized their two friends on the stage.

Hansel sat near the cottage door making a broom. His sister, Gretel, wearing a little red kerchief, sat by the fire knitting and singing.

*Suzy, little Suzy, now listen with care,  
These geese are running barefoot,  
They have no shoes to wear.*

Hansel joined his sister in the song, lamenting how life was not worth living and how they had no money for sugar or bread. Gretel tried to console him with an old proverb.

"When need is dearest, God stretches forth his hand."

"Yes, but I'm not in the mood. I'd like some food rather than stupid speeches," replied Hansel. Chuckles rose from the audience.

Eventually the two children began to frolic and dance about the cottage. Suddenly their mother returned to find that they had abandoned their chores. Already angry because she had returned home empty-handed, in her haste to reprimand them, she knocks over their last pitcher of milk. All three watched unhappily as their supper spreads out in a pool on the floor. Angrily the mother sends Hansel and Gretel out to the wood to pick strawberries for dinner.

While the play was going on, Elli and Dr. Korczak counted up the money from the ticket sales and the donation boxes, lining up the bills in neat piles.

"Nearly six thousand zlotys!" Elli exclaimed.

"That's enough to keep the soup kitchen going for a whole week!" Dr. Korczak was clearly pleased.

"We'll have to do something like this again, but next time we'll do something even better."

"How's that?"

“Next time it’ll be adult entertainment. A serious opera.”

In a fit of wicked glee, the witch flies around her house on her broom in anticipation of her feast on the children.

*I weave a spell, so none can tell,  
I'm here and there and everywhere.  
At stroke of twelve, and not by chance  
I go to join the witch's dance  
And then I stew a witch's brew  
Of snakes and snails and spider's tails  
And frogs and rats and big black bats,  
And lizard's blood – it's awful good.*

Nacia as the witch, amidst loud booing, slithers off her broom all bent over to the oven and throws a log of wood inside. Her sharp nose is bent down to meet her bristly chin and she has three long yellow teeth. Wagging her head and rubbing her warty hands, she muses on how to coax Gretel into the oven. Nearby is Hansel who locked in a cage. The witch goes over to him and feeds him raisins and almonds to fatten him up. While she is distracted, Gretel sneaks into the gingerbread house, finds the witch’s magic wand and waves it repeating the incantation.

*Brr – Hocus, pocus witch's curse  
If you move, I'll make it worse  
Ee-nee, mee-nee, my-nee-mo,  
Now I've got you by the toe.  
Hocus, pocus, dominocus  
Hansel watch the magic stick,  
I will free you, you must be quick  
Hocus, pocus, elderbush  
Magic spell be broken – whoosh!*

Hansel is miraculously freed from the cage. All the children cheered but he put a finger on his lips, bidding them not to give away the secret to the witch. The children fidget restlessly with excitement.

The witch, now ready to eat Gretel, tells her to look into the oven to see if the gingerbread is baked yet.

“No! No!” comes shouts from the audience.

Gretel winks at them, then pretending to be stupid, asks the witch to show her how. As the witch bends over, Hansel jumps forward and the two children push her in and slams the oven door shut to the wild cheers from the audience.

Presently the oven begins to crackle, rumble and shake until it finally explodes.

A crowd of gingerbread children, their sugary crusts falling away, emerged from the oven singing happily that they are now forever free.

Hansel and Gretel’s parents entered to find them safe and see all the children swallowing up in the witch’s oven freed.

"And now, you see boys and girls, the witch was destroyed by her own evil," says Elias in closing.

"I made *ten* zlotys on the sweet sales tonight," announced Lukaš proudly as Grandma was making his bed.

"So what did the Doctor say when you gave it to him?" she asked running her fingers through his black curly hair.

"He shook my hand and said I was a real businessman."

"Here, hop in young man."

Lukaš got in under the covers.

"Grandma?"

"Yes?"

"I wish I had a magic wand so that I could wave it, and say *hocus pocus magic spell be broken* and we'd all be back in Lidice together." He was waving his arms around toward the ceiling.

The smile faded from Elli's face.

"I liked it there, Grandma. I want to go swimming in the pond and catch rock lobsters in the creek." He raised himself up on his elbows. "Even picking cherries was better than this." His stomach was rumbling. There had been no dinner that night.

"You see Grandma, I told you we should have stayed there."

"I wish I had a magic wand too, son," Elli sighed, tucking him in.

"They've taken your father!" wailed Olga when Lutek came home.'

"Why? When?" He was alarmed and confused. His father rarely stepped out of their attic room and was hardly the type to breach any kind of regulation.

"I don't know. He went out to the shop on Nowolipki Street to buy some food and they took him away with the shopkeeper.

Lutek looked across the room and saw his Grandmother. Her face was flushed from crying. She didn't utter a word, but looked imploringly at her grandson for help.

"Who's *they*? The Jewish Police?"

"I don't know," Olga shook her head.

"Well then where is he? At Pawiak?"

"No, on Leszno," she replied

"*The Thirteen!*" Lutek muttered; it was clear to him now.

"Who's that?" asked Olga.

Lutek put on his coat again and was out the door before he had to answer any more questions. He went straight to the Law and Order Services Office, otherwise known as the *Thirteen*, to get his father released. He hesitated before going inside. There was bitterness about the fury and fear he felt.

"Moshe Weiss was arrested for collaborating with a profiteer," said the Law and Oder sergeant scolding. "Profiteering is a serious crime to the whole community and will not be tolerated!" Lutek detected a hint of mockery in his voice too. He felt an urge to punch the sergeant right there and then but he contained this anger. It wouldn't do any good to lose his temper, if anything it would only make matters worse. Instead, Lutek asked how he could arrange his father's release.

"Pay the find. One thousand zlotys," came the glib answer.



Lutek's mind reeled. That was the family's living expenses for the entire month.

"You'll have it. I'll be back. Can I see my father for a moment?"

The sergeant nodded dismissively and allowed them to sue a bare room for a few minutes. Moshe looked like a defeated man.

"Son, I swear upon my father's grave that I have done nothing wrong!" He was obviously afraid and bewildered.

"Papa, I know that. Just tell me exactly what happened so I can help you."

"Well, I'm not really sure. I went to the shop on Nowolipki to buy some flour and eratz coffee. I had a few extra zlotys in my pocket so I asked the shopkeeper to add a quarter of real coffee. As he reached for it, three men standing in line behind me grabbed us both, confiscated the coffee and said we were under arrest. They said we were profiteering and..." Moshe shook his head and his hands began to tremble. "Why, Lutek? Why?"

"Don't worry, Papa. I'll get you out of here soon. Very soon."

He stormed out of the building still wondering frantically what he was going to do next. How was he going to raise a thousand zlotys? It would take at least two dangerous trips over to the Aryan side to make that kind of money. He made straight for the Club just down the street. Mr. Grossman was sitting at his desk as Lutek rushed into his office.

"Mr. Grossman, I need your help," he blurted out. Grossman listened with his characteristic expressionless gaze as Lutek explained his father's predicament.

"We don't have the money, Mr. Grossman," Lutek begged. "I understand you have friends in the Law and Order Service. I was thinking maybe you could talk to them and ask them to reduce the fine. Besides, I'm sure it was a misunderstanding. My father has nothing to do at all with any kind of profiteering."

Grossman remained silent for a moment as he considered the request. Finally he spoke, "Alright, I'll see what I can do. I'll let you know tomorrow."

Later that night, Lutek told his family the news.

"But who's this *Thirteen* you keep going on about?" asked Olga again.

"You don't know? They're a group who set up a Law and Order Office to combat the black market and profiteering. It all sounds reasonable enough, doesn't it, if it wasn't for the fact that they're actually attached to the SS and the Gestapo."

"But I've heard they do all kinds of welfare work, like sanitation and cultural events and children's aid."

"Yeah, and they run the ambulances too. They use those on their smuggling runs!"

"It can't be true!" Olga was appalled.

"All that charity and cultural events stuff is a complete scam. They collect taxes straight into their own pockets, take bribes, and extort shopkeepers and arrest people like Papa. Last month they brought in a truckload of potatoes and made a 100,000 zloty profit on the deal. Yeah, they control the black market alright by cornering it for themselves.

The next day Lutek went straight to Mr. Grossman's office.

"They'll release your father for five hundred zloty. I got the fine cut in half for you," announced Mr. Grossman in a gruff voice. "I had to grease a few palm so the favor's going to cost you."

Lutek looked puzzled.

"Play the rest of the month for free and we'll call it even."

"Call it even?" Lutek tried hard to hide his anger. "Some favor!"

Lutek left the office wondering if he shouldn't have paid the original amount and made a few extra trips over the wall instead. It would have come out cheaper.

"It's so cold," Lutek's teeth were chattering as they walked down Geisa Street toward the cemetery. The snow crunching under their shoes.

"Never mind, you'll be alright. We just have to keep moving, said Lukaš.

They passed the turn-off to their hideout. Lutek looked longingly in that direction. He could just stretch out on the couch by the little stove and go to sleep. But it was Grandma's birthday tomorrow and Lukaš had saved up to buy her the new woolen kerchief he'd seen in a shop window in Kiercelak Square. So Lutek said noting and plodded on, his hands deep in his pockets.

They came to the alcove and waited in the shadows for the change of guard. Suddenly, Lutek felt something hard dig into his ribs.

"What are you boys up to?" rasped a voice from behind.

Lutek turned around a saw the grizzled face of a Jewish policeman. By the looks of him had knocked out more than a few people with this truncheon.

"What's it to you?" snapped Lutek.

"Look, I've seen you to here a few times already, running into the cemetery. Against the rules..." He shoved his truncheon into Lutek's body a little harder so he would wince.

"Why don't you go shove it up your ass!" shouted Lukaš.

"Maybe you want to go to the Pawiak to think it over? Retorted the policeman. He grabbed Lukaš by the arm. The sound of motorcycles approaching could be heard in the distance. Lutek glanced at the clock on Geisa Street. Three o'clock exactly. He didn't want to miss the change of guards otherwise they couldn't make it to the market before closing time. He pulled thirty zlotys from his pocket and shoved it in the policeman's direction.

"Come on, don't be shy. I've got a family and they have to eat too," grumbled the policeman over the din of the motorcycle engines. Lutek took out another thirty zloty and pushed the truncheon aside. Lukaš shook himself free from the policeman's grasp and glared at him belligerently.

The policeman grinned at them, showing a mouthful of rotten teeth. He tucked the money into his pocket and disappeared. The whole incident had only taken a few minutes but they had lost valuable time and the new guards were now already in place.

"Come on, what are you waiting for? It's going to be too late!" Lukaš shouted, pushing his brother forward.

They darted out onto the street and lunged up against the wall, pulling themselves up and over the grabbing onto branches of the shrubs.

"Whew. That was close!" said Lukaš once they were safely inside.

"Yeah! I just hope that son-of-a-bitch isn't going to be there waiting for a handout every time. I don't feel like having to pay him off for the rest of my life."

"Well, if he is there, we'll just have to find another way in," Lukaš said confidently.

Kiercelak Market was full of people when they arrive. Lukaš went straight to the textile shop where he had seen the cream colored kerchief for Grandma. He pointed it out to the lady behind the counter then pulled out a few handfuls of crumpled bills from several pockets. The lady smiled, sorted through the money and wrapped the kerchief in brown paper.

He tucked it inside his coat pocket and went to join Lutek who was buying sausages, rutabagas and potatoes. It was nearly five o'clock now and darkness was approaching. Light snow began to fall. Lutek felt the chill begin to invade the air once more.

"Here, you take this one, it's not too heavy." He handed Lukaš a sack of food. They swung their bags over their shoulders and headed back through the streets toward the cemetery.

"Do you think Grandma will be surprised? Do you think she'll like it?"

"Of course she will."

Lukaš continued to chatter until they reached the last road before the cemetery.

They stopped to check that the coast was clear.

"It's ok. Let's go." They sprang forward and raced into the cemetery. Their well-trodden route marked by familiar shrubs and distinctive headstones lead to Milosz's monument which butted up against the wall.

They were about twenty yards away from it when suddenly they heard the sound of barking dogs from behind.

Lukaš froze. "What do we do?"

"Keep going. Move! Hurray!" Lutek grabbed his brother's sack and with a sudden burst of strength, he sprinted to the monument. With his longer legs he was the first to reach it, but Lukaš was right behind. Hauling both sacks on his back, Lutek began to climb up.

"Come on, give me a push," he called down to Lukaš. The dogs were approaching quickly, howling and barking as they came.

Lutek reached the top of the wall and looked back. Lukaš' eyes were wild with terror. They heard the sound of German soldiers' voices.

"Just go. Keep going. Move!" shouted Lukaš. Lutek grabbed hold of the tree with one arm and climbed down.

Two German soldiers with their dogs crashed through the bushes. Machine gunshots shattered the graveyard silence; bullets ricocheted around.

Lukaš was perched on the top of the wall.

"Come on. Hurry!" yelled Lutek from below.

Lukaš reached over to grab the tree.

More machine gun fire. More German voices.

Lukaš tumbled down from the wall and hit the ground with a thud. Lutek dropped to his knees and bent over the motionless body in horror.

Lukaš let out a terrible moan. He was face down against the ground. His body was horribly twisted and he was oozing blood. In the darkness, Lutek could see very little. He could only hear the strained, gurgling voice of his brother.

"I'm sorry, Lutek. I was too slow. But you have to run, don't let them get you too."

"No! No!" Lutek's voice was trembling. "Lukaš you have to hang on in there, you have to. We're a team." He tried to pick him so he could carry him away, but Lukaš started to cry out in pain once more so he had to put him back down.

Lukaš' every breath was becoming more and more difficult. He was choking on his own blood. Lifting his hand to Lutek's face, he passed icy fingers over his brother's cheeks.

"Run...don't let them get you...promise me."

Lutek wiped the tears on his coat sleeve. He was grateful that the darkness of the night hid his crying from his brother.

“I promise,” Lutek forced the words out through trembling lips.

“Here, give this to Grandma.” Lukaš pulled the kerchief from his pocket. Lutek wanted to scream. Anguish burned through the whole of his body like a red hot knife. He lifted his shaking hands to cover his face and bent over his brother.

“...Promise. Promise you won’t let them...” Lukaš whispered, then his hand fell and his body went limp.

“No! No!”

Lutek shouted out to the empty sky. He enfolded his brother’s small body in his arms and held him tightly. So very tightly.

