

Memo to the Leader

a friend of the reich



A NOVEL BY
WILLIAM WALLING

Memo to the Leader

Second Edition

William Walling

“The future ain’t what it used to be.”

Yogi Berra

Prologue

Solitude was the most maddening aspect of perpetual confinement. His faceless keepers treated him with neither respect nor disrespect, neither kindness nor unkindness. Their Olympian detachment made his existence inhumane, as if he were already dead; and in a sense he *was* dead, though living burial was a lame substitute for oblivion. After an endless period of sleep deprivation and deftly applied psychological pressure,, interspersed with exhausting, medication-enhanced interrogations, exquisite pains were taken to deny him the solace of nonexistence.

Stolid guards with opaque Sinic features never acknowledged his presence when food trays were deposited or retrieved from a slot in the steel-barred door. Infrequently, at what might be noon, midnight, or any hour in between, he was marched from the suppurating, jackhammer-scored walls of his limestone cell to a natural gallery in the caverns, where indistinct voices and muffled cries of anguish were occasionally heard. Encouraged with gestures to shuffle to and fro, he performed lethargic calisthenics, his every move scrutinized by silent, taser-armed guards

He saw no other prisoners, ever.

The invisible, vacuous days dragged past in sunless isolation, strung together like evil beads lacking demarcation into anonymous weeks, empty months. He had ample time — all the time there was, perhaps all that remained as well — to examine, re-examine, reflect upon, evaluate and re-evaluate the confluence of circumstances and situations which had culminated in The Great Mistake. Everlastingly, elliptically, his thoughts went back to the complex jumble of schemes, personalities, actions, encounters and endeavors that had fleshed out the world-changing drama in which he’d played a pivotal role.

Take care what you ask for! The caveat reverberated in his mind like a shrill clarion call, and circled there, spinning round and round until he could not stop second-guessing his part in the triumph *or* the tragedy, and then second-guessing his second-guesses until the riddle had neither beginning nor end and reflexive hindsight crowded his mind into shadowy labyrinths. Panic invariably ensued, searing him with a realization that if his meaningless existence lasted much longer he might find himself *not* himself, but some stranger bent upon trying to pick shadows off the chiseled walls of his cell.

Perhaps if he’d firmly declined to accept the mission, had adamantly refused to go on the fateful night Omsley put in an impromptu appearance at the chalet, events might have taken a

different, more laudable course. That, however, was wishful thinking, the essence of futility. Omsley's surprise visit had made a beginning of sorts, but there had been more.

So much, *much* more . . .

ONE *Colorado-Provinz, Mai, Deutsches Weltreich-jahr 142*

Intrigued by the potential evident in a *Genetik-Brett* haploid chart, a nameless *Aculturization Ministerium* bureaucrat had decided the subject's first language should be German, thus endowing the newborn with prospective fluency garnished by the arsence of a provincial *Amerikanischer Akzent*. Nearly four decades later, Dr. James Silverthorne leaned forward in the leather armchair and began earnestly describing the historical imperatives he hoped to establish if permitted to engage in retrotemporal, on-site research of the events and circumstances surrounding a renowned twenty-century-old battle.

Kanzler von Colorado-Provinz Ernst Kästner lifted an imperious hand, silencing his visitor in mid-sentence. "Your command of our language is commendable, but would you mind helping me brush up on my nodding acquaintance with English?"

"*Natürlich, Herr Kanz* . . . Certainly, sir." James recognized the other's "nodding acquaintance" for what it was — pure sham. Ever mindful of his lofty post in the *Deutsches Weltreich* hierarchy, it was second nature for the erudite official to disarm lesser mortals with false modesty. His true reason for wanting to abandon the mother tongue had to be the black-uniformed *SS-Untersturmführer* in the high-ceilinged, austere decorated chamber. A political attaché assigned to shadow the chancellor wherever he went, and report any act or word that might be construed as contrary to *Nationaler Sozialist* doctrine, he sat stiffly erect beside the obligatory oil portrait of Hitler, his body language denying Silverthorne's very existence.

James reclaimed his train of thought and began anew. "Opinions differ, sir. Many of my colleagues believe the annihilation of three Roman legions was a turning point in one barbarian segment of ancient Europe, while others view *Varusschlacht*, while important in itself, was no major milestone, merely another of the great battles peppering antiquity."

"And your view . . . ?" At ease behind his massive rosewood desk, Dr. Kästner toyed with the Ancient Order of Teutonic Knights signet ring on his finger.

Viscerally certain of his interpretation, James said he was convinced the epic battle had catalyzed an eventual change in ancient Europe's populace. "At that moment in time, Rome had barely finished putting down a massive, drawn-out uprising in what are now the Balkans —"

"Please, Professor," interrupted Kästner. "I've no wish to be inundated with historical expertise. What is your, um . . . gut feeling? Is that an appropriate Americanism?"

"My conviction," responded Silverthorne, "is based on established fact. Neither Caesar Augustus nor any of his successors resumed the aborted conquest of *Germania Magnus*, thus allowing the so-called barbarian tribes in the region the freedom to avert total Roman rule and develop their own language and culture. If the tribal chieftain Roman historians record as Arminius had failed to organize and lead a huge army of barbarian warriors, or the battle had gone the other way, I seriously doubt if the outcome would have —"

"Hermann!" declared the chancellor, a disagreeable burr sharpening his diction. "You meant to say *Hermann der Cherusker*, did you not, rather than 'Arminius'?"

James feigned chagrin over his purposeful gaffe. “Forgive me, sir. Yet either name is equally suspect. The hero’s indigenous name is a historical sidelight I hope to resolve.”

Outwardly mollified, his host nodded. “Do go on.”

“Historical conjecture,” pursued Silverthorne, “has been rife for generations. Various historical quandaries are rooted in what Rome termed the Varian Disaster. Had the vanquished become the victors, for example, would future Emperor Tiberius have resumed the conquest, and perhaps extended Roman hegemony east to the Elbe? If so, would the western empire have later fallen into eclipse with the Gallic *and* Germanic peoples under Caesar’s thumb? Or later still, would a coalition of tribes, the Goths, have successfully marched on Rome? Again if so, how would revised European conditions have affected Charlemagne’s attempt to resurrect the empire, or of greater significance to us what of the modern German empire?”

“Provocative questions indeed,” remarked the chancellor, a refractory glint invading his dark eyes. “Yet referring to *Tausendjahr Deutesch Welreich* as an ‘empire’ strikes me as tactless. Should anyone in the presence of our noble *Reichsführer* or *Reichsleiter* dare call *die Neue Weltordnung* an ‘empire’ I daresay both leaders would take umbrage.”

Pretending to humbly accept chastisement, James said, “Sorry, sir. A slip of the tongue.”

Kästner glanced down at Silverthorne’s thick dossier on his desk beside a leather-bound folio edition of *MEIN KAMPF*, and his manner softened. “Ah, well! No one would dream of belittling your accomplishments, or your qualifications to undertake the junket. Your most recent book electrified historians and literati everywhere, including the intelligentsia in *Welthauptstadt Germania*.” He paused, his manner thoughtful. “Refresh my memory if you will. What was the nickname his subjects bestowed on their beloved monarch?”

“*Der Alte Fritz*,” supplied James, trying to imagine a reason for the change of subject.

A dry chuckle. “*Der Alte Fritz, ja, ja*. Ignoring his self-serving notion to “brush up” on American English, Kästner continued in German. “One glaring omission in your narrative piqued my curiosity, an explanation of how you, a friendless stranger in Prussia, managed to infiltrate *Schloss Sanssouci* and actually stand in the presence of *Friederich der Grosse*. Everyone I spoke with expressed fascination over your word picture of the era’s preeminent ruler leaning on a silver-handled walking stick, shuffling about the palace in his faded military uniform.”

“An accomplished flutist and composer, Frederick devoted his declining years and waning energies more to music than statesmanship or command of the Prussian military.”

“Umm, yes. Quite right,” the chancellor said, reverting to English. “I must say you’ve been enormously privileged, Dr. Silverthorne. I confess to having enjoyed your Potsdam book equally during a second reading. Yet an explanation is still owed. How in the world did you, a friendless stranger, manage to worm your way into serving on the palace staff?”

James forced a self-effacing smile. “Looking through servants, not directly at them, was a practice ingrained in the era’s Prussian elite. As a provincial from southern Germany, a pose my, er . . . peculiar modern accent probably reinforced, I first talked my way into a position as footman. Weeks later, a friendly equerry helped me obtain posting as a bewigged usher. The only glitch in the entire junket occurred when my locket and snuff box were —”

“Glitch . . . ?” Kästner’s brows contracted. “I fear you’ve lost me.”

“A colloquialism, sir, for a problem. Dean Omsley had the locket fashioned in the institute’s nanotechnology lab. Outwardly a trinket on a tarnished silver chain any servant might

own, it enclosed a micro-recorder. The snuff box held all the unprocessed digital images I had snapped in secret, salted with snatches of eavesdropped conversations. I've often wondered what the thief, another servant surely, thought when he or she pried open the locket and tried to make sense of the molecular device. I'm sure both items were simply discarded."

"A dreadful loss." The chancellor clicked his tongue. "Capturing spoken words and tangible glimpses into that rich era of our past would have added enormously to your book."

James readily agreed.

"As for daring a visit to distant antiquity, there are reasons why it might be . . . um, shall we say overzealous? No, foolhardy might be much more accurate. *Retrotemporal Forschungs-Agentur* copied Dr. Omsley's prospectus your proposed junket to my office. It mentions the battle site near Osnabrück, and your intention to be present during the actual conflict."

"Learning every possible detail prior to the days of engagement," said James, "as well as the immediate aftermath, will be crucial to establishing historical integrity."

"Umm-m-m, yes. One would suppose so, but I fear another type of harsh reality also underscores the inordinate degree of risk associated with your proposed junket."

"It's an extremely long jump," admitted James, hoping to deflect what he suspected would come next.

The chancellor nodded soberly. "Two millennia, and then some, far the longest retrotemporal transposition thus far contemplated. But in speaking of risk I was not referring to the time jump itself. Of greater concern in my opinion will be the risk of encountering proto-Germanic tribesmen of that era. You mean to boldly thrust yourself into their milieu armed with scant knowledge of barbarian manners, mores, cultural taboos, spoken dialects, et al. Coming in dangerous contact with the touchy, clannish warriors of antiquity seems unavoidable, warriors I'm told whose avocation and principal pleasure in life derived from wielding their weapons."

"As you can see, sir, I've let my hair and beard grow." James cringed inwardly at how lame it had sounded. "Aside from language difficulties, I have no qualms about giving offense."

As if to reassert his authority, Dr. Kästner fingered the Heidelberg scar disfiguring his left cheek. When first introduced to the chancellor, James had intuited the scar to be a product of inner Party surgery, a typical "signature" of political favor often bestowed upon youthful *Herrenvolk* destined for high government service.

"I am certain," remarked Kästner, "you would not want to become closely acquainted with the difference between a fencing foil and a honed, double-edged battle axe."

Knowing any response would be meaningless, James could think of no reason to inform Kästner that the "touchy, clannish warriors of antiquity" had probably not yet devised battle axes, honed, double-edged, or otherwise fashioned.

The patented smile of a professional politician clicked on and off. "You do plead a winning case, Professor. After all, in the final analysis it's *your* neck you wish to place on the block. The prospectus Dean Omsley submitted was taken under advisement weeks ago. I invited you here this afternoon because of a call from the *Reichsleiter's* office. After discussing other matters, his executive assistant hinted broadly that your junket to antiquity would either be sanctioned or denied within a matter of days."

"Wonderful, sir! Thank you so much."

“Oh, don’t waste your gratitude on me. It is I who should be thankful for having a front row seat on your brave, fascinating ventures into the past.”

Pushing back his executive chair, Dr. Kästner rose and turned to the political officer. “Dieter,” he said in German, “I find myself in need of a breath of fresh air. Go have coffee and relax while I walk Dr. Silverthorne to his car.”

The *SS-Untersturmführer*’s sole response was a solemn blink, a curt nod.

* * *

Nattily attired in a fashionable smoke-gray tunic replete with wraparound collar, Dr. Kästner emerged from the massive neoclassic capitol with Silverthorne in tow. Donning rimless anti-glare spectacles to defeat the brilliant wash of sunshine outdoors, he acknowledged with a regal head dip the salutes of uniformed *Ausland Staatspolizei* sentinels braced to attention on either side of the columned entry.

Razed decades earlier, the old Denver Civic Center had given way to lush parklands surrounding the *Colorado-Provinz* seat of government. Each time he visited the complex, it invariably struck James as not merely pretentious, but obnoxiously grandiose. The neoclassic architecture was reminiscent in style and scale of buildings depicted in the grainy, black-and-white films he had studied, or better still the Olympian scope and grossly pretentious staging of events like the annual Nazi Nuremberg rallies. Descending the broad-risened marble steps at Kästner’s side reaffirmed his conviction. The widely spaced architectonic monstrosities looked as if designed to impress anyone already afflicted with terminal megalomania.

Larger-than-life bronze figures of Nazi demigods Erich Lustmann and Adolf Hitler gazed fondly at one another at the far end of a huge reflecting pool’s acreage. On either side of the water, lesser statuary groupings featured secondary and tertiary *Reichshelden*. The bronze likeness of *Generalfeldmarshal* Erwin Rommel, celebrated “Desert Fox” of the *Afrika Korps*, mastermind of the stubborn defense of *Festung Europa* that proved so frustrating to the Allies, and eventual conqueror of the Americas stared with sightless metal eyes across an infinite battlefield. The adjacent *Panzer Schrein* featured an authentic, weatherproofed King Tiger Tank, a nostalgic relic of what the Ministry for Peoples’ Enlightenment and Propaganda, colloquially the “Goebbels Bureau,” always referred to as the “War of World Liberation.” Beneath the snout of the ugly killing machine’s turret-mounted cannon, the bronze figure of *Waffen SS-Hauptsturmführer* Joachim Peiper, once in command of *Panzergruppe SS-Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, knelt down holding a map flat-pressed to the ground, pointing out a salient ripe for attack to his superior, *SS-Oberst-Gruppenführer* Josef “Sepp” Dietrich.

Huge red and black swastika banners rippled along the broad, tree-lined boulevard. School buses pulling up curbside disgorged clamoring files of children bound on a field trip to the adjacent *Weltreich-Museum*. Flocks of tourists strolled the riparian esplanade alongside the reflecting pool, chatting and posing for digital snapshots. Somewhere in the sprawling adjacent parklands band music played in erratic counterpoint to the faint, rhythmic wheezing of a giant carousel.

At the entrance to the underground garage, the chauffeur waited. Seeing the approaching chancellor accompanied by the passenger he himself had dropped off earlier, he went the limo, drove it out to the curb and stood ready to hold open the rear door.

Two-thirds of the way along the broad, shaded walkway Dr. Kästner took Silverthorne's elbow with unexpected familiarity, and drew him aside. Head lowered as if in thought he, covered his lips with be-ringed fingers and said softly, "Jamie, I hope you realize why the minder there in my office made it necessary to limit our conversation."

Minder! Jarred for some reason by hearing a Briticism the other had probably acquired during an earlier posting in Cambridgeshire Province, James said, "Don't give it a thought."

"It would pain me," said the other, "to have you think I'm less than wholly sympathetic to your proposed venture. It's just that when I'm in front of the *verdammte*, nosy youngster who follows me around like a puppy it wouldn't sound appropriate to appear overly eager to learn the factual details of Hermann's heroic victory over the Roman forces. If it were up to me, my chop would be on your petition and you'd be off to Carlsbad before the ink was dry. Alas! Like most important matters in our world, it's a committee decision, and you know how *that* goes."

"Oh, I do," said James, thinking the other's rhetorical "our world" reference could as easily have been stated literally. It *was* their world.

Exuding professional sincerity, the chancellor said in parting, "We must have dinner together again soon, eh? Please convey my regards to your lovely wife, and to Dean Omsley when you see him next."

"I will, Ernst." The men shook hands. "Thank you for inviting me to come cry on your shoulder. I appreciate your thoughtfulness."

"My shoulder is available at all hours, day or night. *Wiedersehen*, Jamie."

* * *

A matter of professional courtesy, the chancellor had ordered a limousine dispatched to fetch Silverthorne from the institute. The taciturn, uniformed chauffeur ushered his passenger into the rear seat, and asked in German where he wished to be taken.

"Back to Goebbels, *bitte*," said James, thinking the smarmy fellow should've had *Ausland Staatspolizei* stenciled across his forehead. On second thought, perhaps *Ausland Sicherheitsdienst* might be more appropriate; it signified the driver as an SS snoop from *Herr Direktor* Jürgen Müller's stable, not some off-the-shelf Gestapo street thug.

The silent electric limo swept up the curlicue access ramp, slowed at the crest and inserted itself into the smooth, regulated flow of autobahn traffic, then de-energized internally and began drawing power and guidance from induction strips in the roadway. Having no desire to converse with the driver, James depressed a rocker switch; a tinted privacy partition rose between the front and rear seats. He laid his head back against the cushion and pretended to doze until The Flatirons came in view.

Leaving the autobahn, the chauffeur resumed manual control and entered a traffic loop. The limousine took its time negotiating downtown Boulder on manual control, and turned into the entrance of what had once been the University of Colorado, where bold, arching gothic letters proclaimed it:

INSTITUT JOSEF PAUL GOEBBELS

The limo crawled up Broadway, stopping and starting to let haphazardly jaywalking students cross the divided boulevard, then swung into Tenth Street. James lowered the partition. He asked to be dropped off in front of the high-rise Humanities Center, where he got out and

bent to thank the driver. But the chauffeur's billed cap never turned as the sleek electric limo silently surged from the curb.

In a reflective mood, his thoughts centered on the potential ramifications of being summoned to an audience with the province's lord and master, he nodded to several passing students, entered the building and went directly to the elevator alcove. A glance at the antique, wood-framed Seth Thomas analog clock on his office wall told him only ninety minutes were left in his academic day. He considered chucking it, reclaiming his 'copter from the roofpark and heading home to the mountains, then decided to review some material before leaving.

A verbal command woke the computer, causing the flat-panel display to obediently slide up out of its nest and glow to life. He opened the voluminous European History 230 folder, and scanned the list of graduate student names. Before he could request a particular file, an uninflected computer voice solemnly announced, "New news is good news, Boss."

James eyed the blinking mail icon, noted the originator's identity and said, "Open!" A brief phrase instantly appeared: BIRDWATCHING TIME, JAMIE.

"Reply to sender," he instructed, then added: "I'll beg off, Bernard. Too late in the day."

Seconds later the screen read: BETTER LATE THAN SORRY. NICE PURPLE FINCH SPOTTED NEAR CREEK. BIRDWATCHING TIME, JAMIE. DON'T LET ME DOWN!

Silverthorne felt tiny hairs lift at the nape of his neck. "Don't let me down" connoted an emergency, and a colloquial translation of "Hie your arse over here now, now, now!"

He put the computer back to sleep, collected his topcoat and left the office in a rush.

TWO Goebbels Institute, May, DW-J 142

James spotted the rotund figure of Bernard Omsley prowling near the bank of Boulder Creek. Dean of the History Department, his senior colleague carried a tripod-mounted monocular; a shoulder-slung digital camera bobbed at his side. He had halted, and was peering up into the branches of a tree in the copse of yellow pines, ostensibly searching for birds.

Silverthorne knew better. Bernard was checking to see if any surveillance devices were concealed in the layered branches. Conventional wisdom espoused by ultra-paranoid *Deutsches Weltreich* officialdom had it that inherently rebellious students, not to mention cadres of left-leaning professors and liberal-minded teaching assistants, were especially prone to social unrest in general, and political dshot, James called, "Where's your prize Finch, Bernard?"

To an observer, Dr. Omsley's winning smile might have seemed warm and welcoming, but never got past his lips. "Must've taken wing," he said. In late middle-age, his eyes bright with excess nervous energissent in particular. With maddening regularity night-prowling technicians relocated about the campus a surfeit of nano-vid cameras, pinhead audio pickups, and sub-miniaturized motion detectors.

Coming within eary, he was aware of Silverthorne invitation to visit the chancellor. "Any resolution?"

"No, too early. The wheels of *Reichskounzel* may grind slowly, but they grind exceeding fine." Worried without knowing why due to the imperative nature of Omsley's summons, James tried to make his response sound casual — no easy task when he knew every word and nuance of body language was being recorded for subsequent evaluation. "As always," he said, adding a

dollop of exaggerated respect, “Kästner was sympathetic, but unfortunately it isn’t his decision. We’re damned fortunate to have him on our side, Bernard. He makes that extra extra-effort to understand what our junkets are all about, what they mean to all historians.”

Buttering up the chancellor for the benefit of an invisible audience, Omsley said, “He never fails to throw his weight behind our projects.” Sensing that enough praise had been voiced to satisfy the ubiquitous watchers, he gestured toward a nearby pine. “Look, there; bird’s flitted to a higher branch.” He hastily erected the tripod, swung the monocular around, and bent from the waist, looking directly down into the right-angle-prism eyepiece — a posture that made lip-reading impossible — and announced in a stage whisper, “Henny’s cell went down last night.”

James flinched and forced a cough, a pretext for covering his mouth. All but choking on the news, he whispered, “Henderson was *taken*?”

“No, thank God!” was the other’s sibilant reply. “Serendipity! He’s a bachelor, felt the pip coming on and went to the school infirmary. His encrypted e-mail said Müller’s *SD* bloodhounds broke in, triggered the alarm, barely giving him time to bolt.”

To conceal his distress, James said, “I see the Finch. Here, let me have a peek.”

Omsley relinquished the eyepiece and stepped back, letting Silverthorne bend over the eyepiece and whisper, “Whole cell?”

Allowing an affirmative response be taken for granted, Omsley gestured, indicating where the phantom bird had supposedly alighted. “Look higher, off to the left.”

James canted the monocular. “Where the hell is Henny?” he whispered. “Without his expertise we haven’t a prayer of . . . getting it done.”

Omsley swore under his breath, complained about the bird having flown again, eased James aside and he bent over the monocular. “Can’t say for obvious reasons. Says Lebe Device, thorium are safely stashed. New scheme’s in works — our last shot, no question.”

Feeling more than slightly dazed, James took his turn at the monocular. “They’re getting too damn close! Now what?”

Omsley reacquired the monocular. “We dare not do a anything. Overt reaction by either of us would be dead giveaway.”

To keep up appearances, the birdwatchers chased the nonexistent Finch from tree to tree for another twenty minutes. Omsley attached the digital camera to the monocular’s eyepiece adapter and busied himself snapping pictures of birdless trees, all the while exchanging whispered suggestions with James, trying to thrash out an interim solution to a dilemma in a way both knew could easily draw lethal attention.

* * *

In a basement of the institute’s utility complex, *Grösseres Denver Gaus Sicherheitsdienst* Direktor Jürgen Müller punched an alphanumeric code into a panel beside an unmarked door, and was admitted to the antechamber. Nodding to the uniformed guard on duty, lowered his head to the eyecups of a scanner next to the inner security door, letting the computer read his iris patterns. Deadbolts clicked, retracted. The pocket door slid into the wall, opening on a long, softly lit gallery, its walls lined with banks of flat-panel video displays. Hand-picked on a rotational basis from overachievers among *Grösseres Denver Gaus* Senior Hitler Youth, a student deemed politically reliable was stationed before each pair of monitors.

Hands clasped behind his back, Müller strolled at a leisurely pace, pausing now and again to scan a displayed scene. “Anything of interest, young gentlemen?” he inquired of the gallery at large. “Any bloody fistfights, juicy seductions, scurrilous graffiti? Anything above, beyond, or out of the ordinary?”

An adolescent with a tousled crop of dark hair swung around, a mischievous grin in evidence. “Only the usual losers smoking dope on the green, sir.”

“Oh, really?” exclaimed the colonel. “How pedestrian! No, no, young man; don’t look at me,” he remonstrated. “Keep your attention on the doings out there.”

“Yessir.”

“Those nutty birdwatchers’re at it again,” said a stocky lad farther down the row.

Müller ambled on, stopping next to the youth who had spoken. “Ah, Dean Omsley and his time-jaunting birdlover colleague. It never ceases to amaze me how, or for what possible reason, a pair of noteworthy educators can devote themselves to the filthy activities of birds.”

“That pair, they’re famous,” assured the stocky youth. “They wander the campus darn near every day, checking-out the trees.”

“I’m sure they do,” acknowledged Müller. “Yet I doubt if either of those distinguished gentleman will ever do or say anything marginally contrary to doctrine.”

“Uh, guess not, sir. What’s weird is the way they chase birds at all hours, rain or shine or snow. Last winter I had the duty when the campus was two squaws deep, and there they were, stomping around ankle deep in slush, with nary a bird in sight.”

“Hmm-m-m, that does strike me as a bit peculiar. Yet a hobby is a hobby is a hobby; mine’s fly fishing. I know nothing of birds, nor care to learn, but a few of our feathered friends could be white, difficult to pick out against a snowy backdrop, especially on video.”

“Yeah, s’pose so, sir. Mind if I ask what you meant by time jaun . . . ? Minute ago you said, uh . . . time something . . .”

Müller watched Silverthorne’s image take Dr. Omsley’s place at the monocular. “The younger ornithologist you see there,” he informed, “is famous in his own right.”

The youth tripped over “ornithologist,” but let it slide. “Had no idea. Famous for . . . ?”

“Professor Silverthorne has done remarkable research in several eras of our past.”

“You mean gone back in time, like Herr Lustmann?”

“Not to the War Years, of course. He’s written several fascinating books, including an insider’s account of life in eighteenth century Prussia. He’s also the school’s foremost authority on the War of World Liberation. Last quarter, I sat in on one of his lectures after learning that it would be centered on the Barbarossa campaign.”

“For credit, sir?”

“No, no; merely to audit. I’m something of a history buff, you see, with a special interest in the vicious fighting around Stalingrad. A brave maternal ancestor of mine lost his life there. Studied the War Years in Gymnasium, didn’t you, *Junge*?”

“In school, yessir. But Stal . . . The name doesn’t ring a bell. Where is it?”

SD Direktor Jürgen Müller’s knowing smile washed over the youth. “You’d go blind searching for it on a modern map as either Stalingrad, or under its original Russian name, Tsaritsyn. *Der Führer* took to heart a harsh lesson taught by the ancient Romans. Shortly after hostilities concluded, Stalingrad’s fate was identical to that of Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad and

other Soviet cities. A sizable industrial center that once rambled around a bend of the Volga River was decimated, reduced to a barren wasteland devoid of every living thing.”

“The whole city?”

“*Ja, Ja; jeder Stock und Stein. Wehrmacht* engineers razed Stalingrad, then poisoned the soil and rubble with radioactive salts so that nothing could live there for a century and more.”

“That’s *really* wild, sir!” exclaimed the youth. “Your, uh . . . ancestor . . . ?”

“A Sixth Army *Oberleutnant*,” said Müller. “My mother left me a faded snapshot of him in uniform. During the siege, *Generalfeldmarshal* von Paulus was awarded a First Class *Ritterkreutz* for what Professor Silverthorne described as *the* outstanding triumph of the Soviet campaign. He took his promotion to heart, and led a breakout of the huge encirclement trap set by desperate Soviet defenders. Though a thousand kilometers away in his East Prussian headquarters, *Der Führer* yet again exercised his uncanny, intuitive grasp of distant military situations and ordered a warning air-couriered to von Paulus, alerting him to the threat. During that beastly Russian winter, cold weather gear and supplies were dispatched to the front, including thousands of *Winterhilfe* coats collected at home . . .”

Sensing his tale of less than minimal interest to the student, Müller broke off and strolled onward. Offering cursory glances at each pair of video displays, he slowly made his way back up the long center aisle, stopping twice to speak briefly with one youth, then another.

After leaving the surveillance gallery, his pace slowed as he reflected on something the *Amerikanische Jugend* had said — a tidbit having to do with the learned history professors going about their birdwatching hobby when the campus was snowed-in, and likely bereft of birds. Training and experience had attuned Müller to automatically suspect anything and everything out of the ordinary. Any outlier falling even scant millimeters beyond the envelope of what were considered conventional parameters immediately captured his interest.

Presumably of little or no importance, he nevertheless filed the information away in the form of a mental note to order a thorough backcheck on the youth’s reference to winter birdwatching by the history professors, neither of whom in his opinion amounted to anything more than pretentious intellectual poseurs.

* * *

In late forenoon the following day Dean Omsley returned from the lecture hall and found *SD Direktor* Müller lolling in the chair behind his desk. From long force of habit, he larded his greeting with excessive bonhomie. “Ah, there you are, Jürgen. *Willkommen!*”

A stoic nod, a vapid half-smile. “*Guten tag*, Professor.”

Omsley had for some time gone out of his way to cultivate the director, an effort he deemed mandatory in light of the revolutionary conspiracy in which he was deeply embroiled. He rigorously adhered to a dictum that called for holding one’s friends close, and one’s enemies even closer, a philosophy matching that of liberal-leaning, politically disingenuous relatives, acquaintances, and several firebrands among his current crop of graduate students. He and other highly placed co-conspirators scattered throughout the American provinces considered *everyone* the enemy, and at the head of the local queue, rearing head and shoulders above all others, was the *Sicherheitsdienst* colonel arrogantly plopped behind his desk.

“You’ve turned your office into birdland incarnate,” remarked Müller, eyeing a plethora of flat photos, holograms and paintings gracing the walls with images of birds of every feather. “I’ve been sitting here admiring your gallery.”

The avian reference raised Omsley’s hackles at once. “Speaking of birds, I have a new pic worth adding to the collection. Yesterday afternoon I snapped an excellent purple Finch.”

“Finch . . . ? A rare bird?”

“Oh, quite the opposite; a common Chaffinch, yet still an exemplary specimen. Here, would you care to see it? I haven’t had the chance to do a printout.” Without waiting for a response, he verbally commanded the computer to light up, and ordered, “Open *Fringillidae*.” Soft orchestral music began playing.

“Odd term, *Fringil* . . .” Müller interrupted himself. “Why the accompaniment?”

Omsley held his fixed smile. “Another minor conceit of mine, Jürgen. It’s the cuckoo section from Respighi’s Ornithological Suite.”

Outwardly unimpressed, the other merely nodded. “Do cuckoos belong to the same, er, order as the, uh . . . *Fring* . . . whatever?”

“No, a different family called *Cuculidae*,” informed Omsley. “The *Fringillidae* are a family suborder of passerine birds — songbirds, including the various Finches.” Hurriedly surfing through five or six images, he settled on a stock shot. “There! Isn’t it a beauty?”

“To me, it looks like an ordinary sparrow.”

“Similar, if a bit larger. Note the pastel purple-orange coloring behind the eyes, and mixed in with the cape feathers.”

Müller studied the full-color display. “Professor, you said this picture was taken yesterday afternoon?”

“Why, yes. Late afternoon, down near Boulder Creek.”

“I hate to tell you there wasn’t a cloud in the sky late yesterday afternoon. As you will recall, between three and four o’clock a sizable thundershower scrubbed the air clean. Distinct bands of high cirrus are visible above your bird’s perch.”

Omsley’s breathing quickened. “Well, for the love of . . . ! Right you are, Jürgen. I’ve called up the wrong photo.” His hands palpitating slightly, he sifted through the ranks of Finches. “Silly mistake. Ah, here we are.”

“I must say,” the other declared, studying the computerized image, “yours is a very interesting hobby. Tell me, why is it necessary to abandon birdwatching in the winter? Do the snowbirds fail to frequent this locale in the snow season?”

The oblique direction Müller’s fishing expedition had taken froze Omsley’s smile in place. “Not many snowbirds visit the region in winter,” he said, delivering the statement in what he hoped was a jocular, tongue-in-cheek manner, “unless you count the skiers flocking to the nearby mountain resorts.”

The colonel’s mouth curved in a reluctant grin. “Snowbirds, *ja, ja*. A good one, Professor.”

“During the cold months,” Omsley hastened to add, “Jamie and I . . . That is, Dr. Silverthorne and I keep a sharp lookout for woodpeckers.”

“In wintertime?”

“I realize how peculiar that may sound to the uninitiated, but in the fall woodpeckers often bore a hole in a tree trunk and cram it with nuts, then come back in winter when food is scarce and peck them out.”

“*Nüsse . . . ?*” Müller revolved the notion. “I suppose that makes sense . . . to birds.” He rose precipitately, stepped around the desk. Sensing the approach of a warm body, the office’s pocket door obediently slid into the wall. “I should run along now.” Hesitating in the open doorway, he said, “Oh, yes; almost forgot why I stopped by. Tell me, has your time-traveling associate’s proposed venture to Germany’s distant past been approved?”

Taken aback by the blunt query, Omsley said, “You’ve . . . been told of our most recent prospectus?”

“Why, yes. You seem surprised.”

“I am! *Reichskounzel* insists that each prospective venture be held in strictest confidence. We’re forsworn to never announce a retrotemporal research efforts until a junket is formally sanctioned. May I ask how you learned of it?”

“Oh, we have our sources,” said Müller airily. “This upcoming visit to antiquity strikes me as a frightfully long jump — in excess of twenty centuries. Yet after reading Silverthorne’s remarkable book on eighteenth century Potsdam, I’m sure he has the sand, not to mention the smarts and ability to undertake the venture.”

“Oh, never doubt it!” confirmed Omsley. “You’re also correct to assume such a venture to antiquity will include an inordinately high degree of risk. Yet Dr. Silverthorne is not only very knowledgeable, but also extremely adept and resourceful.”

“I am absolutely certain it is so, Professor. Your program to examine our past at first hand is an inspiration to us all. Keep up the good work, eh?”

“Thank you, Jürgen. We keep trying to do our best.”

With a faint electrical-actuator whine, the pocket door slid closed behind Müller. Dean Omsley slumped in the chair behind his desk, knees fluttery, hands clasped to quell the slight palpitation. All too aware that his office and every closet, lavatory, classroom and auditorium within the school’s confines, as well as many on the campus outskirts, were under perpetual surveillance, he did everything possible not to appear unnerved by the colonel’s inquisition, for that was *precisely* what it had been.

Müller’s unheralded appearance and less than subtle interrogation had decidedly struck a false chord. The man had no more interest in birds than did he himself, or for that matter Jamie. No, the officious bastard had *not* dropped by to pass the time of day, or inquire about Jamie’s prospective junket to antiquity. It was no stretch to intuit that his suspicion had somehow been aroused. But aroused by *what?* That was the question of questions.

Had he or Jamie committed a misstep somewhere along the way? If so, it would have had to be a significant gaffe. He closed his eyes, spent a moment piecing together and reconstructing the just-concluded conversation. No bird lover Müller; that was a certainty. But neither could he be considered slow-witted. Hearing his remark about the office’s picture gallery had been enough to define the off-center nature of his reason for “dropping by.” Most of the holograms, paintings and photos littering his office walls had been lifted straight from Audubon stock shots, of from miscellaneous similar publications. If the devious *Ausland Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-*

SS Direktor had no interest in birds, why had he bothered to even mention them? What was it he had said about winter, and snowbirds . . . ?

Snowbirds! A tentative answer flashed through Omsley's mind. Had surveillance caught he and Silverthorne birdwatching in the wintertime, when few if any birds were about? The notion seared him!

Jamie had been right. They were getting close. Too damned close!

THREE Santa Fe, Argentina, May 1960, C.E.

The rains had come to the humid Pampas. Commuters among the two hundred thousand denizens of Santa Fe at the confluence of the Salado and Paraná Rivers, as well as those dwelling across the river in the "twin city" of Paraná, were leery of venturing to the other side with rapidly flowing water roiling at the flood stage.

A nightlong downpour had drenched the enclave in suburban Esperanza, twenty miles northwest of Santa Fe. In the murky light of dawn, the tempest continued unabated. Drainpipes frothed in runnels, discharging runoff from the sprawling, two-story mansion's red-tile roof. A high stone wall surrounding the acreage made the compound blind to the street, where gutters ran full and storm drains overflowed as multi-channeled torrents sought divergent paths to the river.

Tall and forceful in bearing, Erich Lustmann wore a yellow poncho, a broad-brimmed rain hat that obscured his aristocratic masculine features. Emerging from a leased Fiat runabout, he trotted through the downpour, hurriedly unlocked and threw wide the double gates. Dashing back to the Fiat, he slipped behind the wheel and drove into the compound, parking beneath a carport, trotted back to close and lock the gates. Splashing across the courtyard's rain-cratered paving, he ducked into an outbuilding joined to the two-story mansion by a breezeway.

Lustmann doffed the rain hat and slicker inside the entry mud room, shook off the droplets and hung the garments on the first peg in a row. Inside the recreation room proper, opposite the billiard table's green swath, the previous evening's round robin of chess and card games had left a half-dozen tables and chairs in helter-skelter disarray. Neither the fortyish man hunched on a barstool with his back turned, nor the stocky former *Waffen SS Feldwebel* idly polishing glassware behind the coved mahogany bar acknowledged the newcomer's arrival.

Crossing glances with his fellow candidate in the mirror behind the bar, Lustmann brushed back a damp, unruly forelock the color of wheat. "Well, if it's not Mig-gu-el," he said, purposely mangling his pet nickname for the other. "Elbow bending at this hour of morning is precocious, even for an Irishman."

"A Scot to you, Eee-rr-ich!" mocked the man hunched on a barstool without turning his head. "Where the hell have you been?"

Aware that a century-old family migration to Westphalia had inspired "Mig-gu-el's" proud highland forebears to change the spelling of the family surname from McCall to Mackall, Lustmann admitted that he'd been across the river, getting soaked.

"Soaked in the wallet, I'd wager, by some Paraná tart."

"A sound bet." A wolfish grin bared Lustmann's near-perfect teeth. He nodded to the bartender. "Fix me one of those tooty-fruity rum concoctions with a little parasol in it, *bitte*."

The former *Waffen SS-Feldwebel* left off polishing glasses. He blinked, looked askance at the newcomer. "Sir . . . ?"

"You know, one of the layered Technicolor drinks they serve in Buenos Aires tourist traps. Never mind; I'll settle for *Dunkelbier*."

Outwardly unfazed, the bartender pulled down the beer engine's polished wooden handle. Placing a square paper napkin on the bar, he set a foam-topped stein of dark brew on it.

"Colonel Stoltz," informed Mackall, "has been looking for you half the night."

"Oh?" Lustmann, sipped brew. "Manfred will find me soon enough. I was unavoidably detained. The river's still rising; the bridge approach was flooded, and I had to wait for the ferry. Say, what's troubling you so, Mig-gu-el? Why the long face on this damp, drizzly morning?"

Their glances crossed again in the mirror, and locked. The glare Mackall awarded his rival's image should have shattered the glass. "While you were getting your ashes hauled over in Paraná, the colonel briefed us on . . ." Mackall paused, reconsidered what he'd been about to say. "Best if you hear it from Manfred. He may even be kind enough to soften the blow, Eee-rr-ich."

Lustmann Using a paper napkin, Lustmann wipe away his beer-foam mustache. "Thanks, but no thanks. I've heard one to many long-winded orations from dear Manfred. Come, don't be snobbish. What momentous tidings does the good colonel have to impart this time?"

Knowing himself the bearer of ill tidings, Mackall brightened visibly. "Eee-rr-ich," he said, drawing out the syllables in a cheerless parody of his rival's nickname, "It's a news item sure to cause you severe heartburn, so I will. A distinguished country gentleman who went by the name Ricardo Klement disappeared yesterday without a . . . Well, with only the slimmest trace."

In mid-swallow, Lustmann choked, coughed and nearly dropped his stein. Openmouthed, and incredulous he cried, "*Grüssgott!* Eichmann . . . ? Are you serious? *Eichmann* . . . gone?"

"Manfred believes he as picked up. In fact, he's all but certain."

"Who, the Argentines, *Schweinhunden* from the Mossad, who was responsible . . . ?"

Mackall's shrug of indifference said it all. "Manfred's convinced himself it was the Israelis. He admitted it a guess, but a good one perhaps. He mentioned having been advised of a suspicious group seen deplaning at Sauce Viejo Airport within the past week. If it *was* the Mossad, by now he's probably been flown out of the country. That is also a guess, but . . ." A second laconic shrug. "Who's to say? I suppose we'll eventually learn the truth."

"Stubborn, self-centered idiot!" Lustmann swore a vile oath. "If the Jewish pigs do have Karl, he'll hang, no question! He was warned time and again to come live here with us. Manfred begged him, *pleaded* with him. But oh, no! Not Karl! The conceited jackass believed it much safer to not try and hide in a crowd, so he holed up in his lonely country shack. Karl would listen to absolutely no one, only to his inner voice."

A former battle-hardened *Panzeroffizier*, the faintest of faint smiles tickled the corners of Mackall's generous mouth. Never able to find anything good to say about his fellow candidate, it was common knowledge among the Odessa expatriates that Lustmann had once headed an *SS-Einsatzgruppe* made up of Special Section IV B4 thugs engaged in rounding up Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, cripples, mental defectives — anyone suspected ripe for deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau or one of the other slaughterhouses. "You were once quite close to him, is that not so, Eee-rr-ich?" teased Mackall, his sarcasm making the query purposely provocative.

Deeply disturbed by the news, Lustmann had not been listening closely “Close . . . very,” he muttered, still trying to digest the crushing turn of events. He angrily pushed aside the beer stein, and added, “Karl and I were together in Hungary, then again later in Warsaw, and later still in Lvov, Kiev and . . . Kharkov.”

“Ah, hah! Did your duty to the *Reich* and took part in the infamous Babi Yar affair, eh, Ee-rr-ich? You *Totenkopfverbände* turds must have been indecently proud of your triumph over all those helpless men, women and children.”

Lustmann stiffened and his chin lifted. “Karl Eichmann was a great man then, and he *still* is. He will be sorely missed. The question is, what now? Without his support, we —”

“Support!” hooted Mackall. “Precisely what brand of ‘support’ might that be?”

“Don’t play dumb with me!” cried Lustmann, his tone threatening. “You know damn well what I meant.”

“Oh, the *treasure*! Of course, of course; how could I have missed that? Now all becomes clear as a fall of cinders, Eee-rr-ich. I sincerely hope and pray,” said Mackall, a sharp edge to his tone of voice, “whatever is left of our looted treasure remains safely tucked away in some upcountry cave.”

The pirated gold from SS coffers, plus the recast dental fillings and jewelry of countless Holocaust victims had been smuggled to Argentina earlier, when a freighter bearing Eichmann and his illicit treasure trove had voyaged upriver from the Platte to boldly dock in plain sight. One of the principal architects of genocide, *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Otto Adolph Eichmann had been warmly greeted by Juan Perón and his cadre of Fascist officials. Backed by gangs of underprivileged *descamisados* — “shirtless” working-class laborers and ruffians, not to mention the Perónista-controlled police and strong-arm squads — Argentina had welcomed contingents of fleeing Nazis with boundless enthusiasm, and a portion of looted gold had helped finance the social welfare and public works programs trumpeted by the Perónistas as *justicialismo*.

Michael Mackall tilted back his glass and drained the dregs. He idly watched the barman polish glassware, took his time lighting a cigarette and requested another *Schnapps*.

Lost for minutes in dark ruminations, Lustmann eventually broke the silence. “What I meant by support was . . . Frankly, with Karl gone the future of our enterprise turns several shades gloomier.”

Mackall’s response was laden with contempt. “Our *future*, you say? One fine day, you might at least *try* and come back into the real world. All your hero of heroes ever did for us was to keep both blood-soaked hands on the money spigot. Other than that so-valuable service, how will his absence make a whit of difference to our ‘future,’ supposing we *have* a future?”

“Hearing negative crap like that,” accused Lustmann, “makes it clear that you’ve never considered the matter in depth. Five years ago, a junta overthrew Perón and we were subjected to one crisis after another under not just one, but *two* military dictatorships. Now, with Perón in exile and Eichmann gone, when the gold runs out our pitiful remnant of Odessa had also better run out. If only Lebe would step up the pace of his *verdammt* experiments. When and if he ever manages to fit all the puzzle bits and pieces in their proper places, we may at last be able to —”

“— insert the muzzle in our collective Odessa mouth,” Michael Mackall, “and squeeze off a round in unison.”