The sound of barking dogs pierced the air. The guards were closing in again.

## Chapter 26

### Five Million Crowns

Karl's eyes were cast down towards the ground as he wandered back to his new apartment on Masaryk Quay. There was dance music coming across the water and he saw the old stone tower by the Mane Café where he'd often gone with Kamil for a beer. He'd been weary and unsettled in the weeks since the shooting of his friend. Now he felt he was in some kind of limbo, just waiting. But waiting for what exactly? He wasn't quite sure.

He found himself walking past the benches which overlooked the river and with nothing else in particular to do, he sat down. He began to watch some bathers diving from the raft into the molten river. Elsie used to like to go diving there. What was Elsie doing at the moment? He thought back to their first days together, her touch, and her warmth. For years now he'd kept up this dangerous game. He'd been a man obsessed with a mission. It had made him develop a split personality. On the surface he was Karl Becker, steel magnate, travelling around the world doing big business deals. But on the inside he was Felix with his one, clear aim; to bring down the whole Nazi organization.

All his skill and ingenuity were used to smuggle information to the free world. Time and time again he risked his life to get reports over the border to the Allies.

Karl Becker, as Agent 999, secretly reported the deployment of a mere three battalions against France on the Rhineland.

Karl Becker, as Agent 999, secretly reported on the West's over estimation of the German Armed Forces in 1937.

Karl Becker, as Ewald Kleist, secretly travelled to London to urge the British to support the *coup* against Hitler.

Karl Becker, as Agent 999, secretly reported Germany's undefended Western frontier during its attack on Poland.

Karl Becker, as Felix, was the first to send information about planned aggressive acts against France, Britain and then the Soviet Union.

But always, he watched his information sink in a sea of skepticism and folly.

The world did not seem remotely interested in hearing what Karl Becker risked his life to tell them time after time and yet he carried on risking his life to tell them.

Would he ever get out of the Protectorate alive, he wondered gloomily. He *had* to find a way out. But now, he was cut off completely. He wasn't able to use the phone to call home. He daren't even risk writing.

For the first time, Karl realized how Elsie must feel as a Jew in Hitler's Europe. He wondered if she was still safe. He'd been away for so long. How completely afraid, alone and hunted she must feel.

He got up from the bench and made his way along the quayside. As he neared his apartment building he saw the hunched figure of his landlady sweeping the outside stairs. Mrs. Fialov was a kindly woman who had a knack of knowing how to look the other way when it came to having an unregistered tenant.

A window opened in the next building and a woman in an apron and kerchief leaned out and began shrieking.

"Oh, God, Mrs. Fialov. It's Heydrich!"

"What's happened?" asked the landlady looking up from her sweeping.

"There's been an attempt on his life, he could be *dead!*"

The landlady frowned, waved her hand and muttered, 'Thank God' to herself. She went back to her sweeping.

Karl could hardly believe what he was hearing. His heart missed several beats and he quickened his step. He tipped his hat as he passed Mrs. Fialov, then hurried on through the recessed wooden doorway and bounded up the spiral staircase to his apartment on the third floor. Maybe there'd be a news bulletin on the radio. He reached his apartment door out of breath, his heart pumping inside of him. He fumbled for his keys.

He opened the door to find two men standing facing him, their revolvers pointing directly at his head. A blurred voice from the radio droned anonymously on in the background.

"Who the hell are you?" demanded Karl.

"And who the hell are *you*?" the shorter one retorted. He was obviously highly nervous.

Karl stepped forward and closed the door behind him. The two weapons remained trained on him followed him as he walked over to a chair and sat down.

"Seeing as this is *my* apartment," he said, "I think you ought to answer *my* question first."

The first man glanced at his taller companion. The second man spoke. He seemed to be much calmer than his friend. "We were given this address by a friend," he said. "He said we could use this flat whenever we come into town."

Karl inspected them carefully. Both young and fit. English Weston pistols. The tall one had an open wound on his head which was still bleeding. It was obviously fresh. There were what looked like bits of shrapnel embedded in the side of his face and neck. They were on the defensive, but they were definitely not cowed. Yes, they were professionals.

"Is that so," Karl said finally. "Funny thing. I had a friend who told me the same thing. What's your friend's name?"

No answer. They did not feel like trusting a man who spoke Czech with such a heavy German accent.

"Was it Kamil?"

They still didn't answer. However, Karl detected a slight glimmer of recognition at the mention of the name.

"That's a nasty looking wound you've got there," remarked Karl. "How did it happen?"

"An accident. At work."

Just then a news bulletin came on the radio. The urgent voice of the newsreader cut stridently over the static. The two gunmen turned away from Karl and began to listen intently.

*Attention please. Attention please. Today, at approximately ten thirty in the morning, an attempt on the life of Reichsprotector, SS Obergruppenfuhrer Reinhard Heydrich, was perpetrated in Prague. The Protector miraculously survived his wounds and is recovering in hospital...*

"Bastard!" shouted the shorter one slamming his fist on the table. "That bastard son-of-a-bitch!"

“Shh. Wait. Listen,” said his companion.

*...The criminals escaped from the scene of the crime and are now at large. By order of the Führer, Adolf Hitler, a reward of ten million crowns will be given to anyone who has information leading to their arrests. Anyone sheltering these criminals, or providing them with help or, knowing who they are without denouncing them will be executed along with his whole family.*

“Jesus Maria!” exclaimed the shorter one.

“Shh! Quiet,” said the other one again.

*The following measures are to be put in effect immediately. There is a curfew from 2100 hours to 0600 hours commencing today. All traffic on public highways is forbidden during these same periods. All inns, restaurants, cinemas, theatres and places of amusement are to close immediately. Any person who appears in the street in violation of the curfew will be shot. Other measures are also in the process of being introduced. These will shortly be announced over the radio.*

The announcer began to repeat the message, this time in German.

The three men stared at each other after hearing this shattering news. It was clear to Karl that all three of them were in the same perilous position. It would be best if they cast their lot in with each other.

“Look guys, it seems pretty clear to me that the two of you had something to do with this hit on Heydrich.”

“What of it?” The shorter one was still defiant.

“Nothing,” shrugged Karl. “Just that I’m much obliged to you, what did you say your names were?”

“I’m Josef. And this is Jan.”

“Karl.”

“What do you mean *obliged*?” asked Jan.

Karl explained how he had been in contact with the Czech underground for several years and told of his arrest and close surveillance by the SS. By now the parachutists had put their weapons away and were listening intently.

“It got me to the point where I was in a corner with the SS closing in on me again. I asked Kamil to help me get out of the Protectorate. He agreed. We set up a rendezvous where he was going to give the details of an escape route, but...”

He paused for a moment. “That was on the tragic day,” he continued slowly. “Kamil did manage to get the information to me, hidden in a cigarette case, but by then, we were surrounded.” Karl’s voice trailed off again. Flashes of that day came back to him. Kamil’s shouts, people screaming, nonstop gunfire, the tightness in his chest as he ran from the scene.

“I ran like hell until I couldn’t run anymore. When I opened the cigarette case he’d given me, I found the papers inside with the instructions and contacts I needed. There was

the address of this apartment together with the key and the name of a forester in southern Bohemia who would take me across the border through isolated mountain passes. I went to see the forester straight away the next day, but by then all the security services were on high state of alert, watching for me to make my move to get out. Heydrich wanted to get me desperately, you see. He was up for a promotion and my arrest would look good on his record." He paused and smiled ruefully.

"The forester is still monitoring the situation and is going to let me know when the coast is clear. In the meantime, I live here in hiding, just waiting."

"I remember hearing about Kami on the radio," Jan said softly.

"He was a real friend to us too," added Josef. "He was a brave man."

"So you can see, with Heydrich off my trial, you boys have done me a favor."

"Ha. Don't get too excited" said Jan bitterly. "The bastard's not dead."

"Yes, but even so, I reckon there'll be sufficient distraction with all the resultant broo-ha-ha to allow me to slip away quietly."

Jan fell silent. His injuries were bothering him terribly now. His face was swelling and he was getting a bad headache. He withdrew to the bathroom to tend to his wounds and remove some more of the metal splinters.

For the next few hours they continued to listen to the radio for any further news of Heydrich's condition. Nothing new was broadcasted but the radio continued to blast, every half hour the menacing ordinance. From eight o'clock in the evening, Prague radio broadcast it every ten minutes and from nine to ten, every five minutes. It became unbearable to listen to and they switched the radio off, turning it on only periodically.

Few people in the Protectorate were exactly devastated to hear of Heydrich's precarious condition. None less so than Schellenberger, whose personal hopes and ambitions now resurfaced. He personally telephoned the Führer with the news straight away. Hitler flew into a rage not only at the affront of the attack but also at the fact that Heydrich had been travelling in an unarmored car without an escort. While venting his anger he instructed Schellenberger to take over the functions of the Protector on a provisional basis.

"And I forbid you to move an inch without guards or proper protection!"

"Yes, Mein Führer.

"And I want those criminals caught. Right away! Do you hear me? I don't care what it takes, offer a reward. Go as high as one million Reichsmarks. I don't care how much. Just find them!"

"Yes, Mein Führer. Schellenberger's hands were trembling with unrestricted excitement at this unexpected good fortune. He found himself having to concentrate very hard on what the Führer was saying.

"And to show those Czechs who their masters are, I want ten thousand of them shot. Round up anyone you suspect of activities against the Reich immediately and shoot them! That will teach them a lesson!"

It was the happiest day of Schellenberger's life. He put down the telephone down. Now at last he could prove himself. He could shine all by himself, uneclipsed by Heydrich. All he had to do was show the Führer what a competent officer of the Reich he was.

There was no way his boss would be coming back. Schellenberger had been to see him in the hospital before speaking to the Führer. Heydrich was a delightful shade of grey.



He had shrapnel lodged in his spleen; he'd suffered a broken rib and a pierced diaphragm and would need an operation. For all their reassuring words about the Reichsprotector's condition having stabilized, the doctors still looked very worried.

All that Ulrich Schellenberger had ever really wanted was to be somebody important and now Adolf Hitler had given him that chance. In this critical time he was determined not to fail. If he proved himself a success in the Protectorate, there would be no limit to how far he could advance. No, there was no way he would let anything stand in his way now. Not only would he make sure the culprits were found, he would personally see to it that Karl Becker was finally run to ground as well. And that meddling priest Father Rampp, the thief behind the Foreign Office burglary, would also be arrested. But all that would have to wait for the moment. The first priority was the apprehension of the two would-be assassins.

That night Schellenberger ordered the commencing of a massive manhunt. Three *Wehrmacht* battalions sealed off the city and sentries were placed in all the streets. Twenty one thousand men drawn from the security police, the Czech and German criminal police and the uniformed civil police began a ruthless door to door search of over thirty thousand homes.

By dawn, five thousand and forty one citizens had been arrested. Not a single trace of the assassins was found.

It was the end of the day. Lotte untied her apron and slipped out of the house towards the mill pond at the edge of the village. The evening air was moist and cool, brushing against her face like a soothing balm. Barn swallows chirped and darted about overhead catching insects as she approached the pond. She took off her shoes and let the soft springy peat cool her feet. Then she came to her spot. She sat down on the small wooden dock among the tall grass, buried her head in her knees and let herself cry.

It wasn't just the grief of losing Kamil, it was desperation. For years now she'd posed as a Christian, in constant fear of being caught as a Jew. Now that Kamil was gone, what would become of her and her daughters? Should she stay or should she go? But where? And how?

She wiped the tears from her face and stared morosely at the water. The hills glowed a faint red in the setting sun. Rose colored light reflecting from the stillness of the pool and a large carp rose to the surface to gulp air before twisting back into the depths.

The villagers noticed a sudden change in her about a month earlier. When they asked her what was wrong she told them she received news that Kamil had been posted abroad and would not return for a long time, perhaps not until the end of the war. They nodded sympathetically and said no more. Only Lotte's in-laws were told the truth.

It was easier to lie to the village folks than to her daughters but she was too afraid to tell them the truth. The night the Gestapo came and questioned Zofie was still vivid in her memory. Kamil's work was secret and so was the fact that he had a family. As far as Lotte could tell, the Gestapo never found out he lived in LeŔaky with a wife, two daughters and his parents. To mislead them he purposely kept his apartment in Prague. Any display of grief would draw attention. She couldn't give any hint that they might be related to that famous member of the resistance. She shuddered to think what the Gestapo would do to them, and even the rest of the village people, if they ever found out.

Lotte reached into her pocket and pulled out a tightly folded letter the postman had brought that morning. It was from Anna, postmarked Paris. She wondered what strange work Anna must be doing to take her to so many countries. Anna never explained; it remained a mystery. But Lotte was glad for her travels as it allowed them to write to each other. Anna never wrote from home for if Lotte were to receive letters from Palestine, this would immediately put her under suspicion. Lotte read the letter again, straining her eyes in the fading light.

*Dear Lotte and Kamil,*

*Spring in Paris is so beautiful. I wish I had more time to see the sights about I'm working almost round the clock, again! I'll be here for another month, till the end of June or so, and then I'll stop in Budapest for a couple of weeks on my way home.*

*We planted another twenty acres of trees this spring and the men are draining another twenty for planting next year. Shimon has his hands really full and works very hard.*

*Lotte, you must all come and visit us before the bad weather in winter takes hold. They say this winter will be harsher than usual so please try to make arrangements soon.*

*Shimon send his regards, of course, and we both hope you are all keeping well.*

*Love Anna*

At the bottom was a return address in Paris.

Lotte sniffed. Anna didn't know about Kamil of course. She folded up the letter again and stuffed it back into her pocket. Anna had been pleading with them to move to Palestine since before the war broke out. Cryptically, she was urging it again, *'before the bad weather of winter'*.

The idea that had been brewing in her mind all day now became clear. *Now* was the time for her to make her move. There was nothing for her in LeŒaky any more without Kamil, and going back to Germany was out of the question.

She would write to Anna at the address in Paris. If she was lucky they could meet up in Budapest in a month's time and travel to Palestine together.

Lotte jumped to her feet and headed back to the house to write the letter so it could go in the next day's post.

The morning after the attack on Heydrich, Schellenberger took a special plane to Berlin so he could inform the Führer personally of all the steps he had thus taken so far. German tanks moved into Prague. There were immediate executions of a hundred Czechs suspected of opposition. Rewards were offered to anyone who helped in the capture of the culprits.