It was Lustmann’s turn to sarcastically accuse his rival. “You *are* a defeatist bastard!”

“Maybe I happen to fit the role,” was Mackall’s rebuttal, “yet then again maybe not. I’ll return your left-handed compliment, Eee-rr-ich, by explaining what an incurable naïf *you* are. Do you actually have any belief at all in the ability of our resident mad scientist to pull one tiny sliver of success from his bag of magic tricks? If so, my defeatist nature tells me frequent and fervent prayers to St. Jude, the patron of lost causes, will be the order of the day.”

Lustmann bristled. “Permit me to correct something I said a moment ago, Mi-gu-el. You aren’t capable of defeatism, just a cynicism, and that is ten times worse. Lebe’s ‘magic tricks’ are the sole reason one candidate among us may get a chance to act as our savior.”

“*Ach*, some gullible, snotty son-of-a-bitch *you* are!” shot back Mackall. “You dare call *me* cynical. Then was then, for the love of God, and now is now! Sailing backward in time is nothing more than a fifth-rate tale for children. A decade and a half — fifteen miserable years! — have been torn from the calendar since the war ended, and only a bit less since the unlucky day you helped Eichmann escape from that American internment camp. For a decade we’ve been left high and dry, stuck here, dying on the vine in this godforsaken Latin hellhole.”

Mackall’s diatribe caused Lustmann to vividly recall Eichmann’s prophetic words on the eve of their escape. They had been playing the colonel’s favorite game, Skat, at which as usual he was winning when he’d suddenly thrown down his cards and said, “We shall either fail gloriously, Erich, or survive to help put Humpty-Dumpty back together again, not so?”

“Given a choice,” had been his immediate response, “I much prefer the latter course.” How sloppy the Yankees had been! He bitterly informed Mackall how the American toy soldiers had cared about absolutely nothing other than their Lucky Strike cigarettes, Hershey chocolate bars and Coca-Cola. “They had no inkling who Karl was, nor cared to learn, or even *try* to make a connection between his name and career.”

“*Career!*” jeered Mackall. “The head *Einsatz* butcher’s ‘career’ certainly endeared him to your poultry farmer boss, and perhaps even more so to your dearest of dear departed friends, Himmler’s journeyman butcher, Heydrich.”

Lustmann fumed in silence for long seconds. “You’re drunk, Mig-gu-el.”

“Why not? Seen through the bottom of this glass, the soggy outside world takes on a far better, far richer appearance.”

“May I offer a word of warning, my friend?”

“I’m *not* your friend.”

“I stand corrected. You made me lose my head when at last you said something sensible, most probably by accident.” Tightlipped, Lustmann added, “Friend or foe, Mig-gu-el, you’d be wise to heed my counsel. Deprecating the efforts of a better man than you are by stooping to denigrate Lebe’s struggle to ensure our survival is to my way of thinking an infinitely greater wrong. *Herr Doktor* Lebe may one fine day afford us an opportunity to rectify a great wrong, and since he and Manfred both favor you over the other candidates, including me, it would be . . . Don’t bother to deny it. You’ve been the fair-haired favorite since the beginning, and as the prime candidate to undertake the mission, should there ever be a mission to be undertaken, I cannot for the life of me understand why it’s so damnably difficult for you to show a minimum of appreciation for what Lebe is trying so very, very hard to accomplish.”

“Prime candidate!” scoffed Mackall, barking a short, brittle laugh. “Prime candidate for the local asylum would be a lot closer to the truth. It’s equally difficult for me to believe you are as deluded by the good doctor’s craziness as many if not most of the others.”

“Now hear me!” declared Lustmann, raising his voice for the first time. “Why not straighten your spine and at least *try* to act like a believer? If that’s too much to ask, why step aside, if you will, and I’ll be happy to take your place at the head of the queue.”

Angrily slurring his words, Mackall cried, “*Anyone* except you, Eee-rr-rich! If by some miracle Lebe’s fairy tale were to have a happy ending, a lowlife toady like you could never begin to fill the bill. As for being a ‘believer,’ try turning your forefinger around and aiming it at your own breastbone. You’ll find it the most difficult exercise ever invented.”

“Brave talk!” Lustmann said bitterly.

“What,” demanded Mackall, “would *you* know of bravery? While my crewmen and I were engaging Soviet and British armor in our *Tigerpanzer*, you *Totenkopfverbände* shithheads stayed in the rear to do murder, or round up civilian men, women and children for the stinking *Vernichtungslager* camps. You know what that makes you, even if you’ll never admit it.”

The color had risen in Lustmann cheeks. In a low, dangerous tone of voice he said, “I am what I am, and you are what you are. Some time ago, we each swore a blood oath, pledging our lives and honor, our *souls*, to *Der Führer*’s sacred person. You’d do well to keep that in mind.”

“You’d do well,” mimicked the other, “to in mind a different, equally inescapable truth. Fifteen years ago our brave, noble *Führer* sent a bullet crashing into his brave, noble brain.”

Lustmann did his best to swallow the bile the rose in his throat. He was only partially successful. “Tomorrow will once again test Lebe’s craziness,” he said tautly. “Tomorrow we may learn how deluded I and the others are, much to the chagrin of you with little faith.”

“Ah, yes! Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,” declaimed Mackall with garbled Shakespearean elocution, “Odessa’s private, personal mad scientist will once again attempt to pull a live rabbit out of his tall, parlor magician’s hat plastered with stars and comets. Ask yourself this, ‘Friend’ Eee-rr-rich. Other than consistently slaying rabbits in one idiotic experiment after another, and between times boring everyone to insensibility with his technical babble, exactly what has Odessa’s resident genius accomplished?”

Lustmann’s grimace of pure hatred amply demonstrated his opinion of the other’s disdainful words. “Your reckless remarks are unworthy of the *Dritte Reich* you claim to have once served. It’s all I can do to keep from smashing your face with this stein.”

“Well, smash away, Eee-rr-rich! A mighty warrior like you must never shirk from doing what must be done. It will provide one more excuse to smash *your* face, as if I needed another.”

No longer a young man, the burly former *SS-Feldwebel* demonstrated a degree of indifference to his own safety and well-being by stepping between the red-faced, glowering antagonists. “Gentlemen, you’ve had enough. The bar is closed.”

Erich Lustmann turned on his heel and stalked from the recreation room without a backward glance, not forgetting to slam the door behind him on his way out.

* * *

The rain had tapered off and ceased not long after dawn. Brilliant sunshine eclipsed a scurrying procession of cloud remnants, promising a warm, steamy day in suburban Esperanza. Surrounded by onlookers in late forenoon, Odessa’s half-dozen mission candidates reposed in a

mixed bag of chaise lounges and folding chairs ranged in a semicircle on either side of fustian theoretical physicist Alfred Lebe; seated beside him looking pensive was the enclave's nominal leader, former *Wehrmacht Heer Oberst* Manfred Stoltz. Without exception, all of those present were bent upon keeping watch on the sky above a four-meter-square net suspended on thin, rods over a shallow pit filled with wood shavings.

As Lustmann had anticipated, Dr. Lebe was behaving in his usual antsy fashion. The physicist's anxiety never failed to peak each time the crucial instant drew near, but on this occasion his agitation seemed more pronounced than during prior experiments. The noon hour had come and gone with no sign of the specimen, a tardiness doubling and threatening to triple Lebe's disquiet. The elderly, chain-smoking scientist found it impossible to sit still. He rose stiffly from a lawn chair, his arthritic knees creaking, clasped his hands behind his back and haltingly prowled back and forth, first turning one way, then the other, his attention never straying from the empty sky above the net.

Seconds passed, wore on into minutes. Low-voiced murmurs and grumblings could be heard from the attendees, further fraying the patience of Colonel Stoltz. "Alfred," he said, doing his best to pose the question delicately, "roughly how much leeway in your calculations?"

The physicist's tiger-pacing slowed. "It's somewhat indeterminate, making your question difficult to answer. Plus or minus a quarter-hour, maybe a fraction more."

A low-voiced remark from one of the candidates made it known that the previous specimen had appeared within seconds of the designated tick.

Dr. Lebe overheard the comment, and frowned. His manner that of a savant correcting the erroneous impression of a child, he spoke sharply. "My estimate for the prior twenty-four-hour transposition was relatively straightforward, whereas in the current instance I dispatched . . . that is to say *will* dispatch one entire week hence — the tenses used can become confusing. At any rate, the transposition we anticipate will be consummate at any moment will occur approximately one hundred and sixty-eight hours before the fact. In other words, now!"

Lustmann decided to take advantage of the opening. "*Herr Doktor* Lebe, something has always puzzled me. How can the . . . I mean, how is it possible for the specimen to be nibbling lettuce over there in the hutch when any second now the selfsame rabbit is due to arrive from a . . . From some future hour?"

"Selfsame rabbit indeed!" Lebe waxed scornful. "Young man, you spout arrant nonsense. Think about what you just said, really *think!* Then, now, forevermore, duality of existence is an absurdity. Only a single, unique specimen is involved in this and *every other* experiment conducted to date. You ask how can that be? Why, because for animate or inanimate objects to simultaneously occupy two spacetime loci within the normal continuum would amount to an illogical, mutually exclusive paradox, something the natural universe more than simply abhors, but treats as a universal incompatibility, an *impossibility*."

"I hope you'll forgive my backwardness," prodded Lustmann, "but two identical rabbits, not one, do seem to be the case."

"Arrant nonsense! Your assessment is simplistic in that it totally ignores time-tagging. The specimen there in the hutch endures on *our* timeline, and will continue to do so until I dispatch it one hundred and sixty-eight hours from the present moment, whereupon it will be undergo retrotemporal transposition and instantaneously return to the 'now' timeline as we

currently understand the continuum. The retro specimen retaining its ‘then’ time-tag merely *appears* to subjectively coexist with its temporal replicate for the period of one full calendar week until returning, the divergent timelines coalesce, and what you loosely term ‘that selfsame rabbit’ instantaneously reunites with its ‘now’ time-tagged organism.”

“Does that mean,” asked Lustmann his ingenuousness purposeful, “a transposed candidate like myself could shake hands with his younger self in nineteen thirty-nine?”

Lebe frowned, his attitude once again that of a savant confounded by the question of a dolt. “More muddy thinking on your part,” he said harshly. “Young man, I fear you have been infected with a virulent case of imprecise terminology, a disease I find terribly distracting. Tell me, what was your age in the target year?”

“Nineteen thirty-nine . . . ? I was . . . Oh, let me see, twenty during the latter months, and into early nineteen-forty attending the SS academy in Breslau training for —”

“*Sehr gut!* That being the case, in the calendar ‘here and now’ of nineteen-sixty, to use the most familiar calendar metric, despite your penchant for muddy thinking you have by some unknown miracle reached the age of forty, or thereabouts. Should you have the extreme good fortune to be selected for the mission, what you envision is highly unlikely, yet a very unlikely, distant possibility. Once a candidate has been transposed into the past — a one-way trip, since I have yet to devise a method of retrieving a subject specimen — your nineteen thirty-nine time-tagged self will obviously continue to exist along the ‘then’ timeline’s natural progression until the present moment, whereupon the timelines will coalesce, unity will be reestablished, and you will live out you’re remaining years.

“Now then,” continued Lebe, “to finish explaining the result of the fairy tale encounter you have concocted, should you by some amazing coincidence of time and place happen to meet and recognize your ‘then’ permanently time-tagged younger self in nineteen thirty-nine or thereabouts, the youthful ‘you’ might remark on whatever resemblance the pair of ‘you’ happen to share, if any, and that would be the extent of it. No paradox would occur, or ensue, unless either of your separate time-tagged selves lost his life while co-existing in a common plenum.”

“And then . . . ?” questioned Lustmann, suddenly very interested in the answer.

“If such a dire event took place,” said Dr. Lebe impatiently, “and your younger self were to expire, it would be a natural consequence of having lived until that ‘then’ time-tagged instant, and succumbing to a perfectly ordinary passing from existence.”

“Wouldn’t I myself also be, er . . . extinguished?”

“Certainly not! Naturally you leap to a faulty conclusion instead of reasoning it out for yourself. You have lived into the ‘now,’ until now, and cannot help but, er . . . Think in greater depth of the situation you’ve posed. As a visitor, a ‘guest’ in your . . . call it the adopted ‘then’ timeline, you would simply continue living out your lifespan if your other’s permanently ‘then’ time-tagged existence was terminated, whereas if you yourself lost *your* life for any reason, it would be *he* as you so-colorfully expressed who would instantly be extinguished.”

Lustmann did not pretend to understand what he thought of as indecipherable babble. He caught a pointed glance from Colonel Stoltz, and returned an all but invisible shrug. “*Viel Dank, Herr Doktor.* All now becomes clear,” he lied. “In the present experiment, you speak of a week-long, uh . . . transposition. How do you account for the interval between the, uh . . . time-tagged specimen’s future dispatch, and the present moment?”

“What interval?” Dr. Lebe wanted to know. “Past and present timelines coexist within the multidimensional spacetime continua. Think of the ‘other’ timelines as blank slates upon which nothing has yet been written, or *could* be written until my breakthrough. When the current specimen reappears — any instant now, I should imagine — we shall receive confirmation that one hundred and sixty-eight hours from ‘now’ as gauged along the natural, immutable progression of our timeline, I shall once again write indelibly on on figurative blank slate.”

Colonel Stoltz looked troubled. “Alfred, are you saying zero time passes when the specimen shifts from a week in the future to the, uh . . . ‘now’ you keep speaking mentioning?”

As if he enjoyed talking down to an inferior, Lebe’s dry response was burdened with overtones of superiority. “Your question, my dear Manfred, is meaningless. You are attempting to define something in its own terms, thus rendering the question unanswerable. Transit time in relation to *what*? Time itself is an imponderable, a classic unknown. Time may well be a function of the constantly shifting mass-energy states inherent in unknown submolar particles within the plenum, or the product of entirely different, equally unknown phenomena. No one has a vague clue. We are able to measure time’s passage with femtosecond precision, and that writes *finis* to the sum of all knowledge pertaining to the natural phenomenon called time. Other than superbly accurate mensuration, however, the venue of time itself — its period, velocity, vector, origin and method of propagation — remain part and parcel a function of the universal enigma. Time is an observable, and as my work has demonstrated, a manipulable natural phenomenon. For the time being, anything beyond that simplistic assessment must remain in the realm of —”

“*There!*” cried one of the candidates.

A splotted brown-and-white object fell in a long arc, missed the net by a scant half-meter, rebounded from the turf and lay still.

Dr. Alfred Lebe loosing a fulminant curse. His arthritic knees helped carry him across the lawn in a ragged half-trot, where he knelt down with some difficulty beside the specimen. Colonel Stoltz, Mackall, Lustmann and the other candidates grouped themselves around the fallen rabbit. Blood oozed from the animal’s mouth and pink nose.

“Coriolis!” exclaimed the physicist, sounding disgusted. Performing a self-deprecatory headshake, he said, “The exit locus was a much higher than I had calculated. The Coriolis force, a function of axial earthspin, induced lateral impetus in the specimen, grossly affecting its vector at transposition.”

Frowning, Colonel Stoltz scrutinized the dead rabbit. “Alfred, your estimate called for the rabbit to appear roughly three meters above ground level.”

A snicker issued from somewhere in the gathering. “More like thirty.”

“Once again,” declared the physicist, his manner peevish, “you snipe and take issue with inconsequentials, but disregard yet another resounding success. The specimen here before us in the ‘now’ underwent retrotemporal transposition over a nonlinear gulf of one hundred and sixty-eight real-time hours. Whether or not the animal survived is immaterial. Dr. Klinghoffer will perform a necropsy to determine whether tissue damage occurred during retrotemporal transposition, or upon impact — two vastly different consequences.

“Of equal or greater significance,” continued Lebe, slipping into his pedantic lecture mode, “is that I shall now be able to further redefine and refine my retrotemporal algorithms. The useful data deriving from three overtly successful experiments, each over a longer period that the

preceding, will enable extrapolations of greater precision as well as profoundly more definitive when calculating subsequent transpositions. It means infinitesimal residual variances can be further reduced between all previous test data and that obtained from this current success . . .”

The physicist went on to delve into esoteric technical reasons for the rabbit having materialized higher above ground than predicated, falling back as usual on his favorite excuse for whatever had gone wrong. He explained in detail for perhaps the two-dozen-th time how the varied resources of the Planck Institute had once been at his disposal, whereas the pitiful, primitive conditions obtaining in Argentina had vastly disadvantaged him, degrading the quality of his work. He insisted that conducting worthwhile experiments in Esperanza was in no way conducive to performing research in anything remotely like a facile, expedient manner.

Having heard it all before, Lustmann lost interest. Stepping away from the group clustered around Lebe and his dead specimen, he wandered over to the lean-to and paused to inspect the now-empty hutch with a jaundiced expression. Turning toward the mansion, he passed Michael Mackall, pretending not to hear his fellow candidate’s sarcastic comment.

“Ho-hum! Another day, another dead rabbit, eh, Eee-rr-ich?”

Suppressing an all but unquenchable urge to rearrange the other candidate’s lean, self-satisfied features, he marched up the steps, opened the screen door and entered the verandah.

FOUR Estes Park Village, June, DW-J 142

Sipping after-dinner brandy before the cheery blaze in his host’s arched fieldstone fireplace, Ernst Kästner gazed over the snifter’s rim at snowcapped peaks of the continental divide silhouetted against the azure twilight sky, the panorama framed by French doors opening on a flagstone terrace. “Jamie,” remarked the chancellor, “the view from your aerie is magnificent.”

“A magnificent distraction when I’m sitting here trying to write,” declared James. “The light changes hourly, and the mountains appear to change with it.”

His guest chuckled drily. “How awful to put up with a distraction like that!”

Having dealt with few *Herrenvolk* in his thirty-eight years, never before with a highborn aristocrat of Kästner’s stamp, Silverthorne’s opinion of the chancellor was ambivalent. As a panjandrum of the Aryan Master Race, whatever that was, the official symbolized everything he despised, yet it was difficult to regard him as other than a benefactor. The indebtedness stemmed in part from the official’s unflagging support of the retrotemporal research program under Dean Omsley’s guidance, but principally from the unanticipated bounty for which Kästner himself was responsible: the picturesque chalet where he and Emily made their home. Perched on a spur of the mountainside above the village at the eastern gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park, it had been gifted by *Reichskounzel* shortly after publication of the book based on his junket to late-eighteenth century Potsdam.

Apparently the chancellor had been enjoying a sabbatical in what was once Berlin, but formally renamed *Welthauptstadt Germania* in DW-J 14 by none other than *Der Führer*, where he had gone out of his way to lavish praise on the Potsdam venture and Silverthorne’s earlier research junkets into the past. The impromptu testimonial must have impressed *Deutsches Weltreich*’s aged co-chiefs-of-state, co-rulers modeled on a *Führer Richtungweisend* describing the dual consuls who had led the ancient Roman Republic in antiquity. In the wake of that

serendipitous stroke of good fortune, James had been forced to work very hard indeed to overcome his wife's reluctance to entertain the couple she referred to in whispers as, "A typical bloodsucking Nazi overlord and his socialite Frau." Repeatedly explaining why his coveted Chair of Retrotemporal Research at the institute made hosting the Kästners a political necessity having absolutely nothing to do with observing the social amenities, his gentle, continuous persuasion had finally convinced Emily of the mandatory such an informal invitation to dinner would be, since manners alone demanded reciprocating for the occasion when they themselves had been wined and dined in the executive mansion.

The distinguished guest finished his brandy and set down the snifter. "My compliments to Emily. Please tell her the dinner was superb, but satisfy my curiosity about something if you will. Where does one obtain fresh venison this time of year?"

"It's year-round deer season for bow hunters," James told him," gesturing toward the laminated steel bow and quiver filled with broad-point arrows slung beside the fireplace. "When the weather begins to warm, deer migrate back up to the high country. I caught a six-point buck in a meadow near the timberline, dressed it out up there, and had the devil's own time hauling it down on my back."

"Lord help us!" Kästner's head wagged solemnly. "Is there no limit to your prowess? Eminent historian, time traveler par excellence, bestselling author, birdwatcher extraordinaire, and only now one learns of your competence as an archer. What next, Jamie! I'm beginning to think of you as a dedicated overachiever."

The "birdwatcher extraordinaire" quip had tripped all of Silverthorne's circuit breakers. With a pretense of humility, he clothed a very strong urge to dissimulate by redirecting the focus of his "prowess" toward the subject nearest his heart. "Using a bow could be a distinct advantage if . . . that is when I visit early first-century *Germanorum*."

"Ah, *that* again!" Kästner tried to look pained. "Being who and what you are, it's not at all surprising to hear your one-track mind speak its piece. Jamie, why so anxious to get on with the upcoming venture? The celebrated triumph over Rome you're fixated upon is frozen in time. Never fear, *Varusschlacht* will patiently await your arrival."

"The delay is . . . Ernst, lately I find myself going through the motions, not giving my students the attention they deserve, lecturing halfheartedly, with less than full concentration; or worse, sloughing off student questions. I suppose the root of my frustration is a fear that I'll never be, uh . . ."

"Do go on," urged his guest. "I already know what you were about to say."

"A moment ago" said James a bit sheepishly, "you listed my credentials, yet neglected one. I'm supposedly the school's foremost authority on the War of World Liberation, which is very flattering, and causes the waiting lists for my undergraduate courses to grow longer each quarter. What bothers me so deeply is . . . Well, to put it bluntly, why is there no hope of ever allowing someone with my background to visit the War Years, do meaningful research?"

"Yes, I could smell it coming," said Kästner. "Your remarkable achievements have not gone unnoticed by our leadership, nor unrewarded." As if to illustrate the remark, he gestured theatrically toward the shadowed, snowcapped peaks looming far beyond the flagstone terrace. "Jamie, be honest with yourself. Your expertise and experience should make you more aware than anyone of how mandatory an ultraconservative approach to retrotemporal research must

remain. Our leadership is triply pledged to never for any reason relax firm guardianship of the portal to the past opening on the extremely crucial War Years.

"I know, I know," Kästner said quickly, forestalling Silverthorne's response. "For you to feel a desperate need to further the fund of hard-earned knowledge you've acquired is perfectly natural. How else could an enormously accomplished gentleman such as you feel? Why, your incisive critique of Goebbels' ponderous wartime chronicle has gathered no dust on my bookshelf I assure you."

"Please forgive my bluntness once again," said James, his frustration no longer entirely a pretense, "but the sheer volume of half-truths, disinformation and outright misinformation in Goebbels' pretentious 'history' is enough to stagger an historian."

A sharp look. "How can you possibly be aware of anything like that?"

"Goebbels, or whoever penned the tomes in his name," asserted James as if bent upon recovering from his intentional slip, "blithely reminds us of what dire straits the adolescent *Dritte Reich* faced when Red Army hordes crashed into Berlin and took hostage members of the scientific staff, especially physicist Alfred Lebe. Then, after his typically longwinded iteration and reiteration of the 'facts' as he's believed to know them, *Reichsminister* Goebbels explains and re-explains how by virtue of a plethora of military forces, arms and materiel the Americans furnished the so-called Allies had all but annihilated the *Luftwaffe*, devastated *Kriegsmarine*, and overwhelmed the *Wehrmacht* in every global wartime theater.

"What disturbs me most," said James, now on a roll, "is the way Goebbels harps on the fact that with German cities bombed and burned out, the conflict all but lost, the Allies were warned of secret weaponry under accelerated development in Germany: advanced rocket- and jet-propelled aircraft, long-range missiles, nuclear weapons, chemical and bacteriological warfare innovations, and more. Then he takes a deep breath and glosses over what actually took place, leaving the reader and every historian hanging by intimating that in their wildest dreams the Allies never suspected a lurking postwar 'secret weapon' like the Lebe Technique, and lets it go at that."

When James finished, a shadow smile was teasing the corners of his guest's generous mouth. Switching languages again, Kästner quoted a passage from Goebbels' history in German: "I do not recall his words verbatim, but the gist of it went something like this: 'Complacent in victory, the barbarous Soviet hierarchy released Dr. Lebe from captivity, allowing his return to a conquered, plundered, sundered Germany'."

Sundered . . . ! The term startled James. *Why*, he wondered, *had the chancellor irrelevantly injected 'sundered' into the supposed quotation?* Hoping to learn the answer, he improvised. "Yes, I remember . . ." Having steeped himself in the pretentious tomes credited to Goebbels' authorship, he was certain the multi-volume history of the War of World Liberation had alluded to "a conquered, plundered, Germany; but *sundered*, never!"

Noting his host's reaction, Dr. Kästner hastened to say, "Sanctioning promiscuous retrotemporal ventures would be an act of clinical insanity. The vigilance required to keep the door tightly shut can never be allowed to lessen."

"Oh, I agree wholeheartedly," lied James. "However, as a professional historian I do claim a certain degree of expertise, which makes it doubly galling not to be trusted when so

many varied details scream for investigation, so many obscure events cry out for in-depth research and reconciliation.”

“Trust . . . ?” The other’s hard stare disconcerted James, making him aware that he’d broached a subject the other considered distasteful. “Certain things,” said his guest with solemn intonation, “are too crucial to entrust to *any* individual, no matter how knowledgeable, competent, or trustworthy. You and your counterpart at the University of Leipzig went through an agonizing series of examinations and psychological interviews before *Reichskounzel* vetted you to visit selective eras of our common past *only* with permission to learn, never to touch, disturb and potentially mutilate. As you yourself have said on numerous occasions, the reflexive dangers involved in promiscuous time travel would be immense. A single misstep in the past, no matter how innocent or malicious in between those poles, could easily engender catastrophic consequences, and *that* is a sublime peril it is not possible to overstate.”

James realized the chancellor was growing irate over his insistence on discussing a visit to the War Years. In the act of framing a conciliatory comment, he was startled when Dr. Kästner glanced at his finger watch, and rose. “Shall we rejoin the ladies? It’s growing late, perhaps time should call it a night.”

“Ernst, if I’ve offended you, I apologize. Please try and understand why I —”

“No, Professor,” denied the other, “it is *you* who must understand what a waste of breath it is to belabor your belief in a necessity to research the War Years. Gaining approval for such a junket was hopeless yesterday, is today, and will be tomorrow.”

Chagrined at the magnitude of his mistake, Silverthorne nodded and trailed the chancellor out of the study, kicking himself mentally.

* * *

Ebullience personified, the polished political persona of *Herr Kanzler* Kästner resurfaced once he was again in the company of his own *Frau* and their hosts. All smiles, he thanked his hosts for a wonderful evening.

The chalet heliport, carved into the mountainside and ringed by pines, was too confined by far to accommodate the huge, long-range government jetcopter parked below at the village. A small electric runabout air-carried aboard the craft like a ship’s boat had shuttled the guests up the twisty, winding mountain road to the chalet. The runabout and uniformed chauffeur were waiting in the driveway.

After a final round of farewells and well wishings, the Silverthornes saw the Kästners off. Emily hurried back indoors to escape the evening chill. His expression pensive, James hesitated in the entry, watching the runabout’s tail lights disappear downhill. He came inside regretting his mistake with the chancellor. Emily had put on an apron. Preparing to load the dishwasher, she pulled a pouty face and held her nose with two fingers. To her, Gerda Kästner was *the* all time self-centered fashion plate and trophy wife, but she knew better than to say so even in the “privacy” of the chalet.

A moment later, the clicking of dinnerware ceased in the kitchen. Emily called, asking why he’d left the ‘copter parked on the helipad.

“Rolled it into the shed, wings folded,” he replied.

“So why is it still sitting out there?”

Puzzled, James came over, peered out the kitchen window. “Isn’t our bird.”

“What . . ? Who’s is it? I didn’t hear it land.”

Puzzled, he trotted out of the kitchen, ducked through the study and emerged on the terrace in crisp mountain air.

Standing with his head lowered beneath the drooping, slowly freewheeling rotary wings of a two-place commute helicopter, Dean Omsley put a finger to his lips and approached the terrace. His senior colleague took him by the elbow, drew him close and in a stage whisper asked James if he knew of a safe place for them to talk.

“A safe place to do anything is a myth,” was Silverthorne’s whispered response. For the benefit of omnipresent surveillance, he said, “Brr-r-r, cold out here. Let’s get in by the fire.”

“It will turn frigid when you hear what I have to say,” whispered Omsley, clutching Silverthorne’s arm more tightly. Stepping backward, and said loudly. “Sorry to burst in on you like this. I started to make a call, then decided to fly up and give you the news in person.”

Silverthorne’s pulse rate quickened. “Good news?”

“The best! The *Reichsleiter*’s executive assistant called to say *Reichskounzel* has sanctioned your venture to ancient *Germanorum*.”

“*Wunderschön!*” cried James.

Omsley drew him near again, whispered, “Walk with me up the trail a ways. It’s the best we can manage.”

“Chancy,” whispered James, troubled by the abrupt changes in the other’s demeanor.

There was no reply. Now doubly puzzled, James followed Omsley in starlight from the terrace and along an all but invisible walkway bisecting the chalet’s miniature garden. He and Bernard groped their way up a narrow, winding footpath leading up to the crest of the forested ridge.

When he thought they were beyond earshot of the chalet, Dr. Omsley halted and said in a low voice, “There was no call, Jamie.”

“What . . ?”

“Shh-h-h, keep it down! I was having supper in the Hofbrau on Third Street,” said the other, his lips brushing Silverthorne’s ear, “when my alarm started vibrating — Müller’s *SD* bloodhounds, I’m sure.”

Rendered speechless by the disclosure, James flinched, said nothing.

“Drove straight to the institute roofpark, spooled up the ‘copter and never looked back. I knew you were entertaining the local royal couple, and orbited on high until his big bird flew away. Two local cells went down in as many months, meaning someone’s talked. No surprise; they have devious as well as brutal methods to loosen tongues.”

James eventually found his voice. “Puts both of us under the gun.”

Ignoring Silverthorne’s distress, Omsley whispered, “No time for discussion. You’re going, Jamie. Henderson has it arranged.”

“When?”

“Now, tonight! It’s now or never time.”

“It wasn’t penciled in until I returned from *Varusschlacht*.”

“Forget antiquity!” insisted the other. “Everything’s come apart. They’ll scoop me up shortly, but your notoriety may force Müller to touch base with your dinner guest before he can order your arrest, and I doubt if Kästner would sign the warrant on his own initiative.”

“Why not?”

“Give it some thought. My ‘good news’ charade a few minutes ago, plus your prominence in the capital may goad him into pulsing *Reichskounzel* for approval. That could take hours, even days. Whether or not my thesis holds water, minutes count, so listen.”

Omsley outlined his means of staying in contact with Henderson via innocuous e-mail messages sent “in the clear,” but encrypted by use of the unbreakable one-time pad system that ironically employed as its cipher base the official English translation of MEIN KAMPF no one ever read, but it was obligatory to display on every desk, bookshelf, office, school, hospital and public building on all six continents. “You’ll go as planned,” he concluded, “with one glaring difference: retrotemporal transposition has to take place on-orbit.”

“*Orbit!* Jesus, Bernard! How do I get into space, or *down* for that matter?”

“Shh-h-h, not so loud! It could be the easiest part of your junket.”

“*What . . . ?*”

“We’re damned fortunate to have friends in low *and* high places,” assured Omsley. “You’ll pass yourself off as a working steward aboard a *Raumhansa* shuttle due to lift off tomorrow afternoon. Henny’s already aboard *Walküre*; don’t ask me how he got out to the space station because I don’t know. His encrypted e-mail described a reconfigured, ablative pressure-suit rigged by tech specialists as adequate for atmospheric reentry.”

“It’s *that* desperate?”

“Too pale a term,” declared the other. “This police state of theirs makes any others seem permissive: monolithic, iron-handed domination of the globe and damn near every human being in it. You *must* go back, and you *must* succeed! Fortunately, the jump’s relatively short: less than a century and a half. I can’t begin to guess how Henny smuggled the Lebe device into *Walküre*, let alone the ultra-precious grams of enriched thorium isotope we paid for at an exorbitant cost in pain, careers and lives.”

His head spinning, James whispered, “I’ll come down where, when?”

“Somewhere in Europe is all Henny promises, in late spring, early summer, nineteen-forty. That strikes me as premature, but *you* helped choose the time frame.”

Silverthorne’s uncertain nod was lost in the darkness. After several heartbeats of silence, he said, “No way to pin down a meaningful time frame. Arguments have raged over aiming for an earlier or later period of the War Years. The answer’s in their sealed archives, for all the good that does. There’s damned little to go on except Goebbels’ pretentious drivel, or the works of other Nazi bores.

“Who can say how much is valid?” he continued, speaking almost normally much to Omsley’s discomfort. “The alliances with Italy and Japan can probably be taken for granted, but reclaiming the Saar Basin and Sudetenland, annexing Austria, then invading Poland and swindling England and France out of their pledges to Czechoslovakia seem less than probable. All things told, it’s that lightning assault through the low countries and Belgium, followed by the rapid collapse of France that I’ve always considered far too pat for belief.

“After which,” he added, “we’re told Lustmann was sent back to somehow devise a way to coach the Nazi hierarchy, causing Britain to lose an entire army on Belgium’s Dunkerque beaches, while *Luftwaffe* bombers pounded England’s ports, industry and ships into submission. *Kriegsmarine* supposedly absorbed staggering losses from the British fleet mounting the Channel

crossing, and *Wehrmacht Heer* forces won glorious victories on England's southern beachheads. Goebbels spends a quarter-volume commending Hitler's patience for consolidating western Europe before turning his ground and air fury eastward to decimate Byelorussia and the Ukraine, devastate Kharkov and Kiev, totally obliterate Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad, victories that were a long, drawn-out prelude to conquest of the Americas. How can anyone with even trivial knowledge of the War Years swallow *that* outrageous scenario?"

"Nor," said Omsley, "can films of Rommel's *Panzers* rolling through Alexandria to the Suez be ignored, or the shattered B-36 squadrons that braved the Atlantic to bomb Germany's heartland, or the A-6 rocket strikes on New York, Philadelphia and Washington, or the final duplicities after President Dewey's capitulation, with Nazi nuclear warheads raining down on Tokyo-Yokohama and other cities of *Dai Nippon*, and once-proud Italy a vassal state."

James shivered in the brisk night air. "And I'm to change all that. *How*, Bernard?"

"No choice but to play it by ear," said Omsley. "You're uniquely qualified not only due to prior retrotemporal experiences, but because of totally immersing yourself in *their* version of the War Years. The combination makes you the single trump card left in our hand. Fail to play it now, no matter how abortive the odds, and we could relinquish the chance for all time."

"Kästner spoiled my digestion after dinner," muttered James. "He toyed with me, purposely misquoted a tidbit from Goebbels' epic that had to do with physicist Alfred Lebe returning from Soviet captivity to a conquered, plundered, *sundered* Germany. I've racked my brain trying to guess where he came up with that oddly inappropriate —"

"Speculation's useless," interrupted Omsley quickly. "It will be up to you to find out."

"Get real, Bernard! This junket is . . . What I'm being asked to do falls somewhere between ludicrous and . . . Oh, what the hell! Their efficient propaganda mill never tires of boasting about the way their hero of heroes went back and somehow, by some unknown means played the role of marionette master. Lustmann had an enormous advantage when you think about it. He had definitive knowledge of the *real* war to work with, and *must* have used that unique twenty-twenty hindsight to stage-manage and direct the war redux, altering the outcome drastically. I'll wager Kästner knows *exactly* how it was done."

"No point," advised Omsley, "wasting energy trying to guess what he knew, or didn't know. Warring cultures collide, and neither the victor nor vanquished ever escape unchanged. Kästner may be a first-water Nazi politico, but he's also the most thoroughly Americanized official governing an American province. Viewed objectively, he's been a valuable asset."

"Granted, and yet —"

"Hear me out," Omsley hastened to say. "In the last analysis, Erich Lustmann succeeded. If it was done once, it can be done again, Jamie."

"Can it really?"

"Never dare to think of your mission as hopeless." Omsley was vehement. "Lustmann and Hitler are demigods in their pantheon, sacred icons school children are taught to venerate. Huge throngs attend the *Heldengedenktage* marking their saintly savior's triumphant return to the present, a celebration often surpassing Hitler's birthday celebration. We've inferred to the best of our ability where he was, and approximately when."

James groaned. "Approximately . . . ? Bernard, the man was *somewhere* in Europe, *sometime* between nineteen thirty-six and nineteen fifty, and *those* archaic dates are speculative,

not inferences based upon known facts. My task will involve a search that would make child's play of seeking the proverbial needle. Suppose I *do* luck-out and find the man. What then?"

"To my way of thinking," assured Omsley, "it's a virtual certainty that he arrived in Germany prior to the eruption of hostilities. The consensus of opinion says he *had* to have been there when the shooting war started." Bernard pulled up the sleeve of his tunic, consulted his wrist chronometer's luminous dial, and said. "Let me finish quickly, and be on my way."

Speaking softly, he announced that Henderson had rounded up every authentic twentieth century *Reichsmark* he could beg, borrow or pilfer, plus a few items of minor jewelry, hopefully enough to let James scrape by until he could steal or earn more. Duplicate sets of artfully forged documents identified the bearer as a freelance Austrian correspondent, or as a Milanese history professor. "Once on-site," concluded Omsley, "select the most suitable ID. Your German's near-perfect, and you have passable Italian. Either cover will do."

"Austrian would be simpler, said James, "assuming the *Anschluss* actually took place."

"Quickly now!" Omsley said. "Henny's made provision for ninety-six kilograms of transposable mass — you and everything inside the special pressure-suit. Once on the ground in Europe you'll wear *Lederhosen* and pre-tent to hike about on a *Wanderjahr* while attemporizing. On your last junket, you roamed Berlin for just days before getting down to business in Potsdam, but that was only research. This jump definitely is *not*"

Checking his wrist chronometer again, Omsley interrupted himself. "I must go! By this time *Herr Direktor* Müller has sent out his hounds, and the hunt is on." Embracing his younger colleague in the darkness, he said with a catch in his throat, "*Hals und Beinbruch!* You can do it, Jamie! I don't *think* you can, I *know* you can. We're counting on you. All of us, *millions* of us!"

James muttered, "Sounds like I also may break my fool neck."

"Someone will come by in the wee hours to collect Emily," said Omsley. "She'll be safely sequestered, so don't fret about her; it's best if neither of us knows where. Your first move will be to get down to the bakery shop in the village before dawn, between four-thirty and five o'clock at the latest. Sven Carlsen will meet you, send you on your way."

"Sven's one of us?"

"For years," said Omsley. "His drivers begin their deliveries around five-fifteen, five-thirty. He'll hide you in one of the vans, but once away from the village you'll have to make it to the airport on your own. When you get there, stay clear of the main passenger complex. Go directly to the *Lufthansa* offices of Harris Brughley. He'll see to sneaking you aboard a flight out to *Raketenflugplatz* Pacific. And remember to dress accordingly, not like some tourist off on a Hawaiian holiday. You'll be met at the airport in Lahaina."

"What if I'm . . . recognized?"

"Don't let it to happen," warned Bernard. "Shave the beard, trim the mustache neatly, and applique this fake Heidelberg scar a cosmetologist made for us; the instructions are in the packet." He handed over a fat envelope. "The scar will not only label you an up-and-coming young *Lufthansa* executive, it will also draw attention away from your features. Wear dark glasses only in daytime. If you should be stopped and questioned, throw an indignant fit, lay on the bluff and bluster thickly, get up on your high horse, talk down to whoever accosts you."

James nodded. "What about you, Bernard?"

After a brief silence, Omsley said, “Hate to say it’s endgame time, but it is. I wouldn’t enjoy being interrogated. All the luck there is! You are the very best, but even so you’re going to need every smidgen of good fortune that happens to come your way.”

In starlight, Silverthorne stumbled back down the footpath behind Omsley. Standing on the terrace, he watched his senior colleague climb into the two-place commute ‘copter. The glow-coils lit, the first-stage turbine spooled up, the turboshaft engine caught and continued its octave-by-octave climbing whine. Lightless, the small helicopter rose a few meters vertically, tilted and vectored off into the night sky.

Minutes later, his premonition of impending disaster ballooning, James pressed his lips against his wife’s dark hair and whispered only those details he thought she needed to know.

Emily wept quietly for a while. Eventually she stifled her sobs, helped James clip his beard. He shaved and neatly trimmed the mustache, but left it intact. Preoccupied with what he knew was in store, he had difficulty reading the handwritten instruction form on how to aristocratically disfigure his cheek with the faux-Heidelberg saber scar.

FIVE Esperanza, Argentina, 1960; Greater Denver, DW-J 142

After midnight, the dimly lit street lay still and deserted except for an occasional passing car, and a few habitués of the cantina who now and then drifted in or out.

White-hot fires of resentment and frustration burned in Erich Lustmann. Vigilant for over an hour in one of the Fiat runabouts leased by the Odessa expatriates, he had parked directly across the street from the cantina. Rarely taking his eyes from the shadowed doorway, he chain-smoked and stewed about the betrayal, reviling Colonel Stoltz for his obstinate, single-minded insistence on backing Dr. Lebe’s asinine choice of the wrong candidate. Summoning him for a “private chat,” Stoltz had been not in any way solicitous. The bastard had coldly announced with neither a milligram of soft-soap or a dram of painkiller that he, Lustmann, had been selected as first alternate for the mission upon which all of Odessa hopes and dreams rested.

First alternate!

Naïve, antagonistic Michael Mackall had been selected to take the place he knew was rightfully his, and his alone. It had rankled Lustmann beyond his limits to be told where the decision had originated. Selecting “Mig-gu-el,” the intrepid former *Panzerkampfwagen* hero, had been the brainstorm of oh-so-brilliant *Herr Doktor* Alfred Lebe, the senile, arthritic fossil who suffered from an ingrown mind when it came to dealing with anything beyond his own sphere of expertise, or even narrower field of specific interest. In most if not all real-world respects, Lebe was an old fart almost as perceptive as the average thirteen-year-old, yet he’d managed to convince Manfred Stoltz that Mackall was psychologically better suited to undertake the crucial mission than he himself, and most galling of all better *qualified*.

In spite of the ego-shattering letdown he had experienced, Lustmann could not bring himself to do less than vigorously applaud Lebe’s most recent triumph, miraculous transposing a live specimen from two full months in the future to the “now” timeline, thus incredibly bridging the span of one thousand, four hundred and eighty-eight real-time hours, a feat had electrified the Odessa enclave. The specimen, a rabbit “time-tagged” sixty days in the future, were one to borrow the term from Lebe’s lexicon of arcane gibberish, had fallen into the net unharmed, and

promptly vanished upon “amalgamating,” to once again use Lebe’s witchcraft terminology, with its “now” time-tagged, peaceful, lettuce-chewing replicate.

“Nothing,” the physicist had crowed, wallowing in self-adulatory rapture, “succeeds like success!” Ecstatic, beside himself with joy, Lebe had dithered with unbridled enthusiasm, gushing like a hyper-emotional schoolgirl and then launching into an indecipherable monologue describing in unfathomable detail the upcoming correlation and refinement of empirical data that would derive from this, his latest, most impressive triumph that crowned all previous triumphs. Then Lebe had made the mistake of announcing preparations for a subsequent, penultimate trial he’d already “penciled in” — the proposed retrotemporal transposition of a live specimen over a temporal gulf of not one, but *four* calendar months.

At which point Colonel Stoltz had put not one, but *both* feet down. His tone and manner brooking no argument, Manfred had contended that what there was to be learned about Lebe’s retrotemporal process *had been* learned. He had firmly declared that no purpose would be served by conducting further “gee-whiz!” experiments, nor would any foreseeable gain be realized by “wasting” a single additional milligram of costly, difficult-to-obtain enriched uranium isotope to fuel any further “unnecessary” trials.