Hitler was pleased.

"But, Mein Führer, if I may be so bold as to suggest a modification to the original order, for *ten thousand* to be executed.

Hitler nodded for Schellenberger to continue.

"Mass executions on that scale would play into the hands of our enemies. Indiscriminate reprisals of that kind would suggest the attack stemmed from the country as a whole. Furthermore, it would create implacable enemies for us of hundreds of thousands of their relatives and friends. I suggest we execute only those who are suspected accomplices. Plus their families, of course. That way world opinion will see the assassination attempt not as an act of the whole nation, but merely as the individual actions of a few extremists." Schellenberger paused for a moment so he could measure the Führer's response. Hitler was nodding his head slowly, staring absently at the ceiling.

"This way, Mein Führer," continued Schellenberger, "we can also solicit the cooperation of the majority of the population in bringing in our enemies."

Hitler remained quiet for a moment then turned and pointed a stiff finger at Schellenberger. "Alright, I agree. But take heed of this warning. I can see there being a rise in assassination attempts in we do not proceed ruthlessly and energetically in this matter. We must make the most of this opportunity to show that the master race remains firmly in control. I'll go along with your suggestion, for now. But if it doesn't produce results, we'll do it my way. Mass reprisals. Understood?"

When Schellenberger returned to Prague later that day, Gestapo Headquarters was buzzing like a furious wasps' net. Unimaginable numbers of SS men swarmed around each other, mingling with police officers and the armed services. High ranking men crowded around maps. They drew detachments of a hundred men here, two hundred there, discussed new prohibition orders, possible leads, supposed clues and executions. Schellenberger went directly to his safe and took out the photographs of the two unknown parachutists found in Kamil's briefcase. Privately, he didn't believe it was they who carried out the attack, but it was possible they knew who did it. In any case, this was not a bad time to track them down. He had posters made up immediately.

Karl went out in the early evening to buy some groceries and antiseptic for Jan's wounds. He saw the first of the thousands of red posters being pasted on street wall and lampposts. He ripped one down, stuffed in his pocket and hurried back to his flat.

"Take a look at this!" he said, throwing it on the table. Josef picked up the paper and stared at his and Jan's photographs.

### **REWARD!**

*Who knows these men?  
Who knows where they are hiding?*

*A reward of 100,000 Crowns will be paid for information leading to the arrest of the wanted men. Apply to Prague head office, 20 Bredovska, telephone 20411, extension 156 or to any other German or Protectorate police station. The reward will be paid with the utmost discretion.*

*Prague, May 28, 1942*

Josef let out a strange nervous laugh. His features tightened.

"Let me see that." He ripped the red bulletin from his hands and read. "How did they get our pictures?"

"Did anyone you know see you at the site yesterday?" asked Karl.

"No!" Josef was pacing about the room frantically now. "You know what this means! It means we can't set foot outside this room."

Jan went back to the sofa where he was sitting before and held his head in his hands. His headache was still bad. He felt like he had a hammer pouncing away inside his skull. Josef continued to pace about nervously.

"Forget about this poster for a minute. What plans did the two of you make for your escape?" asked Karl.

"Escape? There were no escape plans."

"No escape? Well, what did you intend to do?"

Jan tried to regain some composure. "We were to submerge ourselves in the population at large," he explained, "and wait it out until the end of the war. In London they say it shouldn't be much more than a year."

"A year!" shouted Karl. "In one year...Oh, never mind. Anyway, the way things have gone there's got to be a change of plans. I'm going to check with my friend Stánsky and see how things at the border are looking. When I talk to him, I'll ask if he's willing to take along another two men. When the time comes, and I don't think it will be long now, you can come with me to Germany and on through to Switzerland. What do you say?"

Jan and Josef looked at each other and nodded.

"Yeah," said Josef, "looks like we don't have much choice. Thanks, Karl. See if he'll agree to take us along."

That night, none of them could sleep. Outside, behind the blackout curtains, was a strange noise. Like the humming of an angry swarm of wasps, first far away then coming nearer. The sound of motorcars and motorcycles, a monumental manhunt was taking place.

The three men sat around the table in their living room, playing cards to keep their minds occupied. Every few moments, clammy fingers would reach for a burning cigarette. Deep inhalations. Then the smoke would steam from flaring nostrils and hang overhead in a blue cloud.

Karl played a hand then went over to the window. He peered out from the side of the curtain. Shafts of bluish light flashed about on the roads. The sound of engines and squealing tires. From a nearby convoy came the muffled sound of singing. He opened the window a fraction and listened closely. A German song. The convoy came closer now, turned onto Masaryk Quay and passed in front of their building. He could make out the words of the song now. The singing came from the men in the third truck. In the first and second they were silent. The convoy passed and Karl followed their lights with his eyes to see where they were heading. He felt sick. The trucks were driving towards the firing range. He shut the window and let the curtain fall again.

"It's your deal," called Jan.

"I'm coming." He returned to the table and poured himself another brandy. In the distance there was a volley of shots.

"Are you going to play or not?" Josef's nerves were showing clear signs of strain.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm going to play."

He dealt a new hand and they began to play with intense concentration.

Half an hour later another roar of engines. This time trucks stopped in front of their building. They all froze.

"When I give the signal," whispered Josef, "we all move out through the bathroom skylight."

They sat still. Listening. Waiting.

The doorbell rang downstairs. One ring. Two rings. It echoed through the marble foyer and the stairwell. Then the ringing became continuous as someone held their finger on the button.

A short while later they heard the agitated voice of Mrs. Fialov as she hurried down to open the front door.

Karl stood up and leant his ear against the bedroom door.

"What the hell were you doing making us hang about like this?" demanded a gruff voice.

"I was asleep." Karl could hear the fear in her voice.

"Are you Frau Fialov?" came a barking enquiry.

"Yes."

"You are under arrest!"

"Under arrest? But why?" she shrieked. "There's been a terrible mistake."

"You're guilty of showing public approval of the attempt on the life of the Reichsprotector."

There were more wails and the sound of scuffling. Then the voice of protest from her husband. Then more shouts reverberating up the stairwell.

"This is preposterous. We never..."

"Don't lie. Your neighbor next door can testify."

The commotion died down as the couple was dragged out into the waiting trucks. They sped off in the direction of the firing range. There was quiet in the building again. Only the buzzing of cars in the distance.

The next day there was a lovely clear blue sky and the scent of lilacs filled the air. Karl got up early. He was already dressed for going out when Josef awoke.

"Where are you going?"

"With Mrs. Fialov gone we can't stay here any more. I'm going to meet Stánsky and try to make the arrangements.

Josef bit his lip.

"Don't worry, Josef. I don't think it'll be a problem. If he can't take us right away, I'll find us another place to stay." He finished his cup of cheap coffee, grabbed his hat and was gone.

The latest batch of red posters was being pasted up just as he stepped outside. He ripped one off the wall. There, under 'F' in the list was Mrs. Fialov and her husband and their two sons.

"Damn!" shouted Karl.

In his hospital room, Heydrich was slipping in and out of consciousness as he hovered between life and death.

Lina rushed to the second floor of the Bulkova Hospital. Dr. Dich had called her early that morning to tell her to come at once. It was urgent he said. She passed the hall filled

with black uniformed SS men and went straight to see the doctor who was waiting outside her husband's room.

"Frau Heydrich, your husband's condition has taken a grave turn for the worse tonight," he explained.

"What happened?"

"It began yesterday evening with peritonitis and overnight tests showed he was developing septicemia. We are doing all we can. He's having a blood transfusion and we're giving him a new drug, sulphonamide to control the infection.

Lina stared into the doctor's face. She hadn't understood a great deal of what he said, but his agitated state clearly meant things were very serious.

"He's in an extraordinary amount of pain so he's heavily sedated with morphine. Don't be surprised if he doesn't seem like himself when you go inside."

"Will he be alright, doctor?"

Dich shrugged helplessly. "His condition is acute. It's in the hands of God now."

Lina pushed the door open and went inside.

Reinhard lay on a single bed. He was alone in a vast, dimly lit room. She walked noiselessly to his bedside.

His face was pale and sweaty and he was tossing about, mumbling incoherently in his painful delirium.

"...get my briefcase...uh...where's my briefcase. They know about Enigma...uh...they've known about it for years...Since the very start."

Lina touched his hand to wake him but he was so deeply sedated that he failed to respond.

"...I'll get them...aaahhh..." His face contorted in pain.

Lina looked down at the grey face drenched in sweat. She thought of all the times he made her suffer. The misery that man had caused her! Looking down at him now in his own agony, she could not feel sorry for him at all. He deserved to know how it felt. She shook him awake.

It was the afternoon before Karl made his way back to the Masaryk Quay. He'd accomplished absolutely nothing, he thought to himself as he walked. Stánsky had agreed to take the two parachutists but said the time still wasn't right. Perhaps soon. His second task was even more impossible than the first. In the current state of terror in Prague, no one was willing to let out their apartments to new tenants, especially tenants they didn't know. Not even the fact that he was German seemed to help.

As he stared out over the river, the bells of a nearby church began to sound five o'clock. Then the idea struck him. With new found energy he hastened there.

In spite of the heat outside, the church inside was cool and dark. The air was heavy with the smell of frankincense. Once his eyes had adjusted to the dimness, he spotted the priest near the altar. He hurried over to him.

"Father..."

The priest turned around. "Yes, my son?"

"Father, I need your help," Karl began urgently. Then he hesitated, wondering what exactly he was going to say.

"Why don't you come into my office?" the priest pointed to a side door and started walking. "Maybe it would be better to talk in there."

The priest ushered him into the vestry.

"I'm Father Petrek. Perhaps you should start by telling me who you are."

"Of course, Father. I'm sorry. I've been under enormous strain and, well, my name is Karl Beck." Karl went on to explain his situation frankly.

Father Petrek listened and watched Karl with sharp penetrating eyes. Without hesitation, he offered to take the three men and hide them inside his church in the crypt below.

"Churches are not normally searched by the Gestapo," he said.

It felt like an enormous weight had been lifted from Karl's shoulders. "We'll only need shelter for a short time," he said. "Just until we're able to get out with the help of my friend. I really can't thank you enough."

"There's no need to thank me at all," Father Petrek said modestly. "Helping those in need is my duty. When will you be coming?"

"How soon can we come?"

"Tonight if you wish. But you must be sure to arrive before the curfew."

That night, Karl, Jan and Josef, all coming from different directions at different times, made the short move to the Church of St. Cyril and Methodius.

"It's dark and cold down there." Father Petrek said giving them some warm clothing and a few mattresses. They took the warm clothes from him and dragged the mattresses down the steep wooden stairs. It was black and musty in the crypt. Jan lit a candle. The faint light revealed rows of rectangular recesses along both sides of a long main mall; the places where they put the dead.

Jan and Josef each promptly stuffed their mattress each into one of these recesses. Upon casual inspection they would be hidden from view.

There was no question that this was a safe hiding place. It had just the one tiny window at one end which was no more than a foot square; not big enough for a man to crawl through. The walls were four feet thick.

Each new day that followed was greeted with fresh horrors as the new lists were posted naming those executed the previous day. When the names of those who helped them over the past five months began to appear on the lists, Jan and Josef grew unbearably wretched. The farmer and his wife. The shopkeeper, his wife and three daughters. The doctor. The railway man, his wife, son and two daughters.

Scores of deaths. But still not a single clue leading to Jan and Josef.

The situation outside grew even worse and the three men were now compelled to stay entirely in the crypt. Even with their heavy woolen sweaters, they shivered in the damp cold blackness as they sat and waited.

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, as the first rays of light dawned, Reinhard Tristan Heydrich breathed his last breath. Schellenberger was hovering anxiously at the door and heard the news first. He immediately called Berlin to leave messages for the Führer and for Himmler.

When Hitler received the message later that morning, he returned the call to Prague in an absolute furious mood. He shouted into the telephone for a whole half hour while Schellenberger held the receiver six inches away from his ear.

"It's the opportunity that makes the assassin!" Hitler lectured. "Such heroic gestures as driving around in an open vehicle or walking about in the streets without bodyguards;

it's just gross stupidity, that's all! It doesn't serve the Fatherland one damn bit. That a man as irreplaceable as Heydrich should expose himself to such unnecessary danger like that; it's plan idiocy. Men who are irreplaceable like Heydrich should realize that scores of people are just waiting for the first opportunity they get to kill them. Stupid, stupid, STUPID! Well, he paid the price for being stupid, didn't he! Let me tell you, this man is totally irreplaceable!"

When Hitler eventually tired of his tirade, he turned to quizzing Schellenberger about his search for the assassins. He had to admit in a thin voice that they had yet to find any trace of them. Another blast of fury from the telephone commenced.

"Find them Schellenberger! I order you to find them! Tear the entire miserable little country apart if that's what it takes. Just find me those filthy assassins! Do you hear me?"

As the siege conditions in the city continued, Heydrich's body was moved to Hradshin Castle where he lay in state for two days. Surrounded by SS flags and blazing funeral urns and with the SS guard of honor, Heydrich was transformed in death into a great Nazi martyr. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, his coffin was placed on a gun carriage and conveyed solemnly through the streets of the railway station. Heydrich's body was accompanied to Berlin by Schellenberger and a delegation of leading members of the Protectorate's government, led by President Hácha.

When the coffin reached Berlin, the pomp and ceremony reached a whole new level. His coffin was covered by a swastika flag and placed on yet another gun carriage, this time drawn by six black horses and draped in six black banners. He was paraded through the streets and throughout Germany, flags flew at half-mast.

The funeral took place in the Mosaic Hall of the Reich Chancellery. The crowds began to gather in the early afternoon and all the leading figures of the Third Reich filed into the main hall.

At exactly three o'clock, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra began to play Wagner's death march to the illustrious audience. Schellenberger sat quietly in the front row next to Himmler, Goebbels, Goering and Hitler. In front of them, Heydrich's coffin lay on a raised stage flanked on both sides by mounds of flowers. Ranks of steel helmeted guards of honor kept vigil and there were many more burning urns and torches.

When the Philharmonic had finished playing, Schellenberger began the ceremony with a lengthy eulogy to Heydrich. They were not, however, his own words. He'd passed the task of writing the speech to an assistant. There was no way he could bring himself to perform the task.

Reading from this assistant's notes, he heard himself describe Heydrich as a *'friend of the Czechs, a noble Aryan whose name would be forever carried in the SS hall of fame; the creator of an ideal always to be emulated but perhaps never again to be achieved...'*

Yes, he was thankful he'd given the task to someone else. He could never have written this rubbish himself. It was all he could do to deliver it convincingly without bursting out laughing.

There was wild round of applause when he finished. He returned to his seat.

Schellenberger's speech was followed by another one by Himmler and then by more music.

At last Adolf Hitler rose to make the closing address. He first laid a wreath at the foot of the coffin then took the podium and began to speak. It seemed that the Führer spoke in an uncharacteristically subdued tone.



“He was one of the greatest defenders of our great German ideal...The bitterness foe of all the enemies of the Reich...” He paused, seemingly overcome with emotion.

The Führer continued by citing Heydrich’s exemplary conduct in Prague and his manliness and bravery. Schellenberger didn’t think he could bear to listen to any more of it. He began to fidget in his seat. Mercifully the oration turned out to be fairly brief. In his grief, Hitler seemed genuinely unable to speak for very long.

“He will live forever as the embodiment of duty to the Führer and to the Fatherland. He is irreplaceable!” croaked Hitler.

Irreplaceable. There was that word again.

The Führer finished by announcing the posthumous award to Heydrich of the highest of German military honors.

Immediately after the ceremony, Schellenberger and the delegation from the Protectorate were summoned to a meeting in Hitler’s office.

Only moments after his emotional speech in the Mosaic Hall, they now found an entirely different Führer. The grief-stricken eulogist of before was now a study of towering anger. He glared at them with bulging eyes.

“Listen to me, *Herr Hácha!*” said Hitler, deliberately omitting to use the President’s title. “Your damn Protectorate’s been as source of trouble since the very first day. No! Before then! The Czechs have been a thorn in the flesh of the Sudeten Germans for the last twenty years! But, I want to leave you no doubt,” he banged his fist on the table on each of the last three words, “that I will not tolerate any more trouble in the Protectorate.”

The aging President Hácha sat awkwardly in his chair and gripped the brim of his hat tightly. Hitler leant further forward over his desk and poked his finger in the Czech leader’s face.

“If your people don’t come to their senses and hand over the assassins, let me assure you that the consequences will be dire in the extreme. There’ll be no compromise. I swear to you I’ll deport the entire population!” He began to bellow and wave his arm in the air. “I’m giving you until June 18<sup>th</sup> to find these criminals. Then you’ll see what I’ll do. The entire population, *Herr Hácha!*”

Hácha blinked. He moved his lips to speak but no sound would come out.

Hitler continued to glare at him. Hácha cleared his throat and managed to compose himself enough to speak.

“Please Mein Führer, give me an opportunity to explain the situation to the people of the Protectorate and urge them to prove their loyalty to the Reich.”

Satisfied that this performance had had the desired effect, Hitler agreed magnanimously and dismissed Hácha and his ministers.

Hitler was now alone with Schellenberger and took on, to the latter’s continuing amazement, a third persona. The Führer began to speak in a cool, businesslike tone.

“Now, regardless of what that old fool says to the Czech people, something has to be done to show him and the Czechs that we mean business,” said Hitler quietly.

Schellenberger understood immediately. A purge of blood was necessary to avenge the death.

“We can start with the Jews,” he suggested, “deport a few trains to Auschwitz right away.”

Hitler shrugged. The murder of Jews had become quite routine. "We need something more," he paused for a moment and made an expansive gesture with his hands. "We need something more dramatic." He looked up enquiringly, inviting a response from the SS man.

Schellenberger bit his lip. He knew he had to come up with something. He reached into his briefcase and pulled out a file. It opened at a page which recorded all the parachutists who'd been apprehended in the Protectorate over the past eighteen months. It was an astounding long list.

Then the idea struck him.

"Mein Führer, I'm certain that the assassins were parachutists sent from England. The grenade that killed the Obergruppenfuhrer was British made. They've sent scores of these parachute teams into the Protectorate."

Hitler looked up sternly.

"Most of whom," Schellenberger added quickly, "we've apprehended. We've evidence pointing to various towns and villages where these parachutists were hidden, where they set up their transmitters and so on. What I suggest is that we take these towns and villages, one by one, and eliminate them completely. Kaput. Until the Czechs surrendered our criminals."

Hitler looked at this subordinate with raised eyebrows. He listened keenly as Schellenberger continued.

"Say, for example, we start here, with Lidice. We wipe it out, kill everyone and bulldoze it to the ground. Then we see what happens. If the criminals aren't arrested in a few days, then we move to the next one on our list; Bernartice, and so on. I'm sure that will do the trick."

Hitler mulled it over for a few moments then looked up enthusiastically. Yes, yes. Excellent. That's exactly what we need. Show the Czechs and all of Europe the consequences of defying us." He gave his subordinate a sly smile. "And it will have the extra benefit of our smoking out those lousy criminals."

"We can commence this plan right away," Schellenberger said proudly.

"Hmm," grunted Hitler. Let's hope for your sake, it works."

The same evening, one thousand Jews were deported from Terezin to Auschwitz. Two thousand more were herded into the rail depot to wait for the next available train.

Shortly after nine thirty in the evening of June 9<sup>th</sup>, the town of Lidice was surrounded. All the men and boys aged fifteen or older were shot. All the women were sent to concentration camps. All those children not suitable for the Aryanization program in Germany were sent to the camps. Once all the inhabitants were gone, the buildings were set on fire, and then when the fires had died down, they were bulldozed.

Still no one came forward with any information.

Several days after hearing about the tragedy of Lidice, Lotte received a reply to her letter to Anna. They were to meet at the Imperial Hotel in Budapest on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Three short weeks away!

Lotte set about gathering the family's papers together so they could apply for visas to Hungary. Fortunately Kamil had been able to provide her with false ones which concealed all traces of her true origins. They did, however, still state that she was German by birth. This made her chances of travelling out of the country much better.

Time was running out. Hitler's deadline of June 18<sup>th</sup> was drawing near. If Schellenberger did not deliver the criminals by that date, dead or alive, he knew the Führer would remove him from Prague. Everything he had worked for would be gone, forever.

It was all Heydrich's doing, he cursed. Even after his death, Heydrich was still conspiring against him.

The German police officers working on the case continued to bombard him with their problems and complaints.

'The sort of fear and anxiety that's been produced is hampering our investigations. We need some new crack in the case. People aren't coming forward because they're too afraid of being asked why they hadn't spoken up earlier.'

Finally on June 13<sup>th</sup>, five days before the deadline, Schellenberger ordered President Hácha to announce a short amnesty period.

*Pardon will be granted to anyone prepared to denounce the assassins or provide information leading to their arrest. If you come forward before June 18<sup>th</sup>, no harm will come to you or your family.*

There was panic throughout the Protectorate. Every evening, crowds gathered round the newsstands to read the latest on the hunt for the assassins and the latest list of executions.

"They'll kill us all if those men aren't found," said an old man.

A large, bearded man in a green cap broke away from the crowd around the newsstand. He made his way to the church on St. Cyril and Methodius, walked quietly through the nave and found his way to Father Petrek's office. He knocked on the door and pushed it slightly ajar.

The priest stared up from his desk in alarm.

"Don't be afraid, Father. I only came to leave a message. I'll be travelling across the border in a week's time, on the nineteenth. The weather should be good by then. I'll be at the U Fleku beer hall at noon on that day before to confirm arrangements." Without waiting for a response, the burly man disappeared back into the darkness of the nave.

In the crypt below, Jan was pacing up and down while Karl and Josef warmed their tea over the flame of a candle.

"I can't take it anymore," said Jan in despair. "So many people dying because we're sitting on our asses down here. What are we, Josef? Cowards? Well, I'm not! I'm going to go and turn myself in."

"Do you have any idea what they'd do to you if you did?" said Josef quietly.

"Then we'll commit suicide in a public park, with placards round our necks, saying we killed Heydrich."

"Hmmm," Josef considered the plan seriously for a moment. "No, I have a better idea. Why don't we arrange for an interview with that slimy Propaganda Minister, confess, then shoot him and swallow our cyanide tablets."

"Now wait a second, you guys," Karl interrupted. He'd been listening in silence to his two companions for some time. "You're both starting to talk crazy."

“No, I’m quite serious Karl,” said Josef. Karl looked at him closely. He could see that he was.

“We always knew we might not survive the mission,” announced Jan.

“Look, even if you shoot yourselves in Wenceslas Square in front of everyone, it won’t stop the massacres. Take it from me; they’re hell-bent on wrecking as much revenge as they possibly can. You guys are soldiers; it’s your duty to stay alive.”

Just then they heard footsteps coming down to the crypt. Karl blew out the candle and they scurried away down one of the passages. The door into the crypt creaked open and the face of Father Petrek, illuminated by a candle, poked into the crypt’s antechamber.

“Karl,” he whispered. “Karl, Josef? It’s me.”

Karl emerged from the shadows.

“What is it? Is there trouble?”

“No, I don’t think so. A big man with a beard just came to see me. Said he’s going over the border on the 19<sup>th</sup>. He wants to meet you the day before to go over the plan. Was that your gamekeeper?”

“Yes,” Karl breathed a sigh of relief. “That’s him. Thank God in Heaven, at last!”

“I’ve bought you boys some food. The housekeeper just made it. It’s still warm.” He handed Karl a pot. Karl took it gratefully.

“Hey, what do you make of this?” asked police officer Stula. “It’s just arrived at the station.” His colleague took the letter.

*Stop the search for the men who took Heydrich’s life. Stop the murder of innocent people. I can’t stand it anymore. The attack was carried out by Josef Gaböik and Jan Kubis.*

“Who sent this?”

“I don’t know. It’s not signed and there’s nothing on the envelope. Only the postmark. From TÕeboj.”

“Well, burn it then, if it’s anonymous.”

“I don’t know, the sergeant brought it in. He told me to look at it carefully, think there might be something in it.”

“Oh well, put it at the bottom of the pile then.”

A lieutenant from the next room stopped in the doorway. “What are you two talking about?”

“This letter, Lieutenant,” said Stula uncomfortably.

“What are you going to do with it?”

“We don’t know. We thought about burning it. It’s anonymous.”

“May I take a look?”

“Sure,” said Stula. He handed the letter to the lieutenant.

Instead of turning the letter over to the Gestapo, the lieutenant drove out to TÕeboj personally the next day. By one o’clock in the afternoon he was back at the station, looking pale and anxious.

“What’s the matter, Lieutenant?” asked Stula.

“How do you mean?”

“The letter was genuine!”

It was now Stula's turn to turn pale.

"I drove out to TÕeboj, to tell the Gestapo there that I was investigating a lead. As soon as I got out of the car, even before I'd uttered a word, the Gestapo sergeant shouted at me *'Where's the letter?'* I thought my legs would buckle under me. Stula, he was bawling and barking at me that much. I gave him the letter and he wanted to know why I hadn't brought it in sooner."

"Good God, Lieutenant. Imagine if we'd burned it," said Stula, taking a chair.

"I know."

"Do you think the Gestapo fabricated the letter to test us?"

"I don't know."

When Karel Ňurda's letter failed to produce any results, he decided to take the train to the capital and pursue the matter personally.

In Prague Gestapo Headquarters at PeÕek Place, he now sat before Chief Pannwitz and a Czech interpreter.

Ňurda was a stout man with a round face and thick lips. His eyes darted uneasily as he fidgeted in his chair. The interpreter, Chálupsky glared contemptuously at him and the Gestapo chief looked down at him with obvious loathing. The Germans liked betrayal but hated traitors. Nevertheless, Pannwitz was eager to hear what Ňurda had to say.

"Do you recognize these men?" he asked through the interpreter. He held up the photographs of Jan and Josef.

"Yes, yes..." Ňurda stuttered. They...they're the two men I told you about. The ones sent to the Protectorate to...to kill Heydrich. Their names are Josef GabÕik and Jan Kubis."

Pannwitz scribbled the names down quickly. Those were not the names known to the Gestapo. He suddenly had the suspicion that the squealer Ňurda was a fellow parachutist. Without a word, he beckoned in two of the guards. They descended on the frightened man and began to search him thoroughly.

"What are you doing?" He tried helplessly to fight back. "No! I said I'd help you. I swear!"

"Relax," replied the Gestapo chief reclining in his chair as he observed the scuffle. "It's for your own protection."

Moments later one of the guards produced what they were looking for, the cyanide capsule issued to every SOE agent. One guard deposited Ňurda back in his desk while the other handed over the capsule to Pannwitz. He dropped it into his desk drawer, got up from his chair and resumed the questioning.

"And where do you know these men from?"

"F...F...From England. No, Scotland, actually. We did paramilitary training together."

"How long have they been in the Protectorate?"

"I'm not exactly sure. Six months, maybe?"

Pannwitz pursed his lips. Six months! And they'd eluded his men all this time!

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know."

The Gestapo chief fired several more rounds of questions. Each time he concluded with the same question. "Where are the assassins now?"

Each time Ňurda repeated that he didn't know.

"When did *you* land in the Protectorate?"

“March 27<sup>th</sup>.

“Who sheltered you?”

“My brother-in-law, Antonin Máca, the owner of a printing shop in Láze Bčlohrad, Mr. Krupka in Prague, Alois Moravec, then the Svatos family, then...”

Ňurda proceeded to identify the entire network of people who'd risked their lives to shelter and help not only himself but many others besides. Pannwitz took careful notes. He spewed a bloody trail which betrayed the entire resistance network used by all the parachutists.

It was all Chálupsky could do to stop himself from lunging at Ňurda in front of the Gestapo chief.

From his questioning, Pannwitz was able to identify a concentration of resistance activity in Prague around the Masaryk Quay and Charles Square areas.

He instructed one of his men to get hold of detailed street plans of those areas. He gave his sergeant the list of all those Ňurda had named with the orders that they be immediately arrested.

“Wait here. I'll be back,” he said, and left the room.

As soon as he was gone the interpreter got up and stood over Ňurda threateningly with glaring eyes.

“Why are you doing this?” Chálupsky said through gritted teeth.

Ňurda stammered and stuttered but nothing understandable came out. Chálupsky grabbed him by the collar and shook him fiercely.

“Don't play that shit with me! I want to know why or I'll dig a hole so deep for you that you'll never crawl back out!”