The enclave’s leader, or unelected commander as many of the Odessa expatriates regarded him, had convinced himself it would be mandatory to initiate the mission at once, without delay. To even contemplate prolonging the experimental stage, Stoltz had insisted, tended to worsen the existing oppressive odds against achieving the ultimate objective by allowing the two-decade gap between calendar nineteen thirty-nine and nineteen-sixty to widen further. Each passing week, each *day* Manfred had argued, denigrated the chances of achieving the ultimate objective by making the time jump a fraction longer and more difficult.

Lebe’s vehement rebuttal had iterated and reiterated his most worrisome caveat. Acting prematurely, he had ranted, his gravelly baritone laden with overtones of deep foreboding, would even more surely diminish the overall chances of a successful mission.

Not one to be swayed by rhetoric once his military mindset was cast in concrete, the colonel had firmly silenced Lebe’s objections by emphatically declaring the candidate selected would be dispatched on Thursday, September first, nineteen-sixty, a most portentous date in that it corresponded to the fateful moment two decades in the past when an artfully stage-managed border incident had provided an excuse to send *Wehrmacht* legions and the *Luftwaffe* aerial armada crashing into Poland.

Utterly dismayed, in fact close to tears, to no avail Lebe had done his damndest to outshout the colonel. Having seen it all before, Lustmann had realized he was destined to see it all again: once his martial mind was made up, Manfred became transformed from former stubborn *Wehrmacht Oberst* Stoltz into an adamant, unstoppable force of nature.

At midmorning the next day, Lustmann recalled bitterly, he’d been summoned, forced to endure the infamous “private chat,” during the course of which his emotions had segued from eager anticipation to abject disbelief, then finally to outrage and vindictive fury. Barely able to contain himself upon being advised in so many words that his detested rival was the chosen one, while he himself had been relegated to the post of “designated backup.” It had been all he could do to sit through the remainder of the humiliating, demeaning “chat” without seizing Stoltz by the throat, wringing the life out of him.

During the penultimate briefing it had been even worse: all the candidates had been present, forcing him to sit on his hands, his burning gaze fixed on jubilant Michael Mackall, who naturally refused to glance in his direction, and during Manfred's crisply worded summation the agony burning inside him had doubled and redoubled and soared to empyrean heights.

Fuming in silence, he clicked his gold-flashed lighter, touched the flame to the tip of a fresh cigarette, and only then noticed the half-consumed butt smoldering in the Fiat's ashtray. He chucked the butt out of the Fiat's window just as Michael Mackall emerged from the cantina with a blowzy woman on his arm — a cantina "waitress" well-known for dispensing mediocre sexual favors in exchange for mediocre sums.

A shame, he thought, but there it is!

It had to be made to look like an ordinary after-hours street mugging, something any of the ruffian lowlifes who frequented the cantina might pull off without blinking. Getting out of the Fiat very slowly wearing sneakers, he left the driver's door unlatched for silence, padded across the street and trailed the chatting couple along the darkened sidewalk toward Mackall's parked Fiat, another in the small fleet leased by Odessa.

Tugging the silenced Walther automatic pistol from beneath his belt, he slipped off the safety, quickened his pace and brought the weapon up, using both hands in the isosceles grip. The first round took the waitress squarely at the base of the skull. She pitched forward, sprawling face-down on the sidewalk.

Mackall whirled to stare at Lustmann in open-mouthed disbelief.

"Bad dog!" accused his former rival, and squeezed off two quick rounds. Going down on one knee, he rifled the pockets of the man designated to usurp his place in history. He had difficulty pulling the *Panzergruppe 4* signet ring from Mackall's finger, and hastily stuffed the ring, key-chain, wallet and a money clip holding a wad of folded pesos in the slash pockets of his windbreaker. Rising to a semi-crouch, he turned round and round, scanning the street in both directions. Except for Mackall's Fiat, and his own vehicle parked across the street, only one other car was visible at the curb. Not a single pedestrian was in sight.

He rose, studied Mackall's still, crumpled figure, and said, "*Adieu, Mi-gu-el. À bien tôt.*"

Strolling across the street at a leisurely pace, he started the Fiat and drove six blocks toward the river, stopping only once to toss Mackall's belongings in a refuse bin, but keeping the money clip and currency.

He took his time leisurely driving back to the Esperanza enclave, all the while wondering what had prompted him to bid farewell to his detested fellow candidate in French.

* * *

"Urgent call, *Herr Direktor*. Channel six."

In the limousine's rear seat, *Sicherheitsdienst* Colonel Müller punched up the channel on his satellite phone. Without preamble, he said, "Do you have him in custody?"

"Sir, the suspect's 'copter was intercepted departing the Rocky Mountain Park vicinity. The pilot ignored radioed warnings. Despite our efforts to force the machine down, his 'copter turned toward —"

"Don't make me ask again," interrupted Müller. "Where is he being held?"

"*Herr Direktor*, we have him in custody, but only in a manner of speaking. The aerial pursuit ended when the suspect's helicopter flew straight into the face of Mount Evans. An air

ambulance hovered, dropped paramedics at the site. Recovering the remains is underway, yet making a positive identification will be, er . . . may be difficult in view of —”

“*Danke*. Carry on.” Müller switched off, sat back in the seat and swore a vile oath.

“He was the ringleader,” remarked one of the other officers. “He had to be.”

“*Ja, ja*. I’m sure we shall learn it is so. It could hardly be anyone except Omsley.” Müller swore again. “Fortunately for him, the pompous dean of Goebbels’ history department apparently was piloting the downed ‘copter himself. He took the easy way out, but I daresay his birdwatching accomplice won’t be allowed to tread that safe path. Mertz, where the hell are the ‘copters? By now they should be overhead.”

“Any moment now I should think, sir.”

Müller reached forward and chucked the driver’s shoulder. “Step it up!”

The electric limousine surged faster as it approached Estes Park Village, then had to slow again to negotiate a curve in the road. Tires screeching, a pair of unmarked black vans swept around the sharp curve close behind the limo.

* * *

Hunkered in gloom at the mouth of an alley, Silverthorne was safely shielded from a nearby streetlight by the building’s high wall. He watched the limousine flash past followed closely by a pair of silent electric vans. The headlights of all three vehicles winked out as they slowed, turned sharply uphill and began negotiating the switchbacks leading up to his chalet.

Bernard had been wrong to think Müller might be too fainthearted to order the arrest of a prominent suspect like he himself without Kästner’s approval. *Ausland Sicherheitsdienst* was by reputation not a fainthearted organization, nor would a shrewd professional like Müller who lacked no whit of self-esteem stand by and wait for authorization to arrest someone he *knew* was guilty. It was standard *SD* practice to collar and viciously interrogate anyone who fell under even a mild form of suspicion regarding treasonable activity, no matter how well-connected or favored, and much later, if ever, worry about potential repercussions.

He anxiously shot the cuff of his tunic and checked the phosphorescent dial of his antique analog wristwatch. Dismayed to learn only minutes had passed since he’d last checked, he fretted about being trapped in a time bind. The *SD* vehicles would reach the chalet shortly, and thirty-odd minutes still remained until five o’clock, making it a bit early to safely approach the bakery.

Sometime in the wee hours, with every light inside and outside the chalet extinguished, he and Emily had crouched in near-total darkness until feeble scratchings announced someone at the entry. Holding his wife in a final tender embrace, he had breathed a silent prayer that the underground railroad long ago set up by Omsley was intact and functioning, and kissed Emily goodbye. Wondering if he would ever see her again, he’d hustled her and three pieces of luggage into an unlighted electric minivan, giving her into the care of a dim figure without a single word being exchanged. With deep misgivings, he had watched in starlight as the blacked-out vehicle disappeared downhill.

At 03:50, clad in a navy blue business tunic, a contrasting dove-gray jacket, dark slacks and Wellington boots, he had begun to panic over staying in the chalet a second longer than necessary. Preparing to leave on foot, the notion struck him to drag a red herring across the path of inevitable pursuit. He had switched on a table lamp in the family room, and on second thought also the banker’s lamp on the desk in his study, where he’d left a mug of coffee, purposely

spilling a few drops to indicate a hasty departure. Scattering a few manuscript pages haphazardly, he'd snatched up his briefcase and bolted from the chalet by way of the terrace, leaving the French doors ajar to hopefully invite pursuit in the wrong direction.

The distant thrash of rotary wings snapped his attention back to the present. Flying in a vee, a triad of large government jetcopters were coming in fast from the South, making him glad he had abandoned his own two-place commute 'copter on the chalet roofpark to prevent any other aircraft from landing.

The mountainside above him burst into actinic brilliance. Orbiting like rotary-winged vultures, the helicopters illuminated what he hoped that bastard Müller would believe to be the logical search area. Deciding it best to ignore clock time, he left the alley cautiously, edging around the corner of the building after peeking in both directions along the side street. Briefcase in hand, he sauntered unhurriedly toward the bake shop, to a casual observer an early riser off on a normal business day, and turned right at the first intersection. Halfway down the block, the Carlson's sign and storefront windows were dark. Pausing on the sidewalk, he made a careful, item by item survey of what could be seen along the darkened street, then slowly walked up the driveway leading to the rear parking lot.

"Here!"

Halting, startled by the whisper from shadowed foundations shrubbery on the far side of the driveway, James saw an indistinct shape of deeper black step out, loom indistinctly in the predawn darkness. The shadow uttered a difficult to hear, "This way."

Feeling his arm taken loosely, Silverthorne was guided along the driveway and around to the rear of the building, where the overhead floodlights were dark. Silhouetted against the sky glow of distant street lights, four electric delivery vans were backed up to the rear loading dock.

"Didn't know you were one of us, Sven," whispered James.

"Weren't supposed to," was the proprietor's almost inaudible response. "Every downhill road has to be covered by now. Get in the van, Professor, down on the floor between the racks. My driver delivers every morning at Phantom Valley Ranch. He'll drop you off."

"Don't want to go *into* the park, Sven. I'm heading for the airport, not the —"

"Shh-h-h, don't argue," whispered Carlsen. "Early whirlybird picks up Mrs. Kilpatrick's guests, drops off a few downtown, and flies the rest on to the airport. Eileen Kilpatrick's an old 'n dear friend. I went up there, spoke to her right after Omsley cued me. A half-dozen of her guests are due to ride the early bird today. Make up some story, then mix in with 'em. It's your best bet. For all I know, maybe the only one you've got."

Painfully aware his options ranged from slim to none, James whispered, "Can't thank you enough, Sven. You're taking one helluva risk."

"Our prayers go with you, Professor. Get in now! First light's coming soon."

The van's rear doors were wrenched open. James clambered inside, crammed himself prone in the narrow aisle between racks filled with fragrant bread and pastry.

Seconds later, floodlights drenched the loading dock in actinic brilliance.

* * *

"The most critical mistake you can possibly make," asserted Dr. Lebe, "would be to forget the fail-safe provision. To open the carryall's aluminum case, this off-color rivet on the lower corner also acts as a key." Touching a forefinger to the rivet in question, he said, "Fail to

apply voltage to this rivet before undoing the latches and lifting the lid, and a small charge will instantly turn to ashes the flash-paper, and incinerate the bundled currency. Should that happen, your capsulized account of the war, the scenario of prescribed military and civil corrections and redirections, and the funds needed to sustain you will be gone — a monstrous error. The vital necessity to rigorously follow the opening procedure cannot be overstressed. Make that mistake, and the precious documents will be gone. *Verstehst Du?*”

Lustmann detested being talked-down to. He said irritably, “What type of voltage? Direct current, or . . .?”

“No matter,” replied the physicist. “Minimal amperage will open redundant fail-safe switches, disarm the igniter, and automatically rearm when the lid is closed. Easiest, no doubt, will be to touch the anode with stripped wires from, oh, a table lamp, whatever is handiest. But never fail to remember, Herr Lustmann, that *only* after applying voltage to this rivet can the carryall be safely opened.”

Lustmann’s affirmative nod was slow in coming

“No one could forget something so important,” scoffed Colonel Stoltz, wondering if he meant it. I should also remind you of something equally important, Lustmann. When ready to open the carryall, it will be imperative for you to be certain you’ll not be disturbed. Isolate yourself before delving into the account of the war, removing funds, or whatever. Should anyone from the revisited era glimpse the contents, it could mean the end of —”

“*Ja, ja!* I’m really not all that dull, Manfred.” Eager to be off, but despite the urgency in a mild funk over the prospect of diving into the unknown, Lustmann changed the subject by complaining about his lack of experience as a parachutist.

“There is a first time for everything,” Lebe told him dismissively.

Lustmann sniffed, displeased by the physicist’s cavalier response. “What I still do not fully understand,” he objected, “is the necessity to jump at such a high altitude.”

“Did I not explain the necessity of a safety margin?”

“That’s what puzzles me. Drifting down from on high increases the risk of exposure if someone on the ground happens to —”

“*Ach*, you must *think* before you speak!” Dr. Lebe smacked his lips, further irritating Lustmann. “I’ve told you more than once why it will be necessary to open your parachute at a minimum of one thousand meters above the terrain. There are low hills in Mecklenburg, you see, although none so lofty as a kilometer.”

“What,” inquired Lustmann, “would be so awful about coming down on a low hill?”

“The danger,” declared Lebe much too stridently, “is not a question of landing *on* a hill, but retrotemporal emergence *within* a hill.”

“Within . . . ? Ridiculous!”

“There I shall pray that you will bend a bit and permit me to *differ*,” Lebe practically shouted, his above-it-all-manner coming to the fore. “Can you conceive what might occur if the organic molecules of your body, plus the inanimate materials you carry with you, simultaneously attempted occupy the physical structure of a *hill*? In truth, I’m unable to hazard a *guess* about what might take place, but I would *not* wish to be close enough to find out.”

Lustmann cast a suspicious glance at Colonel Stoltz. “All right, all right!” he said impatiently. “A minimum altitude of one thousand *verdammt* meters it shall be, Professor. You also mentioned latitude as the second essential factor.”

Lebe wagged his head in vexation. “My dear fellow, must I explain everything a dozen times? Berlin circa nineteen thirty-nine, as you may recall, is a large metropolis situated at fifty-two minutes, thirty degrees north, while your immediate destination, Calgary, lies at fifty-one degrees, one minute north. After overnighting in Canada, you and Manfred will be flown north to a latitude corresponding to the lowland latitude in Mecklenburg northwest of Berlin. The bush pilot, a resourceful former *Luftwaffe* courier shot down twice behind enemy lines in Russia, received the lat and lon coordinates in a coded transmission. I used excruciating care calculating, recalculating and triple-checking the precise instant of retrotemporal transposition in relation to two-plus decades of earthspin, and then went back and rechecked all my figures again.

“Leave the aircraft in flight at an altitude of one kilometer or more,” pursued Lebe, “and key my device at high noon, September first. Follow that script to letter, and I guarantee you’ll emerge in midair above the Mecklenburg countryside on Friday, the first day of September in calendar year nineteen thirty-nine of the Common Era. I *guarantee* it, sir! The only problem you may encounter will be for some farmer, pedestrian, whoever to glimpse your descending parachute. Should that happen, it will be up to you to invent a plausible explanation.”

“What if I leave the aircraft and strong winds cause the parachute to drift a good distance and I end up into the Baltic instead of —?”

“*Ach*, that you can forget!” said Lebe. “You would however be wise use any and all means not to land in any of Mecklenburg’s streams, rivers, lakes or bogs. I targeted the area between Pritzwalk and Rheinsburg: only a small river, the Dosse, flows through the region.”

“Erich, we really should board now,” suggested the colonel. “The refueling stops add hours to the long flight to Canada, and you should get all the rest you can in the air. Sleep will come easier if you take it for granted everything is in order.”

“*Alles ist in der Ordnung*,” promised Lebe, anxious to see them on their way.

Stoltz turned around and slowly scanned the nearer and farther reaches of Sauce Viejo Airport. He solemnly shook the physicist’s hand. “*Wiedersehen*, Alfred. I should be back in a week, if not sooner. Until then . . .” He followed Lustmann across the tarmac and up the rear loading ramp of a far-from-new chartered Martin 202 airliner.

Lebe called, “*Glückauf!*” Still harboring a latent mistrust of the replacement mission candidate, the elderly physicist was rife with misgivings. Standing behind the chain-link fence, he watched the passenger ramp retract upward into the aircraft’s belly. A propeller began slowly turning, and the number one engine belched exhaust, roared to life. The other engine started, doubling the roar. An attendant in coveralls reached up, pulled down and unplugged the cable from a receptacle above him on the aircraft’s ventral fuselage. He closed and secured the access panel, then backed out beneath the wing, wheeling away the battery cart supplying auxiliary cranking power to start the engines.

The aircraft wheeled on the ramp in a slow semicircle, the propeller wash blowing Dr. Lebe’s sparse gray hair in disarray. Gripping the chain-link fence, his knuckles white, he chided himself for succumbing to fatalistic misgivings, and offered a silent prayer for the mission’s success, then chided himself again for lapsing from his own firm, self-imposed rule to never let

emotion cause the slightest deviation from the spirit of scientific pragmatism in which he'd long ago immured himself.

Nevertheless, the unsought prayer formed again in his mind in a distant echo of his Catholic upbringing, and he crossed himself.

* * *

It's too easy, thought James, his imagination piqued by the potential disasters lurking in every corner of his mind. Scrunched awkwardly between the racks of bakery goods, he waited for the silent electric van to turn and back up to the delivery dock at Phantom Valley Ranch. The driver de-energized the vehicle and got out whistling a tuneless melody in a less than convincing pretense of going about business as usual. Opened the van's rear doors, he purposely left them aligned with the vehicle's sides to screen the interior as much as was practical.

Silverthorne had never before seen the woman in late middle-age who emerged from the building and began needling the driver with criticisms about items of the previous day's delivery being moderately stale. Her salty comments continued unabated as she motioned for James to clamber out of the van, then all but shoved him bodily into the building. Opening the door to what was apparently a storeroom lined with shelves holding china, utensils and other kitchen bric-a-brac, she whispered, "Stay put until I come collect you."

Letting go the death grip on his attaché case, James flex his fingers and eased down on an unopened fifty-six-dram metal container. Too nervous to sit quietly, he got up again, brushed off dust from the delivery van clinging to his jacket and trousers and shifted his weight, hoping for the best, fearing the worst, and waited through an eternity lasting all of six or seven minutes.

Looking harried, the woman he assumed to be Mrs. Kilpatrick eased open the door and summoned him with a jerky gesture. "Early 'copter's due any minute now," she whispered. "I'm leery of two guests waiting for pickup — German businessmen traveling together, or so they say. Sven wanted you to mingle with them anonymously, but I didn't care for that notion. I'm going to introduce you as a visiting family friend. What name is on your papers?"

"Geist, Wilhelm Geist — 'Willi,' a *Raumhansa* operations executive."

Mrs. Kilpatrick took his arm with maternal familiarity. All smiles, she chattered amiably leading him down a long hallway, uttered a little laugh as if responding to an unspoken comment, and ushered him into the rustic Phantom Valley Ranch lobby. Two women and four male guests reclined in lounges beneath the rough-hewn ceiling beams. At first glance, his prospective fellow travelers appeared to be as Mrs Kilpatrick had advertised: strangers thrown together by chance. Casual introductions were made all around.

"S'tut sehr gleich, Herr Geist." One of the "businessmen" accompanied his polite response by displaying more than casual interest in the "Heidelberg" scar marring Silverthorne's cheek. "Flying with us this morning, sir?"

James smiled. "I wish it were so. I'm here to participate in a teleconference chaired by *Lufthansa*.

"Ah, so you are with *Lufthansa*?"

"No, actually, the North American Provinces Division of *Raumhansa*."

Mrs. Kilpatrick intervened by reprising her sunny smile. "Willi and my nephew, Dolph, grew up together. I look forward to his surprise visits when business brings him to Denver."

The “businessman” performed a second candid appraisal of James. “So you and this kind lady’s nephew were schoolmates? Do you mind me asking where that might be?”

“Stuttgart, sir. Adolphus and I were Gymnasium classmates.”

The other nodded and appeared to lose interest.

The ride to the rooftop heliport of a Denver highrise proved uneventful, but flying on to Greater Denver *Flughafen* forced James to engage in a meaningless conversation with his seatmate, one of Mrs. Kilpatrick’s guests. Adroitly fielding queries about himself, he gently corrected the lady’s misconception that he was with *Lufthansa*, and told of the bedeviling trials and tribulations afflicting him as a manager at *Raumhansa*, the state-subsidized cartel’s spacecraft operations affiliate. Speaking rapidly to forestall further questions, he explained his workaday familiarity with subjects and disciplines about which he knew absolutely nothing.

His first glimpse of a tall, saturnine individual waiting at the helipad to meet the jetcopter raised Silverthorne’s hackles. Clad in a calf-length leather coat, an all but official Gestapo uniform, the greeter boldly made eye contact with each deplaning passenger. “Before sending you ladies and gentlemen on your way, may I have a look at your travel papers, *bitte*?”

Heart racing, in his most authoritarian manner James said, “Your pardon, sir. I won’t be leaving Denver until later in the day.”

“So . . . ?” Inspecting James more closely, the greeter reacted to his air of importance, the expensive looking attaché case he carried. Eyes narrowing at sight of the status symbol marring his left cheek, he asked politely, “May I see your credentials, sir?”

Being “sirred” encouraged James to flip open his calfskin wallet, display the beautifully forged card that bore a rainbow *Raumhansa* hologram identifying him as Wilhelm Karl Geist, North American Operations Manager of the cartel’s space division.

“*Danke*, Herr Geist.” A brisk head bob. “In the event someone from our office might wish to contact you, may I inquire where you will be staying?”

“I won’t be here overnight. This evening I’ll be flying to the Pacific Space Terminal.”

“*Ah, Raketenflugplatz . . .*”

His florid features crowned with a flowing mane of silvery hair, a nattily attired older gentleman approached the group uninvited. “There you are, Willi. Good to see you. Why are you dawdling here? I’ve been anxiously awaiting your arrival?”

“Herr Brughley,” guessed James.

The man in the leather greatcoat spoke up. “Excuse me, is this gentleman a personal acquaintance, sir?”

“Yes, that can be said.” The *Lufthansa* executive’s response amiable, but businesslike, in no way subservient. “Herr Geist is a business associate of long standing.” Brughley’s manner made it clear that no further explanation was necessary.

“You are prepared to vouch for the gentleman’s bona fides, sir?”

“Well, now, let me see.” Something of a showman, the executive pursed his lips as if pondering the question, and asked James if he had recently engaged in any criminal activities, earning a giggle from the gossip woman who had interrogated James in flight.

James forced a smile. “Not lately.”

“Good to hear. Come along. We’ve much to discuss, and only a few hours to cook up some answers.”

Voicing additional non-sequiturs, Brughley casually took his “associate’s” elbow and led him away. Each taking two quick steps, they and boarded the people-mover slideway and were sedately carried toward an office complex adjacent to the airport’s sprawling Terminal “D.” Despite the brisk morning air, James found himself perspiring. He and the executive were the sole occupants of the elevator compartment riding up to the fourth floor of the *Lufthansa* office building, where Herr Brughley’s empty chatter continued unabated.

Several *Lufthansa* employees cast incurious glances their way when James was ushered from the elevator compartment. No one else seemed to pay any attention as Brughley conducted his guest through the antechamber, where his executive assistant was talking on the phone, and into a large, well appointed corner office. Seating himself behind the desk, the executive motioned James to a chair, then put a finger to his lips and whispered an instruction for James to wait in his private washroom. In a normal voice, he said, “Care for coffee, Willi?”

“*Nein, bitte.* I’m fine, Herr Brughley.” Leaning across the other’s desk, James whispered, “How long till, uh . ?”

“Two hours,” was the whispered reply. “You’ll be taken down through the service area, boarded before the other passengers, and met at the arrival gate in Lahaina.”

Without another word, Herr Brughley rose behind the desk, offered James a brusque nod of reassurance, and left the inner office, closing the door behind him.

In the washroom, afflicted with more angst that he had experienced since childhood, James snapped over the lock, set down his briefcase, sagged down on the commode, and began a seemingly endless wait for whatever might happen next.

SIX On-orbit, DW-J 142; Northern Germany, 1939

Predawn darkness still shrouded Calgary when Colonel Stoltz and Lustmann emerged from the hotel and found the taxi Manfred had ordered the previous evening waiting at the curb. They endured the drive to the airport in stoic silence, Stoltz frozen-featured, entirely self-contained, Lustmann consumed with unspoken dread of what he knew was in store. Arriving just as dawn was beginning to break, they were greeted by the pilot with a sober nod. He conducted them to the hardstand in front of a Canadair hangar, where a fuel truck was servicing a high-wing Cessna monoplane.

Several hours into the flight, the Cessna dipped its port wing in a shallow bank and began lazily orbiting in wide arc. “Dead reckoning says we’re on target,” announced the taciturn pilot, pointing to the instrument panel as if to corroborate the declaration. “Fifty-two degrees, thirty-two minutes north, or thereabouts”

Thereabouts! Unnerved by the connotation of potential carelessness, not to mention the former *Luftwaffe* airman’s flippant attitude, Lustmann peered down apprehensively at the Canadian snowscape unreeling beneath them. The sight made him feel ten times more leery about what was about to take place than he’d imagined he could ever be. He was preparing to tell the pilot what he could do with his ridiculous “thereabouts” destination when Colonel Stoltz spoke up extra-loudly over the throttled-back buzz of the light plane’s engine.

“Less than three minutes till noon, Erich. Have you prepared yourself?”

In lieu of an answer, Lustmann squinted at the instrument panel. The altimeter needle wobbled between twelve and thirteen hundred meters, causing him to swallow with difficulty. He managed to utter a weak-voiced, "Yes . . . ready."

"*Ganz gut.* Now for one final time I want you to give me your full, undivided attention." Staring hard at Lustmann, Stoltz was the picture of sincerity incarnate. "Key Lebe's device the instant you fall free of the airplane, but never so much as *think* about touching the 'D'-ring. Pull the ripcord in the here and now, and you will instantly find yourself in yesteryear without a parachute, and plunge to your death. Are we clear on that?"

"*Jawohl. Ich weiss den.*" The message did absolutely nothing to reassure Lustmann. Offended by the colonel's gruff way of stating the obvious, he wondered why his mouth was so incredibly dry, why it was so difficult to speak. "Manfred, promise to . . . watch," he faltered. "Make certain I don't drift down and, uh . . . land there in the snow."

"Relax," counseled Stoltz. "Relax and breathe deeply. Take hold of yourself, steel yourself mentally but otherwise let yourself go limp as a dishrag. All of us have prayed so long and so hard for this moment to arrive that now it strikes me as unseemly for you to be at all squeamish about carrying out the sacred duty to which you've pledged your heart and soul. Alfred's final experiment proved conclusively, beyond a shred of doubt, that his ingenious device will perform *precisely* as specified, and I'm supremely confident that you *will* do your duty."

"I feel like . . ." said Lustmann haltingly. "I mean, I know how . . . Indebted I am for being chosen, and yet . . . Manfred, I'm much bigger than . . . a rabbit."

"Stop your nonsense! You said you were *prepared*. Stop mouthing insane foolishness! Take a firm grip on yourself, and get your thoughts in order!"

A bleak grimace was all Lustmann could muster in the way of a reply. He licked his lips. Despite the cold of northern Canada, a film of perspiration beaded his forehead beneath the pushed-up goggles. He was literally sweating through the final, stretched-out minutes that wore by with glacial velocity.

The Cessna droned on, continuing to orbiting lazily. Now and again the pilot turned expectantly and glanced back at his passengers, but said nothing.

"Time," announced the colonel. Rapping Lustmann's shoulder roughly, his frigid, penetrating stare persisted. The prospective if reluctant time traveler drew back instinctively.

"I know it was you," Stoltz declared coldly. "I had no choice but to play dumb when the detectives came to interview us about Mackall's murder, but all along I *knew* you were responsible. It was not a guess. I *knew*."

Lustmann was speechless.

"If you are one-tenth as eager," added the other in an accusative rasp, "to capture the prize we have handed into your care as I had hoped you would be, nay as I had *prayed* you would be, and wanted the opportunity badly enough to do murder, you most assuredly have the stomach and grit and perseverance needed to undertake the immensely important task you've been vetted to perform. Now it is time to get on with it, Lustmann, to perform the task that *must* be accomplished.

"Leave us now. Begone!"

The colonel's unanticipated indictment skittered around in Lustmann's mind like a hot coal, filling him with a desperate urge to get far away from Stoltz. He groped frantically to

unlatch his seat belt, tentatively cranked the Cessna's passenger door handle. Encumbered by the parachute chest pack and bulging rucksack seated on his shoulders, he pulled the goggles down, adjusted them over his eyes. Inserting his gloved right hand in the quilted, padded coat's slash pocket, he touched the stud of Dr. Lebe's "retrotemporal trigger." Straining with his free hand to push open the aircraft's door against the slipstream, he thrust his right boot outside; the rushing air tried to tear his leg away as he searched with the boot for the "step," a convenience used to board the Cessna, and deplane.

Clutching the door in a death grip, eyes tightly, his jaw clenched, Lustmann drew a deep breath and prepared to launch himself into the thin, cold air streaming past. He froze, paralyzed by the thought of actually diving out of an airplane in flight. One terrified glance at the white terrain passing more than a thousand meters below choked off any further action.

Former *Whermacht* Colonel Stoltz erased all vestiges of indecision by energetically applying the soles of both boots to the reluctant parachutist's backside. Lustmann screamed hoarsely as the violent shove overcame the door's resistance and he tumbled into space totally disoriented, too horrified by the inborn fear of falling to scream again.

The windstream tore his hand from the coat's slash pocket. He desperately tried to relocate the pocket by feel, but the hurricane rushing past made it impossible. He panicked, tried again, tried over and over without success. In desperation, he pressed his gloved hand firmly against his side, exerted pressure and slid it down into the coat's slash pocket. His gloved fingers contacted the stud, pressed it hard.

A vile, gut-wrenching sensation twisted his bowels, the uprushing snowfield vanished. Instantly falling inside a cloud, able to see nothing except mist streaming past, a second strong surge of panic overtook him. Fumbling for the chest pack's "D" ring, his gloved fingers closed around it. He gave a lusty tug; the chest pack came open and the chute unfurled, the canopy snapping open with a harsh jolt carried through the risers that made his testicles ache. Blind inside the dense mist fogging his goggles, he drifted downward until the parachute dropped clear of the low cloud ceiling, and there below, coming up slowly was . . .

Magic!

Releasing the chute's risers with one hand, he ripped the moisture-speckled goggles from his face, let them fall away. With something surpassing abject disbelief, he ogled the gray-green countryside he had never expected to see again. Gentle slopes covered here and there with brakes of low trees were off to the left, beyond a pattern of broad farmlands bisected by a road's string-straight incision. Directly ahead, near as best as he could tell, a low-lying area that had the look of a bog was coming up toward him. Farther off were what might be farm buildings, and in the near distance the silvery sheen of a stream, or river.

The gray, weepy overcast made it difficult to estimate in which direction the wind was carrying him in the parachute. The ground rose, looming closer. What from on high had appeared to be a swampy area transformed itself into a sump littered with large and small boulders that might consist of residue from the ice age flashed inanely in his consciousness. Tugging the chute's risers gently, he ineffectually tried to steer himself away from the boulder-strewn patch, and was unsuccessful.

His boots hit, splashed in puddled groundwater, buckling his legs. He instinctively tucked up and was dragged through the wetland by a brisk breeze that likened the billowing parachute to

a spinnaker sail pulling him through the mud between boulders, deeper into the low, rock-strewn pasture. He dug in his boots, yanked hard with both hands on the risers to spill air, and managed to collapse the parachute.

Then he himself collapsed, breathing stertorously in convulsive gasps and lay unmoving for a time, watching low clouds slowly scud past overhead. At last he clumsily clambered to his feet, unbuckled the harness and let the parachute blow away to become entangled in other boulders. More than once had Manfred advised him of how necessary it would be to bury the parachute. It would be a chore, but seem like the wisest course.

Searching the pasture for anything resembling a drier spot in which to scoop out a shallow pit, he was startled to hear someone call, "*Halloo! Was willst du hier?*"

A boy clad in a heavy, checkered coat of padded canvas twill, with the collar turned up against the cold breeze, had emerged from the nearby woodland. The shotgun draped over the youth's forearm was broken open for safety; his catch, a pair of waterbirds, was tied to his belt. "I watched you float down, sir. Who are you?"

"The most important gentleman you are liable to meet in your life, *Junge*. Come here and help me fold up the parachute."

The youthful birdhunter stayed where he was.

Although intended to be disarming, Lustmann's knowing smile proved ineffectual. He unbuckling the straps, shrugged out of the rucksack and set it on a nearby boulder. Gathering the risers, he pulled the buffeted nylon chute to his chest and compacted it into a muddy bundle. The boy watched, circumspectly keeping his distance.

"Do you realize," asked Lustmann, wondering if the question had so much as a shred of meaning, "today is Friday, September first?"

As if surprised by the question, the boy's nod was slow in coming.

Exhilarated by the response, Lustmann asked, "Been off hunting long?"

An uncertain squint preceded the boy's response. "Since not long after daybreak."

"So you haven't heard the news on the radio."

"The, radio . . . ? *Nein, Ich habe nicht der Radio gehört.*"

"Then what I'm about to say will brighten you day. Before dawn, *Der Führer* sent dozens of *Wehrmacht* divisions smashing into Poland. I just came back from flying over the front taking photos near the border town of Gleiwitz. On our return flight, we experienced engine trouble and I had to bail out."

"Germany is . . . at war, sir?" The youth sounded less incredulous than Lustmann had anticipated.

"Not yet the real war," said Lustmann, "but that will come soon enough. Count on it! The cautious French and British will assuredly declare war on the *Reich*, but at present they are too spineless to fire anything at us except bad words. What people will soon call the 'Twilight War' has only just begun, *Junge*. You may take that as gospel."

Mystified by the new arrival's strange use of unfamiliar terms, the youngster shifted the shotgun uncertainly from one elbow to the other.

Lustmann smiled and approached the teenager. "Don't tell me you fail to recognize a *Schutzstaffeln Offizier* when you see one."

The boy's eyes widened. "You are of the *SS*, *mein Herr?*"

“Indeed.” His manner crisp, Lustmann said, “Enough chitchat. You will now direct me to the nearest telephone, *bitte*.”

The young birdhunter was happy to oblige.

* * *

Frightened by the dangerous duty she had reluctantly agreed to perform, the *Raumhansa* roving safety inspector made no attempt to hide her concern. Having accosted Silverthorne in the boarding concourse not long after the supersonic jetliner touched down on the big island of Hawaii, she’d whisked him into to a service building, had him discard his travel garments and don a rumpled tan jumpsuit replete with the stenciled *Raumhansa* logo, and a pair of the soft, Velcro-shod boots worn under microgravity. After shaving his pencil mustache in a not exceptionally clean washroom, he had peeled the faux Heidelberg scar from his cheek, then scrubbed himself and vigorously towed off, ridding himself of excess nervous energy.

“You’re Rosty Feuerbach’s place,” confided the woman nervously. “He’s, uh . . . To be polite, Rosty’s the ‘pet’ of *Hanseatic’s* chief steward, Herr Dries, who’ll be unhappy to hear his . . . friend’s taken ill.”

“How was that arranged?”

Extremely antsy while waiting with James to board a large jetcopter, the inspector performed a jerky head toss. “A taste of doctored coffee. He’ll soon be fine.” A woman of few words, she leaned toward him when the aircraft reached a point several kilometers offshore, and pointed to what lay ahead beyond the forward transpex bubble. “*Raketenflugplatz* is just ahead.”

A floating metal rectangle gradually emerged from a nacreous haze softening the seagirt horizon. Rimmed with low-lying structures, the space terminal featured a half-dozen launch pads, a pair supporting stubby earth-to-orbit shuttlecraft. The sight gave James pause. He had never ventured into space, nor had any inclination to do so. “How long until departure?”

“*Hanseatic*,” she said, nervousness affecting her diction, “lifts-off in ninety minutes.”

The jetcopter descended toward a bull’s eye helipad on the terminal’s perimeter. Even on familiar turf, the woman’s feeble attempt to mask her agitation while escorting him to the launch pad infected James. Deathly afraid of what might go wrong, the safety inspector led James to the service entrance, where they boarded the shuttle through an open hatchway, and had to dodge around the head of a conveyor belt carrying a spotty procession of medium-sized containers down a passageway leading to the shuttle’s cargo bay.

Upon being introduced to the chief steward, Silverthorne decided his benefactress had correctly gauged the reaction of Herr Dries to news of his underling’s incapacitation. Visibly upset over the substitution, Dries regarded “Junior Purser Braun” with narrow-eyed suspicion, and asked the woman in a droll tone where Rosty was hiding.

“He’s in the Lahaina infirmary,” she told him. “Nothing serious, an upset stomach.”

“Hmm-mm . . .” The chief steward frowned. “And, you — Braun, is it? From the look of you, an American, I doubt if you’ve had significant shipboard experience.”

“Very little, sir.”

“Wonderful, wonderful!” Herr Dries puffed his cheeks unhappily. “Very well, after liftoff we’ll find something for you to do. Stay out of the way until I tell you to strap-in.”

“*Jawohl, Herr Dries.*”

* * *

Berlin!

It was like being reborn, and Lustmann's elation knew no bounds. Overwhelmed by the multitude of sights and sounds crowding into his consciousness like sacred revelations, he exulted in strolling *Ku'dammstrasse*, delighted at sight of red and black swastika banners rippling farther down the thoroughfare, reveling in the sidewalks peopled by Berliners going about their daily lives. A sense of purpose prevailed everywhere, elevated in his case by a sprinkling of *Erdgrau* military uniforms mixed in with the civilian pedestrians.

The capital looked marvelous, no *better* than marvelous! The farther he strolled, the greater and stronger grew the blissful, nostalgic euphoria welling up inside him. Unbelievably, returned by magic to a lost world he had considered dead and buried, if by no means forgotten, struck him as . . . There simply were no adjectives competent to describe his feelings. He had always thought of himself as an unsentimental, pragmatic individual, but this was . . . well, like nothing he had ever known, awake or dreaming. It was a surreal, a fantastic homecoming after a traumatic extended absence, and therefore affected him much more deeply than he would have believed possible. Berlin made him feel young again, rejuvenated, and brought on a renewal of his once youthful exuberance. He had triumphantly returned to the real-world, to the *actual* living, breathing Berlin of his youth and young manhood.

Revitalized in body, mind and spirit, supremely excited to be alive with all his senses intact and apparently extended, he strolled onward, walking on air, inhaling the heady life and energy of Berlin all around him, tasting it like a draft of heady wine, rolling it around on the palate of his consciousness. It was as if he'd been instantly transported to a utopian plane of existence, and in a sense that was *precisely* what had taken place. He relished beyond measure the sheer pleasure of breathing and feeling alive in the once-lost, miraculously revived summer of nineteen thirty-nine. Here he was, mentally pinching himself for reassurance, roaming the streets in the resuscitated, rhythmically beating heart of what in retrospect had been the burned and bombed-out skeleton of a great city the Russian, American, French and British swine had walked away from, leaving behind a ruin. His successful return to the venue he'd known and loved went far beyond fantasy, and ventured into the realm of the sublime. It no longer mattered whether *Herr Doktor* Alfred Lebe was a certifiable head case living twenty-one years in what he automatically thought of as the redundant future, or the most accomplished scientific genius in human history. The arthritic old bastard had assumed monumental stature in *his* eyes, had in fact become his personal patron saint, and the Fatherland's potential beloved savior.

While cleaning the mud from his clothing and boots as best he could at the Mecklenburg farm, he'd halfheartedly fended off the fawning attentions of the youthful birdhunter's stodgy parents, which of course was to be expected; after all, elite *Schutzstaffeln* officers did not fall from the sky into their midst every day of the week. His fanciful word pictures of screaming *Stuka* dive bombers wreaking havoc, or *Panzerjäger* formations rolling into Poland ahead of surging tides of mechanized infantry, had at first had been received with wide-eyed, patriotic enthusiasm. However, after the lad's parents had begun to imagine what the war might bring down upon them, he'd detected overtones of apprehension about the conflict, coming as it had hard on the sparse, two-decade-old heels of the Great War to end War and its carnage.

Frustrated and impatient to be on his way, but inhibited by the lack of a ready means to disable the fail-safe igniter, open the carryall in his rucksack and retrieve a wad of currency, he

had solved the quandary, while mystified his hosts, by requesting a short piece of wire and a moment of privacy. Handed a length of baling wire snipped by the young birdhunter from a roll in the barn, he had locked himself in the bathroom, unscrewed a light bulb, inserted one end of glove-insulated wire into the socket, and touched the other end to the off-color rivet, producing a small yet satisfactory spark. With no small amount of trepidation, he'd unlatched the carryall, apprehensively inched up the lid and loosed a heartfelt sigh of relief. Stacks of banknotes bound with paper straps, and the vital half-ream of irreplaceable flash paper had arrived from the future intact and undamaged.

Rejoicing over a prescient vision of impending mission success, he had fingered the condensed, encyclopedic flash paper account of the "real" war, complemented by a priceless, thinner corollary document containing comprehensive advice and counsel on various ways and means of correcting or redirecting specific, crucial wartime military and political events, happenings, policies, encounters and above all else decisions. Taken together, the separate stacks of flash paper went far beyond the merely precious, especially the "blueprint" prescribing definitive courses of corrective action, and portended a glorious future for the greater Germany to come, a Germany that would make Hitler's *Tausend-jährig Reich* goal a reality.

Magnanimously handing over a large denomination banknote, he had graciously overcome the objections of the farmer and his wife by casually remarking that the SS never failed to pay its debts, and had graciously accepted the farmer's offer to drive him to the town of Ganzlin at the southern end of *Plauer See*, where he'd profusely thanked his benefactor, purchased a ticket and smoked impatiently on the station platform waiting for the train.

An overpowering sense of unreality had gripped him — literally not figuratively taking his breath away — upon stepping down from the railcar in Berlin's *Zoologischer Garten* station. Hatless, the rucksack strapped on his back, he'd strolled *Ku'dammstrasse* in an ecstatic daze, straying from the thoroughfare several times to explore the surrounding streets, and at one point halting in his tracks, transfixed with wonder at the sight only he on the sidewalk considered starkly unbelievable. There across the way, *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedachtniskirche* reared resplendent and intact, not the bombed-out shell of a church he vividly recalled from a brief visit to the capital during the dark days toward the fated, well-remembered war's miserable end.

Continuing his stroll, he resisted an impulse to enter the first haberdashery he came upon and purchase a few items of respectable apparel. He also put aside a desire to phone and reserve a hotel suite, and then got directly to the task at hand. Rebuking himself for being overly eager, he ambled onward block after block toward *Einemstrasse*, absorbing the pace and vitality going on all around him in wartime Berlin.

After a time, he gave thought to hailing a taxi and finding a place to spend the night, but quickly dismissed the notion and strolled onward. The chance to begin his labors would come soon enough. Taking in the reborn milieu of Berlin was far too delicious for someone in his frame of mind to abandon on impulse, or for that matter any other reason.

* * *

"Braun, you slow-witted sluggard! I want that manifest reconciled before we dock."

Es wird, Herr Dries getan." At the chief steward's hoarse command, the object of his insistence seized the aft-going freefall safety line per regulations, tugged himself along the companionway. The frightened, close-mouthed safety inspector had not seen fit to explain that

Herr Dries was not privy to the revolutionary conspiracy, just a loudmouthed bully whose natural bent was to torment underlings. He'd kept "Junior Purser Braun" hopping ever since liftoff.