“B...B...Because, B...B...Benec's government in London has no idea what things are like here at home, h...h...how bad they are already, h...h...how everyone lives in such fear. And to make our lives even worse they send s...s...saboteurs. Look what's happening! Don't you see the red posters every day? I'm doing this to stop the killing and to save my family.”

“You filthy lying rat!” The interpreter punched him in the stomach. “Despite everything that's happened, despite the posters, the whole country's still pulling together, *rooting* for the brave men who've had enough guts to do something heroic. All this time since the attack and no one has so much as breathed a word in spite of all the suffering, all the deaths. Then you come along, and to save your own sorry chicken-shit ass, you make all their suffering count for nothing.” He threw Ňurda against the back of the chair.

“Why did you betray all those people?” he ranted. “You didn't have to mention all their names! They helped you for Christ's sake!”

Ňurda began stuttering again. “I...I...c...couldn't b...bear all that killing. I didn't mention everyone. I didn't mention the postman or the man who gave me new clothes! Only those who housed me. I was f...f...forced to...”

“Forced? By who? No one forced you to come here. You had a safe refuge with your mother. You had clothes, food, papers. Who forced you? You should see what they do when they force people. That would shut your lousy trap.”

Chálupsky heard the footsteps of Pannwitz returning. It was just as well. He was emotionally spent.

“Well, I hope you're satisfied now. If you were worried about what they did to innocent people before, just wait and see what they're going to do to now to all those innocent people you just named.”

Ňurda lowered his head as Pannwitz entered the room and returned to his desk. In the hours that followed, while the Gestapo was already rounding up the first group, Ňurda continued adding to the list of names.

He betrayed the names of other parachutists still in hiding. Lieutenant Pechal, Sergeant Miks, a man named KolaŇik something or other, a Captain Opálka. "He wasn't very nice to me," he added. He named the remaining heads of home resistance, Captain Lustr, Major Blavic, and then the woman who sheltered him during the police raids.

All while Pannwitz scribbled away.

"Did you know Kamil Novák?"

"Yes, I did."

"Do you know how to operate a radio transmitter?"

"No, I don't."

Pannwitz looked at him curiously. He thought it odd that a parachutist would not know. But Ňurda insisted that he was never taught.

"Do you know the locations of any transmitters in the Protectorate?"

Ňurda thought for a moment. "I know of a few. But I believe you gentlemen have already discovered them all. Perhaps there's one in LeŇaky still. Kamil used to transmit there."

Pannwitz looked surprised. "The Karpar transmitter? We found that one."

"No," Ňurda shook his head. "Karpar was found yes, but when Jan and Josef landed, they brought another; Lubre. They gave it to Kamil, to replace the one knocked out at Karpar. I believe Kamil used it until, until his demise."

Pannwitz made more notes.

Chálupsky glared at him fiercely. Through narrow eyes. Ňurda shrugged his shoulders as if to ask why he shouldn't be saying what he was. Kamil was dead now, after all.

In twenty hours that followed, home after home was raided and scores of arrests were made. Some of those captured committed suicide to avoid torturous questioning. But not one person had anything new to say to the Gestapo.

The assassins were no longer in any of the safe houses. Once again, all clues led to dead ends.

Disguised in priest's robes, Karl left the church early on June 17<sup>th</sup>. He made straight to the post office where he placed a call to Stánsky the forester. They were to make their move tomorrow. He wanted to make sure that everything was still ok.

The phone rang. A man's voice answered.

"Is Aunt Maria feeling better yet?" asked Karl cryptically.

"Yes," replied the forester in Czech. "She's much better. She said she'll go and meet her sister in Nepomuky tomorrow then they'll all go strawberry picking."

"Good...good. Well, give her kind regards from all three of us."

"I will. She'll be happy to hear from you."

Karl hung up. It was still on. He rushed back to the church to tell Jan and Josef the good news.

"Thank God!" Jan exclaimed in relief.

"Yeah, I thought with our rotten luck, something was bound to go wrong at the last minute," smiled Josef.

We'll be fine," reassured Karl. "Look, we can't be seen in the street looking scruffy like this. I'll get some razors so we can have a shave and I'll buy us some decent clothes. Then I'll get the train tickets to Nepomuky. We'll get the 9:00 train, which means we'll be out of here at eight tomorrow morning."

Jan looked down at this bedraggled and bloodstained clothes. There was no way he'd get far in broad daylight looking like that.

"What will you do for money?" Josef asked.

"Don't worry. I'll figure something out."

Karl rummaged through his few remaining possessions and found the silver cigarette case and the pair of gold cufflinks. He stuffed them into his pocket.

"It'll take me the best part of the day to get everything sorted out."

"You know Karl," Jan said quietly, "we really appreciate all you're doing for us," his voice trailed off.

"Come on; don't get sentimental on me now. It's nothing," Karl replied cheerfully slapping them both on their backs. "I've got to go now. I've got a lot of running around to do. I'll see you later." With that, he waved his arm and left.

Jan and Josef settled into a corner in the crypt, counting how many hours it would be until they were free.

Even without any solid leads to go on, the Gestapo was not idle. Though many of the key witnesses named by Ľurda committed suicide or died under torture, the Gestapo eagerly went to work on those who remained. The focus of attention rapidly turned to the railway man's family, the MlynáĽs, with whom the parachutists had stayed the longest.

The Gestapo stormed their apartment before dawn on June 17<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. MlynáĽs managed to lock herself in the washroom where she took poison. Mr. MlynáĽs and their son were caught and taken away to Gestapo Headquarters. Attention was now concentrated on the seventeen year old Ata. He was taken to the cellar of the PeĽek Palace and was tortured throughout the day, but failed to contribute any further useful information. It never occurred to the Gestapo that he genuinely did not know anything.

While the authorities were closing in, Karl was hurrying about the city. The first task was to get some money. He sold Kamil's silver cigarette case and the pair of gold cufflinks to an antique jewelry dealer. Then he set about buying clothes and the razors. Then the long walk across town on the railway station. He was able to move about in relative safety during the day as the police and German soldiers tended not to pay much attention to the clergy. By curfew however, Karl found himself a long way from the Charles Square neighborhood and realized he would not be able to make it back in time. Rather than risk being questioned in the streets, he decided to call in the Strahov Monastery and ask if he could spend the night. He was invited in by a solemn friar, given some vegetable stew and shown to a small room.

After eighteen hours of torture, Ata MlynáĽs was limp and semiconscious. Pannwitz continued to monitor the interrogation through the two-way mirror on the wall between the interrogation cell and his office.

"I think now is a good time," he said to one of the guards.

Pannwitz waited and watched. The guard returned to the interrogation room and presented Ata with his mother's head floating in a fish tank.



After Ata's screams of horror had died down in sobs, the interrogator asked him once again where the parachutists were. He'd lost almost all reason now. He lost almost all reason now. He began to mutter quietly almost as if talking to himself. "I told you...I don't know...Oh God, I don't know. I don't know."

The interrogator pressed the point. He struck Ata's right hand with a wooden baton. Ata's mind was wild and desperate. What in God's name could he say to make this stop? What could he tell them? Then, he remembered something his mother had once told him.

"I think, maybe..."

"Yes, go on," urged the interrogator.

"My mother told me once, if ever I was in trouble, I should go to the Church on St. Cyril and Methodius, and hide in the catacombs."

It was nearly midnight when Schellenberger's phone rang. He fumbled in the darkness to pick it up.

"It's Pannwitz. We have our first real lead."

"Huh? What is it?" Schellenberger rubbed his eyes.

"We think they might be hiding in the crypt below St. Cyril and Methodius Church."

Schellenberger was suddenly wide awake. He looked at his clock. It was already the 18<sup>th</sup>. The last day of the Führer's deadline.

"Right." He ordered. "Get every city official on the phone and have them..."

"Now, Sir?"

"Of course now! Have them dig up the city plans of the neighborhood, and find a blueprint of the Church, the crypt especially. I want to know if there are any escape tunnels from down there. I want the whole area sealed off; put as many men on this as you can find. I want men on every street, every alleyway, every manhole, every sewage outlet, every rooftop, and every keyhole. Understand?"

"Yes, Sir."

"We cannot let them get away. Is that clear, Pannwitz."

"*Jawol.*"

"Good. I'll be down right away!"

Schellenberger hung up and dressed quickly. He arrived at Gestapo Headquarters at one o'clock. The place was already bustling. Telephones rang. Drawers slammed, typewriters pounded and orders were shouted.

By four o'clock, seven hundred Waffen SS troops converged from all directions on the area around the church.

"And you," Schellenberger said to Chálupsky, "come with us."

"But I have work to do," protested the interpreter. He had no desire to watch these two men routed out of their hole like hunted foxes.

"No arguing. Come on. And him to," he indicated to Ľurda, who looked suddenly alarmed.

Chálupsky and Ľurda got into Schellenberger's car. Pannwitz climbed in next to them.

"There are no records on file of the church's crypt," announced Pannwitz as they set off.

Schellenberger scowled.

“But we’ll have the place surrounded to there should be no chance of them escaping. It’s imperative we take them alive.”

Schellenberger nodded. His mind was on the Führer’s deadline.

As the chauffeur took the road along the river, Pannwitz and Schellenberger poured over maps. Chálupsky couldn’t bear to look at any of his companions in the car, and instead looked out of the window. Schellenberger was trembling with eagerness. “Go faster!” he kept telling the chauffeur. The streets were completely deserted as they sped along at breakneck speed. Soon they crossed Charles Square and came to a stop at the edge of the inner cordon on Resslova Street.

“Here we are,” said Schellenberger, barely waiting for the car to stop before he was out.

It was a cool, crisp summer morning. The streets were quiet and empty and all the windows were closed. The flowers around Charles Square were in full bloom. The neighborhood suspected nothing. Prague slept while SS and Gestapo officers filled every street in the district, armed to the teeth.

In the blackness of the crypt, Josef was sleeping peacefully while Jan dozed fitfully. He couldn’t stop thinking about the day that lay ahead of them, fighting their way out of Prague, escaping from the Protectorate.

There was a rumbling sound. Then more rumbling for another direction. Jan shifted his position. His muscles were stiff from the damp and cold and his head ached. He could make out what the rumbling sound was not. It was the sound of diesel engines.

Strange. An unusual amount of commotion for this hour, he thought. He listened for a while longer then went over to the crypt’s small window where he’d be able to hear better.

Trucks. Cars. Orders. The unmistakable sound of cocking rifles.

“Josef, wake up,” he shook his companion urgently. “Wake up. Something’s going on.”

Josef woke up in a start. With rifle in hand, he crept to the window to listen.

“They’re soldiers,” said Josef. “Do you think...?”

“Yeah. We’re surrounded.” Jan’s heart was pounding.

“Oh dear God! They’re on to us,” said Josef in panic. “What’re we going to do? We have to do something. Think! We’ve got to think!”

“Ok. Ok. Calm down. It might be just another routine night time check. We’ve been through those before. We just have to hold out there till 8AM. Then we can move out.”

“But we’re stuck down here. We’re trapped. There’s no way out. If they find us here, we’re cornered. Father Petrek knows we’re down here. If they make him talk, we’re finished.” Josef was working himself up into a nervous frenzy.

“Look, let’s move out of the crypt while we still can. We can climb up into the gallery above the altar. No one will know we’re there, not even Father Petrek,” suggested Jan.

They hurriedly set about filling a couple of sacks with their weapons and ammunition. Slinging these over their shoulders, they moved quickly up the steep stairs out of the crypt, through the priest’s office and up into the gallery. They locked the wrought iron grill after them.

“How have they found us?” whispered Josef crouching behind a marble column.

Jan shrugged.

Schellenberger marched up to Father Petrek's lodgings. "Ring the doorbell!" he ordered. A group of Pannwitz's men ran to the presbytery door. The doorbell rang for a long time but there was no answer. Then someone opened it. It was the priest.

Before he could utter a word, one of the Gestapo knocked him off his feet and slapped handcuffs on.

"Give me the keys!" Pannwitz shouted. One of his men began to search roughly through the priest's clothing. In a matter of moments, he was triumphantly waving a bunch of keys in the air.

Pannwitz set off briskly to walk the short distance of the church. He quickly unlocked the church doors and went inside with a small group of his men. The soldiers scattered in different directions in the darkness of the interior while Pannwitz searched for the light switches. In the stillness their jackboots reverberated deafeningly throughout the church. Finally, Pannwitz found the switches and the whole place was suddenly flooded with light.

The Germans made their way forward, fanning out as they advanced. Their pistols were drawn. Their every muscle was taught. No sound other than the clattering of jackboot heels on the stone floor.

As they reached the altar, there was a sudden burst of shots. Cries of pains. Two Gestapo men fell to the ground. One was shot through the arm, the other in the shoulder.

"Pull back!" ordered Pannwitz. His men withdrew to the rear of the building, dragging the two wounded men behind them.

More gunfire. Because they were being fired on from above and because of the echoes, it was hard to tell exactly which direction the bullets were coming from. Pannwitz's men milled around in confusion for a moment then retreated back into the street.

Outside the situation was now tense. The SS had heard the shots and were themselves in a state of intense confusion. Some had fired their weapons. Bullets had ricocheted around the streets.

Pannwitz emerged from the church shouting furiously. He gave orders for the Waffen SS to storm the church and drag the culprits out.

And so the battle began.

Jan and Josef however, held the advantage, firmly ensconced as they were behind the massive columns high in the gallery. Both were also trained marksmen.

Wave after wave of SS attack groups entered were hit by sniper fire and had to withdraw. The situation was becoming an embarrassment.

"We have to hold them off," gasped Josef, "and wait our chances. Then we'll make a run for it. Karl will be waiting for us."

Jan peered out from the window next to him. The morning light was washing the city streets now. Distant church bells rang. It was eight o'clock. He saw SS men on every roof and in every street below. They were everywhere, like ants. He didn't answer Josef. He knew there was no hope of escape. They would eventually run out of ammunition, food, and time. The Germans had time and everything else on their side. His head began to hurt again.

Directly below, he could see Schellenberger stomping about, waving his arms about fitfully as he gave orders. Jan carefully opened the window a little to hear better.

“Throw a grenade up there!” Schellenberger shouted.

“But we have to take them alive,” argued Pannwitz.

“I don’t care anymore!” bellowed Schellenberger. “I just want to get them, damn it! Look at the streets. They’re full of people now, all staring at us while those two lousy Czechs in there make fools of us all. They’re counting the ambulances as they take our men away!”

“We’ve got to move out,” said Jan reaching for his ammunition bag. “Come on, hurry!”

“What’s going on?” asked Josef. He grabbed his things and hurried down the gallery stairs behind him.

“They’re going to throw a grenade up.”

They only had seconds to get back down to the crypt before the SS came in again. Taking two steps at a time, they raced down the stairs from the gallery, ran through the priest’s office and down the step narrow stairs into the crypt.

The explosion overturned the altar, destroyed the gallery and blew out all the windows in the church. The blast could be heard for several blocks.

When the dust settled, Pannwitz found the derelict gallery empty.

“Himmel Nergott!” Schellenberger swore. “Where did they go?”

He and Pannwitz poured over the maps again. They had to figure out some new tactics.

“Do you think they’re still inside somewhere?” said Schellenberger.

“They have to be,” said Pannwitz confidently.

“What if they went down to the catacombs?”

“They probably did.”

“What if there’s an escape route from down there. Into the sewers or storm drains?”

Pannwitz sent teams of men off to comb the riverbanks. If the fugitives managed to make it through to a river outlet, they’d be arrested there.

“So what do we do in here?” Schellenberger was tired and frustrated. He hadn’t slept in thirty six hours.

“We can try to coax them out, have them come out of their own free will. That way, at least we won’t put any more of our men at risk.”

“And how exactly do you think you’ll manage that?” he snapped.

“We can talk them out, over loudspeakers. Persuade them to give themselves up.”

Schellenberger pursed his lips. It was a long shot, but it was worth a try. He turned to Chálupsky and told him to get on the loudspeaker.

“So we’re back in the crypt,” said Jan in a quiet, calm voice.

“Looks like our luck ran out,” Josef laughed nervously. His clammy hands clutched his rifle. “Just think, we should have been on our way to freedom by now. Missed it by a whisper.”

“But what happened? What brought them here, now? Do you think its fate that it was meant to end this way?”

“Come on, don’t go weird on me! I can’t cope with all the philosophical stuff right now.”

"Yeah, I don't suppose it makes any difference." Jan knew there was no way out for them anymore. He buttoned his jacket up to his chin and paced around the crypt feeling the rough walls which had been the physical boundaries of his world for almost three weeks.

Nearly six months since they'd been dropped back in the homeland. Six months of constant danger. Six months of planning. Three weeks since the attack. Two weeks since Heydrich's death. One week since Lidice. The reprisals, the searches, the state of siege, the hundreds of executions, a price of ten million crowns on their heads. Had it all been worth it?

Time. It already seemed to have been an eternity since they'd been able to walk the streets as free men. The stone walls were cold and rough as Jan felt his way round. There was something about danger that had always energized him. One moment facing a seemingly impossible obstacle, the next moment overcoming it. But every time before, they'd always had the chance to win through, to defy death. This time, there was no hope at all. The picture of both of them dead seemed bizarre and grotesque yet he felt an extraordinary calm.

Time passed.

He waited for what was coming.

A sound from outside suddenly reverberated through the crypt. A voice was speaking in Czech through a loudspeaker.

"Listen," said Josef.

"We are calling you to surrender," said the voice. "You will be treated as prisoners of war."

"Ha," laughed Josef. "They really think we're stupid enough to buy that? Prisoners of war, my ass!"

Meanwhile, the Germans were continuing to search inside the church for the way into the crypt. Unhindered by sniper fire this time, they soon found it. But as soon as they attempted to descend the steps into the crypt, they were met by volleys of shots. They withdrew quickly again.

Soon another voice came over the loudspeaker. This time the tone was very different. "Come on, boys. Give it up. Lay down your weapons. It'll be alright."

"I recognize that voice," said Josef.

"Me too. I just can't place it."

They listened closely as the message was repeated.

It's Ľurda!" seethed Josef.

"Ľurda?"

"The one I had the run in with, at Mallaig. Remember?"

"Shit! I think you're right."

"That swine!" shouted Josef. "That backstabbing, filthy swine! So it's him who ratted on us!"

"Come on boys..." Ľurda's voice boomed loudly through the window.

Josef fired a ten second burst through the window. The bullets shattered the glass and sprayed out into the street. Ľurda threw himself to the ground and scores of others went running for cover.

Karl wove a path through the endless crowds. He'd call the forester again that morning. Everything was clear at the borders. Apparently there was some incident or other

in the capital which was occupying all the German's attentions. By the time he passed the National Theatre on the river embankment, Karl had a growing feeling something was wrong. Police and soldiers were everywhere. Damn, he thought, this is not going to make things any easier. Then he reached Resslova Street and saw the church cordoned off.

"Oh, Jesus Christ, no" he said loudly. His legs suddenly felt like jelly. He pushed wildly through the crowds to get a better look.

He saw a handcuffed Father Petrek, face racked with pain, being shoved at gunpoint towards the crypt window.

"Speak!" shouted a burly Gestapo officer. The priest hesitated. The German rammed the end of his pistol in his back.

"Speak, I said."

Father Petrek took a step forward and knelt down on one knee.

"I am ordered to tell you," he said in measured tones, "that you must surrender, that nothing bad will happen to you."

"Never!" shouted Josef. "We are Czechs. We will never surrender. Never! Do you hear? Never! Never!"

Father Petrek smiled. "May the Lord be with you."

Fire trucks began to arrive on the scene. In the confusion of the moment, Karl thought perhaps the church was on fire. Then he saw an SS soldier throw a tear gas grenade into the broken crypt window. Seconds later it was thrown back out. It exploded in the street.

Karl then noticed Schellenberger in the middle of a heated argument with Pannwitz behind one of the trucks.

"That's absurd!" Pannwitz was saying. "We have to take them alive. If we wanted them dead we could have bombed the whole building hours ago."

"We can't take any risk of them escaping," retorted Schellenberger. "And I'm not prepared to remain the laughing stock of the city any longer. Nor, let me tell you, do I have any desire to be sent to the Eastern Front of inefficiency."

"But they're no use to us dead."

"Pannwitz, I want the crypt flooded, and that's final."

The firemen were given their orders and began very reluctantly to set about their task. The prospect of their own names appearing on the next day's red posters gave them no choice but to cooperate. Soon the pumps started up and water began to flow from the hoses over the cobbles, into the gully and down the crypt window. Six hundred and fifty gallons per minute.

Karl felt sick. He had to leave.

He walked away aimlessly in the direction of Wenceslas Square.

It was eleven o'clock. Time was ticking by.

There were no more shooting, no more grenades, and no more announcements blaring over the loudspeakers. Only the sound of running water. Splashing and gurgling and dripping. Echoing funereally into the crypt. Jan and Josef were up to their waists in black, icy liquid.

"We fought like lions," said Josef his teeth clattering.

"I've only one bullet left."

“Me too.”

The water flooded steadily into the crypt. They’d held out for eight hours.

At noon two shots rang out.

It was over.

Ñurda walked into Prague’s Gestapo Headquarters looking smart in his new suit. It went well with his new status as citizen of the Reich.

“I’m here to see Kommandant Pannwitz,” he announced to the secretary.

“Just one moment.” The secretary rang Pannwitz’s number. There was a brief exchange over the phone and the secretary hung up.

“The Kommandant is still in a meeting. He’ll see you shortly. You are to wait outside his office, it’s upstairs to the left.”

“Thank you. I know where it is.”

Ñurda trotted up the stairs whistling to himself. He was walking down the long corridor upstairs when Chálupsky came out of one of the offices. The interpreter stopped dead in his tracks, taken aback to see the loathsome character again so soon.

“Well, if it isn’t Ñurda,” he said. “Haven’t had enough yet? What do you want now? Come to stab more people in the back, have you?”

Ñurda smiled. He began to examine his nails theatrically.

“It’s Jerhot now,” he said. *Herr* Jerhot to you. And if you must know, I’m here on a financial matter.”

Chálupsky felt the anger rise up in him again. “You thought the killing would end if they caught Jan and Josef, but look what’s happening; the killings are still going on! People are being executed and they don’t even know why. The red placards continue to go up! If the killings bothered you so much before that you had to squeal on your friends, why aren’t they bothering you anymore?”

Before Ñurda had a chance to reply. Pannwitz opened the door. He was ushered in and Chálupsky was left standing alone in the hall.

Pannwitz was brief. When their business was done, he rose from his chair and handed Ñurda a letter of credit for five million crowns.

Ñurda jumped to his feet.

“Thank you, Herr Kommandant,” he said. “Thank you very much indeed.” He carefully tucked the letter of credit into his pocket.

## **Chapter 27**

### **Pearl Harbor**

It was February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941. As part of a major restructuring of the US Navy, Admiral Richardson was replaced by Admiral Ernest King. Roosevelt had approved the plans to split the fleet into two and the new Atlantic and Pacific fleet were formed. Overlooking more senior naval officers, the President picked Rear Admiral Husband Kimmel to head the Pacific Fleet and promoted him to a four star rank. The same day, Roosevelt personally promoted the director of naval intelligence, Captain Walter Anderson, to Rear Admiral and gave him command of all Pacific fleet warships. There was strong resistance to this from the naval hierarchy, but the President forged ahead regardless.

Next, Lieutenant Joseph Rochefort was promoted to rank of Lieutenant Commander. His station now controlled the Pacific network. Anderson and Rochefort were both the President's men and firmly committed to the McCallum Strategy. They were posted to Hawaii to bring about its implementation.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941, Hitler's Operation Barbarossa began and the Soviet Union felt the full weight of armed German assault. In a broadcast to the British nation, Churchill pledged his full support to the Russian people.

A few days later, President Roosevelt listened to a recording of the Churchill broadcast and dictated a letter to him pledging America's full support for Churchill's stance.

In the Oval Office, Harry Hopkins and Commander McCallum had an appointment with the President.

"Well, your prediction has come to pass, Harry," said Roosevelt. "Hitler wants the Soviet Union. Will he succeed?"

"Well," said Hopkins, "the Russians are very tough and they don't seem to be quite as sensitive to casualties as we are. There are 190 million of them and we can be damn sure that Stalin will make them fight to the very last man. But all the same, they'll need our help if they're going to succeed. We're back to the same old problem. We still have domestic public opinion massively against getting involved in a European war."

"Yes well," the President said darkly, "whether the American public like it or not, this is going to be American's war very soon. We have to be prepared."

McCallum passed a file over to Roosevelt. "Mr. President, our eight action plan is working very well," he said eagerly. "We've read and analyzed countless radio messages which all indicated clearly that the Japanese are very unhappy with our activities in the Pacific. There have already been calls from their senior military commanders to attack the fleet at Pearl Harbor."

Roosevelt leafed impatiently through the file then leaned forward over the desk to look directly into McCallum's eyes. "Commander," he ordered, "I'm giving you specific instruction to speed things up. I need you to accelerate the implementation of the eight action plan. Use every possible means to provoke the Japanese into launching a surprise attack. The sooner the better. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mr. President. Your orders will be carried out right away. Might I be excused so I can make a start?" The commander stood up briskly, shook the President's hand and left the office.



On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1941, the newly promoted Captain Arthur McCallum flew to Hawaii. He took a taxi to the Administration Building of the 14<sup>th</sup> Naval District. Taking the elevator to a level fifteen feet below street level, he found Rochefort waiting to greet him. He was wearing a red smoking jacket over his neatly pressed khaki uniform. McCallum was surprised to see that he had red slippers on his feet.

"This concrete floor gives me blisters when I wear my shoes," he explained. "Let me show you around."

Half an hour later, both men left the building for their scheduled meeting with Rear Admiral Anderson, the Commander of all Pacific warships.

They got down to business without delay. "Is Admiral Kimmel still unaware that we've cracked all the Japanese transmission codes?" Anderson asked.

"Well Sir," smiled Rochefort. "He's never exactly asked me and I haven't volunteered the information."

"Ok," continued McCallum. "Now that we've created a complete embargo on US and British trade with Japan, my eight action plan is still all but complete. At the moment, the Japanese are still trying to find a diplomatic solution but," he paused for effect, "they will not be successful."

"Yes Sir," continued Rochefort. "From the signals we've intercepted so far, we believe we are very close to being attacked by the Japanese fleet. Here's my analysis, Sir." He handed over a single piece of paper to his superior. "Ok, this is the breakdown. One, the Japanese navy is definitely on a war footing, all the signals indicate this. Two, we have a meeting of Japanese warships and aircraft in the Pacific. Three, a substantial Japanese submarine force has arrived in the Marshall Islands. Four, and this one's the clincher, Sir, six Japanese carriers are sailing in the direction of Hawaii as we speak."

"Are they observing radio silence," the Admiral asked.

"No, they're not," replied Rochefort. "We're in luck there; they seem to be ignoring orders in that respect."

"It's vital, Sir," urged McCallum, "that we keep Admiral Kimmel and his people out of the frame. If he finds out that we're able to intercept and decode Japanese signals, the cat will be out of the bag. We don't want to risk word getting out about the true extent of our code-breaking success. As for now, I propose to remove Kimmel from the list of recipients of White House reports."

"Agreed," said his superior. "How are we going to deploy our carriers?"

"Which are the most effective ones in the fleet?" asked McCallum.

"USS Enterprise and USS Lexington. Then not far behind them is the Saratoga, but that's still being refitted on the west coast of the mainland."

"Keep the Saratoga where it is, Sir, and send the other two out to open sea as soon as you get the word from Rochefort."

"What about the cruisers and destroyer?" asked the Admiral. "We've got 19 very modern vessels. I don't want to risk them."

"We'll send those out as escorts to the two carriers."

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Admiral Kimmel received confirmation that the Japanese fleet was heading for Hawaii. He called an emergency meeting with this second-in-command, General Short.

"I believe the attack on Pearl Harbor is imminent," said Kimmel.

"I fully agree, we need to prepare for war."

"I want to call for an exercise," the Admiral continued. "We have a pretty good idea where the Japanese fleet is heading. Let's set up a naval exercise somewhere between their present position and the Hawaiian islands so we can be ready to surprise them."

He went over to the map of the Pacific on this office wall. "Just here, I think," he declared, pointing to a spot on the map. "See to it, Short."

"Shall I cancel all leave for Thanksgiving?"

"Yes. We'll start on Friday, November 21<sup>st</sup> at 0600 and finish on Thursday, November 25<sup>th</sup> at 0600. We'll call it Exercise 191. We'll deploy reconnaissance planes over a wide area, just in case the Japs are nearer than we think. Issue specific orders for our planes to scout a 600 mile wide area around the exercise location. Send copies of the operational details off to the usual people."