Disliking the strangeness and uncertainty of microgravity almost as much as he despised the close confines and faint, unappetizing odor of the cargo bay, James knew *Hanseatic* would soon maneuver to match velocity and vector with *Walküre*'s orbiting island in the sky. Hoping he'd be able to hear the acceleration warning floating about in the shuttle's bowels, he attached his safety tether's snap-link to a stanchion, and used a hand-held recorder to begin checking-off alphanumerically coded container labels against the electronic manifest, all the while thinking of Emily. There had been no safe way to tell her the truth. She had gamely pretended to believe his vaporous tale of serious, unspecified trouble in the wind, and feigned acceptance of the need for a temporary separation. He once again prayed that no harm would come to her.

The distant honking of a klaxon warned him hurry and finish logging cargo. Minutes later, a mild surge of weight accompanied the low, conducted rumble of the *Hanseatic*'s thrusters, then a series of milder surges, and finally a barely distinguishable jar. A sighing chuff of air, a subtle pressure pop in his ears announced docking. He untethered, busied himself electronically recording freight manifest entries.

Preparing to leave the cargo bay minutes later, the grate of an opening hatch cued him. Either stevedores were preparing to offload *Hanseatic*, or the mean-spirited chief steward had sneaked into the cargo bay to make yet more difficult for his new whipping boy, "Braun."

"Jamie!"

Silverthorne whipped himself around. "Henderson!"

"Shh-h-h, softly, softly." The redhead had grown a wispy auburn beard. Clutching a black medical valise, he closed the hatch behind him. "Scheme's turned rancid. We're in a foot race."

"To . . . get me off?"

"Uh-huh." Henderson's grimace was fleet, wolfish. "No more chit-chat. It's going to be nip and tuck; they must've backtracked you from Estes Village to the airport. We're still in the ball game . . . barely."

James cast an anxious glance at the closed hatch. "Listen, the steward's liable to —"

"Forget him," denied Henderson. "He got real sleepy, won't bother anyone for hours. Now listen good! It's bottom of the ninth, two outs and only one baserunner — you — so laying down a sacrifice bunt won't cut it. Our only shot's a bases-loaded home run."

Speaking hurriedly, Henderson outlined the tale James would have to tell anyone in authority who tried to stop a credentialed *Hanseatic* crewman from entering *Walküre*. "Stamp this in your memory, Jamie: thorium's in convenience locker 429, third tier on the left as you go into the transient passenger lounge." Opening the medical valise, he handed over a plastic keycard. "Hot stuff's in a shielded, heavy-as-hell lunchbox. Cart it down to no-weight in the nadir berthing stack; we're docked in a zenith berth here. Ask for a maintenance tech named Chris Faigele, a regular known to everyone down there. Tell him a dirty joke so he'll know you're not a ringer. He'll prime the Lebe device, fit you out with the special pressure-suit, thruster bottle, and other gear. He'll show you which airlock to use, how and when to do your getaway. Bernard's last e-mail said your false molar'd been implanted."

James nodded. "Dental tech installed."

“Okay, here’s your return ticket.” The redhead rummaged in the black bag, and passed over a tiny, packaged capsule. “Insert it ASAP soon’s you arrive; it’s pre-tuned to the calendar date. The comeback drill’s identical to your other jaunts. Twist the phony tooth while pressing down hard, and your accumulated temporal potential will snap you back into the Carlsbad reception coordinates like an unleashed rubber band.” Henderson felt for something deeper in the valise. There was a barely audible click, and his stern expression gave way to a rueful grimace.

“Henny, no!” James cringed at sight of the timer, the wrapped gelignite bars.

“Afraid that’s how she falls out, Jamie. I’ll try to buy you ten, fifteen minutes — more if I can figure out how. You’ll need a major distraction to keep the goons guessing, and maybe it’ll make ‘em hold off a tad before they start scouring the station running you to ground. Don’t fret about me; got an arm-long list of scores to settle.

“One last word,” concluded Henderson, “and I have to scat. You’re no experienced spacehand, but the magnitude and purpose of you’re tasked to do will make you pretend you are. Suited-up in vacuum, lower the reticle in the pressure-suit’s headpiece — Faigele’ll show you how — and use it like a horizon sensor to align your attitude at a right angle to the planet’s limb. Luckily, their hoity-toity *Walküre* tin can is in a fairly low orbit. Transfer injection from roughly the hundred-and-fifty-mile-perigee will phase you with earthspin, nineteen forty, or as close as a number crunching chum and I could calculate. From what I monitored when *Hanseatic* was in ascent boost, you’ll have a short wait till Europe rolls over the horizon.

“When the British Isles show up on the distant limb — pray for no dense cloud cover — turn your backside to the line-of-flight, but make sure to stay vertical relative to the substellar point on the ground directly beneath your boots, and chin the red lever. If there is cloud cover, you’ll have to interpolate the substellar point from whatever terrain you can spot. Clear so far?”

Growing more nervous at every word spoken, James nodded mutely.

Henderson’s grunt of approval was marginally reassuring. “The retro-firing sequence,” he warned, “will kick hell out of you. You won’t mass much, but at *Walküre*’s orbital velocity beaucoup kinetic energy has to get bled away. The yellow chin lever’s backup in case the red switch bilges, but it won’t, so don’t sweat it. Then comes the re-entry heat wave; don’t let it scare you. An aneroid switch will automatically trigger retrotemporal transposition at about six clicks altitude. It’ll take you right out of the pressure-suit, hopefully over Germany, Austria, Hungary or Poland. The ocean’s no problem, only a number of lakes, rivers and streams you’ll *have* to stay clear of. And f’Chrissake steer the chute away from the mountains! Come down over the Alps, Dolomites, or whatever range, and you’ll need to do some fancy riser work to change direction. Pop the chute right after transposition, and try to get your bearings terrain-wise while still high up. Got all that?”

“I . . . think so.”

“Terrific, Jamie! Shake my mitt and wait a while before beating it out the cargo hatch. We’re betting the whole damn farm on you. Let us down, and I’ll come back to haunt you.” He squeezed Silverthorne’s hand, turned and tugged himself along the freefall safety line.

* * *

Wearing only briefs, an undershirt, calf-length stockings and suspenders, Erich Lustmann stood on a carpeted, elevated pallet in the fitting room and condescended to let a haberdashery clerk take tape measurements and call out figures to another.

Fussing inconspicuously behind the busy employees, the chief tailor regarded the tall, distinguished looking customer with frank curiosity. “Your pardon, Herr Klasse. If I recall correctly you mentioned a need for underclothing, as well.”

From his high stance on the pallet, “Herr Klasse” literally looked down his nose at the tailor. “Um-m-m, a half-dozen undershirts and briefs will suffice for the present. I would also like several white linen dress shirts. My luggage, you see, was dispatched by the railroad fools to a destination I did not have in mind.”

The tailor clucked in sympathy. “Most regrettable, sir.”

“I would be the last to argue,” said Lustmann, disgust written large in his aristocratic, clean-shaven features. “Without your prompt assistance,” he added, “I would have to traipse about in the travel garments I wore stepping into your excellent establishment.”

“Always a pleasure to be of service, sir. Please allow me to verify your wishes if you will.” The tailor consulted a note pad. “You expressed a desire for . . . ?”

“A pair of woolen worsted suits,” supplied Lustmann, “tailored precisely like the sample I was shown — one dark brown, the other dark gray. I should also like two summer-weight linen suits, one tan, and a second light blue, tailored per the same sample.”

“*Ja, ja*, It shall be as you say, Herr Klasse.” The tailor consulted a calendar. “Will it be convenient to return for the fittings in, shall we say, six days?”

“That will not be necessary. I’ll be at the Adlon. Have everything sent there.”

“Your pardon,” objected the tailor, “but without proper fittings you run the risk of —”

“I realize you mean well,” interrupted Lustmann, “but please honor my request.”

The tailor, by no means ingenuous, had overseen custom uniform fittings for dozens of ranking military and government officers. Early in the current fitting session, when the debonaire gentleman was being measured for sleeve length, the tailor had noted the SS blood-type tattoo inside Lustmann’s left arm, not far below the armpit. “Perhaps,” he suggested diffidently, “we can also interest you in a uniform, Herr Klasse.”

A sharp look. “My current assignment,” Lustmann said curtly, “requires civilian attire.”

“Of course, Herr Klasse. Please do not be offended; I only thought to inquire. I must also say the briefs you are wearing are, uh . . . well, are most unusual. I don’t believe I have ever seen anything quite like them.”

A self-conscious downward glance made Lustmann wonder what the tailor would think if told his jockey shorts had been — that is, *would be* — purchased in far off Argentina two decades in the future. “My undergarments are made to special order,” he said, and abruptly changed the subject. “I have also been thinking about ordering a few ready-to-wear items. Nothing stylish or custom tailored, you understand. Perhaps a jacket and two pair of trousers to make myself presentable until the other garments are delivered.”

“We shall be delighted to accommodate all your wishes, sir.”

After the customer had dressed in his new off-the-shelf garments, the haberdashery’s elderly owner and proprietor took it upon himself to personally present the bill. “Only a deposit is necessary today, Herr Klasse. The balance will be considered due when you —”

“My whereabouts often change on short notice. It will be more convenient for me to settle now.” Riffing a wad of banknotes, Lustmann counted out the quoted sum.

Unaccustomed to accepting large denomination currency, the proprietor made an effort not to look embarrassed when he ordered a clerk to prepare a receipt for “cash.”

Making ready to leave, Lustmann asked if he might use the establishment’s telephone. With operator assistance, he placed a call to the Hotel Adlon and reserved one of the more expensive second-floor suites.

SEVEN On-orbit, DW-J 142; Berlin, Autumn 1939, C.E.

James realized his effort to make haste made him look amateurish. Wending his way aft along freefall safety lines like a clumsy spider on a strand, he snubbed his momentum, slowed to a halt at the passageway’s terminus and peeked around the corner. Locked in place on the freefall conveyor belt, lightweight, offloading cargo containers were disappearing one by one, taken “down” into the *Walküre* structure.

He jerked his head back at sight of a pair of watchers idly observing the offloading procedure on either side of the hatchway. Probably *Ausland Staatspolizei* goons, he thought, his mind racing. Henny had promised no more than fifteen-plus minutes of grace, but a slice of that had already evaporated while he’d waited for most passengers to disembark. Letting his breathing slow after the exertion, he rehearsed the coming encounter. How would Henderson’s proposed scenario play best? Sincerity, yes — *if* he had the moxie to pull it off, but a dead giveaway if his nervousness showed, or his tongue misfired while answering questions. The best bet might be to pretend willy-nilly scatterbrained agitation.

He rounded the corner, snubbed and gave one long-armed heave on the safety line in a poor imitation of a salted spacehand. Sailing headlong into the freefall rigging, he allowed the net to recover from the impetus of his plunge, and reached for a “lower” strand.

“What’s the rush?” asked one of the watchers.

“I’m a purser, sir. I would like to —”

“Your ID, *bitte*.”

A small, swastika-crowned *Sicherheitsdienst* medallion gleamed on the breast pocket of the man’s tailored jumpsuit. *Not one*, thought James, *but two SD pros, most likely posted to be on the lookout for a fugitive named Silverthorne*. He hooked an elbow through the rigging, tugged out his wallet.

His expression neutral, the *SD* agent appraised the forged ID, relayed the information to his partner in a monotone. “Braun, Heinrich G. *RH* employee 792054.”

The second agent scanned an electronic *Hanseatic* crew list, looked James over and asked, “Where were you born, Heinrich?”

“Düsseldorf, sir.”

“Why the big sweat to get inboard?”

James hesitated, pretending embarrassment. “I, uh . . . There’s this young lady, a passenger . . .” He glanced sheepishly from one *SD* man to the other. “You’ve never seen such a *Schatze*! In a quarter-hour, I have start prepping for the return flight, but I’m, uh . . . well dying to catch up with her, get her number.”

The agent who had first accosted James said, “You know crewmen aren’t supposed to chase passengers, Braun. Ah, well! A quarter-hour tryst seems hardly worth the —”

“Luther!” The other agent tapped his ear. “Condition Red, Zenith docks!”

“What is it?”

“Not sure. A now, now, now summons!” The *SD* agent poked James rudely. “Back aboard ship, you! Move! Enter the station during an emergency and we’ll find you later. Then you’ll very sorry, *versteh?*” The agents swarmed “down” the rigging.

Look for me later, you bastards, and it will be some search! He waited until the way was clear before descending the rigging, and went the bank of spin elevators. He worried in passing a pair of *Hanseatic* crewmen, neither of whom offered him a second glance.

Mildly queasy after his first traumatic bout with microgravity, he followed signs, fidgeted while the spin elevator matched rotation with the torus ring housing the other torus segments. After a short pang of dizziness, he felt minimal pressure on the soles of his boots. Head-lowered, trying to hurry inconspicuously, he joined a sprinkling of passengers and others headed in the same direction along the midway, and slipped into an alcove adjacent to the transient passenger lounge wishing for a chance to reconnoiter before moving to the designated locker. But seconds were dribbling away, leaving behind fewer precious minutes.

He palmed the keycard Henderson had given him. Locker 429 slid open, revealing an oversized sheet-metal lunchbox stenciled with the *Raumhansa* logo. He remembered to breathe again, silently saluted Henderson. Even under *Walküre*’s pseudo-gravity spin, the lunchbox proved massive, very difficult to handle. Trying to appear nonchalant lugging the shielded burden against his leg, he soon gave up; it’s mass spoiled his gait, lending him an eccentric, gliding lope. His burden turned yet more unwieldy in the nadir berthing stack once the spin elevator rotated to a stop, and a blinking microgravity sign reminded him to use the safety rigging.

Clutching the lunchbox handle, he one-handedly tugged himself along a freefall safety line, awkwardly heading “down” into the nadir dock area. He’d barely cleared the interlock chamber when an alarm klaxon squalled and a resilient iris began contracting in the hatchway at his heels — a tangible warning that a hermetic hatch was about to close and seal off the stack. His margin of safety had been less than two meters.

Pressing onward past workers swarming into the corridor, curious to learn what the fuss inboard was all about. He crossed glances with a man in a pale green jumpsuit, snubbed to a halt and asked where he could find a tech named Faigele.

“Chris Faigele? *Ja, ja*, maintenance depot, just past bulkhead sixty-one.”

“Danke.”

“Hey,” the other called after him, “what’s the stir inboard? Why’d they seal up?”

“Don’t have a clue.” James pulled his way along the stack. Bulkhead 56, 57 . . . He ticked off three more, clasped the nylon line one-handedly to slow his headlong plunge, then nearly lost the lunchbox when inertia made it decide to keep on moving.

God! Can’t be any time left!

There it was! Bulkhead 61! He pushed off transversely, arrested his short flight before an open cubicle. Four men in jumpsuits radiated in all orientations in front of a flat-panel video monitor, attentive to a blaring announcement of some kind. Before he could pulse one of them, someone grabbed his free arm.

“Skip the joke; I’ve heard them all. Didn’t think you’d make it.”

“Neither did I,” said James.

“Pass the lunchbox to me,” urged Faigele. “This way!”

* * *

The portly, middle-aged bellman made an effort to conceal his surprise at the amount of the gratuity, but his appreciative smile gave him away. All the suave gentleman in Suite 204 had requested on this drizzly, overcast morning was to procure a pair of ordinary flashlight batteries, and obtain the early bird editions of *Berliner Morgenpost* and *Bild-Zeitung*.

“Most generous of you, sir.” A quick, practiced bow. “If you wish, I’ll be happy to insert the batteries in your flashlight.”

“That won’t be necessary.” *Or even possible*, thought Lustmann, who had no flashlight.

“Should you require anything else, sir — anything at all — I shall be at your beck and call. Perhaps you would also like a copy of *Völkischer Beobachter*.” He referred to the official Nazi Party organ.

“Ah, good suggestion. And you are . . . ?”

“Hans, sir.”

“I’ll be sure to commend your prompt service to the management, Hans. In addition to *Beobachter*, I would like a copy of *Tageblatt* later in the day.”

“Delighted to be of service, sir. If I happen to be off duty, I will make sure another takes care of it, and any other wishes you may have. Thank you very much, sir.”

After a dismissive wave from “Herr Klasse,” the bellman performed an obsequious parting bow and eased the door shut behind him.

Lustmann dialed the hotel operator, asking for room service. While less than palatial, the deluxe second-floor suite suited his needs to a tee. The parlor featured a small balcony that overlooked *Pariser Platz*, with the landmark *Brandenburger Tor* and *Unter den Linden* in the near distance. The suite’s amenities included a kitchenette and a small refrigerator. In addition to ordering a light breakfast of fruit and pastry, he asked for a half-case of *Dunkelbier* to be sent up.

Caging the telephone, he unfolded *Bild-Zeitung* with an air of eager anticipation and scanned the front page. The newspaper’s contents struck him as similar to obtaining a private preview of the stone tablets Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. He was immediately warmed by a premonition of the impending mission’s success for, not the least bit surprisingly, the lead column was capped by a picture of the dark-eyed, iconic *Führer*, signature mustache and all, staring sternly at a world Lustmann devoutly wished would eventually be Nazified.

Skimming the morning edition reinforced in broad strokes what little he remembered of the Polish campaign. General Von Rundstedt’s Army Group South was said to have overrun the Warta River in several places, with Krakow not far ahead of rampaging *Wehrmacht Heer* forces. To the north, Kluge’s Fourth Army had begun linking up with Kuchler’s Third Army Group coming in from East Prussia, while *Luftwaffe* Stukas and JU-88 medium bombers had decimated the rear. *Bild-Zeitung* also reported that the Poles had apparently stationed their defensive forces too close to the German border, a tactical error that allowed the juggernaut to sweep past and grossly disrupt desperate Polish defensive troop movements. A pair of enemy divisions had been shredded during attempts to pull back through the corridor and regroup.

In refolding the newspaper, he again glanced at the black-and-white newsprint photo of Hitler. It struck him as oddly wrong-headed in this, the miraculous second-time-around Berlin, as

he thought of it, to realize that he himself had never shared the reverence for Hitler amply demonstrated in word and deed by his *SS* compatriots during the “other” nineteen thirty-nine. Throughout the ultra-destructive epoch to come of this — to him personally, but to no other — the bitter conflict reflexively beginning in what *Herr Doktor Lebe* would’ve termed the “now” timeline, the eventual outcome of which it was his wholehearted desire to set aright, he admitted to formerly characterizing the Austrian corporal as a malignant narcissist randomly endowed by Mother Nature with a natural bent and consummate talent for inflammatory demagoguery. He recalled how, at the start of this same “other” war, he of the mustache, drooping forelock and hypnotic dark eyes had stridently talked his way into leadership of a splintered collection of street thugs and radical misfits with the audacity to label their movement the National Socialist German Workers Party. Subsequently, after serving months of punishment in Spandau Prison for having instigated the reckless, grossly premature revolutionary adventure in *München*, Hitler had managed to sway the infinitely wiser heads congregated about world-weary Chancellor Paul von Hindenburg, and a majority of the German public, after having successfully suborned a segment of the professional military command staff.

Unbelievable as it seemed in the reborn “now” timeline of nineteen thirty-nine, it seemed exceptionally strange to think a shrewd lowlife like Hitler had managed to talk his way into becoming the elected Chancellor of Germany, and thereby ensuring the birth of *Dritte Reich*. However, felt that in what he could not help but think of as “the first time around” as well as the “now” *Der Führer*’s virulent anti-Semitic sentiment was the sole virtue he himself had fervently agreed with “then,” and agreed with even more fervently ‘now.’ After all, wasn’t the struggle he had been awarded the honor of revising a direct consequence of the worldwide Zionist plot, coupled as it had been, and was in the “now” again coupled with the economic debacle that had befallen the Fatherland in the wake of the outrageous French and British reparations demands to which Imperial Germany had succumbed in the wake of the Great War to end War? His temper flared brightly, an emotional spike he knew was a customary reaction to the injustice of it all.

Skimming the front page of *Morgenpost* brought a paper-thin smile to his lips. In the wake of day-long talks in Parliament voicing bitter opposition to the passifistic line taken by British Prime Minister Chamberlain’s government regarding the invasion of Poland a decision had resulted to present the *Reich* with an ultimatum.

An ultimatum! Lustmann giggled merrily. *The mice forever seek to bell the cat.*

Morgenpost also informed him that the National Service Act passed in Britain called for conscripting all able-bodied men between the ages of 19 and 41. The French government had decided to do much the same, plus an addendum in the form of a declaration to the effect that France had every intention of fulfilling its obligation to Poland. In other news, ten bomber squadrons attached to the Royal Air Force Advanced Air Strike Force had been flown across the Channel and currently invested French airbases. In Rome, fascist *Wunderkind* Benito Mussolini had declared Italy a neutral nation, and the called for a five-power peace conference.

“Herr Klasse” laughed aloud upon reading this tidbit. If Hitler was a malignant narcissist, Mussolini would have years of study ahead of him before giving serious thought to elevating himself to that lofty status. Italy, forever a fascist hindrance, and never an aid, remind him of a defamatory joke that had circulated among the *SS* trainees in the aftermath of Mussolini’s febrile military adventure into Abyssinia, which naturally had ended in disaster. An entrepreneur, it was

reported, had acquired for sale several boxcars loaded with surplus Italian military rifles. The posted sales advertisement read, “Never fired, only dropped once.”

Chuckling in an unanticipated flush of good humor, Lustmann got up to answer the door chime and admitted a pair of waiters bearing a breakfast tray and a half-case of beer, both of whom reacted to the extravagant tips with astonishment matching that of Hans the bellman.

After a Spartan breakfast of sweet Danish, coffee, fresh-sliced fruit and berries, “Herr Klasse,” ever the munificent tipper, set the tray out in the hall to be picked up, then locked and chained the door to his suite, carefully taped the flashlight batteries together end-to-end, and took down the aluminum carryall from a high shelf in the bedroom walk-in closet. Eliciting a small spark by grounding the lowermost battery, and touching the exposed positive terminal of the uppermost to the rivet standing-in as an anode. He then repeated the action just to make sure, unlatched the lid and opened the aluminum carryall with undue caution, breathed a sigh of relief and removed the uppermost half-dozen sheets of tissue-thin flash-paper. Bringing the stack into the parlor, he sank into an armchair next to the French doors leading out to the balcony and began read, intently burning the crisply compressed, edited text into his consciousness.

After a time he frowned in disgruntlement, replaced the documents, closed and latched the carryall and put it back on the closet’s high shelf. The rampage into Poland had taken the *Wehrmacht* forces all the way to the Vistula before keeping faith by halting there as signatory to Foreign Affairs Minister von Ribbentrop’s prior non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. The Polish *Blitzkrieg* would soon be succeeded by similar triumphs, incursions into Belgium and the low countries, followed by the conquest of France, with the war’s first phase crowned by the later occupation of Norway and Denmark.

However, reading the precise flash paper account of the early war had driven home to him a singularly displeasing fact: he had arrived in Berlin prematurely, so early in fact that there would be little or nothing for him to proactively accomplish during the coming months. Mid-nineteen-forty would have been a more appropriate target date for arrival, since no conceivable reason obtained for tampering with military success piled upon success after success. His first major redirection would be to influence a crucial event about which Colonel Stoltz had preached and coached the mission candidates to distraction: correcting Hitler’s inexplicable lack of insight and subsequent inaction during the sorry evacuation from the continent of Allied forces near the Belgian port of Dunkerque. That momentous event, however, would not take place until late May and early June of the ensuing calendar year, many months in the “now” future.

What that fat, brandy-swilling pig Churchill had called “A miracle of deliverance” — the rescue of several hundred thousand Allied military personnel from the beaches by a flotilla of large, medium and small English watercraft — had been a gaffe so utterly illogical that scheming of methods aimed at correcting it would definitely warrant his full attention. Allowing a reprise of Hitler’s monumental blunder, the Odessa brain trust had counseled, would have to be averted at any and all cost. A number of other, more subtle “homework” items would also require study before the time was ripe to finalize and dispatch the introductory letter. Once an accomplished *Wehrmacht* field-grade officer, Stoltz had possessed a more comprehensive overview of the war than any of the other Odessa expatriates. He had lectured the mission candidates at length, of course describing what he believe had gone right on the battlefield, at sea or in the air, yet more often than not emphasizing and what had gone wrong. Between times Stoltz had incessantly

drilled his lessons into the half-dozen assembled candidates during session after session, listing various means and methods by which military and political leadership opinions could be swayed if positively blatant or subtle corrections were targeted to overcome the bureaucratic failures and inefficiencies that continually and prominently exacerbated military and political problems.

The hiatus in jet-propelled aircraft and rocketry development was a prime example of precisely the sort of thing it would be mandatory to eliminate if possible, or minimize. Heavy bomber production would have to be strongly encouraged, especially after some pea-brained, self-satisfied *Luftwaffe* high official “then” had been known to insist that bombardment aircraft be equipped with a maximum of two engines, not the four necessary for long-range operational aircraft. Even more asinine had been the way he’d prescribed that all medium bombers had to also have *dive bomber* capability, a dictum amounting to sheer insanity. Delving into esoteric matters like those, however, would have to be put off until later.

He rose from the chair, opened the glass-paneled French doors, stepped out on the balcony and lit a cigarette. The drizzle had ceased, but a gloomy gray overcast hung over Berlin. Leaning on the balustrade, he smoked hungrily, the cold morning breeze on his cheek, and studied an attractive young *Fraulein* ankling past in the file of pedestrians on the sidewalk below.

Fifty times more than an ordinary human being would consider “ample funds” were locked away in the carryall, in itself a massive understatement. The Odessa organization had supplied him with a fantastic cache of large denomination *Reichsbank* currency which, in the “now” timeline were no longer the formerly worthless, engraved, printed sheaves of paper. In addition to the invaluable flash paper documents delineating the course of the war in every theater, or the step-by-step corrective flash paper “blueprints” defining means and methods of how to best to carry out his mission. It was reassuring to realize more cash than individual could spend was bundled in the carryall, a treasure he would deposit in increments to safeguard it from theft or inadvertently burnt should the carryall be opened unsafely.

His mood changed. He looked forward to the fall and winter months, a period that might as well be filled with good times. His eyes moist, he followed another *Fraulein*’s high-heeled progress along the sidewalk.

Could anyone find fault if he were to enjoy himself during the hiatus to come?
Never! he concluded.

* * *

James found it difficult to keep his fast-moving accomplice in sight. Toting the all-important lunchbox, Faigele led him into an airlock service compartment, where racked tools and a pair of slack, matte silver pressure-suits were stowed along the curved outer bulkhead.

Faigele battened the hatch behind them. “What do you mass?”

“One seventy-five, stripped.”

“Um, pounds. In kaygee, that comes to . . . call it seventy-nine. Henny calculated to the gram. There’s some hurry-up work I have to do with the thorium. Stay put till I call you. Hefting the shielded lunchbox, Faigele pushed off, disappeared headfirst in the airlock chamber.

Hour-long minutes evaporated with glacial velocity. Then something apparently nudged *Walküre* Space Station, causing a low-frequency rumble to rattle loose equipment. Faigele darted out of the airlock chamber.

Certain of what had taken place, James said, “Henderson . . . ?”

A bleak nod. “Word of a zenith bomb scare went through here just before as you showed up. Hurry now! With the hubbub topside, traffic control radar might miss you altogether. Strip to the skin, and put these on.”

James ripped open his jumpsuit’s closure strip. Clumsy under microgravity, he got out of the garment and his briefs, donned clean, old-fashioned woolen underwear, a tan cotton shirt, well-worn *Lederhosen* and calf-length woolen stockings. Floating topsy-turvy in midair, Faigele helped him tie the leather thongs of scuffed hiking boots. The worn tweed jacket handed to him had leather patches sewn at the elbows; before folding it, James stuffed a Tyrolean felt hat replete with a feather in the band into a side pocket.

Next came a faded canvas rucksack. “Strap it round your middle,” urged Faigele. “The chute’s a backpack. Easy does it!” The maintenance tech’s nimble fingers mated a pair of quick-disconnect metal clamps of an aluminum band supporting the Lebe device, and fastened it under Silverthorne’s arms. “Not too comfortable, but it’ll have to do.

James let the other help cram him, gear, chute, rucksack and all, into a bulky, oddly configured pressure-suit. Only a small peephole remained in the convex headpiece lens; the remainder had been thickly sprayed with some kind of hard, whitish gunk. Faigele moved behind him, quickly attached a pair of slender thruster bottles to mounting pads on the rear of the suit’s utility belt. “Hit the test circuit test lever on the left.”

Looking up at the prism viewer over his forehead, he craned to depressed the chin lever.

“*Ganz gut!* You have juice to the squib.” Warning him to keep his chin away from that lever, Faigele twisted home the electrical connectors. “Here’s the drill. Red’s for transfer orbit, green’s the backup. Your mass is fairly low, so the thrusters should kill all but a smidge of orbital momentum.”

“Which means . . . ?”

“With orbital velocity all but nulled, your descent should be almost a straight fall into the atmosphere. When you feel the first fringes of air tearing past,” added Faigele, “you’ll start to see a reddish glow building all around your suit. Don’t let the re-entry fire-bath scare you. Chin the blue lever and a heat shield will slide down over your headpiece lens. I’ll seal you now, and into the airlock with you! *Gluckauf!*”

Swaddled like an infant in heavy outdoor clothing, plus wearing a cumbersome rucksack inside a cumbersome, unfamiliar pressure-suit, not to mention his movement hindered by the bulky external parachute pack, James nodded his thanks to Faigele, who returned the nod, exited the airlock chamber on the fly and cycle the inner hatch closed.

Feeling like an ungainly teddy bear with the vacuum gear beginning to balloon around him as lock pressure fell, James heard his own ragged, unnaturally loud breathing over the faint, conducted hum of pumps scavenging air in the chamber. The sound dwindled, gradually died. The egress light winked green, and Faigele cycled open the outer hatch.

Stretching his right gauntlet outside, James felt for the handhold described by Faigele, touched it and seized the slim bar with both suit gauntlets. Drawing a deep, agonized breath and held the bar in a death grip, slowly pulling himself out into vacuum.

The endless night formed a starry backdrop to the glowing planet that for some reason look as if it was in an “out” direction, not “down” below him. Three vessels limned in earthlight were berthed in the nadir stack — a pair of bloated, stub-winged aerospace vehicles that looked

identical to the *Hanseatic*, and a blunt-ended, space-to-space lunar transport irreverent military personnel had dubbed a “boxcar.” Below, whether it looked like it or not, was the rumbling, immensely curved planet, cloud-draped and lovely.

He clumsily wrenched himself about to faced outward, locked both boots against the station’s skin, squatted with the help of the handhold, and conscientiously flexed the pressure suit’s knee joints to the limit of their articulation. Drawing a deep breath noisy in his own ears, he let go of the handhold and drove hard with both legs.

Sailing headfirst through vacuum, he made an effort to shut out of his mind the inborn fear of falling, and almost forgot to resume breathing. When he thought his modest momentum had carried him far enough out to moderately lessen backscatter in the station’s traffic control radar, he threw out his left arm and leg as he’d been taught; the resultant gradually rotated him about the suit’s short axis. Several tries later, after experimentation had taught him to more adroitly use the headpiece reticle, he managed to orient his attitude facing toward the planet’s ethereal blue limb, a task made difficult by the small window in the thermal protection gunk smeared on the suit’s faceplate lens.

He corrected his residual minor-axis tumble by throwing his head back against the headrest’s quilted padding, and stabilized after several tries. Stars forming the Dipper’s curved handle swam into his limited field of view. Moving arms and legs in unison, he turned his self one hundred and eighty degrees about his long axis until the planet’s distant limb again crept into the reticle, and awkwardly stabilized again. Tolling the passing seconds, he muttered, “Thousand and one, thousand and two,” and continued the countdown. There was absolutely no sensation of motion, although he was aware that relative to the planet’s surface his velocity matched that of *Walküre* Space Station, something on the order of twenty-eight thousand kilometers per hour.

In minutes, the toe and lower ankle of the Italian boot, plus a fringe of Sicily’s northern coast appeared in a gap of the cloud cover obscuring much of the Alps and beyond. What had to be a slice of northern Europe was visible, as well as what might be a fuzzy portion of the French coast. If the British Isles had already rolled over the limb, they were invisible beneath a dense layer of cloud.

Encased in vacuum gear, he used his arms to rotate clockwise about his long axis, stabilized again flying “backward” with relation to his and *Walküre’s* orbital vector, his orientation “normal” to the Earth, that is to say literally at his feet, with the soles of the suit’s boots directly “above” at the surface. With no small surge of apprehension, he closed his eyes and chinned the red lever.

An exceptionally loud, conducted roar beat in his ears. A strong, steady shove kicked him hard in the small of the back.

EIGHT Berlin, Spring 1940, Autumn 1939, C.E.

Impeccably clad in a conservatively cut, double-breasted gray business suit, Erich Lustmann preened himself before the full-length mirror of his suite’s walk-in closet. He checked the precise four-in-hand knot of a contrasting red paisley tie, he glanced down at the new black oxfords selected for the important occasion. Trying on a black homburg, he adjusted the brim, turned left, turned right, decided it made him look like stiff as a pompous Britisher, and doffed it. Using both

hands he smooth his overlong crop of dirty-blond hair, and make a mental note to look up a competent barber.

Grasping the ivory handle of his new ebony walking stick, he stepped out into the second-floor hallway, made sure the door was securely locked, bypassed the elevator and loped down the stair. Making his way across the lobby, he looked neither left nor right and handed over his latchkey at the desk, inquiring if there were any messages for Suite 204.

The deskman dipped his head with Prussian dignity. "Allow me to have a look, sir." The youthful clerk made a project of consulting a small sheaf of spindled notes left by the night attendant. "*Nein*, Herr Klasse. Nothing for you I'm afraid."

"*Viel Dank*." The intent of the ridiculous though necessary query had been to confirm and reinforce his pose as a transient Swedish business executive. In the extremely unlikely event of a positive response, he had been prepared to dash upstairs, abandon everything except the carryall and flee the Adlon in a condition approaching panic.

The uniformed doorman touched his billed cap at sight of the tall, distinguished looking gentleman who emerged from the hotel briefcase in hand. The prestigious black Mercedes-Benz Saloon leased by Lustmann was parked in front, taking up curb space reserved for taxis. He had paid a hefty premium to ensure that car and driver would be on stand-by from noon to midnight, seven days a week. "*Deutsche Reichsbank*," he instructed the driver tersely.

The establishment's monolithic, multi-windowed façade had been designed to impress passersby, and succeeded. *It had been*, thought Lustmann, *and was again in Lebe's unlikely second-time-around timeline, the repository of untold millions in SS-confiscated wealth.* The main chamber's vaulted ceiling, marble-sheathed walls and ultraconservative décor enhanced its solemn atmosphere of rock-solid integrity, but maintained Prussia's regimented love affair with providing a proper place for everything, and keeping everything in its proper place.

Lustmann made a point of not making eye contact with the well-tailored clerk who came forward to offer a welcome. Looking through the fellow as if his existence was superfluous, he paced in leisurely fashion along a row of offices, conscious of the eyes following his progress, glancing at the nameplate beside each door he passed. He halted outside an office occupied by a comely brunette with an elegantly coifed, upswept hairdo he judged in her late-thirties. A polished brass nameplate identified the occupant as:

G. L. SHARPE, NEW ACCOUNTS MANAGER

Her gray-blue eyes alight with interest at sight of the debonaire gentleman poised outside her door leaning on an ebon walking stick, G.L. Sharpe cut short a phone conversation, caged the instrument and rose gracefully behind the desk. "*Guten tag. Wie kann ich Ihnen helfen?*"

"Good day to you, er . . ." He glanced back at the nameplate . . . "Fraulein Sharpe, is it? I am Herr Klasse. I would like to discuss opening a special account."

Her manner soft-spoken, businesslike, the attractive woman smiled and gently corrected him. "I am Frau Sharpe, Herr Klasse. I will be happy to accommodate your needs. Won't you come in, have a seat?"

Lustmann hesitated. "Your pardon, Frau Sharpe." Pendant on a silver chain against her stylish dark green dress was a miniature replica of the Knight's Cross. He sank into a straight-backed chair across from her desk, staring pointedly at the facsimile medal. "I hope you'll

excuse my forwardness, Frau Sharpe. I assume it was a loved one who earned the signal badge of honor you're wearing."

Her manner unselfconscious, Frau Sharpe touched manicured fingertips to the cross. "My husband, Herr Klasse. I regret having to say it was a posthumous award."

"Oh, do forgive me! Surely the tragedy did not take place during the current campaign."

"No, it was . . . It happened some time ago. My husband was an airman, a pilot assigned to the *Kondor-Legion*."

"Ah, yes," Lustmann said knowingly. "The *Luftwaffe* air wing dispatched to Spain in support of Franco's struggle against Communist riffraff daring to call themselves 'loyalists.' Frau Sharpe, I beg you to overlook my indelicacy. Can you ever forgive my thoughtlessness for reminding you of a terrible loss."

"You are most considerate, Herr Klasse. My husband was stricken in the air, but not in combat. By the time his aircraft returned to the ground, his appendix had burst. He left us a short time later in a Spanish hospital."

Lustmann clucked in sympathy. "So unfortunate, and . . . unnecessary."

A flicker of appreciation illuminated Gerda Sharpe's gray-blue eyes. "You mentioned an interest in opening a special account, Herr Klasse."

"I was told *Reichsbank* offers private numbered accounts."

"Oh, absolutely confidential, but not numbered," she assured. "Certain Swiss financial institutions provide that service, and our bank works closely with BIS, in Basel, yet numbered accounts are not available there, either. Although our new president, Herr Funk, believes it very unlikely, given sufficient facilities and time it might be possible for someone extremely adept in advanced mathematics to decipher any numerical sequence. Instead, our private accounts are keyed to a client's restricted private data, with access via supplementary background information, plus a codeword or phrase of the client's choosing."

"There, Frau Sharpe! You've hit upon an operative term of major interest: discretionary. It will be mandatory for all my transactions to be conducted with utmost discretion."

"On that score you may rest assured, Herr Klasse. Discretion is the bank's specialty."

"I am certain it is so." Without asking permission, Lustmann rose and closed the office door. "You will no doubt think it odd, Frau Sharpe, but in order to do business I must tell you in confidence that it will be mandatory for each of my transactions to be conducted on a purely cash basis. I happen to represent a certain highly placed government official who insists upon preserving his anonymity, for whom I act as a proxy in all financial dealing."

Lustmann went on to glibly spin the rehearsed tale, explaining that deposits and withdrawals would involve international wire transfers of significant sums, and informed the attractive accounts manager it would ordinarily be unthinkable to take a stranger into his confidence, but with a view toward avoiding curiosity with regard to the unusual procedures and arrangements, he believed it best to achieve mutual understanding at the very beginning?

"As for being requesting you to be responsible for closely preserving confidentiality," he concluded, "I'm certain the widow of a warrior who made the ultimate sacrifice for the *Reich* is worthy of implicit trust." He smiled, advising her that he was burdened with the task of ensuring the continuing availability of the finest grade of Swedish steel being produced for sale to the *Reich's* armaments industry. As a corollary endeavor, he confessed, it was also his duty to assist

in ensuring the ongoing neutrality of Sweden, the principal supplier of superior steel products. Hinting that he would be staying at the Adlon for an extended period of weeks and possibly months, he mentioned in passing that he would occasionally be at home in his private estate near Malmö, and sincerely hoped she understood how important it was to maintain the clandestine nature of all prospective business dealings between himself and the bank.

“Your confidence in *Deutsche Reichsbank*,” Frau Sharpe said matter-of-factly, “will not be misplaced, Herr Klasse. I see no obstacle to satisfying your every requirement. The amount of your first deposit will be . . . ?”

“A million and one-half *Reichsmarks* in large denominations,” he declared in a purposely offhand manner, and meaningfully hefted the hand-tooled leather briefcase.

Frau Sharpe surprised him by not reacting to the stated sum other than saying, “There are several forms you must fill out, Herr Klasse — informations the bank guarantees to hold in total confidence. Afterward, you may select the private codeword or phrase I spoke of — nothing too common, yet easily remembered, but never written down.”

Lustmann dipped his head. “I am entirely at your disposal, Frau Sharpe.”

* * *

To James, the flaming thermal bath of atmospheric reentry had been ten times more terrifying than predicted by Henderson. Automatic retrotemporal transposition had taken place on schedule, and his prior research junkets had accustomed him to the brief, gut-wrenching sensation that accompanied being precipitately flung backward or forward in time. Instantly falling free of the scorched vacuum gear at transposition, he’d yanked the parachute’s D-ring hard and the canopy had unfurled part way, then popped open, billowing above as the harness rudely jerked him to what felt like a sudden stop in midair.

Only scattered portions of the surrounding countryside were visible through patchy, low-lying clouds. Drifting downward from a high enough altitude to require labored breathing, he scanned the lay of the land below, searching for relatively open areas. Snowy peaks, indistinct in the bluish haze of distance, loomed above an undercast of cloud. The sheen of a large lake caught his eye nestling below the foothills.

A novice parachutist, he sensed the ground coming up faster than he had anticipated. He came close to drifting across an unpaved cowpath of a road, but the breeze refused to carry the chute as far as he had estimated. Instead of coming down in an inviting plowed field, he dropped into a patch of shaggy firs bordering a denser patch of forest, and instinctively raised both arms to protect his face. Fragrant boughs whipped past; after a ripping jolt he found he found himself dangling in the risers, the breeze souging though the fragrant layered branches around him, the midmorning sun warm on his cheek.

He looked up. The parachute’s torn canopy had been impaled on the treetop meters over his head, while the ground directly below was hidden by spreading branches. Judging from a stretch of plowed field visible on the far side of the rutted dirt lane he was no more than three or four meters above ground level, yet being unable to see what might be underneath the tree made it difficult to settle on the next move. He could either hang there and wait for whatever might happen next, or take a chance, unlatch the harness and shove the limbs below aside falling past to the ground. Yet anything could be under the tree — a fence, a hayrack, a farmer’s bull.

The cry of a childish voice reached him. “*Dort ist er!*”

Two boys who looked to be teenagers came dashing up the lane. The shout in German elated Silverthorne; it meant he'd come down in Switzerland, Austria, or best of all perhaps somewhere within Germany's borders.

A third, younger boy halted behind the first two and waved excitedly. James returned the gesture. The youngster waved again.

"Are you able to get down, sir?" The older boys standing in the lane gazed up at him.

"I think so," called James. "What is under this tree?"

"Only dirt, sir, and patches of grass."

"Ah, good! Then stand back." Undoing the chest catch, he lifted his arms and slid out of the harness. His limbs drooped under his weight and he made a feeble effort to push them aside as he fell, thrashed the air for balance, landed canted over, rolled on his shoulder, and sat up.

"Whew! That last step is a crusher."

"Are you injured, sir?"

"No, not at all." Gaining his feet stiffly, James brushed himself off. "I'm glad you three happened along when you did."

"Who are you, sir? Where did you drop from?"

Lacking an opportunity to open the backpack and examine the forged papers, he did not recall the cover identities Omsley had invented. Falling back on his role as a *Raumhansa* purser, he said, "I'm Heinrich Braun. What are your names?"

The boys introduced themselves as Karl, Stefan and Heinz. The eldest, Karl, squinted up at the partially clouded sky. "We saw no aeroplane or balloon, Herr Braun. No machine was in sight up there when you came drifting down."

Knowing his stock of believable tall tales was limited, James said, "It was a sailplane, Karl — a glider. I found myself trapped in a strong updraft, with no way to lose altitude. It soon became a question of letting myself be carried higher and freezing to death, or suffocating from not enough air to breathe, or using the parachute."

"*Wundershören!*" exclaimed young Heinz.

Karl was persistent. "Your craft was too high to be seen?"

"I was very high," assured James, and that certainly had been true.

"What is that odd, uh . . . belt thing around your waist, Herr Braun?" asked Stefan.

"This? It's part of the apparatus that holds one in place while soaring." He fingered the retrotemporal generator's shell, now bereft of the Lebe Device and its thorium isotope power source. "I jumped too quickly to think about bothering to disconnect."