When Anderson received the Exercise 191 communiqué, he immediately picked up the phone to McCallum.

"You have to stop it!" his subordinate shouted down the phone. "It's going to jeopardize all our hard work of the past year. The eight action plan will fall apart if the scout plane discovers the exact location of all the Japanese fleet and mounts an attack. You can't allow it to happen!"

Anderson requested a meeting with his superior, Admiral Kimmel, right away.

"I have to express my objection, Sir, to the 600 mile wide area reconnaissance plan outlined in Exercise 191," he declared.

"Why, precisely?"

"It's quite simple," said Anderson. "Our planes would run out of fuel. Our carrier-based aircraft can carry enough fuel for 600 mile round trip."

"But I'm reliably informed that the aircrafts' fuel capacity gives them a range of over 700 miles. And we can increase the amount of fuel that the ships carry to meet their requirements. What's your worry?"

"But you know what young pilots are like. They so easily get carried away. They'll exceed their search range, run out of fuel and fall into the Pacific! I ask you urgently to reconsider the matter."

"As you know Anderson, my search strategy is designed to prevent any enemy carrier force approaching Pearl Harbor undetected."

"There's another problem," countered Anderson. "My carriers can't physically carry enough extra fuel to constantly supply search planes on such a wide area of patrol. Would you like me to call Washington for clarification, Sir?"

Kimmel was quite aware of his subordinate's influence at the White House. "No," he said. "There's no need to do that. Ok, the exercise will go ahead without long-range aircraft reconnaissance."

And so on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, the exercise went ahead. Heavy seas pounded the warships and a many sailors were injured.

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, Admiral Ingersol contacted Kimmel from Washington.

"Good morning Admiral," Ingersol began. "How is Exercise 191 progressing?"

"Very well Admiral, thank you."

"I need to warn you there's a possibility that the Japanese may attack us soon at Pearl Harbor."

"I'm very well aware of that, Admiral. That is why I'm lying in waiting for them."

"No," Ingersol protested. "You are not to place the Pacific fleet in a position that could risk provoking Japanese action if we're wrong about this. The President is quite clear about it. The Pacific fleet is to stand down from a war footing immediately. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly clear Admiral. I will issue the orders right away." Kimmel hung up and shook his head in frustration. He'd been told in no uncertain terms that if he found the Japanese fleet and mounted a preemptive strike against them, then he'd be disobeying orders. He could face a court martial.

At 3:30PM on that day, Kimmel cancelled Exercise 191.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of November, the carrier USS Enterprise left Pearl Harbor for Wake Island, escorted by 11 of the fleet's newest warships. The carrier Lexington followed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December with an escort of eight ships. Following orders from Washington, Kimmel left his most elderly vessels inside Pearl Harbor.

Thenceforth, Rochefort reported twice daily to McCallum on the movement of the Japanese fleet. It was clear that the fleet was on a direct heading for Pearl Harbor. These reports were not included in the daily communiqués sent to Kimmel.

At 9:45AM on December 6<sup>th</sup>, Harry Hopkins was pacing backwards and forwards in the Oval Office. The President came into the room.

"Good morning Mr. President." Hopkins handed over a file. Roosevelt spent a few minutes reading it.

"So," he observed. "Japan's charging us with obstructionist tactics aimed against her economy. They're accusing us of taking Kai-Shek's side in their China war."

"As you can see Mr. President, this communication was sent by the Japanese foreign ministry to their ambassador here in Washington. Take a look at when he's been told to come and present himself at the White House. 1PM tomorrow, which means 7:30AM Hawaii time."

"This means war."

"It does indeed, Mr. President. It's too bad we can't strike the first blow."

"You know we can't do that, Harry. It's the price we have to pay."

"Do we inform the Army Chief of Staff, Sir?"

"In time. All in good time." The President waved his hand in the air.

The information was communicated to Army Chief George Marshall 15 hours later. Instead of picking up the scrambler telephone and tipping off Kimmel and Short directly, he chose to use the Western Union. Thus Kimmel and Short failed to receive the warning in time.

At 7:45AM on December 7<sup>th</sup>, Kimmel's phone rang. He picked it up.

"Commander Murphy, Sir. We've just discovered an enemy submarine in the Harbor's entry channel."

As the Admiral waited for his chauffeur, he witnessed the USS Arizona exploding in a giant fireball.

The Japanese fleet carried on to complete their surprise attack. The six carriers of the Japanese first fleet contained a total of 414 aircrafts, of which 360 were launched in two waves against Pearl Harbor. At 9:35AM, the raid ended and the Japanese aircraft began returning to their carriers. They left behind 2,273 dead, including 68 civilians.

Of the 101 warships left in the harbor, 16 suffered major damage, and five were put permanently out of action. The army air force lost 96 planes and the navy 92. The Japanese lost 29 planes and five midget submarines.

And so on Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, McCallum had the satisfaction of knowing that his eight action plan had been a total success. Congress immediately declared war on Japan. Now young men were ready to die for their country and began to volunteer in large numbers to join the US Armed Forces. The American public was no longer opposed to being involved in Europe's war and the President was free to pursue his aim of ridding Europe of Hitler's army. A week later, Admiral Kimmel was relieved of his command and demoted to Rear Admiral.

On the morning of December 8<sup>th</sup>, Churchill telephoned the President.

"It's quite true," said Roosevelt. "They've attacked Pearl Harbor. We're all in this together now."

"This certainly simplifies things. God be with you, Mr. President." Churchill put the phone down and turned to Foreign Minister Halifax.

"Alright, America is now at war with Japan, but she's neutral with regard to Germany." There's still the great danger that the American public opinion might demand the concentration of their war effort against the Japanese, leaving us still out in the cold with Germany right on our doorstep."

"I don't think we need to worry about that, Prime Minister. Intelligence reports suggest that Hitler is going to declare war on the US sooner rather than later. He'll be carried away in his desire to support his Japanese allies."

Lord Halifax was proved right four days later. Hitler suddenly lost his head and obliged Churchill by declaring war on America.

In the early hours of December 12<sup>th</sup>, Churchill drunk one last double brandy and went to bed feeling a huge sense of relief. Britain could so easily have remained isolated, but Adolf Hitler had come to the rescue.

The Prime Minister now decided to set sail for the United States to meet with his American counterpart.

The day before he was due to depart; Churchill sat in his study contemplating the best way forward now that America was on board. He poured himself a large whisky and lit a cigar.

'I don't intend to fight the Germans at their own back door right now,' he said to himself. 'They're still too strong. Let them and the Russians wear each other down. Then we'll make our move. But in the meantime, I'll have to be seen to be doing something so we'll send ammunition and equipment to Stalin. It's not in our interests for Germany to vanquish the Soviet Union totally. If they were to achieve complete control of Russia, then we'd all be finished. Hitler would be unstoppable. He'd achieve his goals of taking over

Britain, the USA and all the Americas. What we need to come out of this war with is a terminally weakened Germany *and* Russia. I need to be very careful and play my cards close to my chest. As for the Americans, we'll just have to lead them *very* slowly into our theatre of war, the British Empire.'

He took a large sip of whisky as cigar ash fell onto his shirt front.

Churchill stood up and looked at his map of the world on the wall.

'Hmm,' he mused. 'There's no reason at all why we couldn't incorporate much of Europe into the Empire once Germany is vanquished and Russia is so weakened that she no longer represents a threat.'

With the United States behind us, our troops will be fresh and we will be able to secure our oil holdings in the Middle East and more important, the Suez Canal, our gateway to India and the Mediterranean.' Churchill looking extremely happy and relaxed took another large sip followed by inhaling his cigar. 'I have to make sure that the Americans are kept busy away from any direct confrontation with Germany for now.'

The telephone rang.

"General Allenbrook to see you," said the secretary.

"Let him in," Churchill barked.

General Allenbrook was the newly appointed Chief of the Imperial Staff. He came into Churchill's study looking slightly the worse for wear.

"I hear you've been up all night, Allenbrook."

"Yes Prime Minister. I had to get this report completed before you left for America. This is how I think we should conduct the war over the next 36 months."

"Go ahead. I'm eager to hear your views."

"We have to avoid direct confrontation with Germany to ensure the protection of our colonies. We need the Americans to help us by supplying tanks and warplanes. We'll use those to reinforce the eighth army so that they can take on Rommel's Afrika Korps in Egypt and Libya. Then we should move towards securing North Africa, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco in 1942. The British and American armies can mount a joint occupation of those countries. If you still think that a second front shouldn't be launched in northern France in 1943, then we can keep the Americans busy by initiating an invasion of Sicily and Italy. Once they're caught in a war there, they'll not be pressing the French issue for at least another year. The Mediterranean will become ours and we'll secure our oil holdings in the Middle East and our route to the colonies.

"And this is your considered view, General?" asked Churchill.

"Absolutely, Prime Minister. We don't owe the Russians any favors so I'm firmly against the idea of rushing into a very costly second front in France just to take the pressure off them. The *Wehrmacht* is too strong at the moment. We have to protect our interests."

Churchill poured himself another whisky. "Yes," he said. "This is most excellent." He sat back contently in his chair. "I dream of a post war Europe where Britain holds the balance of power."

There was silence for a few moments as both men contemplated the implications of the path they'd chosen to take.

Churchill was the first to speak again. "Well, I'm very glad that we both agree on strategy. But how about our American friends? I rather fear they don't share our views."

“That’s correct, Prime Minister. US General Marshall in particular is eager to open up a second front in France. He’s talking about spring 1942; October 1942 the latest.”

“Nonsense, the Americans will never be ready by then,” scorned the Prime Minister. “They’ll need at least three years to prepare for such an attack. Leave that with me. I believe I’ll be able to persuade the President of this.” He paused for a moment and inhaled deeply on this cigar. “But let me ask you something off the record. If we were to attack northern France in the spring of 1942, what would be our chances of succeeding?”

“Well, to be frank, our intelligence reports show that Hitler has transferred over 145 divisions to the Russian front and only left around 20 divisions in the west. And these divisions are tired. They’re not as strong as the ones facing Russia. We could put enough men into the field to outnumber them three to one. Germany won’t last long if it was faced with two fronts, one in Russian and one in France. Especially with the Germans losing ground and getting a real beating from the Russians, I can’t even see them diverting any divisions to speak of to France to counter our advance. They’re having trouble right now just holding their lines in Russia. The distance from Normandy to the Ruhr is less than 400 miles. If we were to mount such an attack, the chances of it being completely successful are quite high. Within a couple of weeks we’d be knocking at Germany’s front door.”

“Yes, well let’s keep these thoughts to ourselves, shall we?” said Churchill tersely. “I want to see the Germans and the Russians wearing each other down for a good few more years yet.”

He paused again for a moment.

“I’ve read General Marshall’s report,” he continued, “on the projected increases in US army strength and industrial production. It seems highly over optimistic to me. What do you make of our friend Marshall?”

“Well, I rate him as being rather naïve when it comes to actual warfare. The Americans always talk big but we mustn’t forget that they’ve never really conducted a war on this scale before. They can’t suddenly leap into a massive war footing at a moment’s notice. Their army only comprised of 174,000 men in 1939 and on single division could be said to be ready for combat. General Marshall reckons he’ll have two million men ready by January 1942 and another million the following year. I can’t see how he’s going to do that.”

The next day Winston Churchill set sail for the United States on board HMS The Duke of York, accompanied by a large team of expert advisors including his close friend Beaverbrook. For security reasons, the party was sealed below decks on the battleship as she crossed the stormy north Atlantic. Churchill was in good spirits. He turned to his physician and personal friend, Sir Charles Wilson.

“Suddenly,” he declared. “I feel that the war is as good as won and that Britain will be safe. I’m confident that I’ll be able to strike up a good relationship with the President. We are now fellow combatants. But we British have two and a half years of war behind us. So we must make very sure that the Americans follow our lead and do not try to make the running themselves.”

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, HMS The Duke of York reached the entrance to Chelsea Peak Bay, Virginia. Churchill and his party immediately took a plane for Washington.

They were greeted in person at the airport by the President. “I hope you will treat the White House as if you were in No. 10 Downing Street,” he said cordially.

"I hope to have the pleasure of receiving you at No. 10 Downing Street before too long, Mr. President," replied the Prime Minister.

Churchill was given a bedroom across the hall from Harry Hopkins. The White House became a busy and noisy place as Roosevelt and Hopkins talked into the early hours of the morning with the British Prime Minister. It became clear that they were rapidly beginning to forge a close personal relationship. General Marshall left for his own quarters just before midnight. He did not like the way things were going. He did not like the idea of a US President cozying up to a British Prime Minister.

Churchill liked a long bath in the morning. He often dictated letters to a secretary in the next room behind half-closed doors. One day, while Churchill was lying in his bath deep in thought, the President arrived in his quarters. Churchill was late as usual and Roosevelt had grown tired of waiting for him. He coughed outside the bathroom door.

"Hello Mr. Prime Minister," he shouted.

"Oh good morning Mr. President, please come in."

The President stopped in his tracks in confusion. Churchill raised his voice a little louder. "Come in, please," he repeated.

Roosevelt reluctantly pushed his wheelchair through into the bathroom. To his complete dismay, the Prime Minister stood up totally naked.

"Please Mr. President," he declared, "her Majesty has nothing to hide from the President of the United States of America." He slumped back into the bath and both men erupted into laughter.

"But what can I do for you," Churchill asked, after their laughter had subsided.

"Well, I've read your paper," replied the President. "The North African plan interests me greatly. I've given this area a lot of thought myself. That part of the world is very important strategically to both of us. I agree with you that we need to control the Mediterranean to defend a possible German thrust into the western part of Africa. From there he could easily put together an Atlantic fleet and threaten Brazil. If Hitler took Brazil he could very easily attack the United States from South America."

He paused for a moment. "In any case," he continued, "I need the American public to see their boys fighting on the other side of the Atlantic. I want it to finally sink in that our country's at war."

Churchill nodded in private delight. He'd successfully persuaded the President to go along with this North African plan. The opening of any second front in France would be years away.

Later that day Churchill reported on his meeting with the President to the war cabinet. "We're all together here," he said in conclusion, "as a big happy family. The Americans and ourselves are exchanging views in an atmosphere of the greatest intimacy and informality. Let us make sure it stays that way."