"I shouldn't wonder that you were very frightened," said young Heinz.

"Frightened indeed!" admitted James. It was by no means an untruth; the flame bath during atmospheric re-entry hadn't induced what could be called run-of-the-mill fright, but a siege of naked terror. He stretched, stamped his boots to settle the rucksack on his shoulders. "I must be more careful in the future. Tell me, how far is it to the nearest town?"

"Winterlingen is little more than three kilometers down this lane," said Karl. He grinned. "Until now, I have never heard anyone call it a 'town'."

James returned the boy's grin. "Well, I must be on my way. Say, my parachute is ripped beyond mending. You fellows may have it if you can figure out a way to get it down."

The notion excited the youngsters. They put their heads together, began engineering means and methods of recovering the ruined chute.

James swung a leg over the low, split-rail fence and set out along the rutted lane. It *was* Germany, no borders to cross! He congratulated himself for surviving the crisis at the chalet, a nerve-wracking sequence of chases, and particularly the ordeal of descending from orbit. He'd made it! He was *here*, striding along a rural lane in the best of spirits. If Henderson had done his homework properly, he was alive and well and in one piece, hiking in the cloud-drifted spring sunshine of Adolf Hitler's adolescent *Dritte Reich*. Thinking of Henderson, his euphoria waned. The redhead's martyrdom saddened him.

When the young parachute retrievers were out of sight, he stepped behind a roadside tree and relieved himself. Undoing the straps, he eased the rucksack from his shoulders, unclipped the aluminum shell housing the Lebe Device and thrust it deep into a thicket, then pulled loose brush over it. Opening the rucksack, he pocketed the meager wad of currency, stowed the handful of jewelry in an inside jacket pocket, and sat down, his back against the bole of a tree, to examine the forged documents.

In concocting dual mythical identities, Omsley had chosen wisely. Either of the fictitious individuals would do; both were purportedly citizens of nations known to be allied with the Nazi cause: Signor Vittorio D'Agati, a Milanese history professor, and Herr Hans Steyr, a freelance Austrian journalist from Salzburg. The photos in either case were identical, reproduced from a digital quickie he had obtained applying for a *Vergangenkarte* in DWJ 134. *Wait*, he corrected himself, that date may have been proper for someone in the "then" timeline, but in the "now" it definitely was not. Resting against the bole of a tree, having safely landed in what he sincerely hoped and prayed was Nazi Germany, in calendar year nineteen-forty of the Common Era, the outmoded Gregorian calendar was again in vogue. Dating an event in accordance with what he had been accustomed to in the "then" timeline of *Deutsches Weltreich* was an example of loose thinking, something to be strictly avoided. Similar slips might not only compromise his cover, but undermine the atemporization process. He more than anyone had to know what a very unavoidable prerequisite it was to atemporize in any visited era, and perhaps enormously more so in the crucial "now" of circa nineteen-forty early wartime.

Was he sufficiently proficient and accent-free to pass himself off as an Austrian national? He *knew* he was. Austria had been, or soon would be annexed to *Dritte Reich*. He wondered if the *Anschluss* had already taken place? *More sloppy thinking!* Bringing Austria into Germany's sphere might be fact or fiction, but "is, was, would be, should be" et al, were tenses that required thought before using. The pretentious, multi-volume chronicle credited to Goebbels' authorship had been advertised as a meticulous, intimately detailed insider's account of the War of World Liberation, yet in the here and now reality of Germany, nineteen-forty, *Reichsminister* Goebbels' pretentious, wordy tomes could no longer to be considered a "history" that could be awarded even minimal credence.

He stared at the sets of forged credentials held in either hand. The Austrian cover would be twice as easy to maintain as the other, and posing as a journalist would be much simpler to pull off. His Italian had fallen into disuse; he longer felt comfortable or proficient using the language. His mind made up, he opened the waterproof container in the tweed jacket's pocket, wondering where and how Bernard's team had unearthed archaic rarities like wooden kitchen

matches, and consigned the Italian identity papers to the flames, gained his feet and smeared the ashes around with a boot, donned the backpack and resumed hiking.

A kilometer farther along the lane he met a lone farmer coming the other way driving a horse-drawn cart. He and the driver exchanged pleasant nods in passing one another. Twenty more minutes of vigorous walking brought a church spire poking into view above the treetops on a low, rolling hill not far ahead. The lane topped the gentle rise, revealing Winterlingen as a picturesque village nestled among gently rolling Black Forest slopes. Descending a shallow grade, he entered the narrow main street and passed a half-timbered hostelry, a cobbler's shop, a bakery, a *Bierstube*, a small square of green called Keinath's Park, and several more shops. Uphill, dozens of neat, half-timbered houses were ranged about a rise topped by the church.

Thirsty after the hike, he turned back and went into a wood-paneled taproom. The malty, heavy-bodied stein of lager served by a taciturn bartender exceeded all expectations. Other than a collection of elders clustered around a card game in the rear, he and the barman were alone.

"Just what I needed!" He ordered a refill. "Do you by chance have a map of the region? High time I found out where my *Wanderjahr* is taking me."

The other left off reading a folded newspaper and rummaged under the bar. He unrolled a dog-eared sheet of parchment, slapped it flat on the polished wooden surface. "Winterlingen is here." The bearded barman pointed, then punched the mechanical cash register with a loud *cah-ching!* and made change for Silverthorne's *Reichsmark*.

James learned he had landed by chance a short distance north of the Danube, and east of the Rhine in the Hohenzollern section of Baden Württemberg. From on high, it had been the far off Alps he had glimpsed, with the sheen of *Boden See* — Lake Constance — gleaming between puffy clouds in the distance. Stuttgart, the nearest city of any size lay fifty or more kilometers off to the northwest, while Berlin was over six hundred clicks northeast. He could either work his way toward Munich, and head directly to Berlin from there by rail, or strike for Stuttgart on foot. The latter was not the most direct route, but traveling at a leisurely pace would give him an ample opportunity to atemporize thoroughly.

"Tell me, does the road through Winterlingen lead all the way to Stuttgart?"

"*Ja*, from Hechingen it does. You could hike to Tailfingen," informed the bartender, indicating the destination on the map, "and from there take the footpath over the hills to Hechingen, which is . . . here. Going onward, you'll cross the Neckar on the bridge at Reutlingen, then on to Stuttgart."

Finishing his second stein of beer, James thanked the bartender, reseated the backpack on his shoulders and set off with a will toward Hechingen.

* * *

Letter-prompt as always, Hans the pudgy bellman never failed to deliver the morning newspapers soon after a truck dropped off the bundle at the corner of the hotel's service alley and *Wilhelmstrasse*. Graciously accepting the usual extravagant tip, Hans displayed his profuse gratitude by bowing and scraping and beaming as he exited the suite.

Lustmann yawned, eased open the door to the bedchamber and glanced inside. Gerda Sharpe was still sleeping, her long brown hair draped across the pillow, her face turned away. In the dim light, the aureole of one fulsome breast peeked at him amidst the rumpled bedding. He had made love to her twice the previous evening. Had it been three times? Twice, thrice, what

did it matter? It was too early in the day for incidentals. Besides, who kept score? He recalled the way she had begun felting him with a degree of reticence, making it a bit tedious to achieve climax, yet had finished with gusto. *That* he remembered clearly.

A good time was had by all. The inane, recurring thought certainly did apply. Gently closing the bedroom door, he sat down over coffee and the newspapers. *Völkischer Beobachter* again convinced him the bother of unfolding it would only waste time and energy. The NSDAP party organ featured adjectives galore interspersed in gross overabundance with glowing phrases, and nothing else. The lead column described in lurid propagandistic verbiage how the Reich's "magnificent, valorous, dedicated, unstoppable" *Wehrmacht* was busy "scorching" Poland. He impatiently crumpled *Beobachter*, let it fall to the carpet.

As far as he could tell, the sole aim of *Der Angriff*, an agitprop rag published by the Goebbels' Enlightenment and Propaganda Ministry — the all time classic misnomer — was to suborn and redirect the collective mindset of German workers and their soon-to-be-meaningless unions. He discovered *Angriff's* content to be even less appealing than the purported "news" disseminated by *Beobachter*. As a young *SS* cadet in training he had sensed how ironic it was for Hitler to have taken over the aggregation of misfits, miscreants and street thugs, including some founding members of the original National Socialist German Workers Party, and remold it in his own image. A joke absent of humor, that was. Taken as a whole, the Nazi hierarchy had no more interest in German workers than it did in German beasts of the field; in fact, both were treated as consumables, commodities to be used by the leadership for its own purposes, or ignored, and discarded after exhausting all or most usefulness. *German workers*, he knew, not guessed, *would learn a harsh lesson when slave labor began pouring into the factories, farms and businesses.*

Once an eager young *Hitlerjugend* stalwart, his sole reason for having gone to the trouble of researching and documenting his "untainted Aryan" bloodline had been to earn the privilege of later petitioning for membership in the Nazi Party, a prerequisite for admittance to the *Vogelsang SS* Academy. His deeper purpose had been a devout ambition to aid in every conceivable way what had then been bruited about as a "satisfactory resolution to the Jewish Question," and had consoled himself with the knowledge that Able Adolf, supported by the coterie of criminals and self-important, semi-demented windbags he'd drawn into his inner circle, would be unswerving in their crusade to implement a truly *final* Final Solution.

Crumpling *Der Angriff*, he dropped and unfolded *Bild-Zeitung*, noting the date caption: Wednesday 26 September, 1939. Here at least was a smattering of reportage, a taste of the meat and potatoes pertaining to genuine news, not the airy soufflé spouted by the pair of discarded "newspapers." French forces had apparently advanced eight kilometers into the Saarland along a wide front, a Gallic misadventure in Lustmann's opinion, comparing it to whistling in the dark. The French claimed their military incursion had forced the withdrawal from Poland and subsequent redeployment of a half-dozen *Wehrmacht* divisions. Clear-headed British observers, on the other hand, expressed serious doubt existed as to whether this was so. The advance had apparently positioned French forces within hailing distance of the Siegfried Line, but General Gamelin, the frog in command, must have realized a frontal assault on Germany's defensive bastion was out of the question. At any rate, he had apparently called a halt to France's so-called "Saar Offensive."

In Poland elements of General List's army group had met with pockets of stiff resistance near Lvov. Elsewhere, *Wehrmacht* detachments driving across Poland's plains had successfully swept north beyond multiple bridgeheads established on the eastern shore of River San. The Polish army in and around Poznan, cited earlier as one of Hitler's typical scare tactics for having had ambitions of invading Germany and marching on Berlin, had unexpectedly turned about and attacked the Eighth Army's flank, igniting a vigorous battle near River Bzura. Polish troops had also managed to not simply slow the advance, but had pushed back *Wehrmacht* forces a number of kilometers south of Kutno. The Poles had temporarily recaptured Lowicz, while Gdynia had been evacuated. The *Luftwaffe* had bombed Krzemieniec in eastern Poland, declaring it an open city after Warsaw's diplomatic community sought refuge there. In Bucharest, former salesman and current Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop had issued vigorous demands for Romania to refuse asylum to any Polish officials who might dare to cross the border, and had then issued an empty threat of military reprisal for noncompliance.

In France, the Anglo-French Supreme War Council had met for the first time in Abbeville, where a Czechish army-in-exile was said to be forming. *Even louder whistling in the dark*, thought Lustmann, utterly fascinated to read accounts of unfolding events which he not only had distant prior knowledge, but also possessed an irrefutable, capsulized, encyclopedic account of what to him would always remain the *real* war. Everything currently taking place along this miraculous, second-chance timeline was automatically magnified a thousand-fold if viewed through the lens of the omniscient flash paper documents safely locked in his carryall.

Gerda Sharpe emerged from the bedchamber wrapped in a bed sheet that concealed her nudity only indifferently. She mumbled a sleepy request for coffee.

"Surely, my love." Lustmann poured for her. "Did you rest well?"

A groggy affirmative nod. "What time is it? I should get home, on to the bank."

"Early," he told her. "Sevenish, thereabouts."

Gerda sipped coffee, regarding him over the cup's rim, her gray-blue eyes half-closed. "Erich, I had a dream. You were in it."

"How romantic!"

"Something about you . . . bothers me."

"Oh? Can't have that, can we? What may I ask do you find bothersome?"

"Who the hell are you, anyhow? Every bit as importantly, or more so, *what* are you?"

Lustmann laid aside the newspaper. Staring hard at the woman, he said slowly, "Rather an odd pair of questions."

"Did you honestly think me gullible enough to swallow that fish story about fronting for some highly placed Nazi official, or the froth about your swank Swedish estate?"

"Froth . . . ? Gerda, my darling, whatever can it be that makes you doubt me?"

"Oh, come on! In my modest though occasionally important position I deal practically daily with dandified, nose-in-the-air second- and third-echelon *Reich* executives, each of whom stages a grand entrance and wishes to be received as some exotic form of royalty, and escorted by an entourage of mindless know-nothing heel-clickers and yes-men, but never — not *ever*; believe me — by a sophisticated gentlemen like yourself. Never!"

"Dear Gerda, that is the most interesting left-handed compliment I have ever received." He punctuated the utterance with a disarming smile. "Shall we return to bed, discuss it further?"

“Oh,” she said airily, “you’re a demon lover, and obviously much better than simply well-off. Those attributes make you a valuable client of the bank, yet something about you . . . No, about your fish story struck a false note the instant you first stepped to my office.”

“How very disappointing!” Lustmann tried to keep the saucer demitasse he held from chattering, and sought to redirected the conversation along more comfortable lines. Striving to keep his voice level, he asked Gerda if she belonged to the Party.

“What . . . ?”

Her puzzled expression made him think she had not heard him clearly. “The Nazi Party, Gerda. Are you a member?”

The restated query earned a blink, the merest hint of a frown. “Why do you ask? Does the SS plan to arrest me?”

He forced a chuckle. “No, no reason, except I . . .” He stopped, frowning. “You weren’t supposed to learn of my . . . affiliation. But as things stand, I see no reason to deny it.”

“I noticed your tattoo the first time we . . . came together. My father,” she added, “was an ardent Nazi, but I could never think of a reason to petition for membership. What does that have to do with —”

“How did your father come to join? The circumstances?”

Gerda wrinkled her brow attractively, and sipped coffee. “I grew up in the Wilmersdorf district of Berlin. As a girl, I helped serve customers in our family’s bakery during the twenties, when a wheelbarrow loaded with marks purchased a loaf of bread, if any was to be had. Once each month, like clockwork, Communist thugs came by and explain to my father how easily the store’s big plate glass front window could be shattered by ‘accident.’ Father paid up, of course, like every other merchant on the block, and hated himself for it.”

“*Kristallnacht*, sans Jews,” said Lustmann.

“Extortion, plain and simple it was. One morning a truckload of *Sturmabteilung* huskies pulled up on our street. A pair of Brown Shirts strutted into the bakery and demanded to know if we were on the Communist collection list. They left a phone number my father was to call when next we were bothered. Papa made the call. Shortly thereafter there were broken heads in the street, and we never saw the Communists again. In my father’s eyes, the *SA* had changed from a troop of insolent, loudmouthed bullies and brutes to a legion of out-and-out heroes. He petitioned for Party membership a few weeks later.”

Lustmann had listened closely. He nodded. “Yes, Roehm’s *SA* grew out of the older *Freikorps* who battled Communist agitators in the aftermath of the Great War. Later the *SA* gave way to a much greater, more dedicated organization.”

“So you’re an SS officer. I’m impressed.”

A dismissive shrug. “Gerda, you’re too perceptive to be fed any more fish stories. My reluctance to be truthful stemmed from the fact that the knowledge could put you in harm’s way. Now, since you know my . . . occupation, it forces me to explain my undercover assignment as something vitally important. I report directly to the office of *Reichsführer*-SS Himmler himself” He shut up, mildly unnerved by Gerda’s cool, unblinking stare.

“Changing the subject,” she drawled, “also seems vitally important.”

“I won’t have you think ill of me.”

“Oh, forget it! I promise to believe anything within reason. Unfortunately, there’s more.”

“More . . . what?”

“More of a profound reason to . . .” She trailed off uncertainly, her steady, disconcerting gaze still locked with his. “Erich, your original cash deposit was a million and a half in large denomination, serialized banknotes.”

Taken aback, he said cautiously, “True. What has that to do with —?”

“Mixed in with the currency in your fancy briefcase was a singularly peculiar bedfellow: a *Tausend Mark Reichsbanknote* with minute engraving variances, a watermark, and serialization appropriate to the date of issue that . . . Wait, your pardon. I should’ve said slight variances the bank’s experts believe appropriate to the date it *will* be issued.”

“*Will* be issued? I don’t understand.”

“Neither does anyone else, Erich. Expert analysis establishes the issue date will occur in calendar year nineteen forty-two. Unless I’ve been grossly misinformed, we’re sitting here, drinking coffee in you pricey, luxurious Adlon suite in the fall, *nineteen thirty-nine*.”

Lustmann’s heart skipped a beat. Colonel Stoltz had personally vouched for the germane museum quality of every item he himself had been allowed to carry into the past, including the then-useless *Reichsmarks* unearthed hither and yon by the Odessa organization, and archaic wooden kitchen matches and other items. Manfred had described more than once what exquisite pains had been taken to ensure that an anachronistic disaster such as Gerda had just described could *never* take place. “Ridiculous!” he said with a hoped-for degree of vehemence. “A foolish mistake like that must be the work of some counterfeiter, or perhaps a dimwitted clerk.”

A negative head shake. “The provenance of high denomination bills is routinely checked. At first both experts called in, in addition to the bank’s specialists, quoted your theory more or less word for word. The clerk who counted out your first deposit recorded the peculiar banknote, but rather than sending it to the vault with the remainder he brought it to my attention. Under a microscope, the note evidenced minor wear and tear, indicating that it was not, *could not have been*, a pristine issue, but quite likely had been in circulation. Nor do other experts called in by Herr Funk believe it the work of a counterfeiter. The ink, paper, engraving, watermark, so forth and so on, you see, have been verified as authentic. One of my associates is checking on the likelihood of a misprint in serialization, or a cataloging error, or whatever else, yet he refuses to believe any of those answers are probable, or for that matter even possible.”

Lustmann drummed nervous fingers on the coffee table. “I’m at a total loss to explain an outré occurrence like you describe. All I can say is . . . Let me assure you of one thing: the funds I deposited are entirely legitimate. Every single *Reichsmark* derives from SS holdings. Where else could the monies have been obtained?”

Gerda’s semi-accusative stare weakened. She looked away, finished her coffee and rose without another word, clutching the sheet around her, and disappeared in the bedchamber.

Silently cursing the carelessness of his Odessa compatriots and whoever else had been tasked to round up the money, he made a decision. Lovely playmate or not, bedding the widow Sharpe had been an egregious error, and she would have to go — a regrettable necessity, but there it was. Not yet, however; the banknote was a ringer, something that probably would have come to light with or without their romantic interludes. More to the point, should something untoward happen to the attractive *Deutsche Reichsbank* accounts manager, the instant their liaison came to light the lantern of suspicion would shine brightly in his direction. He toyed

impulsively with a notion of abandoning the Adlon forthwith, registering at another hotel and transferring the remaining funds to a different bank, and quashed the notion at once. Fleeing would only serve to contribute to any potential suspicion, while doing nothing whatever might hopefully allay it. His sole recourse for the time being would be to stand fast, bluff it out. During the months to come, he would redirect all his energies from pleasure to purpose, and silently vowed to concentrate his entire being on the monumental task he had been dispatched to do.

Gerda hurriedly primped, dressed and left the suite. Lustmann forgot about both her and the bogus banknote. He began a preliminary search aimed at finding exactly the proper destination for the introductory letter he had thus far put off thinking about, let alone writing. He would put pleasurable pursuits and laziness aside, and at the earliest possible moment set pen to paper in earnest and begin drafting the all-important first letter.

* * *

Silverthorne's trek took him through Ebingen, a village larger than Winterlingen, where he rested on a bench near the church, but didn't tarry long. By the time his worn boots had marched their weary way to the community of Tailfingen, the sun had dropped behind forested hills. Ominous bronze and saffron clouds had gathered, painting a ruddy sunset glow in the west.

He found shelter before the rain came, letting a cloddish innkeeper to persuade him that the best food and softest beds in all Baden Württemberg were to be found beneath the hostelry's gabled roof. In the dining room, the flat, unseasoned "veal" was served with tiny dumplings called *Spaetzele*, and the waiter's wink and nod. The main course, James realized after his first bite, was venison; an unwary stag had probably wandered too close to the inn. Washing down his first meal in Germany with two steins of absolutely delicious beer, he went up to his room and undressed. Gratefully crawling into bed, he pulled the goose-down comforter to his chin, listening in drowsy contentment to rain dripping from the eaves.

Downstairs, he had resisted an urge to buy what passed for the local newspaper because the thought of trying to read it, bone-tired as he was, made him believe it a hopeless project. Gothic numbers on a calendar prominently displayed in the inn's wood-paneled foyer had displayed the date: *Donnerstag, den 11 April 1940*. If anything he had learned or even inferred about now-contemporary history proved factual, Nazi Germany's war machine had just fallen upon semi-defenseless Denmark and Norway.

Approaching the outskirts of Stuttgart at mid-afternoon the following day, he began to have second thoughts about taking the train to Berlin. During a rest stop on a sidewalk bench in front of the rail station, he decided to skip railroad transportation in favor of hiking onward, the rationale being that atemporizing on foot would be a more valuable experience than spending a portion of his limited funds riding to the capital in a comfortable rail coach.

Stuttgart to Aalen, northwest through Ansbach all the way to Nuremberg. Most nights he slept beneath roadside trees, envious of that first, luxurious night at the inn, and either hitched rides or hiked along the lightly trafficked country roads. A talkative truck driver picked him up and bent his ear for forty kilometers, then treated him to a lunch of *Wurst und Bier* in Bayreuth. The loquacious trucker insisted the war making "Nervous Nellies" of fainthearted Germans would be over in a matter of weeks, a few months at most. After all, hadn't the *Reich* been waging "war" since the previous September? If so, what had mighty England and France done after their proud declarations of war? Nothing, not a thing except to issue threatening noises.

According him, the oh-so-brave French snail-gobblers and tea-sipping Britishers sat behind the silly Maginot fortifications, or stayed safely across the Channel, sweating little green apples, not fighting. The driver insisted that was all the enemy had done, or *could* do, except to watch the *Reich's* mighty forces enjoy military success capped by success after resounding success. Hadn't the *Whermacht* overwhelmed strategic regions of Poland, and stolen away the bastardized nation calling itself Czechoslovakia without a shot fired, not to mention having had the sand to recover what were rightfully Germany's to begin with, the Saar Basin and Sudetenland.

James proved such a rapt listener that the trucker invited him to wait while he ran an errand — an errand of the flesh, as later reported in lurid detail — and then faithfully carried him all the way to Leipzig. Resting for an hour after an atemporizing walkabout of the city, James found a day-old discarded newspaper neatly folded on a park bench. He learned that General von Falkenhurst now shared the headlines with Admiral Raeder and the triumph of *Weserübung*, the High Command's military nomenclature designating the Danish and Norwegian blitzes.

"Your papers, *bitte*?"

Alarmed, James stumbled to a halt. He had been ambling along the sidewalk of a small town in Brandenburg lost in thought, and had failed to notice the policeman's approach. *Natürlich*, " he said, not forgetting to smile.

The *Schupo* was young and short in stature, with pinched, arrogant features. Passing over his credentials, James made sure the policeman also glimpsed the wallet's wad of *Reichsbank*.

"Ah, an Austrian, I see. How are things in Salzburg, Herr Steyr?"

James added an extra dollop of warmth to his smile. "I'll find out in a week and a half. My *Wanderjahr* is coming to an end."

"You are employed by a Salzburg newspaper?"

"*Nein*, I'm a freelance journalist here to gather background material for a series of articles about the wartime mood of Germany. With Austria now a part of the Reich, there is very much interest at home."

Having apparently taken James for a vagrant, something not at all surprising in view of the "journalist's" Lederhosen, backpack and rumpled Tyrolean hat, "Umm-m-m," was all the youthful officer said before he handed back the forged documents, nonchalantly strolled away.

The incident, his first bad moment, made James appreciate the fact that the *Wanderjahr* togs he'd grown accustomed to wearing, while appropriate to the Black Forest and lesser wilds of Germany, would never do in cosmopolitan Berlin. After his footsore arrival in Wittenberg, he searched the side streets, spent an hour sorting through a pair of secondhand store's heaps of castoffs and racks hung with other people's discards. It was more than staying in character that caused him to haggle with a clerk over the modest price difference between his hiking attire and the items he wished to purchase. He emerged in a worn-but-not-threadbare dark gray business suit, a pair of rundown-at-the-heels black shoes, and a much more optimistic outlook.

On April nineteenth, 1940, brimming with nostalgia he stood for the second time in his life beside the pre-renovation Brandenburg Gate, watching a yellow tandem-streetcar roll past the colonnaded monument, bells clanging. Auto traffic and pedestrians in *Pariser Platz* partially obscured his wistful gaze down *Unter den Linden*. In the late eighteenth century, when Frederick the Great had been in his declining years, Berlin's broad thoroughfare had been lined six rows deep in magnificent old lime trees — *Linden*. Now only four rows of puny, two- or three-year-

old saplings had been planted, he later learned, following extensive excavations leading to the construction of a subway beneath the thoroughfare.

Overwhelmed by his first glimpses of the much more modern capital than he'd seen in Frederick's day, James to remind himself he was in Berlin, not the familiar *Welthauptstadt Germania* capital renamed by none other than Adolf Hitler in the wake of the War of World Liberation. Skipping lunch, he wandered about hour after hour. Many streets were still village like, partially devoted to bicycles as well as autos, trucks and buses. Even a few *Pferde Droschken* — horse-drawn carriages — lingered here and there in the outlying districts, holdovers from a more slow-paced era. White-jacketed traffic policemen exuded Prussian authority and dignity regulating vehicular flow with their whistles and precise arm commands. Considering the capital's wartime status, fewer uniforms were to be seen than he'd anticipated, though here and there a few *Feldgrau* uniforms of *Landseers* from the ranks stood out amid the red collar tabs of *Wehrmacht* officers. In *Friederichstrasse* he halted on the sidewalk, taken by the appearance of a dozen *Hitlerjugend* juveniles trooping past clad in short black trousers and brown shirts, each wearing a black neckerchief slipped through a braided leather loop.

He rested on a bench for the better part of another hour, conscientiously adhering to Omsley's repeated counsel to atemporize thoroughly, analyzing the flow of traffic and the pedestrian passersby, comparing the street scene with what had been memorable from his late eighteenth century visit to Berlin prior to heading for Potsdam. Feeling "at home" in an unfamiliar era of the past was an indispensable requisite, while remaining a stranger, or allowing oneself to continue to feel and act like a stranger, tended to increase the risk of making some unconscious social gaffe, and thereby drawing undesired attention to oneself, something especially dangerous for an intruder in wartime Berlin.

After a while, too restless to sit still any longer, he rose and went off on another sightseeing fit. A stroll through *Pariser Platz* and down the center mall of *Unter den Linden* taught him that King Frederick's old armory, the *Zeughaus*, had transformed itself into a military hall of fame. Intrigued, he climbed the steps and strolled from gallery to gallery, inspecting suits of sixteenth century armor, the death masks of notables, including one that marked the passing of revered former Chancellor von Hindenburg. His interest was piqued by hosts of mannequins ensconced behind glass, each clad in resplendent military uniforms drawn from various bygone eras. His wanderings came to an end after he paused to read a placard informing him that the uniformed wax figure of Napoleon Bonaparte was crowned with the actual hat the emperor had worn on the fateful Waterloo battlefield.

Since his previous visit, certain sections of the city had undergone sea changes of one kind or another. Frederick's parade ground had become the busy acreage of Tempelhof Aerodrome. The massive, red-brick façade of Town Hall had been scrubbed clean of accumulated grime, and many open fields and woodlands he dimly recalled from the late eighteenth century, mostly in western sectors of the city, were now a maze of paved streets lined with relatively new structures.

Ravenous in late afternoon, he treated himself to an early supper in a large, popular restaurant featuring a dozen halls, each with its distinctive theme and décor — sunny Spain, the fabled American Wild West, the Rhineland, and so forth. Choosing the Bavarian Alps, he dined on a so-so serving of thin-sliced pork tenderloin while a thunderstorm raked a not very authentic

model of *Zugspitze*, Germany's loftiest mountain. Although a good deal less than realistic, the diorama was nevertheless impressive in an amateurish way. Simulated thunder crashed, accompanied by the patter of rain drumming on the "roof." In the storm's wake, the sun broke through and a yodeler strolled about to comfort the diners.

With dusk approaching, his immediate interest turned to finding shelter — if possible, a decent, reasonably priced lodging. Walking about with that aim in mind, he crossed the Spree on the lower pedestrian level of double-decked Oberbaum Bridge that spanned the river and continued along *Warschauer Strasse* toward the railroad yards. Circulating in a mixed residential and small business neighborhood, he spotted a red-and-black swastika banner prominently displayed in the window of a moderately rundown two-story house situated at the corner of a side street. Drawing nearer, he slowed his steps upon noticing the ROOM FOR RENT sign in the other front window opposite the swastika.

The grumpy, sharp-eyed woman who answered the doorbell announced herself as Frau Kraven. She nodded an invitation for Silverthorne to enter, labored up two flights of creaky stairs and showed him into a cheerless, bleakly furnished attic room smelling faintly of mildew. Since all he wanted or needed was basic shelter, a place to sleep, he readily agreed to the modest weekly rental. Frau Kraven, obviously curious about his "modern" accent, inquired if he hailed from some other country. He repeated the now-familiar tale of being a freelance Austrian journalist from Salzburg, an explanation that drew a sniff of mild suspicion from the middle-aged woman, who apparently regarded the profession of scribbler with small enthusiasm. She treated "Herr Steyr" to a brief, poignant account of her late husband's demise. A conscripted *Landser* battling in the Normandy trenches during the so-called Great War to end War, neither Herr Kraven nor his remains had returned from the Western Front.

When the door finally closed behind the inquisitive landlady, James dumped his rucksack in a corner. He descended to use the boardinghouse's second floor hall bathroom, got out of his clothes quickly and fell into the narrow, lumpy mattress that was more a cot than a bed.

He was asleep in minutes.

NINE Berlin, Winter 1939, Spring 1940, C.E.

In early morning, a Saturday according to parlor calendar, James hustled downstairs feeling well rested but half starved. On his way to the front door, meaning to rush out and find an inexpensive local eatery, he was startled to hear the landlady invite him to join the other lodgers in the dining room. Referring to her establishment as more a bed and breakfast hostelry than a boardinghouse, Frau Kraven apologized for not telling him a standard breakfast of boiled porridge, coffee, toast and jam was included in the weekly rental.

He was wolfing down oatmeal with cream and brown sugar, spreading butter and jam on slice after slice of fresh-baked dark Pumpernickel, when a pair of early risers in late middle-age lodgers entered the dining room chatting about the big event of the day.

A big event indeed! thought James, recognizing what they were discussing, and figuratively kicked himself. He consoled himself for having been too weary the previous evening to appreciate the significance of April twentieth, blaming the oversight on confusion and waning excitement of having arrived in the capital. What better way to atemporize than possibly catching

a view of the living, breathing megalomaniac whose demagoguery had revived barbarity in a society that had produced Beethoven and Goethe and Frederick the Great?

He learned how purchasing a day-ticket entitled the holder to transfer at will from subway to surface to elevated conveyances in any order and combination. Boarding a tram later he checked connections with the operator, jumped down before the tandem yellow streetcars departed, and waited for one with the required number, which turned out to be crowded. Riding packed in standing-room-only the short distance to *Tiergarten*, he decided Berlin's public transportation system circa nineteen-forty would do credit to that of many cities in later eras. During the previous day's wanderings, he had been equally impressed during brief visits to a pair of postal substations not far from the boardinghouse he intended to use as his "office." If the degree of accommodation he had witnessed was typical of small branch stations scattered throughout the city, all the others should likewise offer well-lighted public rooms staffed with ink pots and, wonder of wonders! sharpened pens with which one could actually *write*.

Joining thousands of Berliners congregating along *Charlottenburger Chaussee* to witness the parade celebrating Hitler's fifty-first birthday, he found the early comers in a congenial, festive mood. Smiles were the order of the day. Happy chatter filled the crisp spring air. Many spectators had equipped themselves with homemade periscopes fashioned of small hand mirrors affixed to cardboard mailing tubes.

Forty minutes later the celebrants gathered along the thoroughfare cheered a procession of horse-drawn caissons slowly rumbling past, followed by armored cars preceding a *Wehrmacht Heer* regiment marching in lockstep. The men in uniform men looked young and inexperienced, probably infantry trainees assigned to parade duty because their experienced brethren were engaged in more important business elsewhere. Instead of carrying a weapon, each soldier striding in ranks lofted a tall pole in the forest topped with black swastika banners.

At last, wheeling slowly along at the pace of a walking man in the wake of a military band trumpeting the anthem, a huge, open Mercedes-Benz touring saloon rolled past bore the twentieth century's most reviled despot. Standing in the forefront of the rear seat, his dark eyes visible beneath a billed cap, *Der Führer* wore a tan military uniform with a red swastika armband encircling his upper left arm. Exuding a stolid, self-satisfied manner, Hitler kept his right hand lifted in a sustained, bent-elbow Nazi salute that made James infer that he was celebrating himself as much, or more, than was the wildly cheering, flag-waving throng.

An electric fluid filled the air as the entourage swept past. Swastika flags waved as if applauding the continuous, approving clamor rising from the crowd. Seated in the seat beside Hitler, his ferret-like features serene, *Reichsminister* Goebbels shared The Leader's glory, and florid-featured Hermann Göring was seated opposite Goebbels. Wearing a permanently pained expression, Hitler's anointed deputy, Rudolf Hess, sat beside the driver in the front passenger seat. A half-dozen black-uniformed *SS-Leibstandarte* elite, Hitler's personal bodyguard — praetorians in all but name — walked on either side of the slow-moving vehicle.

James stood poised on tiptoes, peering over the people standing ahead of him, and did his best to remain inconspicuous by cheering as loudly as the spectators all around him. Unable to tear his eyes from a scene that struck him as synthetic, a scene that to him had the melodramatic aspect of set-piece lifted straight from the grainy black-and-white films he'd viewed ad nauseum as a schoolboy, and later studied with intense professional interest. Furthermore, the sight

provoked within him the same reaction as it had in his own timeline — revulsion coupled with sieges of abject disbelief. Whether in real-time circa nineteen-forty, C.E., on film or still photographs during the *Deutsche Weltreich* era, it was starkly incredible — *impossible* might be a more accurate term — to appreciate what an indelible, blood-smeared mark the smug, stereotypical face riding past a stone's throw from where he stood had left on all mankind.

Eyes watering, his emotions roiling, he turned and edged toward the fringes of the crowd. The elation sweeping over him upon safely arriving in Berlin had evaporated. Witnessing the parade's pomp and circumstance had brought home to him the sheer hopelessness of *his* unique situation. What could one lonely stranger actually *do* to thwart the strength and purpose and will so vibrant in Hitler's militant *Dritte Reich*? Omsley's encouraging words echoed hollowly in his mind: "Lustmann succeeded, Jamie. If it can be done once, it can be done again."

No reason why not, Bernard. No reason except for . . .

He reproached himself for letting a defeatist attitude surface. After all, he'd barely put in an anonymous appearance in Berlin, hadn't been on site long enough to atemporize, let alone take the first tentative step in what promised to be a near-hopeless hunt. Barring a major miracle, it would take much, much longer, plus a lengthy, all-consuming effort to catch a bare whiff of Lustmann's trail, if a trail existed. Even then, he would not only have to track the man down, but learn how he had accomplished *his* miracle, and invent means and methods of reversing the process. It was self-deceptive to anticipate major, minor, or incidental miracles to fall from the sky and aid him in a quest that seemed less fruitful now than it had when dreaming and scheming about how to accomplish the "miracle" in the vanished *Deutsche Weltreich*. The single course open to him would be to assume that Erich Lustmann was at that instant alive and well and in Berlin. If so, how could he hope to locate an individual much like himself, equally anonymous and thriving *somewhere* in a wartime metropolis of more than four millions?

Prowling among the *Tiergarten* trees in the grip of a gloomy sense of foreboding, a random notion gave him sudden pause. If he himself had taken the trouble to catch a glimpse of Hitler's birthday festivities, mightn't his quarry also be here in *Tiergarten*?

Fired by the prospect of ending his search before almost before it had a chance to begin, he quickened his pace. The crowd was dispersing gradually. People gabbled about how regal and triumphant Hitler had looked. He overheard a woman comment on how graciously *Der Führer* had halted the slow-moving procession in order to accept a nosegay from tiny blonde twin girls. Berliners congratulated themselves, assuring one another the war would soon be over and things would quickly return to normal.

Plowing back and forth along *Charlottenburger Chaussee*, James searched the faces and figures all around him. He spotted a tall gentleman striding in the opposite direction he thought might be worth a closer look, and hurried after him only to discover he'd been chasing a puffing, ruddy-faced elder who most likely walked several kilometers each day to keep fit.

The crowd thinned at a still more gradual pace. James eventually turned discouraged steps toward The Kroll, a fashionable open air restaurant in *Tiergarten* doing a land-office business now, in the wake of the parade. He circulated around the terrace for a quarter-hour evaluating the diners, and was forced to conclude that Lustmann had to elsewhere. Crestfallen, he rode rebounded the crowded tram and rode aimlessly for hours, searching the sidewalks along

the way for the familiar face long since etched in memory, and then walked about aimlessly, without purpose, for a quite longer time.

In late afternoon, two lackadaisical brown bears on the other side of a steep-sided cliff and moat at the Berlin Zoo ignored him and a collection of ogling children and gawkers standing behind the railing. He dined sparingly at a sidewalk café, was drenched by an unexpected shower, and concluded his roving by leaning on the balustrade of the Oberbaum Bridge and staring down into the turgid waters of the Spree. He stayed there until the twilight chill forced him to descend from the bridge, hurry down the street to the boardinghouse and climb the creaking stair to his cheerless, unheated attic room.

* * *

Leery of certain preliminary choices he'd been reviewing, Erich Lustmann scratched them off his list one at a time, narrowing the selected targets to three — a pair of similar establishments in what once had been Merry Widow Sharpe's neighborhood, the Wilmersdorf district of *Mitte*, central Berlin, and also a third out beyond *Landwehrkanal* in Schöneberg. Researching in person a dozen and a half prospective destinations for the not-yet-begun, if most definitely necessary introductory letter he'd put off writing to the point of putting off the putting-off, he done limited surveillance on a half-dozen addresses gleaned from advertisements in newspapers and magazines, plus several lifted from the telephone book.

Undertaking the impromptu expeditions on foot, often in the rain and once during intermittent show showers, his commitment to wandering the streets alone to no obvious purpose had bewildered the driver of the leased Mercedes-Benz. The taciturn fellow, impressed by the monumental tips received for doing much more waiting than driving, had followed orders to the letter. On more than one occasion he had parked the gleaming auto on an anonymous side street, and dozed behind the wheel, awaiting the return of his mysterious, well-heeled passenger.

Herr Klasse, as the driver knew him, had begun to lean toward the Schöneberg address. Either of the potential Wilmersdorf targets fronted on moderately busy streets, whereas the smaller Schöneberg establishment was situated in a narrow lane, lost in a row of shops, older houses and flats. Any of the three would do to test the waters, which was how he thought of the pristine letter he was forever preparing to write, but had not gotten around to sitting down with pen and paper and actually *writing*. Schöneberg was also favored partly for being situated in a quiet neighborhood, but mostly because of a particularly garish display in the front window.

Now the end of December was near, and the calendar year of his premature arrival had all but spent itself. Worse, it was weeks past the date he had promised himself would be the absolute deadline for composing and dispatching the introductory letter. The task nagged him daily, and on occasion hourly. Finishing the letter and sending the damned thing on its way had changed from something that could be done "later" to an inarguably immediate chore, a nagging duty it would be impossible for him to shirk. Getting the message on paper, and posting it, was something that should not — *could* not — be put off any longer.

He winced, thumbed his throbbing temples. Ever since opening his eyes before dawn, a massive ingestion of aspirin had been engaged in a losing battle with a vile hangover, not to mention being compounded by a nagging toothache. With or without analgesic, the damned tooth now troubled him more than the morning-after effect of overindulgence. He'd vowed to cut down on champagne, on high living in general. Distasteful as that prospect was, he knew it

would be mandatory to make an appointment at a local dentistry parlor. Afterward, hopefully free of all distractions, he intended to sit down and devote every gram of energy to the all-important, long-overdue task, no excuses permitted.

Gerda Sharpe had absented herself for weeks after reporting the results of the bank's investigation of the "impossible" thousand-mark banknote, and he'd been reduced to pursuing loose women in bars and restaurants, or on one memorable evening a dazzling specimen at the theater. Just as well, he supposed, for their intimacy to have cooled. Disposing of Frau Sharpe might not be necessary after all.

Gingerly massaging the gum line above the aching tooth, he thought of Gerda at greater length. During his second visit to the bank, she had reposed behind her desk in the manner of a queen bee, greeting him with an air of practiced aloofness reserved for total strangers. Her distant attitude had reversed itself in a minor way when he had turned over another briefcase bulging with cash, accompanying the deposit with a casual quip: "We shall pray none of these banknotes will be minted at some future date."

Reminding her of the inexplicable, post-dated banknote once in circulation had earned him a distasteful grimace, but no bare hint of a smile.

Pleased to see the Christmas holiday folderol over and done with, he made a valiant effort to ignore the throbbing tooth while skimming the Thursday, twenty-eight December edition of *Morgenpost*. Leafing through the articles and news stories, searched for a morsel of current news with which to underscore the importance of the introductory message he had put off, and had kept putting off writing, but which now simply *had* to be penned and sent on its way. The authorities, informed *Morgenpost*, had announced that seventy thousand inhabitants of a Polish town, Kalisz, were scheduled for deportation in order to make room for scores of ethnic Germans flocking into Poland from the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. *A start*, he thought, *if only the tip of the relocation iceberg to come.*

News of the war in Finland drew less press coverage largely because it involved military aggression by Germany's supposedly non-aggression pact co-signer, Stalin's USSR. Holding a tenuous position around Suomussalmi, an element of the Soviet 9th Army, the 163rd Division, had been ripped apart by successive, persistent Finnish attacks. Soviet reinforcements, cited in *Morgenpost* as the Red Army's 44th Division, were expected to arrive shortly and succor the elements in place, but the force had suffered delays moving forward due to constant harassment by the fierce, tenacious Finns, whose standard tactic during winter operations was to isolate individual Soviet columns crossing the Karelia Peninsula's trackless, forested snowfields, outflank them with small, agile ski troopers and decimate them one by one. The Soviet command had apparently failed to counter this tactic with troops allegedly less well trained and equipped for cross-country ski troops than the Finns clad all in white, and therefore almost invisible against a snowy backdrop. Concerned over the mounting attrition, Stalin had reportedly ordered preparations for a coordinated, step-by-step assault on the Finnish Mannerheim Line.

In Switzerland, exiled industrialist and one time Nazi fundraiser Fritz Thyssen had sent a vigorous protest to Hitler, insisting that he had not sacrificed millions in favor of the Bolshevik USSR's cause, but in opposition to it. In the North Sea, the British battleship HMS Barham had been damaged by a torpedo attack credited to *Kriegsmarine* submersible *U-30*. In Britain,

compulsory meat rationing had begun. In China, Japanese bombing raids had ravaged Lanchow, a military supply base in the northwest deemed vital for Chinese defensive forces to hold.

Dissatisfied with the bland nature of the day's news, Lustmann noisily crumpled *Morgenpost* and chucked it in the general direction of a leather-bound wastebasket. Nothing in the way of a military or political crisis had yet appeared on the near horizon, not *one* newsworthy item of enough importance to reference in the pristine message he simply *had* to finish and post.

The persistent, pulsing ache drew his attention back to the sore tooth. Vigorously rubbing his lip over the offending bicuspid, swore a fulminant curse, decided enough was enough and rang the front desk. "Herr Klasse, Suite 204 here. Would it be possible for the hotel to recommend the services of a competent local dentist?"

After an impatient wait, he jotted down an address and phone number, curtly thanked the deskman, and requested an outside line from the hotel operator. Calling the dentist's office, he had to twice repeat his explanation to the receptionist that his dental problem verged on an emergency. After listening with half an ear as the woman again tried to assign him an appointment several days hence, he broke in and told her irritably he was in Berlin on important business, staying at the Adlon, and added that the hotel's management had recommended the services of Dr. Kleinschmidt, and said the constant siege of pain made it very difficult to function normally, and impossible for him to endure with an ordinary appointment pending.

Promptly at two that afternoon, the leased Mercedes delivered him to the dentist's ground floor office. After an additional thirty-five-minutes of tooth-pounding misery in the waiting room, a white-smocked assistant finally seated him in a tilted-back leather dental chair, and fastened a bib around his neck. White-haired and stooped, Dr. Kleinschmidt suffered from curvature of the spine. Wearing wire-framed bifocals with outrageously thick lenses, the dentist nodded politely to his "emergency" patient and scrubbed his hands at the sink. Using a dental mirror and steel pick, he examined the indicated tooth. "How long has it bothered you, sir?"

"Few . . . days, week," mumbled Lustmann, tongue-tied by the instruments.

"*Ja, ja*, I believe we can . . ." The tools came out of Lustmann's mouth. "Only two fillings are visible, both unusual to say the least. May I ask where this work was done?"

Lustmann quailed inwardly. *Not again!* he thought. It had been his lifelong conceit to take punctilious care of his near-perfect teeth, brushing and flossing religiously, exactly as he'd been taught as a youngster. A bearded Argentinian dentist had repaired the caries in question with plastic fillings, first-time-ever procedures made necessary by the accumulated exigencies of wartime, a subsequent decade of foreign exile, and a contributing change of diet.

"Experimental." He described the fillings as the work of a Swedish researcher.

"Remarkable!" Dr. Kleinschmidt clucked enthusiastically. "The material is certainly not amalgam. Whatever it is, it's as white, or perhaps a touch whiter than your enamel. The fillings look so natural they are difficult to discern. Can I trouble you for the name and address of the, er . . . specialist responsible for this radical procedure?"

"I'm sorry to tell you he's no longer with us, Doctor. If you're ready, can we please get on with it, and plug the bicuspid? I have an extremely important appointment in less than two hours, so time is of the essence."

The dentist complied, doing so in a somewhat distracted frame of mind. An injection of Novocaine adequately numbed Lustmann's jaw, but his pristine exposure to the noise and

vibration of a low-speed dental drill circa late 1939 almost caused him to tear the bib from his neck, bolt from the chair *and* the dental office. Clamping his eyes tightly shut, he sat through the punishing ordeal with feigned stoicism, all the while wondering when and from what quarter the next idiotic anachronism would rise up and bite him in the ass, or once again in the mouth.

* * *

As usual, James awoke before sunrise. Only a dim glow illuminated the east-facing filmed window centered on the end wall like a second thought between the attic's steeply canted eaves. He was hungry, but thought it prudent to pinch pennies and dismissed an urge to go out in search of coffee and a roll, and instead letting his stomach growl until it was time for the usual monotonous boardinghouse breakfast.

He was beginning to appreciate the fact that Widow Kraven, the inquisitive reigning matriarch of all she surveyed, apparently nurtured vague suspicions about him. It was her habit to track the comings and goings of all five lodgers, but for whatever reason she seemed much more curious about the lifestyle and activities of the purported Austrian national who had the temerity to call himself a "journalist." James was certain that on more than one occasion while he had been out she'd surreptitiously entered his room and doubtless poked through his personal effects and belongings — a nosiness he found slightly worry-making. At the first opportunity he meant to visit a pawn shop or secondhand store to see what was available and perhaps squander a portion of dwindling funds on as primitive a tool as a used typewriter to substantiate his cover as a journalist by writing a newspaper article for snoopy Frau Kraven to find.

His determination surging, he wrapped himself in a blanket against the early chill, took several sheets of foolscap and a pencil from the backpack and began to list every shred of data he had acquired about Lustmann. The *Deutsches Weltreich* hero of heroes had been — that is to say, *would* be — fortyish when Lebe's team of Odessa fanatics purportedly dispatched him from Argentina circa nineteen-sixty, C.E. In the here-and-now, it meant his quarry, also an intruder like himself despite an early life in Germany, was only a few real-time years his senior.

Numerous bombastic biographies, eulogies and tributes had characterized the hero of heroes as a true "Renaissance man," a patron of the arts of superior intellect and impeccable taste, the rarest of rare individuals endowed with a golden touch, a scientific dilettante who had aided physicist Alfred Lebe in developing the quintessential details of his pristine retrotemporal system. An accomplished historian, James had always harbored an intuitive suspicion that the hero celebrated in song and story had actually been more a confidence man than a scientist or artist or anything else. Reading between the lines, his studies had heighten his belief that the sleek, egotistical gloss of the *Reichsheld* venerated in innumerable books, films, poems and media accolades of every type and variety — even an opera — bespoke little more than moderately high intelligence, plus an enormous degree of resolve and Olympian self-esteem.

A principal reason for this suspicion had been the persistent, subterranean rumors the dread of reprisal had kept as whispered inferences that inferred Lustmann was a dabbler in the occult "sciences," perhaps even a fervent subscriber to arcane beliefs. In the official, state-published biography, the hero's life had been minutely examined, dissected and cataloged at far too great a length subsequent to his celebrated postwar recognition by the neo-Nazi autocrats who ruled the empire a decade and more after Hitler's passing. Several highly placed leaders of the lengthy, widespread conspiracy which had recruited he himself had risked their lives by

forwarding an in-depth investigation of Lustmann's "career," apparently unearthing tidbits pertaining to the then-sixtyish savior of *Deutsches Weltreich* for his checkered past marred by a pair of failed marriages, and a seamy incident involving a prima ballerina in Ukraine Province's *Gauleitung* officials had never been able to squelch. He had also suffer a half-dozen plunging dips and rocketing ascents in and out of Party favor that had proved difficult to sweep under the heavy neo-Nazi rug. In late middle-age outwardly indifferent to politics per se, Erich Lustmann had wallowed in super-celebrity status, undoubtedly certain his fame had elevated him to Olympian stature due to his heroic, world-changing retrotemporal escapade.

In the final analysis, official propaganda notwithstanding, his lifestyle had perhaps also contributed to his ultimate undoing. The underground insurgency which had unanimously elected he himself as the candidate capable of becoming a prime catalyst of change had provided further enlightenment in the form of additional rumors and scandalous innuendoes suggesting that the hero's deeply mourned passing had not been the result of a massive stroke after all but rather due to his dissolute lifestyle. His demise, according to the most disparaging whispers, while no more than half-believed, broadly hinted that the hero of heroes had drunk himself to death, all the while conducting séances for affluent dowagers, courting well-heeled distaff members of the lunatic fringe, and wenching limitlessly. If even partially true, his passing had drawn the final curtain over a life unlike that of any other "scientific dilettante" or "artist" in recorded history.

After jotting down his reflections, James came full circle, ending face-to-face with the enigma topping all other enigmas. How in the sacred name of God Almighty had Lustmann, alone and purposely friendless during his miraculous sojourn in wartime Germany, managed to gain the attention of one or more ears, hearts and minds within the Nazi hierarchy? How had he managed to make himself *heard*, let alone gain an ability to take advantage of his prescient foreknowledge of the shape things to come were said to take without his interference. How had his warnings and suggestions been made *known* to those in authority, let alone believed and least believable of all *acted* upon? How had the man changed history, the nitty-gritty *mechanics* of it? Every fellow conspirator in the hopefully never-to-exist *Deutsches Weltreich* he had left as a desperate fugitive had eagerly voiced one pet theory or another, and the questions stemming from those theories had been endlessly debated. There was, to cite an extreme example, the utterly fanciful Martin Borman hypothesis hinting that Hitler's little-known closest of close associates, the shadowy, behind-the-scenes figure who'd replaced Rudolf Hess as the *Der Führer's* anointed deputy, had in truth been Erich Lustmann. A number of less extravagant theories also abounded, each of which he himself considered equally preposterous.

Hunger eventually drove him to dress hastily in the chill attic room and hurry downstairs to yet again indulge in Frau Kraven's "standard" breakfast. In the last analysis, whatever means and methods Erich Lustmann had used to aid Nazi Germany's victory over the combined Allied forces mattered not a whit. Finding him would provide some if not all the answers.

Finding the man . . .

* * *

Warned a dozen times to neither write the letters nor address the envelopes in longhand, and thus avert potential detection by some handwriting expert, Lustmann rigorously adhered to the dictum by laboriously printing the semi-scripted first message letter by letter, punctuation mark by mark. Each succeeding missive after the critical, all-important introductory letter, would

of course be written in like manner and style if for no other reason than to prove them and their source genuine, the message in each restricted to either a briefly stated caveat, or notification of one or more erroneous impending military or government endeavors, or an insistence that the manner in which an impending decision seemed likely might lead to a calamity, or in selective cases a jeremiad aimed at preventing a specific military or political debacle about to be erroneously implemented in order to hopefully thwart the plans, actions or reactions of the so-called Allies. The Odessa brain trust had decreed that editorializing could cloud the message itself, drumming into him the fact that wordage in each letter be kept to an absolute minimum.

Vainly proud of the Spencerian calligraphy he'd practiced diligently as a schoolboy, and then further cultivated during his *SS* career, he found printing the first letter word by word very tedious, unsatisfying, and inhumanly frustrating. While the finished missive might be less than perfect, he conceded that hand-lettering did for some reason enhance message's impact. Colonel Stoltz, aided by a literary-minded former *Waffen-SS Gruppenführer* had put their heads together to write, rewrite, edit, picked to pieces, and then rewrite yet again, before polishing to perfection the text of the introductory letter. In essence, all he'd needed to do was transcribe the result verbatim, and here and there add a brief fillip of his own invention. For example, after several tries, he decided to capitalize the entire text, his rationale being that since all nouns were capitalized in German, it made everything simpler.

Lighting a cigarette, he sat back and on the third or fourth time smoked hungrily while admiring his handiwork:

UPON RECEIPT OF THIS NOTE I AM CERTAIN YOU WILL BELIEVE ME UNDER TREATMENT BY NOT ONE BUT AN ENTIRE TEAM OF PSYCHIATRISTS. NEVERTHELESS, I CAN NO LONGER HOLD BACK WORD OF CERTAIN INDELIBLE, RECENTLY EXPERIENCED VISIONS THAT AWAKEN ME IN THE NIGHT, OFTEN NIGHTLY, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, AND KEEP ME SLEEPLESS. I CANNOT BEGIN TO EXPLAIN THE VISIONS I HAVE "EXPERIENCED," OR WHY THE "SIGHTS AND SOUNDS" WHICH COME TO ME FROM NOWHERE OFTEN TURN ME INTO AN INCURABLE INSOMNIAC FOR LONG PERIODS.

ALL I AM ABLE TO TELL YOU WITH TOTAL ASSURANCE IS THAT I KNOW MYSELF GROSSLY AFFLICTED WITH SOME COMPLETELY UNKNOWN FORM OF PRETERNATURAL TALENT, AND A MORE FIENDISH "TALENT" IT IS THAN ANYONE NOT AFFLICTED COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE. WORSE, IT IS A TALENT WITH WHICH I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO WISH TO BE ENDOWED, NOR ANY CONCEIVABLE REASON TO POSSESS.

I DO CONFESS TO HAVING SUFFERED SINCE CHILDHOOD FROM WHAT MIGHT BE LOOSELY TERMED "VISIONS," ALTHOUGH DURING THESE ESPECIALLY TRYING TIMES THAT TERM NOW SEEMS AWFULLY LAME AND INAPPROPRIATE. YET TRUTHFULLY SUCH VISIONS DO NOT ALWAYS OCCUR WHEN I AM UNDER CRITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES ASSOCIATED WITH THE WAR OUR BELOVED REICH IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN PROSECUTING WITH VIGOR AND BRILLIANCE. FOR SOME INEXPLICABLE REASON, HOWEVER, IN SOME EXOTIC PRECOGNITIVE FASHION AM I ABLE TO CLEARLY DISCERN FUTURE EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS NOT AS YET REALIZED.

I UNDERSTAND HOW INSUFFERABLY IDIOTIC THAT STATEMENT MUST SOUND, AND I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT A NEGATIVE, FOOLISH IMPACT IT WILL STRIKE IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF WHOEVER HAPPEN TO READ THIS LETTER. BUT I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO SELF-RIGHTEOUSLY INSIST THAT WHAT I HAVE DESCRIBED, WHILE UTTERLY FANTASTIC, IS ENTIRELY ACCURATE. THE CLARITY, SCOPE AND INDELIBLE NATURE OF MY MOST RECENT "VISION" MAKES IT STARKLY IMPOSSIBLE TO REMAIN SILENT, HENCE I HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND REFUSE TO SLOUGH OFF MY STRANGE, PECULIAR TALENT AS DELUSIONAL. SPECIFIC FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THINGS TO COME — MY "VISIONS," I ASSURE YOU — ARE TOTALLY ASYMPTOMATIC OF THE MENTAL ILLNESS TO WHICH I HAVE FOREVER DREADED FALLING VICTIM. IT THEREFORE BEHOOVES ME TO FORCEFULLY ASSERT, REASSERT AND UNDERSCORE THE PLAIN AND SIMPLE TRUTH, WHICH IS THAT I JUDGE MYSELF TO BE AMONG THE SANEST OF THE SANE.

TO BALDLY STATE THE KNOWN FACTS, OUR BELOVED REICH IS ENGAGED IN A JUST AND RIGHTEOUS WAR DESTINED TO AVENGE THE UNRIGHTEOUS VENGEANCE OF THE ENGLISH AND

FRENCH TO WHOM THE FORCES OF IMPERIAL GERMANY SUCCUMBED AFTER A TREASONOUS BETRAYAL BY ITS OWN LEADERSHIP AT THE GREAT WAR'S CONCLUSION, WHEN EXCESSIVELY SEVERE, UNCONSCIONABLE REPARATIONS DEMANDS PREVENTED OUR GREAT NATION FROM REASSUMING ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE ON THE WORLD STAGE. NOT MERELY ONCE, BUT OVER AND OVER, AGAIN AND AGAIN HAVE I "SEEN" FRENCH TOY SOLDIERS, REINFORCED BY BRITISH REGIMENTS FROM ACROSS THE CHANNEL, CROUCHED BEHIND THEIR FUTILE MAGINOT FORTIFICATIONS IN ANTICIPATION OF A FRONTAL ASSAULT THAT INEVITABLY WOULD LEAD TO SEIGE AFTER SEIGE OF TRENCH-WARFARE STALEMATE THAT COULD NOT HELP BUT AMOUNT TO A REPRIS OF THE HORRIFIC CARNAGE SUFFERED BY ALL CONCERNED DURING THE GREAT WAR.

THAT, HOWEVER, I AM ABLE TO CONFIRM, WILL NOT TAKE PLACE. IN MY "VISION," I HAVE SEEN A KILOMETERS-LONG PANZERJÄGER COLUMN ROLLING THROUGH A DENSE, HILLY FOREST IN ORDER TO READY AN ASSAULT ON THE LOW COUNTRIES AND FRANCE BY MEANS OF A CRAFTY LIGHTNING THRUST AROUND, AND NOT THROUGH, THE MAGINOT BASTION ON WHICH THE COMPLACENT FRENCH INSANELY PRIDE THEMSELVES. THE REICH'S CONQUEST OF FRANCE WILL CAP A SERIES OF GLORIOUS TRIUMPHS, VICTORIES WHICH THE FRENCH AND BRITISH MILITARY ARE WOEFULLY ILL-EQUIPPED AND UNPREPARED TO OPPOSE. I HAVE "SEEN" VICTORY AFTER VICTORY WROUGHT BY WEHRMACHT HEER FORCES IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM. I HAVE "SEEN" A CONQUERED FRANCE, "SEEN" PROUD SWASTIKA BANNERS WAVING OVER THE PARIS BOULEVARDS, RIPPLING ON THE CROWN OF NAPOLEON'S TRIUMPHAL ARCH. I HAVE "SEEN" DER FÜHRER'S LITTLE HOP-SKIP OF TRIUMPH IN THE FOREST OF COMPAGNIE, WHERE THE FRENCH SURRENDER WILL TAKE PLACE AND CREATE A SUNBURST OF RIGHTEOUS GERMAN PRIDE. WHY PRIDE? BECAUSE THE SURRENDER WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE IDENTICAL RAILCAR WHERE IMPERIAL GERMANY'S NOVEMBER CRIMINALS PROSTITUTED THEMSELVES AND THEIR NATION BY BECOMING SIGNATORIES TO THE VILE, DISGRACEFUL "ARMISTICE," AND THE UNJUST "PEACE" THAT WROTE FINIS TO THE CONFLICT.

MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE ON EARTH DO I ENJOY A DEEP, HEARTFELT, ABIDING UNDERSTANDING OF HOW INDESCRIBABLY DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR MY "VISIONS" TO BE ACCEPTED AS OTHER THAN THE RAVINGS OF A LUNATIC UNHAPPILY CONFINED IN SOME MADHOUSE. YET BELIEVE YOU MUST! I POSSESS NEITHER THE IMAGINATION NOR INTELLECT TO ACCOUNT FOR MY "GIFT," OR "CURSE," WHICHEVER THE CASE MAY BE. ALL I CAN DO IS TO HONESTLY AND STRAIGHTFORWARDLY RELATE THE INCREDIBLE PICTURES THAT FLASH BEFORE MY MIND'S EYE, NEVER CEASING TO DEPICT SUBSTANTIAL IF UNVERIFIABLE FUTURE EVENTS IN AN INEXPLICABLE, NEVERENDING CASCADE OF PRETERNATURAL "VISIONS."

In search of exactly the proper catchphrase with which to capture the spirit of the letter, Lustmann unsnapped the rubber bands securing the support documents furnished along with the concise, flash paper account of the war. Reviewing the first few pages, he came across some lines the scholarly SS had urged Colonel Stoltz to incorporate back there — rather two decades hence — in far off Argentina. What the obnoxious know-it-all *Gruppenführer* had come up with struck Lustmann as not merely obscure, but neither apt nor meaningful. On second thought, he appreciated the need for a reference, keyword or whatever, that would emphasize the repeated claim of possessing some nameless precognitive power. He eventually settled on a triplet the *verdammt* SS group leader had credited to a poem penned by someone named Eliot. He shrugged, and on general principles appended it to the final paragraph:

TIME PRESENT AND TIME PAST ARE BOTH PERHAPS CONTAINED IN TIME FUTURE, AND TIME FUTURE CONTAINED IN TIME PAST.

Satisfied, he concluded by printing HEIL HITLER! and in place of a signature lettered, A FRIEND OF THE REICH.

In like manner, he used bold strokes to address the Schöneberg envelope in green ink, but of course refrained from listing a return address. Licking a postage stamp, he pasted it on the envelope, slipped the letter into the envelope, licked the flap and sealed it, then tucked it into an inner jacket pocket. He intended to go out later, post the critically important introductory letter in whichever anonymous substation or letterbox he happened to pass first on one of the side streets

one or more blocks off *Unter den Linden*. Every ensuing letter would be surreptitiously mailed in one or another of the multitude of red letterboxes, postal drops and substations scattered from one end of Berlin to the other.

And beyond, should that prove necessary, he thought, delighted to have the nagging chore over and done with.

TEN Berlin, Spring 1940

Charged with leading *Amt Ausland/Abwehr im Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, the Third Reich's military intelligence gathering agency, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris disliked wearing his custom-tailored *Kriegsmarine* uniform, although specific state and social functions made doing so obligatory. What he invariably did wear, and seldom if ever discarded, was a stoic mask few individuals he dealt with were able to penetrate. Wily and urbane, nattily attired in a dark brown business suit on this damp spring morning, the admiral considered his work infinitely more important and rewarding than his family, or the small coterie of personal friends and acquaintances with whom he rarely had much to do.

Allgemeiner Feld-Marschall Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of Staff and Supreme Commander of the Third Reich's armed forces, sat stiffly upright across Canaris' desk tapping an impatient forefinger on the armrest of his chair in anticipation of the admiral's reaction after reading the bizarre letter he himself had burst into the office unannounced expressly to show to the admiral. His displeasure evident when Canaris looked up from the sheets of plain, unwatermarked stationery without a change of expression.

"Odd," Canaris said in his own laconic fashion.

"Out of the blue," informed Keitel, "a Hungarian fortuneteller who goes by a single name, Zoltan, walked into *Amt IV* Prinz Albrecht Street headquarters, and told the duty officer the letter had arrived in the post, then boldly announced it worthy of official attention. He was of course arrested; Heydrich's Gestapo clowns naturally arrest anyone and everyone on sight."

"Naturally," echoed the admiral, outwardly aloof even though the letter had triggered an inordinate degree of concern due to a shocking, virtual certainty that OKW General Staff conferences held next door to his own *Tirpitzufer Strasse* headquarters had been compromised. Canaris spoke his mind; his left and right hands had been held incommunicado throughout his naval and intelligence careers. "What do you make of the letter?" he asked, Keitel, hoping the query sounded as casual as he had intended.

A blink of irritation preceded the general's reply. "I consider it the raving of a mentally unbalanced individual who has nonetheless convinced himself of his own sanity."

"Wilhelm, really! It might be safely said that all madmen," observed Canaris, exhibiting a flash of mordant humor, "are convinced of their personal sanity?"

Keitel smacked his lips irritably. "Surely," he argued, "you aren't suggesting this . . . 'Friend of the Reich' is endowed with supernatural prescience?"

"Surely you know damn well I am not suggesting anything of the kind." The admiral's voice remained level, unemotional, but the inherent sarcasm came through as an unsubtle rebuke. "If you truly think this silly letter is the work of dementia," he prodded, "why bring it to me?"

“Because whoever he may be, and whatever his degree of mental balance, what the writer has to tell us is damned disturbing. The depth of knowledge he demonstrates goes far beyond any rational explanation.”

Eying his visitor keenly, Canaris gave thought to the wisdom of venturing on a fishing expedition, “How so?” he inquired.

“You may recall the way *Generaloberst* Guderian revised and refined the tactical scheme for initiating the western campaign, Operation Gelb, although that did not take place until he had inherited the basics from von Manstein. The codenamed operation was formerly adopted weeks ago. Thoroughly briefed on Gelb, were you not?”

“The essentials,” admitted Canaris, who found retaining his offhand manner a bit more difficult. “Whoever deserves the major credit for Gelb, it struck me as a most impressive piece of work. *Der Schnelle* Heinz achieved a degree of notoriety due to his penchant for ignoring any orders with which he does not necessarily concur, then assaulting whoever and whatever stands in the way of his armor. He proved himself a worthy battlefield commander during the *Anschluss* and Sudetenland operations, and perhaps more so during the Polish actions. Are you hinting that the gist of this fellow’s ‘vision’ mimics the western offensive outlined in Gelb?”

“*Far too closely,*” emphasized Keitel, “for coincidence to have played even a minor role. General Bock’s army group, you may also recall, is slated to assault Belgium and Holland in a feint aimed at drawing French and British defenses northward, while Leeb’s army group simultaneously holds the frontier opposite the Maginot defenses, pinning down the forces now investing the fortifications. The surprise western thrust calls for von Rundstedt to lead his *Panzergruppen* through the Ardennes, skirting the static Maginot positions by a surprise strike through a hilly, forested region many tacticians consider impenetrable by armor. Rundstedt is then slated to cross the Meuse near Sedan and engage the French and British forces from the rear.” Keitel paused. “What troubles me most about our self-proclaimed ‘sane’ Nostradamus is that practically everything is now in readiness to very shortly launch the radical offensive.

“Admiral,” pursued Keitel, his mien serious, sharply focused, “I put to you a guarantee I personally know to be true, something I believe sincerely, with all my heart. As we speak, not a single individual other than a member of the senior staff is so much as marginally aware that Gelb has gained *Der Führer’s* stamp of approval.”

A curt nod. “I am certain you’re correct,” said Canaris, believing none of it.

“The is also something else,” added Keitel. “It disturbed me enormously to read how, in Our Friend’s ‘vision,’ *Der Führer* was doing a little victory jig outside the identical railcar where, to paraphrase the letter’s words, Imperial Germany’s November criminals betrayed the nation in nineteen-eighteen. You often remark about what a showman Hitler believes himself to be. Think how like him it would be to self-dramatize his triumphant role during an historic occasion like a prospective French surrender. I can’t bring myself to ignore a conviction that something dire lurks between the lines of this strange letter. A threatening undercurrent runs through it, an opinion I attribute to one singular fact alone: whoever the writer is, he definitely has a frightening depth of knowledge concerning affairs we are sworn to conscientiously guard in total secrecy. He *must* be run to ground quickly, and *must* be . . . encouraged to talk.”

“Umm-m-m, yes. There we concur wholeheartedly.” Canaris had liked neither what he had read, and perhaps least of all neither the letter’s implications, nor what he’d just heard from Keitel. “You say ‘He,’ Wilhelm . . . ? You assume the letter was written by a man?”

“A reasonable assumption, *nicht so?*”

Miffed at having his question answered with a question, one of his own favorite tactics, Canaris asked sharply, “Has Himself seen this peculiar letter, or been told of it?”

“Certainly not. Not yet, anyhow. I thought it unwise to present him with anything so unusual before consulting you, Admiral. Other than myself, to the best of my knowledge only that *Reichsheini* Himmler, his trained monkey Heydrich and partially trained monkey Müller, together with possibly another *RSHA* higher-up or two know of its existence.”

“Good. Let’s try very hard to keep it that way for the time being.” Canaris glanced at the hand-lettered sheets innocently unfolded on his desk. Upon reminding himself what it had to say, he revised his original suspicion. The damned letter was not, *could not be*, the product of espionage. The dullest spy ever to draw breath wouldn’t dream of consummating an act of sheer brilliance like penetrating an *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* staff conference, then turning about head to tail and *mailing* to his victims a detailed description of the ferreted secrets.

“This ‘Friend of the Reich’ could be a veteran of the Western Front,” suggested Canaris. “Perhaps a retired field-grade officer sufficiently versed in reading maps to grasp the current western situation in its entirety, quickly put two and two together and intuit the value of Gelb’s tactical surprise in much the same way it was devised by von Manstein and Guderian.”

“Possible, I suppose.” Keitel gave an impression of shrugging off the notion.

“On the other hand,” Canaris went on to say, “Be that as it may, I share your concern over the last item you mentioned. Our ‘Friend’s’ vision of Hitler doing a little victory jig in Paris perturbs me as much, and maybe even more than it does you.”

Keitel concurred. “Precisely! That touch is too vivid and insightful to be invented out of whole cloth by anyone with or without a military background. The author of this letter, whoever he is, would have to be personally acquainted with *Der Führer’s* . . . quirks to, uh . . .”

“You’ll get no argument from me.” Canaris folded the letter, his manner thoughtful, handed it back to Keitel and advised him to keep it in a secure place.

Keitel nodded brusquely.

“Whether our ‘Friend of the Reich’ is found to be an authentic seer,” said Canaris, drawing out his words, “or eminently certifiable, I judge the letter itself to be the work of no simpleton. A high degree of sophistication — an intellectual ambience — pervades the terms our ‘Friend’ uses, and the phraseology as well. You say it was posted here in Berlin. Good! Should there be another, it will narrow the chase to the city. Leave the Hungarian’s address with me, Wilhelm, and his phone number. Since *lieber* Heinrich and his *SS* poultry herders already know about it, best I think to let Heydrich’s Gestapo fumblers handle the preliminary legwork. His vicious bastards could hardly be termed competent, yet they know their way around the streets. I’ll order the Hungarian released along with an official apology for having detained him, but not until he’s been pumped completely dry.”

“Sensible.” Keitel rose. “Once our ‘Friend’ is located, we can have him shadowed, find out where he goes, what he does, whom he contacts.”

“Just so,” said Canaris, disdainful of the other’s habit of stating the obvious. “Once in custody we shall warn him in no uncertain terms of what will happen if he dares to breathe one word of the letter’s contents to another living soul. Innocent, guilty, or falling into the wide crack between, once a substantive amount of preliminary information has been gathered we’ll run the fellow to ground, that I promise you!”

“Put your best people on it,” advised Keitel, earning a second nod filled with disdain also lurking not far below the surface.

“Never fear, Wilhelm. My very best asset and his team will lead the investigation.”

Canaris thanked the field marshal for privately alerting him to what might or might not be an extremely serious, breach of security. Chatting about another matter, he showed Keitel to the door.

* * *

At first sight, the manual Olivetti on a dusty shelf in a seedy backstreet pawnshop looked like an obsolete relic. After a brief hagggle with the pawnbroker, James had handed over a few *Reichsmarks*, taken it home to the boardinghouse, where he’d cleaned it up and decided all it needed was a new ribbon. The only other typewriters he had ever seen belonged to a collection of manual, electric and portable machines in Greater Denver’s *Reichsmuseum*. However, there had never been any reason for him to learn to type. The efficient voicewriter he’d used on his “own” timeline had incorporated — rather *would* incorporate — transliteration firmware that permitted collateral storage of text in whatever language one chose, while ancillary software provided sophisticated nuance-of-meaning editing automation, syntax and integral spell-check, plus automated proofreading. In his former future life, talking into the voicewriter had been as natural as breathing. A tool beyond value when writing, editing and polishing his papers and books, the voicewriter had also facilitated the seamless dissemination of information to and from students and associates whose native tongue was other than English, German or Italian.

The obsolete yet still useful Olivetti’s unfamiliar QWERTY pattern of keys protruded in staggered rows — round discs identified with a Gothic letter, number or symbol. Having no choice but to hunt and peck, he hunted and pecked, distracted by the loud, erratic click-clack of type striking a sheet of foolscap in the worn roller.

Once finished, he captioned the op-ed piece “Berlin’s Wartime Mood,” bylined to his alter ego, Hans Steyr. Wondering if bothering to write it had been a waste of time and energy, he had accomplished the chore due to a certainty that his nosy landlady was becoming increasingly curious about the Austrian “journalist” who came and went on innumerable nameless errands, but had thus far demonstrated nothing in the way of actively practicing his supposed profession. In a personal sense, committing to paper the impressions he had gathered roaming the capital and striking up conversations with Berliners had helped him organize his thoughts.

One self-admitted academic foible acquired early in his academic career had been a firm though perhaps odd conviction that whatever was not written down had never really happened. Whether or not committing the faux article to paper had any value remained to be seen. Now, at least, his snoopish landlady could hear sporadic typing coming from the attic room, and it might be enough to convince her that the foreign boarder was who and what he advertised himself to be, an Austrian gentleman involved in the profession he was actually hiding behind.

Reviewing the article, he realized he had laid it on thickly. The tract told in exuberant terms of the buoyant optimism and patriotic fervor displayed by a cross-section of the Berliners with whom he'd come in contact — shopkeepers, laborers, professionals, and in one singular instance a streetwalker whose opinions he'd sampled because she glibly responded to each of his questions in the interest of soliciting trade. A basic think piece, the op-ed article was a paean describing in excessively enthusiastic terms how men, women and children alike endorsed the “just and righteous war” Germany was prosecuting, and went on to suggest none too subtly that since Austria was now a part of *Dritte Reich* his fellow Austrians would be wise to take note of how the German populace was reacting, and follow suit. The three and one-half pages of double-spaced, hunt-and-peck prose, not to mention the clumsy, laborious, exasperating use of the relic simply to get his thoughts on paper had wearied him, depleting his psychic energy.

Feeling a need for physical activity, he descended the stair soft-footed, ducked past the widow Kraven, who was singing to herself off-key in the kitchen, and slipped out of the boardinghouse to resume his random search for Erich Lustmann.

Footsore after hours of fruitless wandering, he decided assistance was needed, stopped at a bookseller's shop in *Alexander Platz* and bought a guidebook titled *BERLIN VON A BIZ Z*. Back at the boardinghouse, he stayed in the lonely attic room the rest of the day, recording and plotting the location of every major and minor bistro, theatre, restaurant, opera house and movie theater he discovered using the guidebook, or by having pounded the pavement neighborhood by neighborhood, and sometimes street by street, in various sectors of Berlin.

Mornings thereafter were given over to sketching out and writing articles supposedly destined to be sent home to Salzburg for publication, with afternoons reserved for making his rounds, hoping to pick out the unmistakable face in the crowds. Between times he lived a Spartan existence. At the current rate of expenditure, his cash would be gone in another month — six weeks maximum if he watched his pennies — and he would need to fall back on his last resort, the scant handful of jewelry. He seldom failed to read with intense interest news of the war's progress in day-old newspapers scrounged from park benches and trash receptacles.

The notion to cash in the jewelry sadly turned back his thoughts to Bernard Omsley, who would have been proud of the thoroughness with which he had atemporized. He began to feel comfortable as any homegrown Berliner, using the rich, racy argot of the streets, where money was “wire,” “moss,” “gravel,” or “powder,” and *Reichsmarks* were *Eier* — eggs — or sometimes *Emmenchen*, a diminutive of the letter “M.” Far and away the best linguistic tutors were the salty-tongued flower sellers in *Leipziger Strasser*. He stopped there whenever he was in the vicinity, and made a practice of handling the blooms critically, all the while dropping comments about the withered appearance of bouquets despite their exorbitant cost, always receiving a fluent dressing-down that helped build a fulsome liberal education on the niceties of slanderous abuse.

Spending a niggardly sum, on more than one evening he purchased a standing-room ticket and tried to develop fallen arches at *Staats Oper*, arriving an hour before the performance to search for Lustmann among the early comers, then prowling the lobby during intermission to survey the crowd of chatting, smoking opera goers. When *Staats Oper* began emptying out after the final curtain calls, he conscientiously watched for his quarry in the departing crowd.

On a memorable evening prior to reveling in the contrapuntal magnificence of *Die Meistersinger*, he'd been severely jolted by a momentary scare. Unbeknownst to him, rumors had

circulated to the effect that Hitler might wish to attend the performance. The Leader never did showed up that evening, but upon entering the opera house James was accosted by a man he assumed to be a Gestapo agent who no doubt considered the second-hand clothing James wore did not look appropriate among the well-dressed opera goers, and demanded to see his papers. He also endured a surprisingly indifferent production of Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, and weeks later a rather pompous production of *Aida*. At last he was forced to conclude that Lustmann was not an opera buff, and sought less highbrow entertainment elsewhere.

If, came the scary, constantly recurring thought, *the man's even in Berlin*.

Next he tried sporting events and open-air band concerts, going so far as to reconnoiter a bordello or two, and on impulse figuratively held his nose and attended a stage-managed Nazi rally. All such ventures produced equally disappointing results, and he began to think of them as wasted effort. Uneasily, with increasing frequency, he forced himself to reject the dread notion that Lustmann had not yet to put in an appearance. It was a fear that not only cropped up more frequently, but was spurred by an increasing sense of urgency as time passed, bringing on fits of depression that made him to take a firm grip on himself, resolutely push aside discouragement, and steel his devotion to the quest. Nothing during the early course of what he could not help but think of as "The War Years" seemed at variance to the accounts rendered in numerous tomes he had studied in school, and later more assiduously after being endowed with professional insight that equipped him to become totally absorbed in digesting the ponderous, thirteen-volume official history of The War of World Liberation credited to *Reichsminister* Goebbels.

He also played endless suppositional games, striving to walk in Lustmann's shoes while making his rounds in Berlin, trying to imagine where the hero of heroes might be staying, how and by what means and methods he might be adopting to get on with his mission, positing how he might occupy his leisure time. Was there actually a major difference between Lustmann's situation and his own? He and his quarry, interlopers both, were likewise strangers in Berlin, although in that respect Lustmann owned a built-in advantage: German-born-and-bred, he had supposedly visited the capital more than once as a youth and young man.

Wasn't it entirely reasonable and logical to assume that he *had* to be in Berlin now, in spring, nineteen forty? Physicist Lebe and the Nazi expatriates who had schooled the hero on his mission and dispatched him would certainly have wanted their man on scene when hostilities erupted. Best, perhaps, to take his presence for granted, an attitude that should make finding him a matter of sheer perseverance, a matter of never giving up.

He despondently closed the guidebook late one cloudy afternoon, stopped for a bite of supper in a small mom and pop café, and in low spirits wearily dragged himself back toward the boardinghouse, crossing the Spree on the Oberbaum Bridge pedestrian walkway. Ambling three blocks beyond the bridge toward the railroad tracks, he turned the corner, halted on the sidewalk in alarm, and shrank back against the fence in front of a house.

An indistinct figure, head tilted back, the brim of his hat pulled down over his eyes, was slouched in the driver's seat of a sleek black Audi sedan parked at the curb directly in front of the boardinghouse.

James deliberated in the shadows, took a deep breath, averted his features and walked quickly past the Audi, then hurried up the steps. Neither Frau Kraven nor any lodgers were smoking, reading or listening to the radio in the parlor. He trudged up the creaky stair, and

hesitated on the second-floor landing, peering upward. Through the row of posts supporting the upper bannister, he could see door to his attic room standing ajar.

Angered to think his snoopily landlady had again invaded his privacy, he surged upward, meaning to once and for all set her straight. Reaching the narrow attic landing at the top of the stairway, he felt the small hairs lift at the nape of his neck. It was not Frau Kraven who sat in the rickety chair behind the ancient Olivetti typewriter on the decrepit mahogany nightstand he used as a desk.

Outwardly at ease, the unsmiling intruder stared out at James through the partly open door. "Come in, Herr Steyr," he invited, "or would you prefer to be addressed as A Friend of the Reich . . . ?"

* * *

A temporary shut-in due to heavier than normal spring snowfall, Lustmann spent the morning reading newspapers, and as it sometimes did the "news" inspired a siege of melancholia. Plain vanilla in every aspect other than details known only someone able to dip into a treasure trove of factual data relating to current warfare, and what was to come as well, the events read about matched to a tee the flash paper "script" safely locked away in his carryall. Every item of reportage, including the constant radio bulletins, used glowing, grandiloquent terms to relate the manifold successes being achieved by the Reich's military juggernaut.

Press attention was currently focused on the air-sea rampage aimed at occupying strategically situated Norway and Denmark. "News" of the dual operations, spotty enough as it was, caused his spirits to sag. The smooth course of the war, achingly familiar in almost every respect, left him with little or no ammunition to use in writing letters designed to actively forward his mission. Having laboriously composed, printed by hand and posted a second letter, then a third weeks later, the core message in each had been to hopefully remind those in authority of the uncanny accuracy inherent in each of his "visions." As an afterthought, he had also warned of the danger posed by British sea power, and had made a point of referring to the Scandinavian campaign by "insider" nomenclature, *Weserübung*, a codename supposedly known only to members of the military hierarchy. Posting the third letter on the last day of March, he had unobtrusively dropped it in the slot of a sidewalk red letterbox distant from the Adlon.

After Hans the bellman, prompt as ever, had delivered the morning papers, bowing and scraping and voicing undying gratitude for the customary overly generous gratuity he received, the Tuesday, April 9th edition of *Morgenpost* offered good tidings pertaining to the *Weserübung* campaign, in addition to tidbits not quite so good. As an example of the former, *Morgenpost* reported that a pair of *Wehrmacht* divisions commanded by General Kaupitsch had conducted a clockwork-precise attack, overwhelming Copenhagen in less than twelve hours. On the other side of the ledger, the landings in Norway were proving to be much more difficult undertakings than OKW had anticipated. A flotilla of troop carriers steaming toward Oslo apparently had met increasing resistance upon entering the fjord, and at the Oscarsborg Narrows a newly commissioned heavy cruiser, the *Blucher*, had been sunk. This setback had compelled troop landings some distance from the objective, while airborne units had likewise taken serious casualties during simultaneous paratroop drops at the Oslo airport.

Dense fog had disrupted the invasion at Kristiansand, although most components of the *Wehrmacht* had moved safely ashore. The vital Stavanger airfield had been taken by airborne

forces, but a preponderance of equipment pertaining to use by the ground assault troops had been lost offshore when a Norwegian destroyer sank the vessel carrying it. At Bergen, surprise had won the day after the cruiser *Konigsberg* was seriously damaged by shelling from a Norwegian coastal battery. To the north, Trondheim had fallen almost without a shot being fired.

The most indecisive segment of the Norwegian operation, the push toward Narvik, had included a sharp exchange between the British battle cruiser *HMS Renown*, and *Kriegsmarine* pocket battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. In spite of a disparity in firepower between the respective opposing forces, *Gneisenau* had sustained sufficient damage for her captain to break off the engagement. A British destroyer force was said to be steaming toward Narvik, while off Kristiansand the cruiser *Karlsruhe* had been sent to the bottom, probably by a British submarine. Despite these difficulties, *Morgenpost* of course labeled the *Weserübung* incursion a resounding success in all respects. Most forces had managed to get ashore and establish control of the crucial Stavanger airport, now a base for *Luftwaffe* squadrons based there to restrict British operations, and had in fact already sunk one destroyer and damaged the battleship *HMS Rodney*.

Lustmann despondently crumpled the newspaper. Sipping coffee laced with brandy, he flicked his gold-flashed Dunhill, studied the flame briefly before touching it to the cigarette, and reflected upon the upcoming events capsulized in his flash paper scenario of the war. A nonaggression pact between Germany and that vicious Georgian opportunist, Stalin, had been signed prior to the massive *Wehrmacht* assault on Poland. He grimaced rancorously over the underhanded way Soviet *Schweinhunden* had demonstrated their Communist-style compliance with the treaty by sending Red Army contingents into Poland from the east. The nonaggression pact now in force was worth a good deal less than the paper on which it was inscribed, and more than a year remained until the onset of *Barbarossa*, the invasion of Russia. It would be no simple task, he knew, to provide “visionary guidance” to the Nazi mastermind whose demagoguery ruled the thinking of every other NSDAP mastermind, thereby helping ensure a hiatus in the war in order to firm up and consolidate all European gains, and thus significantly delay the *Barbarossa* invasion; nor could that be a simple, straightforward task like most other “coaching” suggestions designed by Manfred Stoltz and his confreres on ways and means of influencing, rectifying and redirecting the course of the war to hopefully omit downstream errors. Delayed or not, *Barbarossa* lay months and months in the future, so little was to be gained by thinking about it at this early stage of the overall conflict.

One goal of definite consequence had been drilled into him, the oft-repeated urging to dispatch a stern caveat aimed at turning about head to tail what Stoltz had referred to as “the early war’s most idiotic fiasco,” the occasion when a third-of-a-million British and allied troops had been successfully evacuated from beaches near the Belgian port of Dunkerque. He would have to throw his heart and soul into composing the Dunkerque letter. As Manfred had stressed, a gargantuan degree of political and international pressure would be exerted on the British if vast numbers of Tommies and their allied cousins should be slain or taken prisoner at Dunkerque, and what a bargaining chip those irreplaceable troops would become when peace negotiations began with the government of fat, brandy-swilling Prime Minister Churchill! Dunkerque would take place prior to the crucial nexus when he would have to begin coaching Operation Sea Lion, the Channel-crossing that simply *had* to lead to invading and conquering the British Isles.