Many other smaller meetings took place between British chiefs of staff and their American counterparts.

General Marshall remained unswerving in his commitment to the idea of opening a second front in France. He read a letter from Stalin dated September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

*The Germans consider the danger of invasion from the west a complete bluff. As a result they have transferred all their forces to the east. Consequently,*

*we stand now having lost more than half of the Ukraine with the enemy at the very gates of Leningrad.*

Marshall looked around the room. "The Russians are suffering tremendous human losses," he continued. "They're running into millions. If we open a second front in France soon, it could divert over 40 German divisions from the eastern front. That would be at least give Russia a fighting chance."

Britain's Admiral Pound shook his head. "No, I'm sorry, we can't agree with you. We don't believe in a head-on confrontation with the Germans in Europe. That would be too damaging to our forces. We believe in a more covert, indirect approach. We propose the establishment of underground armies throughout occupied Europe to cause maximum disruption to the German occupying forces there."

"But that will be a total waste of time!" Marshall retorted. "Dancing around the German troops won't achieve success. It'll prolong the war unnecessarily. You know as well as I do that the German army has overwhelmingly committed its forces to the eastern front. They're totally vulnerable in the west! We could easily mount a successful offensive using the same troops you proposed to deploy in the African theatre! And once the Germans are soundly beaten in Europe, they won't have the means to go to Brazil."

But Churchill's plans were adopted and the western allies' strategy for the rest of World War II was firmly set in stone.

"Good morning Your Excellency," said Archbishop Spellman's secretary. "Your presence is required outside."

The Archbishop was busy in his office at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral going through some paperwork. He was operating a large adding machine and writing numbers in a log book.

By now Francis Spellman has successfully turned the heavily debt-ridden New York Archdiocese into the richest one in the world. He was involved in all kinds of wheeling and dealing with bankers, industrialists, Wall Street traders, corporate executives, labor leaders, real estate brokers and anyone else of influence in the field of making money. He sold the title of *'the Knight of Malta'* for \$50-100,000 to many wealthy Americans who were eager to hold such an honor. Some were known to have paid as much as \$200,000 to be named a knight. Spellman became known throughout the Catholic world as Cardinal *'Money Bags'*.

"Can't it wait?" he complained. "I'm very busy. I have to finish this financial analysis."

"No, Your Excellency, it can't wait. The traffic has come to a complete stand still and there are two traffic policemen out there redirecting the traffic all around us. There's a man dressed in a very elegant Italian suit at the West door with a big smile on his face. He's requested your presence immediately."

"What's his name?"

"I think his name is Casto or something like that. He speaks with a very strong Italian accent."

The Archbishop sprang up. "That's different," he said. "Go tell him I'll be there straight away."



When Spellman arrived at the West door he saw over a dozen men unloading to huge rectangular metal objects. A very elegant dressed middle-aged man dressed in a suit and tie approached the Archbishop. He bent to kiss the ring.

"Hello Frank," said Spellman. "I'm sorry; my secretary should have told me you were here sooner. I don't like to keep Frank Costello waiting for ten minutes."

"No problemo Your Excellency. I have a small gift for you. From me and my boys."

Frank Costello was a well-known New York mobster. He had taken over as head of the Mafia from Lucky Luciano who was serving a 50 year prison sentence.

"Oh, look how beautiful these doors are!" Spellman enthused. "What are they made of?"

"The best. The very best, Your Excellency. Bronze. They'll last forever and look, they fit perfectly."

The Archbishop gave a broad smile of gratitude and pleasure. He followed the men who were carrying the doors and started to give them instructions. He turned to Costello.

"Thank you. May God be with you," he said. "These doors will make the entrance to the Cathedral such a monument to the Glory of God. Thank you so much, my son."

"No problemo. Please pray for me."

"I will indeed. And tomorrow I will say mass for you."

Once again, Costello bent to kiss the Archbishop's ring. Spellman was still in a state of near ecstasy over his new set of doors.

It was April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, and the United States was at war. President Roosevelt called his friend Archbishop Spellman for an urgent meeting.

"Hello Francis."

"Good afternoon Mr. President."

"I need a favor from you Francis."

"Ask ahead. You know I'll be glad to help in whatever way I can."

"Well Francis, since we declared war on Germany, the damn German sympathizers in our country have been busy working for the Nazis."

"How do you mean, Mr. President?"

"We lost 21 ships in January, another 27 ships in February and 50 in March."

"My God, that's a huge number!"

"Well, you see my dear friend, Francis; these German-American sympathizers are supplying Herr Hitler with lots of very useful shipping information. In turn, this information is relayed to the German U-boats who are waiting just outside our coastal waters. As soon as our vessels sail, the U-boats just pick them off like sitting ducks."

"Why can't you just catch these German-American traitors and lock them away?"

"Well, it's not that easy. Pro-Nazi sabotage is widespread. It's been wreaking havoc with allied and American troop ships and supply ships all along the north east coast."

"Who controls the north east coast?" asked the Archbishop.

"Ah, now you're starting to understand me, Francis. It's the Mafia."

Spellman took a drink of water. He knew what was coming.

"I see. So the Mafia could stop the German-American sympathizers from getting into the ports in the first place. Then they wouldn't have any information to supply."

"Correct Francis. The Mafia has total control over the North-Eastern seaboard. They can certainly do it if they wish to."

"But Mr. President, what has that to do with me?"

The President took off his glasses and looked squarely at the Archbishop. "My friend," he said softly. "The Mafia are good Catholics and I know that they've been seen to be extremely generous to the Catholic Church on many occasions."

President Roosevelt held up a magazine which featured on its front page the New York Cathedral with its massive bronze doors. "Wonderful picture of the Cathedral," he said. "Such magnificently ornate doors!" The President opened the magazine and flicked through the pages. "And there's an article inside on your success in getting the New York City Hall to pay a fortune of a tiny piece of church land."

"Ah yes, Mr. President. Those were long and complex negotiations. We were fortunate enough to come to a mutually beneficial understanding in the end."

The Archbishop looked at the President intently. Roosevelt still had his eyes fixed on the front cover of the magazine.

"Well, I'm sure we can come up with something that will help the situation."

"What do you have in mind, Mr. President?"

"Very simple, Francis. I want you to tell the Mafia to stop those bastards from sabotaging our ships. We're losing thousands of good American soldiers and we need them all if we're going to stop this damn Hitler from taking over Europe."

"You realized, Mr. President, that even if I agree to your request, I shall have to ask the Holy Father for his permission before I can do anything."

"Good, that's fine Francis. Send His Holiness my regards."

Two weeks later Archbishop Spellman arrived at the Vatican and requested to see his old friend Sister Pascalina before his audience with the Pope.

"Dear Sister Pascalina," he said, wringing his hands as he spoke and pacing up and down nervously. "The President wants me to make a deal with the Underworld on behalf of the United States government. How am I to present such a dreadful ideal to the Holy Father? But how can I afford to turn down Roosevelt?"

For the next twenty minutes the Archbishop explained to her in detail what the President had asked him to do while Pascalina listened attentively to his words.

"Nothing that any politician says or does surprises me any longer," she said.

"Is there any chance of your broaching the subject with the Holy Father before I speak with him? I need your help with this, Pascalina."

"Oh, very well. I'll have a word with him about it before you go in. But make no mistake; I'm only doing it out of friendship."

"I'm so grateful for your help, Sister Pascalina," he whispered. "I won't forget it."

"You don't owe me anything. Just keep up your good work in the United States. The congregation of our church is growing nicely. You've transformed an almost bankrupt Catholic Church into an extremely wealthy and successful organization which is expanding all over the United States. I'm extremely grateful to you for that. I will do what I can."

"Thank you once again, Pascalina."

"But let me ask you one final question. How important is it to you that the Holy Father approves the President's request?"

"It's very important indeed. So far the White House has opened lots of doors for us. Whenever I need any help, they're only too pleased to accommodate me. I really do not wish to turn Mr. President down."

The same evening, while Pius XII was about to say his evening prayers, Sister Pascalina asked if she could have a private word with him.

"I spoke to Archbishop Spellman earlier. He's scheduled to see you tomorrow morning at ten o'clock."

"Ah, good. I'll be delighted to see him. He's done such a wonderful job."

Sister Pascalina explained the reason for Archbishop Spellman's visit to Rome. The Pope was quiet for a few minutes as he mulled over Pascalina's words.

"How can I turn a deaf ear to a President as powerful as Roosevelt?" he said finally. "He's made an understandable request. He wants to save his countrymen from being killed. The United States with its growing Catholic population is very important to the Vatican. I am most anxious to keep our relations cordial."

"So, I can tell Archbishop Spellman that you will receive him tomorrow to discuss the matter?"

"No, Sister Pascalina, I cannot discuss any matter which relates to the Mafia. I am the Pontiff. Just tell Archbishop Spellman that he has no need to bring such matter up with me. It would be much pleasanter if His Excellency and I confined our private audience to saying a brief prayer together."

The Pope smiled mischievously and held Sister Pascalina's hand as he led her to the door.

Immediately upon Spellman's arrival back in New York two weeks later, he arranged to meet with Costello. Once again the mobster knelt and kissed the Archbishop's ring.

"I need a favor from you, Frank."

"The Archbishop's word is my command. Whatever you say, I will do, Your Excellency."

The Archbishop explained what he would like Costello to do.

The Italian nodded in a business-line manner. "Do you have a contact for me within the American Navy?"

"Yes. You will be working with Lieutenant Commander Charles Haffenden. He's responsible for the safety of all US cargo and troop vessels along the north-eastern seaboard."

"Fine. You can rest assured that all spying and sabotage will cease within a very short period of time."

"I am very grateful to you my son. I will continue to pray for you."

"Fine, fine. Now I need a favor from you in return. You know my boss, Lucky Luciano. He's serving a 50 year jail sentence. Once we're successful in our mission, may I hope that the United States will look favorable upon the possibility of significantly reducing his sentences?"

"Well, I can't promise anything, but I will certain pass the message on to the appropriate quarters."

"That's all I need you to say, Your Excellency."

"Don't forget. We all have our patriotic duty to perform in this unhappy time of war."

"I am honored and overjoyed to be of service to my church and my country."

Within weeks, the sabotage and espionage along the eastern coastal ports entirely ceased.

### ***Croatia***

It was April 1941, and Hitler's army had once again been victorious. They had swept through Croatia and installed their friends from the Ustase Party as a puppet government under the German occupation.

The head of the Croatian Catholic Church was the Archbishop of Zagreb, Monsignor Stepinac. The Pope called him to Rome for talks.

"Good morning Archbishop, you bring me good news, I trust."

"Wonderful news, your Holiness! I am so happy to be able to tell you that the new Catholic Ustase Regime under Pavelic's leadership has caused the Croatian state to rise again like the risen Christ!"

"Good, good. I have always had faith in our Croatian Catholics."

"I have personally been invited along with twelve other priests to sit in the Croatian parliament. The government will consult with us on the new rules and regulations which are being put in place to strengthen the Catholic faith of the Croatian people."

The Archbishop pulled out a file. "How many people live under the Ustase administration?"

"I have it all here Holy Father. Croatia's population numbers almost seven million. Just over three million are already Catholics. Orthodox Serbs account for another two million, there are just less than a million Muslims and there are a few ten thousands of Protestants and Jews."

"I see. What are Pavelic's intentions?"

"He's determined to ensure that the whole Croatia becomes Catholic within a short period of time as possible."

"If it wasn't for Hitler, the whole of Yugoslavia's government would have been taken over by Stalin's Communists. The population would have all become Atheists. There's only one man who can save Europe from being overrun by Stalin's troops. That man is Adolf Hitler!"

"You're right, Holy Father. The Catholic Church must fully support the Ustase Regime in Croatia. I believe we'll be able to convert most of the Serb Orthodox Christians to Catholicism."

The Pope took off his glasses and looked directly at the Archbishop. He opened his arms as if he was preaching.

"We need to have a vision," he said. "A vision of victorious Germany where the 200 million lost atheist souls of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union will embrace the one true faith."

"That is why our work of conversion in Croatia will be so important. It will give us useful experience and show us how best to set about the conversion of the Soviets once they are under the rule of the Third Reich."

"You have a difficult job, Your Excellency. Go and do God's work."

On his return to Croatia, Stepinac was called to a meeting with Ustase Regime leader Pavelic. "I want to see a purely Catholic Croatia." Pavelic said. "And I'm not going to show

any tolerance towards the Orthodox Serb Church. I don't consider it to be a genuine church. It's nothing more than a thinly disguise political organization."

"May God strengthen you in your holy mission," replied Stepinac.

On June 8<sup>th</sup>, Education Minister Mile Budak stood up to make a declaration in the Croatia parliament. Archbishop Stepinac and the other priests listened carefully to hear what he had to say.

"The Orthodox Christians came here as visitors," he said. "And now it is time for them to leave this country once and for all. But we do not wish to be harsh. Those who wish to stay must accept conversion to our faith. The choice is theirs to make.

But the reality was somewhat different. From July 1941 onwards, the Ustase government launched a massive campaign of conversion and murder. On the ground, members of the Orthodox faith were not given any option. If they refused to convert to Catholicism, then the entire family was murdered, often in the presence of Catholic priests.

Protests from all over the world and representations were made to the Vatican. But they all fell on deaf ears. One such communication from Muslim leaders in Banjaluca, was sent to the Vatican in November.

*There has been slaughter of priests and other religious leaders without any pretense of a trial. There have been mass shootings of entirely innocent people, often women and children. There has been large scale forced conversion to the Catholic faith. These are events that have filled honest people with dismay and left the Muslim populations of the region in fear of their lives.*

The response from the Vatican was brief and unsympathetic.

*We do not blame the government of the Ustase for these errors. We do not desire to represent the errors as being the typical behavior of the servants of the Ustase. Rather, they are the result of a few irresponsible elements within the Croatian state who are unaware of the great responsibility which falls upon their shoulders.*

Ultimately, almost a million Serb Orthodox Christians were murdered by Ustase bands and 300 Orthodox churches destroyed. Over 500 Orthodox priests and bishops were killed. About 200,000 Orthodox Serbs were forced to convert to Catholicism although the Catholic Church always insisted that all the conversions were voluntary. Despite many international protests and requests for the Pope to denounce the atrocities by the Croatian government, Pius continued to sit on the fence.

*Volume 3*  
*Will follow*