Slated to take place in upcoming late May and very early June, 1940, Dunkerque would occur in a time frame not that far off. If Hitler's incredible indecisiveness and failure to act were to be successfully reversed, ameliorated or hopefully overcome, Dunkerque would become the war's first major turning point. It was not too early to begin a first draft of that crucial letter, but unfortunately, as had been the case with both recent letters, it was a message he would have to compose from scratch — a worrisome notion in itself. Moreover, it would by necessity include the corollary need to inject verbiage consonant with the theme and tone of the prior letters. The labor necessary to compose, edit and polish the Dunkerque letter, plus those to follow, struck him as prospective tasks at which he did not consider himself anything like proficient.

Shortly after the Dunkerque letter, two others would be due, possibly three. The principal objective in each would be to revise the tactical thinking of super-egoistic, self-centered *Reichsmarschall des Grossdeutschen Reiches* Hermann Göring. The flash paper "script" in his possession included a précis of the aerial war and called for a series of "lessons" on various means and methods of obtaining positive, practical bombing results, not simply strewing civilian carnage during the coming summer's aerial assault on England. Göring's wrongheaded, one-track-mind penchant for exercising attempt after attempt to terrorize the Britishers into submission by decimating the civilian portion of London, Coventry, Manchester and other cities desperately needed revision. In Lustmann's estimation, Göring was a very much overrated public national hero due to his wartime role in the Great War, when he'd replaced revered Baron von Richthofen who had left the Imperial German Air Service in a coffin. According to Colonel Stoltz, Göring had not the fuzziest conception of how obtuse the "stiff-upper-lip" Britishers could be, or how obstinately and defiantly they would refuse to be intimidated by an aerial *Blitzkrieg*. No, the *Luftwaffe* objective would be — should have been — to attack and destroy every stick and stone of Britain's industrial infrastructure, including aircraft production facilities, ports, factories, shipyards and every vessel encountered at sea, or docked.

If all went according to the master plan formulated under the concerted guidance of Manfred and the self-declared wiser heads among Odessa's expatriates, the *Luftwaffe's* egocentric, self-styled marshal might be forced to heed the message, and might also have to abandon the non-regulation, self-inflating uniforms he was addicted to wearing, yet another stroke of overweening hubris which on occasion made him something of a laughing stock. The *Reichsminister* would have to put aside his drugs, *Schnapps*, an endless parade of women, his thievery of art objects, and instead devote his entire being to what had to be done.

He paused to reconsider, and promptly readjusted his thinking. To he alone in this, the nineteen-forty timeline, the reborn war might seem a reprise of its former progression. That, however, was not the proper way to view it. Objectively, not subjectively, this *was* the first time around to those who were now fighting and dying and planning or directing the manifold advances, retreats, events, adventures and misadventures of the soon-to-be-global conflict. He sincerely hoped that before the so-called "Battle of Britain" ran its course during the lovely European summer on the near horizon, Hermann Göring would have to be convinced to abandon his preconceptions and self-indulgences, then take charge in a forethoughtful, aggressive manner. If that fanciful, wishing-well consequence were to come about, as surely as night followed day it would set the stage for the *Seelöwe* Channel crossing, a waterborne invasion leading to the

subsequent conquest of the British Isles, and the eventual consolidation of western Europe under Nazi Germany's hegemony.

* * *

James stood rooted in the doorway to his attic room, and stifled a panicky impulse to dash back downstairs, out of the boardinghouse and into the night. A flashing image of the man slouched in the black Audi sedan parked outside helped squelch the notion. Heart pounding, he took a firm grip on himself, opting for an air of bold indignation. "Who are you?" he demanded.

His neutral expression unchanged, the stranger ignored both queries. "Let me to ask once more how you prefer to be addressed? *Als Herr Steyr, oder Freund des Reichs?*"

His breathing ragged, James did not have feign perplexity. Assuming a more aggressive stance. "A friend . . ? I'm as patriotic as the next fellow, but I don't . . . Say, what the hell is this all about? "What are you doing in my room? What do you want?"

"While undertaking journalistic endeavors," asked the other calmly, "do you always use this broken-down typewriter, or perhaps change pace at times and hand-letter your articles in, oh, shall we say green ink?"

"Green . . ?" The question gave Silverthorne pause, and more importantly a chance to think. He took it for granted the suave, well-dressed stranger seated on the edge of his bed was no Gestapo thug. Yet whoever and whatever he was, he definitely was not inclined to disguise the impression he gave of smooth, mannerly self-assurance. A counterattack seemed in order. "Sir," he said heatedly, "you have me at a disadvantage by appearing in my room uninvited and asking meaningless questions. Frankly, I have no idea what you're talking about. You may be someone in authority, but I have a right to know who you are, what you want of me."

"Sit down and relax, Herr Steyr." The other gestured toward the rickety, ladder-backed chair, the only other item of furnishing in the stark attic room. "I think perhaps what I needed to know has been answered. Be assured: you are in no difficulty of any kind. In the interest of saving time, may I have a look at your papers, *bitte?*"

His unannounced visitor's abrupt transformation from stern interrogator to cordial interviewer reassure James not at all. He made a project of extracting and handing over his credentials, then obediently sank down in the rickety chair.

"Ah, Salzburg. The woman who runs this place mentioned you were Austrian." Returning the forged credentials, his air speculative, the other fingered the pages of foolscap resting beside the Olivetti. "I do hope you will not be offended, Herr Steyr. I took the liberty of reading this manuscript while awaiting your return. Truthfully, I was impressed. It struck me as unusual, and surprising as well, to learn how a foreign journalist assesses the wartime mood of we Berliners, especially through the use of distinctly upbeat terms."

His tension easing only a trifle, on a hunch James paraphrased a statement in the Nazi bible. "*Der Führer* tells us Austria simply had to return to the great German mother country, and not only because of economic considerations."

Though his expression remained neutral, a twinkle of mild amusement invaded the other's dark eyes. "*Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Führer*, Herr Steyr?"

James nodded. "Precisely, sir. Since the *Anschluss*, *Der Führer's* words have turned into something of a cliché, yet surely those selfsame words will help rewrite my country's history. Our border with southeastern Germany is no more than an easily erased, arbitrary line on a map.

Many Austrians now regard themselves an integral part of *Dritte Reich*, a social marriage most compatriots would have no other way.”

“An interesting assessment.”

“We share not only the language,” added James, “but in essence the cultural and social worldview of most if not all Germans. I know this is to be true in Salzburg, Linz and Vienna, especially since *Der Führer* boasts of Austrian roots himself, and —”

“Enough, Steyr.” His visitor’s lips twitched. He asked what had prompted James to leave Salzburg.

“It was a spur-of-the-moment decision. A freelancer with limited funds, I opted to spend my *Wanderjahr* here because the editor to whom I plan to submit my articles sounded eager to gain firsthand knowledge of the mood of German citizens. I intend to inform them how wholeheartedly Berliners in particular have formed solid ranks behind —”

“You are not affiliated with a newspaper, magazine, some type of publication?”

“Not presently, yet one day I sincerely hope to be. One might say having my work published is a rather a . . . well, I confess to being ambitious.”

The other nodded. “I suspect your ambition will pay dividends. You write very well, Steyr. It’s quite simple to foresee considerable success coming your way.”

“Why, thank you. You are most kind. Success to date has been limited.”

“You’ve lived all your life in Salzburg?” The queries came faster now.

“No, I was apparently born in my namesake town, Steyr.”

“Apparently . . . ?”

“I grew up a foundling, an orphan who knew neither parent. To my misfortune, you see, that is why I was ineligible to join the Party after applying in Salzburg. There was no possible way to document my heritage.”

“You petitioned to join the National Socialist Party?”

“Twice, sir. But the authorities told me —”

“Yes, yes; I understand. So you spent your infancy in an orphanage?”

Making up the tale as he went along, James confessed that for him the orphanage had been only a matter of hours. “When I was brought in, so they told me, a middle-aged couple happened to be there looking to replace the son lost on the Eastern Front during the Great War. Given in to their charge, I was never formally adopted, but given a good home, named for the town of my supposed origin, cared for and loved for myself alone. We moved to Salzburg in my eleventh year.”

“And the name of your foster parents . . . ?”

“Grundig, sir. Bishop and Klara Grundig. Very fine people, the finest.”

“Bishop, a churchman?”

“No, no; my foster-father’s given name.”

“Do the Grundigs still live in Salzburg?”

“Sorry to say both passed on some time ago.”

His gentlemanly visitor glanced at the manuscript. “Your work is interesting, Steyr. You write directly to the point, with a clarity of statement, few if any discursive comments or asides. If you have no objection I’d like to show this piece to a professional acquaintance. Do you think that might be possible?”

“Why, yes. I’m very flattered, sir. Of course, I would like to have it back afterward and, er, polish it, perhaps interest a Viennese editor in publication.”

“I promise to have it back in your hands within a week. Will that be satisfactory?”

“Why, certainly. Thank you very much, sir. Would it be an imposition to ask your name?”

“Meisinger, Ulrich Meisinger.” The smooth-talking gentleman rose from his seat on the bed and offered his hand. Gathering up the three manuscript pages, he nodded a cordial farewell. “You’ve been very cooperative, Steyr. I hope we meet again.” Tall and lean, purposeful strides carried out of the attic room. He ducked his head slightly to pass beneath the doorway’s lintel.

His fists clenched, badly shaken by the unexpected visitation, James did not move for a time. Reliving the encounter in memory, he slowly descended the stair, his thoughts tumbling over one another, and bathed his face in cold water in the second-floor hall bathroom.

He knew it pointless to try and guess who Herr Meisinger might be, or what brand of officialdom he represented, yet who had been behind the surprise visit was obvious. His nosy damned landlady’s curiosity about her boarder and his comings and goings at all hours, must have alerted . . . who . . . ? The authorities of one stripe or another, certainly, but *which* authorities? His inquisitor was no run-of-the-mill Gestapo thug. He judged Meisinger to be a polished, intelligent professional whose forceful personality and authoritative manner guaranteed control of anyone under questioning, nor had his questions resembled what one might hear from an interrogator bent upon grilling anyone under active suspicion. His opening persistence in asking if “Herr Steyr” wished to be addressed as someone friendly to the *Reich* was . . . What the hell had *that* been all about?

He continued to revolve the disturbing interview by a total stranger, attempting to imagine its potential ramifications, if any, and in so doing he retraced the bouncing ball variety of their conversation while slowly climbing the stair back to his room. He sat on the lumpy bed and stewed about it for a while, and eventually gave up. Whatever the unheralded visitation’s upshot might be, having his anonymity evaporate was worry-making. Yet there was a positive side: spending a few precious *Reichsmarks* to purchase a tool that allowed him to reinforce his pose as a journalist was beyond doubt the smartest move he’d made since arriving in Berlin.

He decided to sit down in the morning and — just in case — write a backup article.

ELEVEN Berlin, Spring 1940

Admiral Canaris rarely allowed his emotions to surface, though exceptions did occur. “You *had* to show him the *verdammt* letters, didn’t you?” he demanded, smacking his lips in distaste. “Why were you insistent on making him aware of the letters, *why* for the love of God? Why do you forever whisper in his ear? Is it simply to curry favor, *what?*”

Unable to cope with the heat in the admiral’s eyes, *Reichsfuhrer-SS* Himmler blinked and looked away. “*Der Führer*,” he said at last, “has a right to know everything that transpires.”

“Oh, really?”

Cornered behind his desk, Himmler was in the habit of issuing never-to-be-argued-with orders no one dared to question. Detesting confrontation in any form, and deeply resenting the way Canaris had burst into his office unannounced, he tried to imagine what form of reprisal the

belligerent *Abwehr* chief might devise for anyone who had betrayed a confidence, and failed. “May I ask how you learned he was upset?”

“A call, at breakfast.” Canaris folded his arms across his chest, subjecting Himmler to a further barrage of punishing scrutiny. “Himself, not Hess. He demanded to know why we haven’t turned up the letter-writing charlatan, and in the same breath insisted on learning why he’d been kept in the dark about our crazy Nostradamus. I had to tell him the truth, no choice.”

Once again Himmler self-consciously averted his gaze, turning his rimless spectacles opaque in the reflected glow of the banker’s lamp on his desk, and veiling his eyes. “I shouldn’t wonder that he flew into one of his classic rages.”

A snort of abject disgust. “Not over the phone,” denied Canaris a bit more calmly, yet still seething internally. “His carpet-chewing tirades are reserved for OKW conferences if and when things do not go *precisely* according to his ‘vision.’ Have you any inkling what a gross, unwitting disservice you’ve done, Heinrich?”

“That is totally unfair,” objected Himmler. “How could giving him an opportunity to read the letters possibly do harm?”

“As usual,” declared the admiral, his refractory gaze continuing to bore into the other, “you ask the wrong question. What you should have inquired was how, in what way, encouraging Hitler to learn about, and perhaps *concur* with the fanciful ‘visions’ supposedly turning our Friend of the Reich into a permanent insomniac could be of advantage to him, to *anyone*?”

“I . . . advantage? I don’t see how you can possibly —”

“Think, for the love of Christ, *think!* Until the deranged person who insists on penning these ridiculous notes has been run to ground and the truth wrung from him, making Hitler aware of the ongoing lunacy is not the useless distraction you may believe it to be.”

“What do you mean?”

“If our prophetic ‘Friend’ remains hidden much longer,” said Canaris, “have you given any thought to what could come of his cascade of ‘visions?’ For instance, what if our noble *Führer* decides to cash in on the letter-writer’s game of playing seer?”

“You can’t be hinting that he might —?”

“Hinting! No, no; not *hinting*. Heinrich, you more than anyone must be aware of how truly gullible he is in his own self-assured fashion, and how fixated he is, has always been, on Wagnerian fairytales of fate, magic fire, dragons, sword-wielding invincible Aryan supermen, all that childish rot. What if the *Reich*’s Leader begins taking *credence* in our Friend’s outrageous prophecies, and eventually turns into a true believer? What if Himself begins swallowing whole the content of one preposterous ‘vision’ after another? You know the man, know what he is, what he himself *thinks* he is. Isn’t it conceivable to believe he might pull out of his ass one of the instinctive, on-the-spot decisions he’s famous for, and *act* on it? What then? Who among us will have the stomach to whisper loudly in his ear try to talk him out of it? Will *you*, Heinrich?”

“Preposterous!” Himmler’s attempt not to appear cowed fell short. “You’re exaggerating, Admiral,” he said defensively. “All I had in mind was —”

“— currying favor!” supplied Canaris, biting the words short. “All of us compete for his ear, which is to be expected. But *you* never fail to shoulder your way to the head of the queue, except when you’re shouldered aside by that demented astrologer Hess who follows him around like a puppy. To our great misfortune, *der Führer* has the unsettling habit of paying close heed to

whoever first comes forward and begs his ear. Your *Endlösung* solution to the Jewish question is an outstanding example of precisely that brand of arrant folly.”

“Folly . . . ?” Nettled by the remark, Himmler riposted with a quip. “Don’t tell me you’ve become a Jew-lover, Wilhelm.”

The admiral’s jaw clenched. “May I remind you,” he said, once again furious, “that your chief hatchet man, loyal, devoted Reinhard Heydrich, was once a naval intelligence officer under my command. For some time the two of you have schemed to take over *my* intel operation, and persist in acting as if I knew nothing about it. Now Reinhard has elevated himself and become the principal architect of the grandiose *SS* scheme to obliterate the Jews. Does it surprise you to learn that I cashiered him in the twenties over a scandalous affair with a young married woman.”

“Reinhard,” assured Himmler, “has performed remarkably in reorganizing and —”

“*Ja, Ja!* Some time you must tell me all about *lieber* Reinhard. He no doubt earned your undying praise for integrating the State Security Police, *SiPo*, and *Sicherheitsdienst* into what is now labeled the Reich Security Main Office. An aide called to my attention the fact that you’ve put your chop on his scheme to add an *SS Einsatzgruppe* organization to your ballooning list of functions, its objective the extermination of all eleven or more millions of European Jews. I spoke to Göring about it, but he was preoccupied with juggling his aerial circus and grant me only the time it took to nod knowingly. It’s my firm conviction that at this critical juncture implementing your demise of the Jews program would be an egregious error.”

The remark greatly disturbed Himmler. He fiddled angrily with a pencil. “How so?”

“Because it’s still early days,” replied Canaris. “Look at the big picture now and then, not just whatever is in your *SS* pasture, and you may notice that the Reich has initiated simultaneous conflicts on more than one front. The major contests at arms are still a distance over the horizon, the war’s eventual outcome far from decided. I have no qualms about your scheme to target and deplete the ranks of Gypsies, mental defectives, homosexuals, political dissenters, and others we can obviously do without. But if you and your number one heel-clicker, Reinhard, insist on commencing your masterful pogrom prematurely, as you’ve already done in Poland — the Reich will be the poorer for having wasted a valuable asset.”

“You consider the *Jews* an *asset*?”

“For the time being, a valuable asset,” asserted Canaris. “Why is it so deucedly hard to appreciate what a major asset the Jewish labor pool would be if properly handled? Collect the *Juden* to your heart’s content, round up every one you can find, but instead of obliterating the lot put them to work in the factories, farms, hospitals, mines. Suspend your Final Solution until the war is at least partially won.”

“Admiral, you amaze me!” Himmler sounded as if he meant it. “Organizing a pool of unskilled Jewish laborers would be like —”

“Don’t talk, Heinrich! Listen!” The admiral soundly thumped Himmler’s desk for emphasis. “Unskilled labor, *nein, nein, nein!* Salted throughout the populace in every major and minor city in Europe are gross numbers of Jewish physicians, nurses, lawyers, scientists, accountants, financial experts, bankers and other assorted professionals, as well as a huge army of skilled workers. Let the doctors and nurses treat and care for their fellow Jews. Let the scientists’ brains be picked, their collective expertise utilized to our advantage. Encourage other

competent segments of the Jewish population to perform likewise, each in their particular fashion, and the *Reich* will be the richer for it.”

“What makes you think,” demanded Himmler, stung to the quick by the sermon, “so-called professional, educated Jews would agree to serve the *Reich*?”

“Their willingness or lack thereof,” insisted Canaris, “would depend upon the variety and frequency of whatever fairytales they’re told. Talk to Goebbels about it. Obtain his advice on how to spread the word that Hitler wishes with all his heart and soul to protect the poor, downtrodden Jews from further anti-Semitic uproars, wholesale evictions, relocations, pogroms and above all the terror of idiotic calamities like *Kristallnacht*. Lean on their patriotism.”

“*Jewish* patriotism?” cried Himmler.

“Sneer if you wish,” said the admiral. “I for one can’t imagine why it’s so difficult for you to believe me when I tell you many Jews think of themselves as primarily Germans, and only secondarily as *Juden*. Haven’t the Jews been among us for centuries? Haven’t many if not most of them prospered?”

“The Jews are confirmed enemies of the state,” was the wholly unequivocal mantra Himmler invariably fell back on. He added, “Enemies must be dealt with.”

“Granted, but please don’t try and tell me how unwise it would be to make full use of one’s enemies before turning about and, as you say, dealing with them.”

Stumped by the utterance, Himmler voiced his other standard rationale for anything and everything. “*Der Führer* wills it so.”

“Ah, *does* he indeed? In the main,” accused Canaris, the heat rising once again in his eyes, in his overly precise diction, “one might believe his wishes reflect whatever you and that imbecile Hess, or the ghost who walks, Borman, has just whispered in his ear.”

“Admiral, you go too far! Our conversation has strayed into perilous territory. It’s my sincere belief that the Jewish question *must* be resolved quickly, else we shall be forced to . . .”

Canaris did not let Himmler finish his rebuttal. More upset than when he had stormed into the other’s office, he turned on his heel as if to leave in a huff, then paused in the doorway to hurl back a request. “Do me a kindness, Heinrich. Order your alter ego, Heydrich, to keep his hide-and-seek nitwits from chasing after me every time I leave the *Tirpitzufer* headquarters. Where I go, what I do, and who I choose to see is neither his affair, nor yours.”

After he delivered the exit line, Canaris made sure to soundly slam the door behind him.

* * *

Lustmann awoke at daybreak bursting with nervous energy. He blamed his eagerness to get to work on the work regimen he had instituted, made his toilet hastily, sat down in the parlor and folded open the *escritoire*’s writing surface, preparing to finish a draft of the Dunkerque letter begun the previous evening, and then edit and polish it to his total satisfaction.

The crux of the message had formed in his mind with crystalline clarity, but composing the draft had given him fits. He’d worked until after midnight, driving himself half-crazy writing and rewriting, rewording and scrapping the opening paragraph, then doing it all over again, and yet again. Engaged in a determined, haphazard search for the optimum way to frame what he knew had to be said, he resolutely tried over and over to say it effectively while struggling to adhere to the tone and manner of the first three missives. In the end, upon reading what he’d written. Judging it unsatisfactory, he scowled, swept aside the legal tablet filled with scribbings.

Thoroughly frustrated by the daunting task after two more hesitant tries, he charged into the bedchamber cursing under his breath, snatched the aluminum carryall from a high shelf in the walk-in closet and brought it into the parlor. Making sure the entry door was locked, the deadbolt turned and the chain affixed, he grounded the taped-together flashlight batteries and produced a tiny spark on the rivet doubling as an anode, unlatched the lid and extracted the first half-dozen pages of the condensed flash paper script recounting actual wartime events, circumstances and situations. Concentrating, he burned the terse, compressed text into his mind:

10/05/40 Per Führer directive Op. Gelb launched. 136 Wehrmacht Heer divisions, 2,500 Panzers & 2- or 3-to-1 Luftwaffe air superiority opposed by approx. 125 French/British divisions, + 3,600 Panzer units + added support from Belgian forces.

05/12/40 Leeb's Army Group C secures German frontier opposite Maginot Line. Rundstedt's Army Group A attacks after passing through Ardennes. Bock's Army Group B advances into Belgium & Holland, draws most British/French forces north. W/3 Panzer corps in lead, Rundstedt strikes toward Sedan, Montherme & Dinant w/little opposition, mainly French cavalry easily thrown aside. Bock's Group B carries out parachute landings in Netherlands to paralyze resistance. Maas River crossed near Arnhem. Belgian Eben Emael fort falls to airborne glider force + Luftwaffe support. Day's end advances in accord with Gelb master plan/schedule.

05/14/40 Enemy reacts to Belgian attack. Allied 1st Army Group, British Expeditionary Force + French 7th Army advances on Dyle & Meuse above Namur, joins Belgian forces linked w/Dutch on left flank. At evening, much of Dyle Line occupied & Wehrmacht reserves strengthen position. Advance forces French 7th Army into contact south Holland & is handled roughly. Churchill visits King, officially named PM. British troops land in Iceland, advance elements set destroyer/scout-plane base to stop coming Atlantic convoys & to harass enemy in U-boat campaign.

05/16/40 Guderian's fast Panzers cross Meuse, open fifty-mile gap in front & to reach Channel coast six days hence. Churchill orders Operation Dynamo evacuation of troops/equipment from Belgian beaches near Dunkerque. Rundstedt leery of Guderian's overly aggressive tactics, urges halt to Panzer offensive till mobile infantry brought up to assault Allied positions. H agrees, halts Guderian armor & prevents cut-off retreating British/French/Belgian forces & allows sea escape.

Lustmann paused deep in thought. Composing narrative of any kind was to him a totally foreign experience. While struggling mightily, writing and tearing up draft after draft of the Dunkerque letter, he had toyed with a notion to insert a sentence or two alluding to the rumor he remembered circulating within the SS, the gist of it implying that Hitler was predisposed to regard the stubborn, wrongheaded Britishers as not merely fellow northern Europeans, but strayed members of the Aryan brotherhood who might one day be convinced to aid in the struggle against communism. He wondered if such a misguided view might have influenced Able Adolph to hold back and permit the British to consummate the Dunkerque fiasco. If so, would it be appropriate to hint that such an absurd notion, whether or not it had any validity, might have led to Hitler's dereliction? The strange notion was difficult to take seriously. After all, the enemy was the enemy, a conclusion no one could argue with, or rebut. Frowning, he resumed reading.

05/18/40 Precious hours pass beyond retrieval. H rages/worries re: endangerment to offensive's southern flank & resists advice, insists instead on westward drive, fears a second push southwest could trash entire western campaign & clings to drive northwesterly per Op Gelb scenario.

05/24-26/40 Wehrmacht left wing Panzers + mechanized infantry halted & kept in place per Führer directive + orders Luftwaffe to finish Dunkerque enemy forces. Von Brauchitsch & Rundstedt beside themselves re: senseless, contradictory orders to attack enemy in full retreat in one sector & fall back in orderly fashion elsewhere, freezing forces in rear of massive enemy personnel vulnerable to decimation helpless on strand waiting to be destroyed/taken prisoner.

05/27/40 - 06/04/40 Bad weather grounds Luftwaffe. 700-vessel hodgepodge destroyers, minesweepers, trawlers, yachts + all types small craft cross Channel & rescue +/- 300,000 British/French/Belgian troops from Dunkerque beaches, but most heavy equipment abandoned. Major Wehrmacht forces/Panzers stand by & rage helplessly & let 1/3-million enemy escape to fight again.

The accompanying tutorial advised him in this letter it would be mandatory to begin salting his message with astrological signs and abstruse arcane gibberish in order to augment and reinforce the validity of "his visions." *An odd instruction, and damned difficult to follow.* He knew nothing of astrology except that it was nonsensical. Buying a book on the moronic subject and cribbing from the text seemed the simplest solution. He lit a cigarette, and again revolved the stray notion to include a reference to Hitler's peculiar penchant for harboring pro-British sentiments, and once again scrapped the idea. Daring to mention the *Führer's* susceptibility to a weak, oddly romantic view of the British would only remind the reader of his personal fancies, follies, foibles and cants, and would therefore be counterproductive, and yet . . .

Best leave well enough alone, he finally decided, and stick to his strong desire to do everything humanly possible to effect a head-to-toe turnabout in the disgraceful outcome at Dunkerque, simply by focusing on how damaging Hitler's failure to act . . . No, no! OKW's failure to act had been when writing a vivid description of the Allied evacuation "vision." On second thought, would any harm come from inserting between-the-lines a hint that *Der Führer's* supposed belief in the "Aryan brotherhood" of the British was wholly erroneous. He thought about it at length.

Back in the Argentine "future," Colonel Stoltz and the Odessa pundits had stated, restated and pounded into the mission candidates their insistence that it would be mandatory to retain a strong positive note in each letter dispatched. The most essential of essentials would be to furnish positive warnings, positive statements, and keep everything positive, positive, positive! If that tack were to be stringently adhered to, the gist of the Dunkerque letter would by necessity consist of carefully worded, positively oriented declarations citing "facts," and demanding that Hitler revise his thinking, *convince* himself that looking the other way would ensure a potentially disastrous consequence by permitting Churchill's "Miracle of Dunkerque" to be realized when entire enemy brigades slipped away across the Channel.

And a positive message it will be, he promised himself. With purpose and determination, suddenly knowing what he had to say, and how to say it best, he took up the fountain pen, filled it from a bottle of green ink and laid a sheet of stationery on the *escritoire's* writing surface. He

hesitated when a recurring thought stirred misgivings. Would accomplishing the onerous mission task set before him even be worthwhile? Had Hitler, or for that matter any ranking member of the Nazi hierarchy viewed a single, laboriously hand-lettered word of the first three missives? What if all his hard works had gone no farther than the Schöneberg address, and been consigned to the trash bin as the outré rantings of some crank? He had no way of learning the answer, nor would an answer show itself until the results of what would take place on the Dunkerque beaches became a reality recorded in the newspapers.

He wrote haltingly, frequently scratching out a line, swearing, crumpling the sheet and starting over. Twice he tore to confetti what he'd written, swore more luridly and jammed the scraps in the wastebasket. He wrote, fidgeted and wrote, obliterating a word here, revising a sentence there, breaking off more than once to pace the parlor in a fit of pique and condemn his own ineptness. Lost in the task, he was startled to hear someone tap lightly on the door to his suite. A glance at his wristwatch told him super-attentive Bellman Hans, his promptness semi-demonic, had arrived with coffee and the early bird editions of the morning papers.

He closed the carryall's lid, leaving it unlatched, turned the working papers upside down on the escritoire and, ever cautious, opened the door only a slit.

Standing in the hallway, a tray holding a silver coffee service shoulder-high in the splayed fingers of one hand, with *Morgenpost* and the other newspapers tucked under the opposite arm, a uniformed bellman Lustmann had never seen before dipped his head deferentially. "*Guter Tag, Herr Klasse.*"

"Where is Hans?"

"Your pardon, sir. Hans is indisposed. The desk asked me to inform you that the manager would like a word with you at your convenience."

Lustmann's pulse-rate quickened. "Why does he wish to see me?"

"I was not told, sir. The desk wished to phone your suite earlier, but feared disturbing you at that hour would be inconsiderate."

"I see," said Lustmann, who saw only potential complications. Concerned about the switch in bellmen, he motioned the man inside, suppressing an urge to gather up the vital necessities and bolt from the Adlon. "Tell management I will make myself available, but please have them call first."

"Certainly, sir." The bellman set his burden on the table, his gaze darting around the parlor, coming to rest briefly on the closed aluminum carryall. Dipping his chin, he accepted the more than generous gratuity with outward equanimity. "*Viel Dank.*"

Lustmann locked and re-chained the door, righted the overturned the working papers and replaced them in the carryall, latched and stowed it in the bedroom closet. From beneath a folded newspaper in a bedside end table drawer, he lifted out a Walther automatic pistol, ejected and checked the clip, jammed it back in place and screwed a cylindrical silencer into weapon's muzzle, then worked the slide, injecting a round into the chamber. In the act of slipping off the safety he decided against it, carried the pistol back into the parlor, concealing it beneath the upholstered cushion of an armchair, and sat down to await the call.

Eleven minutes later by the clock, the telephone jangled.

* * *

“Herr Steyr!” The widow Kraven was standing on the second-floor staircase landing. She called again more loudly, “Yoo, hoo, Herr Steyr!”

James left off two-finger typing and eased open the door. “Yes, Frau Kraven?”

Nosy or not, his landlady had obviously been impressed by the aristocratic gentleman who had come calling on her Austrian boarder a week earlier. Herr Meisinger’s visit had inspired a marked change in her attitude toward James, treating him extra-politely and attentively as her star lodger. “Telephone for you, Herr Steyr.”

Silverthorne quailed. “Oh, thank you. I’ll be right down.” *A phone call from . . . who?* he thought. To the best of his knowledge, no one outside the boardinghouse except Herr Meisinger knew anything about him, so the caller had to be his smooth-talking inquisitor. Curious and a bit apprehensive as well, he descended the stair. The hall telephone was an antique installed across from the entrance to the parlor, where an elderly boarder used an ear trumpet to listen to the radio already blaring at ear-bending volume.

James lifted the earpiece from where Frau Kraven had parked it atop the black, wall-mounted telephone box. He covered the cone-shaped mouthpiece with his palm, cleared his throat, and lifted his hand. “Steyr here.”

Someone at the other end of the line also cleared his throat before announcing himself in a reed-thin baritone as Herr Stampfl, calling from the Reich Ministry for People’s Enlightenment and Propaganda. “Herr Steyr, I have taken the liberty of calling at home in order to invite you to an interview here at the ministry. Can you possibly arrange to come around ten o’clock this morning, should that hour be convenient?”

“The, uh . . . Why, uh, yes, or course,” faltered James, not entirely sure what he had heard due to radio gabble coming from the parlor. Stretching the phone cord, he used his free hand to swing the door shut, cutting off the noise. “I don’t . . . I happen to be a visitor unfamiliar with Berlin, Herr, uh . . . May I ask the whereabouts of the, er . . .”

“The ministry in *Wilhelmsplatz* would be difficult to miss. Our offices are in the old Leopold Palace. Please announce yourself to the receptionist, and explain that your appointment is with the executive editor, that is to say myself, Herr Stampfl. I am very much looking forward to meeting you and discussing your work. We shall be expecting you, Herr Steyr. Good day!”

In the act of requesting something further in the way of an explanation, James heard a faint click as the line went dead.

Now what? he thought, groping to replace the earpiece in the pronged hook. Obviously the call had to do with the article he’d written. Herr Meisinger had mentioned wanting to show the piece to . . . What had he said exactly? Something to the effect of showing it to a professional acquaintance, most likely the editor he’d just spoken with at the propaganda ministry. Although extremely reluctant to have anything to do with officialdom of any variety, he realized that failing to keep the appointment would only invite suspicion, so . . .

Sharply at nine o’clock, after the skimpy daily breakfast of porridge, coffee, toast and jam, he buffed his worn shoes, adjusted the knot in his one and only necktie, donned his Fedora after adjusting the crease in its crown, and left the boardinghouse in a state of mild nervous excitement. Turning into *Wilhelmsplatz*, only a few minutes’ walk from *Potsdamer Strasse*, he realized Herr Stampfl had been truthful. It would indeed be difficult to miss the looming façade of the Leopold Palace. Set well back from the street, the building looked different somehow than

he remembered seeing it pictured while atemporizing prior to the Potsdam research venture. He tried to remember passing the memorable structure during a seventeen eighty-two stroll down *Wilhelmplatz*, and could not recall whether the palace had even been there then.

Off to the right, adjacent to a broad plaza in front of the palace, the bronze figure of “Iron Chancellor” Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck-Schönhausen absently studied passersby with sightless metal eyes. Mild skepticism evident in his expression, James knew the statesman held in universal high esteem by historians had been born during the final year of the Napoleonic Wars. Credited with nation-building due to his struggle to semi-unify Germany’s provinces, Bismarck had become united Germany’s first, most revered chancellor.

Minutes early for the appointment, he worked off a surfeit of nervous energy over the uncertainty connected with the coming interview, and where it might lead, roved about the plaza, examining the impressive building from various angles. Roman numerals chiseled in a weathered cornerstone told him he’d been correct in thinking the palace might not have been there in seventeen eighty-two. The carved cornerstone gave a century-later construction date: 1880.

The receptionist, an officious, bespectacled woman seated behind the bastion of a large walnut desk in the palace’s ornate, high-ceiling lobby, wore a doubtful expression after appraising Silverthorne’s far from new apparel. He gave his name, mentioned the executive editor who had asked to see him. The woman nodded, squinted through her bifocals at an appointment list. “Ah, yes; here we are: Herr Steyr. I am not mistaken Herr Stampfl is out of his office at the moment. I believe he can be found in the Garden Room.” She gave directions.

James tapped on a set of high double-doors inlaid with enameled cloisonné panels depicting medieval knights. Golden handles turned, and Herr Stampfl, a harried looking, balding gentleman of middle years, offered a perfunctory greeting. “Ah, Herr Steyr. Of course, of course. Do come in and have a seat.” Obviously the busiest of busy individuals, the executive editor shook hands damply, ushered his guest into the Garden Room and motioned him to a chair, then reclaimed his post behind a massive desk and resumed leafing through a sheaf of papers.

Ignored, James turned his hat brim slowly in his fingers. The telephone rang twice while he waited with forced patience for whatever might happen next. A pair of overheard, one-sided conversations ensued, consisting mainly of grunted affirmative responses by the executive editor. Another quarter-hour passed in a silence broken only by the sound of Stampfl shuffling papers.

The double-doors to the Garden Room opened abruptly. Attired in a tailored tan uniform featuring a red swastika armband prominent near his left shoulder, *Reichsminister* Goebbels bustled into the lavishly appointed Garden Room. Scarcely offering Silverthorne a glance, he began pulling off leather gloves one finger at a time.

At his master’s abrupt entrance, Herr Stampfl rose and scurried away from his temporary seat at the desk.

Hat in hand, James rose uncertainly.

“*Herr Reichsminister*,” announced Stampfl by way of introduction, “this is the gentleman you wished to see this morning. Herr Steyr is the Austrian journalist responsible for the article your *Abwehr* acquaintance, Herr Meisinger, recommended so highly.”

A stony glance of indifference. “Ah, yes. Good of you to come on short notice, Steyr.”

Abwehr! The affiliation Stampfl had mentioned registered in Silverthorne’s consciousness like a douche of ice water. Learning Meisinger belonged to the *Reich’s* premiere intelligence

agency was *not* what might be called encouraging. Dismissing his apprehension, he bowed curtly to acknowledge the great man's status. "May I say what a tremendous honor it is to meet you, *Herr Reichsminister*."

A nod, a lukewarm smile. "Your article appealed to Herr Stampfl and our staff, Herr Steyr. I also believe it a quite impressive work of propaganda." Goebbels laid his billed cap on the desk. He used both hands to smooth back his sleek black hair, and slumped into the high-backed executive chair behind his desk. Not a gentleman of impressive stature to begin with, he looked half his size when seated, like a pinch-faced youth pretending to be an adult. Head cocked to the side, he sized up James candidly. "Correct me if I am mistaken, but I suspect my use of a term with pejorative connotations prompted a reaction on your part."

James fumbled for an appropriate response.

Looking pleased with himself, the *Reichsminister* continued. "You may take as gospel the word of a fallen Catholic, Herr Steyr, when I tell you the term 'propaganda' originated when friars in the seventeenth century began publishing 'hard-sell' tracts promoting their faith. During the Great War, the term fell into disrepute when the antagonists propagandized everything from soup to nuts to battleships. The British, by their own admission are adept at dispensing skewed information, especially now that they have fallen in league with America's Roosevelt, who despite repeated claims of neutrality he loves to parrot has created a mislabeled bureau called the Office of Facts and Figures, or something of that nature, headed by a spinner of fables with the unlikely name Archibald MacLeish. Our ministry, you see, makes it a practice to keep the enemy's competitive doings firmly in the forefront of our consciousness at all times. On either side of the Atlantic, the war of words being waged goes hand-in-glove with the shooting war, and we intend to win both of those engagements."

"I am certain it will be so, *Herr Reichsminister*."

Having finished what had sounded to James like his standard sermon, Goebbels changed tack without breaking stride. "To speak frankly, Herr Steyr, as one scrivener to another, the unsolicited opinion editorial you penned for Austrian consumption leads me to believe you enjoy total confidence in the Reich's leadership. For an Austrian, can this be so?"

"*Der Führer*," said James with what he hoped was a depth of feeling the other would appreciate, "has shown himself to be a statesman second to none, *Herr Reichsminister*." On inspiration he added, "A second Frederick the Great, one might say, on a much larger scale."

"One might indeed," applauded Goebbels. "A noble comparison, I must say. You are a student of history?"

"An ardent student, *Herr Reichsminister*."

A slow nod, a glance at the clock on his desk. "I fear the time available for discussion is limited this morning, so I shan't bandy words. I told Stampfl to invite you in this morning in order to learn if we might commission additional work. How does that notion strike you?"

"Why, I . . . I am flattered beyond words, speechless, *Herr Reichsminister*."

"Excellent! Other than a mild penchant for understatement, you demonstrate a flair for inserting precisely the type of aggressive, read-between-the-lines message *Der Angriff* wishes to publish on a regular basis. No polemics or diatribes, simply a deft, straightforward word-portrait of not necessarily things as they are, but as one might wish them to be. In view of your obvious talent we shall spare you the usual lecture about how to accomplish whatever prospective work

on our behalf you may choose to undertake. Nothing I foresee will prohibit you, a freelancer if I correctly recall the words of my acquaintance, from also having your work published in Austria.”

“Thank you so very much, *Herr Reichsminister*. You are most gracious. I appreciate the opportunity much more than I can ever say.”

“Oh, you are most welcome. One thing more, then I must attend to my duties. When he forwarded your article, my friend mentioned finding you living in some dreary boardinghouse. I’m sure suitable quarters can be found for you, and office space as well, of course, here in the ministry. How would that suit you?”

Instead of suiting him, the invitation frightened James to the point of stuttering. “You’re, uh . . . You are so very kind, *Herr Reichsminister*. I will of course be delighted to show you every word I manage to put on paper, but . . .”

“Would living and working here in our company make you unhappy?”

“Oh, not in any way, *Herr Reichsminister*. Please do not be offended, but I . . . What I meant say is that my sources are out among the people. I roam the streets daily and casually engage strangers in conversation. Dressed as I am, an obvious foreigner who speaks with an accent, people accept me as other than a Berliner, which tends to make the ingenuous questions I pose to solicit opinions seem reasonable and proper. Were I to furnish any slight hint of an association with officialdom, I am sure those with whom I come in contact would be a good deal less inclined to confide their actual opinions and observations. Comfort and convenience aside, I prefer to remain anonymous, at least for the present.”

Herr Stampfl and his master exchanged meaningful glances. “Steyr,” intoned Goebbels, looking even more pleased with himself than he had earlier, “you show a great deal more cleverness in person than was to be found in your article. Cloak your identity and purpose in any manner you see fit. The results are important, the means of achievement immaterial. Now then, when will we be privileged to see another think-piece?”

“Quite soon, I believe, *Herr Reichsminister*. A few days ago, less than a week. I spoke with a truck driver whose outlook and responses made him an excellent sounding-board.”

“Better and better,” said Goebbels, beginning to sound a bit dismissive. “We shall look forward to seeing more of your work.”

Executive Editor Stampfl blinked to acknowledge the affirmative nod Goebbels directed his way. To James he said, “Herr Steyr, if you will come with me your manuscript will be returned to you.”

“You are very gracious, *Herr Reichsminister*.” James dipped his head. Trying not to sound obsequious, he said, “Meeting and talking with you has been a genuine pleasure. I can’t begin to thank you enough for this wonderful opportunity.”

Goebbels did not bother to look up. “The pleasure is mine, I assure you. Oh, one last thing before I forget. Stampfl, see to it that Herr Steyr is provided with credentials identifying him as one of our stringers.”

“*Jawohl, Herr Reichsminister*.” The telephone rang. Stampfl picked it up with spastic haste. “*Ja, ja*,” he said, and then covered the mouthpiece. “Leni Riefenstahl, sir.”

“That bitch! I was hoping she’d return my call.” Goebbels took the phone.

James followed Stampfl down a long hallway and into a spacious, high-windowed office. The executive editor handed him the stapled-together pages of his article and a freshly minted

copy of *Der Angriff* said to contain the published piece Steyr had written. Clipped to the foolscap manuscript sheets was a fat envelope.

“Herr Steyr, if you will be so kind as to leave your mailing address with the receptionist, a card identifying you as a ministry associate will be mailed to you immediately.”

James thanked Herr Stampfl profusely. Forever harried and hurried, the other extended a damp hand to be shaken, offered hasty well-wishings and saw James to the door with an air of unburdening himself.

Back in the plaza, a reaction to the nerve-wracking experience set in, and he found it difficult to calm down. Delighted in one way, yet also leery of what he had unwittingly gotten himself into, he took the long way around, walking many blocks out of his way on a slow return to the boardinghouse. Closeted in his dreary attic room, he unsealed the envelope, peeled back the flap, and the contents nested within fell from his grasp — a thick wad of *Reichsmarks*.

Elated by the windfall, he unfolded *Der Angriff* and learned his article had been rendered unrecognizable. Undergoing a magical sea change, it had been transformed into an op-ed tract personally bylined to the diminutive, weasel-faced *Reichsminister* he’d just met. Any vestiges of the “mild penchant for understatement” Goebbels had mentioned was absent, replaced by luridly worded “Rally round the flag!” diatribes salted with cliché after cliché inserted not simply to invite, but to *command* loyalty and dedication to the Nazi cause by every German worker who had acquired and sustained the ability to read and understand the written word.

Chuckling softly, James then threw back his head and laughed aloud, and laughed uproariously, uncontrollably. The money problem had solved itself in a thoroughly incredible way. A principal figure of the Nazi hierarchy, in fact no less than a member of Hitler’s inner circle, had gone out of his way to help finance a venture whose goal was not merely to ensure the demise of *Dritte Reich*, but the total extinction, or more properly never-to-exist obliteration, of the *Tausend-jahr Deutsches Weltreich* it might otherwise become.

The ironic journalistic assignment by Goebbels eventually inspiring yet more chuckles. James vowed to spend the money gleefully, faithfully promising himself to accompany each and every *Reichsmark* spent with gales of silent, wholehearted laughter.

* * *

“Please come in,” invited Lustmann.

In his mid-sixties, Hotel Adlon’s balding manager peered at Lustmann in guarded fashion, and hesitantly entered Suite 204. “I hope you will forgive me for disturbing you at this early hour, Herr Klasse.”

Lustmann closed the door, gestured wordlessly at the settee.

Looking uncomfortable, the gentleman chose a seat. Lifting his eyes, he involuntarily gasped, semi-hypnotized by the round eye of a tubular silencer attached to the muzzle of the Walther *Polizeipistole*, *Kurz* automatic in Herr Klasse’s rock-steady fist. “P-please,” he quavered, more frightened by the menace in the guest’s eyes than the weapon.

“You will answer my questions forthrightly,” declared Lustmann. “If you do not, I cannot allow you to walk out of here. The choice is yours. Do you understand?”

The manager murmured something that was not quite a word.

“Why was a strange bellman sent to snoop about in my suite?”

Perspiration filmed the manager's high, balding forehead. He licked his lips. "The, uh, because of the woman. I was asked to ascertain if and when she again visited your —"

"What woman?"

The man had difficulty swallowing. "She, er . . . The lady you have . . . entertained on occasion. I was not told her name."

"Not told by *who*?"

"Why, the police. A detective, Chief Inspector Fürstenburg, came her to the Adlon and urgently requested to be informed if and when the woman put in another appearance in your company. Judging from what little he said, it has to do with a counterfeiting investigation.

"You will have to speak much, much plainer than that."

"Please! I know absolutely nothing about such investigation. The inspector mentioned a banknote with an unbelievable . . . A large denomination bill with an impossible date of issue, and said nothing more." The hotelier lifted his hands helplessly, let them drop in his lap.

The verdammt nineteen forty-two bill again! thought Lustmann. Sensing a need to soften his approach, he lowered the Walther PPK, then further diminished the threat by laying the automatic pistol aside, but within easy reach. "I pray you will forgive my belligerent attitude, sir. It seemed necessary beforehand. In any event, please accept my sincere apologies. What I am about to tell you must be held in strict confidence. Do you . . . ? That is, does the Adlon agree to remain silent about what I am about to disclose?"

Despite no longer facing a presumably loaded weapon, the manager hemmed and hawed.

Lustmann frowned. He made a point of retrieving the weapon, holding it loosely, not aiming it at the hotelier. "I really must ask you once again if you will direct the hotel staff to abide by my wishes? I'm afraid a positive answer is all I am able to accept."

"Why, I . . . yes. Of course," blurted the manager, his gaze fixed on the weapon.

Now that he definitely commanded the other's undivided attention, Lustmann spun a rehearsed tale heavily larded with intrigue and subterfuge, implying cloak-and-daggerish acts of of crucial importance to the *Reich*, yet revealing no particulars pertaining to the clandestine business dealings he explained that he alone was responsible for executing. He explained that such dealings were vital, a matter of state security, and in fact so much so that in his current assignment he reported directly to the office of *Reichsführer-SS* Himmler. Any further snooping into him personally, or his affairs he assured the manager in the sternest terms, would open the Adlon and its management to an in-depth investigation by officials not known for being kindly disposed toward any type of inquiry or interference.

"Henceforth," he concluded, "for the remainder of my stay in your splendid hostelry I insist that absolutely no one except chambermaids, room service personnel, and a chubby bellmen named Hans be permitted to enter my suite. Do I have your pledge to that effect?"

A jerky nod signified the manager's wholehearted acquiescence. "It shall be exactly as you, Herr Klasse. Your stay with us will be in total accord with your express desires."

"Excellent! I am so glad to hear that. Thank you for your patience. You may go now."

Visibly shaken, the manager bobbed his balding pate and exited Suite 204 hurriedly.

Lustmann lifted the telephone, requested an outside line from the hotel operator and dialed Gerda Sharpe's *Deutsche Reichsbank* number. After three rings, someone speaking in

unctuous, pear-shaped tones came on the line to inform him that Special Accounts Manager Sharpe was otherwise occupied, and inquired if he himself might be of assistance.

Lustmann scowled, cradled the telephone without responding. A counterfeiting suspect of all things! A single, never-to-be-sufficiently-damned, not yet issued banknote had once again jumped up to bite him. The simple to pose question he asked himself, was difficult or perhaps impossible to answer. Would it be wise to quit the Adlon forthwith, or could he hope to stay on and bluff it out? Go, or stay, which? Fleeing would be chancy in that it would also tend to draw immediate attention to himself. On the other hand, whichever course he adopted it would first be necessary to learn from Gerda exactly what had transpired, the reason why the authorities had purportedly initiated a counterfeiting investigation involving *him*.

He muttered an oath, poured coffee, decanted a stiff dollop of brandy that filled the other half of the demitasse, and stirred. Lighting a cigarette, he stared at the curl of smoke, his features twisted in the expression typical of someone believing himself a hunted man. If only the geniuses under Stoltz's direction had taken as much care as the colonel had advertised when rounding up a cache of then-defunct twentieth century banknotes, this confounded complication would have occurred. Irony doubled, redoubled and compounded!

Ausserordentlich! The situation's ingredients and potential consequences sliced into his mind like a freshly sharpened blade. With the future of the world literally hanging in the balance, this idiotic obstacle to the smooth, ongoing conduct of his mission had appeared in the form of one miserable, supposedly misdated banknote, its provenance something utterly impossible to explain to anyone in the "here and now" timeline.

A glance at the masthead of *Morgenpost* revealed the date: Friday, May seventeenth — an entire week later than he wished. First, foremost and above all else would come the mandatory task of finishing the *verdammt* Dunkerque letter and dispatching it. His failure to complete the letter plagued him in the manner of an open, festering sore. Crowded into a tight corner time-wise, he was determined to sit down and finish the hated task, get it out of his hair, then rush to the nearest postal substation, address the envelope there, and post the *verdammt* thing.

Wait, forget that. Doing the job hastily and haphazardly would violate his own firm, self-imposed rule. Upon completing the Dunkerque letter, he would post it exactly like the others, casually dropping it in whatever random sidewalk letterbox he happened to be strolling past. For better or worse, it would be a tremendous relief to get the nagging chore over and done with.

Draining the dregs of brandy-laden coffee, he squashed the cigarette in an ashtray. Filled with unswerving determination, he went into the bedchamber, took down the carryall and opened it only after impatiently employing the usual electrical fail-safe procedure.

Concentrating intensely, his head bent over the task, he was soon absorbed in his work, and detesting every second of it.

TWELVE The Dunkerque Letter, May 1940

James felt himself again sliding toward despondency, nor could he think of anything that might help him climb out of the emotional slough. At the end of the first week in May, having searched the streets fruitlessly day after day, week after week, and between times engaging strangers he pegged as susceptible to casual conversation with the goal of obtaining their opinions as meat for

future articles his badly frayed psyche was at a low ebb despite being semi-employed by the *Reich's* propaganda ministry. He had penned a second op-ed piece, keeping in mind Goebbels' critique that his work was prone to mild understatement, by luridly parroting the optimistic outlook of the truck driver who had picked him up shortly after he'd fallen out of the sky into the Black Forest. Gratuitously shortening his *Wanderjahr* trek to Berlin, the garrulous trucker had repeatedly voiced a grossly optimistic prediction that the war would last only a short time before things returned to normal, a preachment that for some reason had stuck fast in his memory.

Vowing to stay away from the Leopold Palace unless responding to a summons, he had stopped at a familiar haunt, his "office" in the postal substation a few blocks off *Unter den Linden*, where it had cost him only pennies to dispatch the manuscript to the propaganda ministry's hard-charging executive editor, Herr Stampfl. Seated at a low counter in the writing room he had been consulting the *BERLIN VON A BIS Z* guidebook in desultory fashion. Closing it, he was preparing to get up and leave when a tall figure filled in the doorway.

Electrified, he looked up, choked and forgot to breathe. He tore his gaze away. Seconds passed before he could bring himself to dare a second quick peek.

The newcomer had seated himself in a cane-backed chair on the other side of the counter, and was looking down at whatever he was writing, his features partially obscured.

Was it Lustmann? There was no way to be sure; the man's posture, bent forward, intent upon what he was writing, made it difficult to make out his appearance. James lifted his guidebook, pushed back his chair with as little noise as possible. Stepping around the counter, he passed his suspected quarry, and one fast glance returned an impression of an envelope addressed in green ink. Fearful of allowing the other a look at his face, he fled the substation, hurried to the end of the block and crossed the side street along with several other pedestrians. Scalp tingling in anticipation, he rushed back to a point on the sidewalk opposite the postal substation. In a state of supreme agitation, his hands were palpitating slightly. Hee folded his arms across his chest.

Hatless, a tall, rangy figure emerged from the substation clad in a stylish tan topcoat, and all doubt vanished. The aquiline nose, prognathous jaw and dirty-blond hair firmed Silverthorne's conviction.

Erich Lustmann! In the flesh!

Unable to contain himself, his heart trying to pound a hole in his chest, James followed his quarry from the opposite side of the street. The distinguished looking gentleman strolled at a loose-limbed, leisure pace, turned the corner heading toward *Unter den Linden*. He paused there, cupping his hands against the breeze to light a cigarette, his head turned away, obviously using the reflective glass in a storefront window to furtively scan the scattered pedestrians behind him on the sidewalk.

Caution's one thing, thought James, *but why bother?* He couldn't imagine why Lustmann, like himself a stranger from a future era, would be a bit concerned about something as unlikely as having grown a tail here in Berlin. Following the prospective hero of heroes in a state of unbounded exhilaration, James made certain he remained unobtrusive by losing himself among the pedestrians on his side of the street. Something that had flashed in his consciousness when he left the postal substation made him catch his breath and halt in his tracks.

Green ink!

The words uttered by the polished gentleman Stampfl had mentioned as someone from the *Abwehr* resounded like a trumpet call in his mind. Not once but twice had Meisinger inquired if “Herr Steyr” preferred to be addressed as a “Friend of the Reich,” and had also asked if he ever put aside the relic of an Olivetti typewriter and wrote in green ink.

The question had been meaningless then, but now took on a *definite* meaning. It began to look as if Lustmann’s wariness about being tailed, when capped by — or perhaps *multiplied* by Meisinger’s pointed questions — did very much more than infer that Nazi officialdom was not simply aware of Lustmann’s presence, but actively engaged in attempting to run him to ground.

Led a block farther along the side street, James had to halted again when Lustmann stopped to pull the handle, opening the access slot in a bright red sidewalk letterbox — one of roughly five thousand in Berlin proper — and dropped in an envelope. James made a mental note of the adjacent cross street, wondering why his man had bothered to address the envelope in the postal substation, then fail to post it there and facilitate delivery.

Shadowing his quarry discreetly, he stayed well back on the *Unter den Linden* sidewalk, and had to stop yet again to watch Lustmann cross the broad thoroughfare with a group of other pedestrians. Matching strides with the tall man on his side of the artery, James passed through the Brandenburg Gate landmark into *Pariser Platz*. Tingling in anticipation, breathing heavily, he saw Lustmann turn toward the the swank Hotel Adlon. Ignoring the uniformed doorman’s deferential head bob at the entrance, the would-be hero of heroes pushed his way into the hotel.

Why not the Adlon? thought James, so excited he could hardly contain himself. A gentleman of sensibilities, the legendary once and future *Weltreichsheld* could not be expected to lodge just anywhere. On his side of the wide boulevard James was far too impatient to go back to the corner and wait for the white-uniformed policeman directing traffic to blow his whistle and beckon permission for pedestrians on either side to cross. Dodging the light traffic, he trotted over to the center mall, and on a hunch stopped warily behind the ornate bronze base of a very tall light post, letting it partially screen him from view. The precaution proved wise; a dim figure could soon be seen peering out between draperies shrouding a large, high-arched lobby window.

James stayed put until the figure behind the glass vanished, then had to wait for a break in traffic to trot across. Conscious of the doorman’s mute appraisal of his better than seedy yet much less than Haute couture apparel, he entered the hotel’s sumptuous lobby, realized at once how out of place he must have looked. Slumping down on a padded bench partially hidden from the desk by a pillar, he pretended to consult his guidebook while covertly peeking around the pillar. Facing the other way, Lustmann was waiting for the deskman to reach up and lift a latch key from the polished ebony pegboard on the paneled wall behind him, and hand it over along with a plastic smile.

James waited impatiently until the elevator doors rolled closed, cutting off the view of Lustmann, rose and casually sauntered past the desk. Not many guests were out of the hotel at the moment. The deskman, busy sorting mail, took no notice of James as he tolled the number and distribution of room keys missing from the pegboard. Three empty pegs protruded in the second-from-bottom row; two on the left, and only one on the right, from where it looked at a distance the clerk might have taken down Lustmann’s key.

Walking on air, James emerged from the Adlon secure in the knowledge that Lustmann was very likely a second-floor guest at the Adlon. Locating the man, learning his whereabouts,

were pluses so enormous they vastly reduced the former imbalance afflicting in his mission equation, greatly lowering the abortive odds against his chance of success.

His optimism soaring, with long strides he retraced his route to the red letterbox where Lustmann had posted the envelope. Mail pickups were normally made four times every weekday in cosmopolitan Berlin. Further quickening his pace, he all but trotted along the sidewalk, dodging around pedestrians, crossed the targeted side street just as a postal worker, the strap of his leather bag slung over one shoulder, knelt down to unlock the red letterbox.

The postman looked up, surprised by the way James had dashed up pretending shortness of breath. "Excuse . . . sir. Just now . . . mailed letter. I think . . . it was incorrectly addressed. Would it be too much to ask to, uh . . . let me check?"

The pudgy, middle-aged letter carrier straightened, subjecting James to a suspicious squint. "Sorry, sir. It's highly irregular to let anyone to tamper with —"

"*Nein, nein.* I have no wish to touch the letter. All I want is to, uh . . . make sure the street number is correct. It's *very* important. The envelope will be easy to find; it's addressed in green ink. There's an *Emmchen* or two in it for you, and . . . All I need is time enough for a quick glance." James folded the currency in the palm of his hand.

His expression dubious, the other blinked and made the *Reichsmark* disappear. "Well, now," he said pleasantly, "a small favor for one of our regular customers should do no harm. Green ink, you say . . . ? Ah, here we are. Is this the letter, sir?"

Silverthorne etched the address in his mind. "*Ach!* How stupid of me." Hiding his elation beneath an exclamation of disgust, he added, "I've troubled you for nothing. It's as it should be."

"Good. No damage done, eh?"

"Not a lick. Have a beer on me after work, and forget your troubles? *Viel Dank!*"

"Don't mention it, sir."

James headed directly for the nearest bus stop. He plopped down on the bench, took out the guidebook and scrawled the envelope's green address on the inside of the flyleaf, and then consulted the guidebook's fold-out map. The letter had been addressed to Zoltan, no surname, at a street number in the Schöneberg District. It might mean nothing, and yet . . . He reminded himself of Meisinger's reference to green ink, thinking *It also might mean a great deal.*

Either way, he was in a fever to check out the address.

* * *

At dusk, the street lights came on, reflecting highlights from the gleaming Mercedes saloon parked at the curb directly in front of a NO STOPPING sign. On edge in the rear seat, Lustmann watched impatiently from the rear seat, willing Gerda Sharpe to emerge from the bank. He had phoned twice earlier, finally reached her, invited her to have dinner with him. She had declined, begging off because of another engagement. He had cautiously dropped a hint aimed at eliciting information about the alleged counterfeiting investigation, and again had been disappointed when she'd declined to discuss it over an open telephone line.

Seeing her exit the bank and approach a minute later, Lustmann pushed open the rear door. Gerda hesitated, glanced suspiciously in both directions along the sidewalk, then slid in beside him, pulled the door closed and inclined her head toward the driver in a wordless inquiry.

"No problem," he assured her. "Speak softly."

“Erich,” she said, giving his name the inflection of a curse, “your *verdammt* nineteen forty-two banknote has ignited a firestorm.”

“So it seem. Are you aware of how the police became involved?”

“*Aware . . . ?* Oh, I am most certainly aware!” A grimace of pure frustration momentarily transformed her delicate features. “An arse-kissing colleague of mine took it upon himself to bring the bill to the attention of none other than *Reichsbank* President Funk.”

“And in so doing,” guessed Lustmann, “did himself a very large favor.” Hearing her mention the bogus bill was an acerbic reminder of how lax his former Odessa compatriots had been when assembling the stack of then-useless currency.

Gerda tossed her head angrily. “Playing fair-haired boy is something at which that sorry son-of-a-bitch is extremely good.” Shooting a nervous glance out the tinted window at passersby, she said, “I can stay only seconds. Being seen with you is begging for trouble.”

“I’ll keep you only long enough,” assured Lustmann, “to find out —”

“That may be either too long,” she snapped, “or not long enough. A chief inspector came to the bank several times to see the director. Our security people have been watching my office ever since Herr Schacht was called in to clear up the mystery of your famous banknote.”

“Who . . . ?”

“Herr Hjalmar Schacht in person. Once *Reichsminister* of Economics, and recently the *Reichsbank* president, Schacht could be called an expert’s expert when it comes to currency. He firmly believes the miraculous banknote to be the work of some counterfeiting genius, and he’s been casting suspicion on me as an accomplice. Me! I’m all but certain my *desk* was searched a day or two ago while I was at lunch. How did you learn of the investigation?”

Lustmann related the visit by the Adlon’s manager. “I stalled him — frightened him, actually. He also mentioned a chief inspector who wanted to be informed if and when you visited me again at the Adlon.”

“Oh, wonderful! All that attention focused on little me! Did the police question you?”

“No,” he admitted, “but I imagine it’s only a matter of time.”

“Good God, Erich! What brand of devilry are you mixed me up in?”

“A simple mistake on someone’s part, what else? How likely is it for a banknote to be minted in nineteen forty-two and float around years, not months, before it’s date of issue?”

“Beyond belief, but that isn’t the real problem.”

“So what, if I may ask, *is* the real problem?”

“All I know are the bare essentials,” she said. “What I tell you isn’t to be bruited about, so don’t prod, not that it would do you much good. Herr Schacht took a personal interest in the *verdammt* banknote after Funk’s experts judged the paper and engraving letter-perfect. It also shows signs of moderate wear, definite evidence that it’s been in circulation.”

Lustmann said calmly, “Now I ask you, Gerda, in all fairness how can anyone possibly hold you or me accountable for *one* erroneous bill in a deposit a million and a half? A silly error by someone has to seem every bit as strange and mysterious to *everyone else* as it is us. ”

Gerda swung around, facing him squarely and looked him in the eye, naked disbelief written large in her luminous eyes. She shrugged. “I have to go. Good luck, Erich! I’m afraid this is goodbye.” Pushing open the door, she fled from the automobile.

Lustmann fumed quietly for seconds, then lit a cigarette and irritably ordered the driver to get the vehicle moving.

* * *

Stepping off the bus at an intersection blocks beyond *Landwehrkanal*, James paused to consult the guidebook map before heading through a respectable if less than fashionable section of Berlin's Schöneberg district. Few pedestrians were about; the store fronts and walkup flats he walked past presented orderly, weathered frontages common in a moderately genteel neighborhood, and most likely a mixed bag of professionals and working-class denizens.

A block farther on he came upon a vacant delicatessen. Boards nailed-up covered the shattered glass of one front window; *Juden raus!* daubed in yellow paint marred the intact glass of the other. A crude Star of David painted on the padlocked front door told a sad, mute story.

He turned into the designated street, and checked the number on each frontage, and came near his objective across the way, and halfway down the block. Recognizing what was in the storefront window brought him up short. He uttered a self-deprecatory chuckle. The opaqued plate glass window festooned with zodiacal arcana featured a large, mystic Persian all-seeing eye; centered above it, a garish poster depicted a bearded, turbaned seer staring out at the world, his expression one of studied, heavy-lidded indifference. The Great Zoltan's advertisement of himself was primarily concerned *with* himself and his role of "world-famous" astrologer. Red-bordered golden letters lost between dual forests of exclamation points abundantly urged all potential customers to come in and learn precisely how:

!!!! THE ANCIENT ART CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE !!!!!

How silly! No, make that ludicrous! Checking out the destination of Lustmann's letter had sent him chasing iridescent astrological rainbows. Even in wartime Berlin, engaged as Lustmann had to be in a mission designed to literally alter the course of world history, the once and future *Weltreichsheld* could not forgo indulging in his personal fancy. In a way, the discovery was a good sign, an *excellent* sign. Wasting his time and energy on a frivolous preoccupation with the occult meant he would have less time and energy to devote to the business at hand. No doubt soliciting horoscopes and similar stuff and nonsense via envelopes addressed in green . . .

Wait, *green* ink! Hadn't Meisinger inquired if he himself ever used green ink instead of the decrepit typewriter? It was something worthy of thought, but . . .

Bemused, and also vaguely disappointed with himself for attempting to follow a blind alley of logic into a cul-de-sac, he caught a bus back to *Pariser Platz* and posted himself on a bench across from the Adlon and made a show of reading *Völkischer Beobachter*, glancing over the newspaper to keep an eye on the hotel entrance. With darkness approaching, he gave up, dropped the newspaper in a trashcan and straggled back to his lonely attic room. Consummating the quest after endless weeks of fruitless searching had put a bright, shining star on this, far the most productive day yet spent in Berlin, he was happily weary.

Later in the evening, however, something began nibbling around the periphery of his subconscious, something lurking just beyond the liminal threshold of conscious, rational thought. Whatever it was, he couldn't seem to pin it down, bring it into focus. He sought his lumpy bed early to escape the chill, and lay there, hands behind his head, staring blindly into the darkness, revolving theories, examining strategies, suspecting this, discarding that, speculating endlessly. At last he must have fallen into deep, dreamless sleep.

Sometime during the wee hours he awoke with a start.

Or history! The searing thought erupted from nowhere.

He rolled out of the lumpy cot masquerading as a bed, ignored the cold and began tiger-pacing the length and breadth of the frigid room, repeatedly smashing a fist into his open palm, uttering short-bitten expletives in more than one language.

It fit! God in Heaven, how it fit! The caption in the Great Zoltan's window encouraged passersby to learn how the "Ancient Art" can change their lives. He muttered the phrase aloud, repeated it. Was it remotely conceivable that Lustmann might be . . . ?

No, it was too farfetched, too incredible for belief.

Or was it . . . ?

For some reason, he sensed that he'd found a tentative answer, fantastic though it might was. Erich Lustmann was playing the role of *seer* in his crusade to change the world.

Preternaturally wide-awake, he gave up all thought of trying to slide back into sleep, wrapped himself in blanket and quilt and sat on the bed, watching dawn's gloomy gray luminescence seep through heavy cloud cover to light the eastern sky beyond the filmed attic window. After a skimpy breakfast of oatmeal, coffee and toast, he went out to buy a morning paper, and once again posted himself across *Pariser Platz* from the Adlon. It would never do for suspicious Erich Lustmann to tag him as a loiterer. After an hour and more of vigil, he shifted to the center mall, and later to a spot farther along the divided boulevard running through the plaza.

In early afternoon, having all but memorized every word of *Beobachter's* May eighteenth edition, he feared becoming a conspicuous fixture on the street and abandoned the Adlon. The reason to pinch pennies no longer obtained; *Reichsminister* Goebbels' was paying him a good deal more for the propagandistic drivel he wrote than it was worth. He splurged, treating himself to a hearty lunch in a medium-priced café and wandered about, thinking.

Despite the satisfying midday meal, the morning's nonproductive vigil had left a sour taste in his mouth. He'd been hoping to tail Lustmann wherever he went, and perhaps discover what sort of obscure link might exist between real-world nineteen forty and the outrageous "false prophet" theory of changing history that had awakened him in the night. Lustmann apparently was sticking close to the hotel, but even so it was worrying to leave the Adlon unwatched. His man could move out, depart unseen for some unknown sector of Berlin, or elsewhere, anywhere, some obscure locale where he might remain forever hidden. Yet there was no way he alone could maintain an around-the-clock watch on the hotel, not when he had his own daily routine to follow. Whether his man ventured out tomorrow, next week, next month, or never, he decided to go back and once again reconnoiter the lair of the Great Zoltan to hopefully ferret out a meaningful connection between the astrologer and Lustmann, although it meant taking for granted the fact that a meaningful connection existed.

* * *

As if it were unclear, Admiral Canaris held a carbon-copy transcript of the most recent letter gingerly between thumb and forefinger. "Ulrich, my faith in 'visions,' nil as it was, has vanished. Now our 'Friend' adds astrological twaddle to his prophetic balderdash, making this effort a thousand times worse than all others. His scribbles tell us such and such will happen because Jupiter is in trine with another starry invention, especially since the Moon has been bugged while in carnal conjunction with the cow who jumped over it. Balmy nonsense aside,

in his current 'vision' he was good enough to leave the question of questions unanswered: How in the name of merciful God Almighty can our 'Friend of the Reich' possibly envision, or intuit, invent or otherwise describe a senseless future development like Hitler's predicated lapse on the beaches near the Belgian port of Dunkerque?"

Having many-times-over earned his reputation as the premiere investigator on the *Abwehr* staff, Ulrich Meisinger numbered among very, very few individuals who had also earned the admiral's trust and confidence. Called upon infrequently to act as Canaris' sounding board, he felt it safe to say, "The morning intercepts include a sporadic phone conversation between and some unidentified field commander and presumably London. The translation hinted at a discussion of possible need to evacuate all British expeditionary forces from the continent."

"*Ja, ja*; that intercept poked me in the eye like a sharp stick at the morning briefing." Duly vexed, the admiral wagged his head. "Not that I wish to be a believer, but coupling an intel tidbit of that stripe with our 'Friend's' warning letter punched all my buttons."

Meisinger stroked his jawline and stepped over to a wall map of northern Europe, where he studied the line of little pinned flags signifying current *Wehrmacht* advances and positions. "Here in the north," he ruminated, pointing, "Reichenau's Sixth Army overwhelmed Antwerp. In the south, Guderian took Cambrai yesterday, then halted most *Panzerjäger* formations between Peronne and St. Quentin to regroup, although some units apparently still pushing forward. Rommel's Seventh Armored Corps met fairly stiff resistance that, slowing his advance toward Arras. Toting the cumulative military situation in relation to Belgian and French geography leads me to believe the, uh . . . It does seem reasonable, perhaps even likely, that another . . . oh, however many more days of conflict, could see the enemy thrown back to the Belgian coast."

Canaris irritably fluttered the transcript in his hand, and let it fall to his desk. "Ulrich, don't tell me our 'Friend's' childish ramblings have made a believer of *you*."

"By no means, it's just that . . . Whether childish ramblings or Socratic messages, can our 'Friend's' caveat be ignored? Whether believer or scoffer, his latest 'vision' of a massive evacuation, even if it is salted with astrological gibberish, strikes me as a true cause for wonder. Somehow, what it suggests could actually take place in this, the real world."

Canaris smacked his lips, grimaced as if he had tasted something vile. "Nattering oracular 'visions' and astrological gibberish notwithstanding, the notion that 'visions' are to be taken seriously is . . . *Ach*, you've made your point, Ulrich. Yet even if his 'vision' contains a smidgen of validity, all it adds up to it, well . . . Truthfully, it amounts to useless information."

"No argument. Acting beforehand to avert what he's suggested would be madness."

"To so much as *dream*," said the admiral, "of warning *Der Führer* about *his* potential failure to act is a thoroughly dreadful notion. Yet citing Hitler's specific lacks or faults as our 'Friend' has done disturbs me less than a sidelight he only touches upon. To your immense good fortune, Ulrich, you've had limited personal contact with our glorious leader, whereas I'm called to answer his summons often, usually to endure a severe dressing down. I know the man well, or perhaps better than well. I know his heart, and I know his soul if he happens to own one. This letter hints at his sentimental belief in the Aryan brotherhood of the *verdammt* Britishers."

"I caught that inference, too, Admiral."

"Months ago," continued Canaris, "I myself and a few members of the General Staff were invited to his *Berchtesgaden Kehlsteinhaus*. A captive audience, we fore forced to listen to

Himself expound on the future of the Aryan race. Strangely enough, his *Weltanschauung* does credit the Englishers with their own niche in the Aryan ethnic fairytale. He ranted at length — at much too great a length — about the ‘likelihood’ of finding common geopolitical ground with the Britishers. He lectured us on how they might eventually be brought around to our way of thinking, and possibly throw in with us and aid in the battle against Communism.”

Meisinger’s high forehead creased. “It wouldn’t be fitting for me to comment, except to say it’s an outlook so peculiar it had never occurred to me. But don’t you think warning him of a potential tactical failure to act is more important than —?”

“*Lieber Gott!* Daring to warn Himself of *anything* is like picking the scab on a raw, festering wound.” Indulging in a fit of acute displeasure, Canaris said, “That bespectacled ass Himmler dared to warn *me* the letter’s mention of our failure to order the decimation of allied forces awaiting rescue in Belgium would infuriate Hitler beyond all bounds of reason. Ranting about the farcical nature of the letter’s scurrilous, counterproductive insinuation, he also warned me that upon reading the letter H would go down on all fours and literally chew the carpet.”

“Understandable, I suppose,” said Meisinger, feeling some sort ooft response necessary.

“No, there we sharply disagree, Ulrich. What is happening, and has happened, surpasses not only all bounds of reason, but also shatters all boundaries of understanding. The privileged few who know what this latest letter contains universally agree that our ‘Friend’ must be collared soonest so that the truth can be wrung from him by any means available. Somehow we *must* bring closure to this insanity.” The admiral rose abruptly, and came around the desk to confront his star investigator face to face. “The inmates have taken over our asylum, Ulrich. My worst fears are beginning to be realized hour after hour, day by day in the manner of slow water-torture. Hitler pulses Himmler unmercifully, demanding to know if another letter has arrived, then in the very same breath demands to be told why one has *not* been received.”

Aghast, Meisinger said, “You don’t mean he —”

“I mean precisely what you suspect, Ulrich. *Dritte Reich’s* exalted Leader is starting to give *credence* to the predictions of this . . . this charlatan.”

In the interest of placating his superior, Meisinger made a feeble attempt to reassure him. “We’re doing everything possible to find him. My team leader, Kurt, and I plan to visit the astrologer again today, not that I believe he can tell us anything new. Yesterday’s letter was postmarked at a substation several blocks off *Unter den Linden*, within a long stone’s throw of *Brandenburger Tör*. That may be helpful, or maybe not. The postal authorities told Kurt the letter could have been dropped off in any of ten or more sidewalk letterboxes scattered about the area. Every postmaster has his people keeping a sharp eye out for an envelope addressed in green ink.”

Canaris pouched his cheeks, lifted his hands shoulder high, and plopped down wearily behind his desk. Leaning forward on his elbows, he patted his splayed fingertips together, his steadfast gaze locked on Meisinger. “I appreciate the fact that you’re doing everything possible, Ulrich . . .” He hesitated, reconsidered what he had been about to say. “Here’s a thought I’d like you to chew on. You and your team have been attacking the problem in typically straightforward fashion, trying every which way you know to backtrack the letters our ‘Friend’ keeps dispatching to this stargazing fraud, Zoltan. Normally I’d be the very last to fault you for employing direct tactics, but in this singular instance the trail you’ve worn yourself out striving to find has all the

earmarks of an invisible path leading nowhere. This entire affair is so strange and unreal that a more indirect, roundabout approach to solving the puzzle may be more fruitful.”

“Indirect . . . ?” Meisinger frowned.

“It has been my experience,” said the admiral, “that in our work oddness often breeds more oddities, and strangeness tends to beget more strangenesses, and in turn often as not sires additional oddities. Why not change venues, play the game a bit differently for a time and see where it takes us?”

“Not sure I follow, Admiral.”

“How about ordering your team,” said Canaris, “to stay in close contact with military intelligence, the civil police, perhaps even liaise with Heydrich’s Gestapo misfits? Urge your people to solicit aid from those they contact by having them discreetly pulse every nook and cranny of Berlin for strange items, anything odd, any inexplicable outliers that may surface, unusual happenings, events a tad out of the ordinary, whatever doesn’t quite fit the template of normalcy. In short, anything odd, uncertain and difficult to explain.”

Meisinger returned his superior’s stare. “Interesting that you should suggest it. Are you thinking blind alleys often teach one to work in total darkness.”

“Precisely.”

“Believe it or not, your observation struck an immediate chord,” said Meisinger in a musing tone of voice. “It brought to mind an example of just the sort of oddity you may have had in mind. Kurt recently reported hearing from a chief inspector in his acquaintance a tale of some outrageously unusual banknote the city police are holding as evidence in an ongoing counterfeiting investigation.”

“Outrageously unusual in what way?”

“More so than either of us could imagine,” said Meisinger. “Kurt said a number of experts had been brought in to examine the bill, and they all verified its authenticity. The chief inspector told Kurt that serialization assured the fact that it was issued . . . Pardon me, that it *will* be issued during calendar year nineteen forty-two.”

“Ridiculous!”

“No one could argue with your conclusion. Nevertheless, an extremely peculiar sidelight also cropped up: the anomalous bill’s ridiculousness has aroused a disproportionate degree of interest in certain quarters. You must be familiar with the scheme to undermine Britain’s economy by counterfeiting gross quantities of Bank of England currency.”

“I was briefed on it, and thought it nonsensical.”

“More than once,” said Meisinger, “has *Der Führer* been petitioned for approval to consummate what some believe might be a deft stroke — floating gross quantities of letter-perfect, oversized ‘bed sheet’ banknotes the British are so in love with, as well as ‘guineas,’ prestige bills valued at twenty-one shillings instead of the usual twenty.”

“Foolishness!” declared Canaris, and then frowned, pausing to ruminate. “To me, the proposed venture falls somewhere between highly suspect, and wasted effort, yet for now let’s let the police handle counterfeiting problems. What tie could exist between this supposed ultra-damaging inflationary assault on Britain’s economy, and a single bogus banknote?”

“It appeared from nowhere,” enlightened Meisinger, “arousing everyone’s suspicions. The economics ministry supposedly worries about the likelihood of the Englanders corrupting *our* currency in much the same way we contemplate grossly inflating that of Britain.”

“Ah, now the waters clear a bit,” Canaris said dismissively. “However that affair may turn out, I should like to see you adopt my suggestion for a while. Don’t let your efforts flag when it comes to chasing down the slimmest of slim leads, but at the same time have your team stay on its toes for news of anything out of the ordinary, anything outside the envelope of what most individuals consider natural and normal.”

“I surely will, Admiral.”

“Good. Now get on with it. Explore every avenue and dimension of whatever surfaces, and *please* find our ‘Friend,’ and while you’re at it find some way to make it march.”

THIRTEEN Surveillance

James spruced himself up, combed his hair, now badly in need of cutting, and rubbed out the worst scuff marks on his secondhand shoes. Mindful of the fact that the windfall *Reichsmarks* bestowed by the Goebbels ministry entitled him to an improved wardrobe, he toyed with a notion to pawn the handful of jewelry he’d carried into the past before the items were lost or stolen, then thought better of it and decided to do it later.

The bus dropped him off at the prescribed Schöneberg intersection. Approaching Zoltan’s stargazing establishment, he crossed the street halfway down the block and paused beside a lamppost to reconnoiter. Everything looked exactly as it had during the prior visit, with a single exception: a black, near-new Audi sedan was parked at the curb in front of Zoltan’s starry emporium. Although the license tab was civilian, the auto had a sleek, well-maintained “official” aspect that made it seem a touch out of place in the middle-class neighborhood. Vaguely troubled by the vehicle’s presence, he wondered if it could be the same Audi he’d seen parked outside the boardinghouse on the evening suave Herr Meisinger had visited his attic room.

Strolling onward to the end of the block, a victim of indecision, he fended off an urge to abandon the venture on general principles, come back some other time. Yet a strong urge to scout the Great Zoltan’s astrology parlor, see what there was to see, hear what there was to hear, and if possible learn the seer’s connection to Lustmann.

Eventually convincing himself it would be safe to pose as an innocent customer eager to obtain whatever variety of celestial divination the “Ancient Art” the Great Zoltan had to offer, he cross the street, not paying attention to the nonexistent street traffic, and had to dodge an elderly man on a bicycle who tooted the horn on his handlebars in annoyance. Slowly and cautiously turning the knob, he inched open the door of Zoltan’s astrology parlor. Unlike many other Berlin shops, no tinkling overhead bell announced a customer’s arrival or departure. Leaving the door slightly ajar, he slipped into a vestibule hung with faded crimson draperies that gave off a faint, musty odor. A crystal ball rested like a giant’s teardrop in a three-pronged wooden stand at the center of a heavy-legged walnut table that had seen better days. A wall poster half the size of the one in the opaqued front window depicted the “world famous seer” plying his art, peering into the crystal ball with insolent dark eyes beneath bushy, gray-shot brows.

A barely audible voice-buzz filtered through a closed door, emanating from what must be a back room. Standing perfectly still, James struggled against an impulse to bolt from the premises and not look back. But after coming this far, the lure of discovering a tie between Lustmann's letters and the astrologer was too enticing for him to just cut and run. He tiptoed over a faded Oriental rug one slow step at a time, cautiously pressed his ear against the closed door.

"... do you dare tell us the letter wasn't *read*?" Whoever the hidden speaker was, his indistinct question was delivered sharply, making him sound testy, out of sorts.

"I... oh, no, sir! *Never* would I presume to do that! As I said, it came in yesterday's post around four o'clock. The instant I saw the green lettering I rushed to call your office."

Green lettering! The magic words rooted James to the spot, his right ear jammed against the door. He tried to catalog the second speaker's accent as best he could — Romanian, or more likely Hungarian considering the one and only name used by the seer, possibly a pseudonym...

"Patience, Kurt," advised a softer, more cultured voice. "Herr Zoltan has been extremely cooperative, and I'm certain he will continue to help us."

"In every way possible, sir," volunteered the presumed astrologer.

James reacted to the softer, more sophisticated baritone advising patience by backing away from the door in alarm. It hardly seemed possible, yet even when heard indistinctly, from the other side of a door, the speaker's suave intonation and precise diction were remindful of the way that *Abwehr* agent, Meisinger, had questioned him. If it *was* the smooth talking gentleman, it frightened James to a state of near-panic to think what an incriminating coincidence it would be for Steyr, a purported Austrian journalist, to be caught snooping in Zoltan's stargazing parlor.

Torn between yet another reflexive impulse to dash out the door, and an equally strong, overpowering desire to eavesdrop further, his fear of being found out was leavened by a sense of having stumbled into exactly the right place at exactly the right moment. He drew a deep breath, open-mouthed for silence, and agonized over his decision to take such a chance, the resolutely repositioning his head against the door and listened intently.

"See there, Kurt," admonished the smooth talker, "he promises to be the soul of cooperation. Now then, Herr Zoltan, we stopped by today because this madness had gotten out of hand. When your, er... pen pal, whoever he is, began sending you his astonishing predictions they were naturally considered the work of an acutely disturbed individual. Unfortunately, that view no longer obtains. His letters have transformed the unknown writer, harmless lunatic or not, into someone who's proved devilishly perturbing to certain highly placed government officials.

"You may rest your mind about one aspect of these strange letters," continued the same smooth voice. "Your unwitting involvement in this peculiar affair, together with your candid responses, makes your reason for opening and reading the first two letters addressed to you easy to understand; they were after all addressed to you personally. Forwarding all subsequent letters, however, prohibited you from learning more about their contents. In the interest of determining where we are as of this moment, and where we might be able to go from here, let me recapitulate certain informations in those letters as a preface to hopefully learning more about the writer.

"As you no doubt recall, Herr Zoltan, our 'Friend' precisely defined the terms of the Munich Pact — not a great accomplishment, since he did so after the fact — and then boldly 'envisioned' France nor England as unprepared to react militarily to pact violations, describing their inaction as, quote, a reprise of the spineless French and English antics in nineteen thirty-

eight, when Austria was annexed to the *Reich*, and the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia were liberated, close quote. He also foretold our coexistence treaty with the Soviet Union, and not only predicted the lull in hostilities beginning last fall, and advised that ‘The Franco-British Alliance would project various offensive schemes neither had the muscle to execute.’

“However,” continued the speaker, “what you had no way to know when reading the early letters was that when the *Wehrmacht* first smashed into Poland his prophetic letter also named names and cited deployments down to brigade level with incredible *accuracy*, and even more incredibly listed their approximate, then-current *locations*.”

A faint, wheezing sound was the only response James was able to hear.

“To paraphrase the words from an early letter,” pursued the speaker. “our ‘Friend’ told us the Reich did not invade Belgium in November, nineteen thirty-nine as planned, a failure greatly disappointing *Der Führer*, and forcing a propitious wait until spring, nineteen-forty, to strike here where it was least expected. I’m sure the newspapers informed you that last month, in full accordance with another of our ‘Friend’s’ predictions, Norway and Denmark fell to our forces.”

“Ausserordentlich!”

“A monumental understatement, Herr Zoltan! Our prophet’s detailed ‘visions’ foretell future events in frightening *detail*, and were in each case uncannily *accurate*. His prophecies surpass all bounds of probability, or for that matter rationality. To date, he has been *one thousand percent* correct. What makes that fact so utterly unbelievable and acutely painful in the view of our leadership is that certain of those in authority have taken an unhealthy interest in his oracular ‘visions.’ A close personal acquaintance of mine overheard *Der Führer* himself say, ‘See there, great minds do think alike after all.’ I’m certain you find that deeply disturbing, Herr Zoltan.”

“Stargazing nonsense!” James recognized the harsher voice belonging to Kurt.

A note of reproach crept into the smooth-talker’s rejoinder. “Ah, but *is* it nonsense?”

Entranced by what he’d been hearing, James distinguished the faint sound of labored breathing and pressed his ear harder against the door.

“Relax, Herr Zoltan,” encouraged the silken voice. “You’ve absolutely nothing to fear. There has been no iota of wrongdoing on your part, nothing you can be faulted for doing or not doing. A formal apology was tendered after you were mistakenly arrested, is that not so?”

There was a muffled grunt indicating agreement.

“Yet despite your reassurance,” continued the smooth voice, “be forewarned about how mandatory it is to reconfirm your pledge of total secrecy with regard to the matters under discussion. Next, you see, we plan to make you privy to the selective contents of later missives *only* in the interest of learning more about this . . . great art of yours. So for one last time I will issue the same stern warning: should your tongue wag loosely and divulge one syllable of what is I shall reveal, your skin will be removed one square decimeter at a time. Understood?”

A faint blubbing sound evidenced Zoltan’s complete understanding.

“Now then, we shall skip the accompanying gibberish about Saturn being in the Sun’s second house, and so forth and so on. You may pretend to comprehend starry nattering of that sort . . . By the way, does the accompanying astrological mishmash mean anything to you?”

“N-nothing, not a thing, sir. It is what you just called it, gibberish. The astrological terms are childish at best, and at worst one might say —”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted the smooth voice, and an all but inaudible sound of rustling paper. “Ah, here we are. To quote from the transcript of a letter you swear you never opened, ‘In the early hours of May tenth, Army Group ‘B,’ von K  chler’s Eighteenth Army striking across the Peel Line, will push Winkelman’s Army of the Netherlands back to the Dyle Line, while Reichenau’s Sixth Army advances across the Belgian frontier with huge success. Von Leeb’s Army Group ‘C’ will feint an attack on the Maginot defense bastion, thus pinning down over forty French divisions and allowing von Rundstedt’s Army Group ‘A,’ led by General Guderian’s armored divisions, to crash through Belgium’s Ardennes Forest, a region the French military had considered impenetrable by *Panzers*.’

“Herr Zoltan,” said the speaker went on to say, “the events and actions cited in the letter have been featured in every newspaper account and radio broadcast in Germany, making it pointless to waste breath enlightening you as to their accuracy. The true crusher is that the letter in question was postmarked weeks before the events described took place. I must also tell you, and please remember your desire to retain a whole skin, that for some time the OKW Chief of Staff, General von Manstein, has made a constant nuisance of himself advocating a totally unorthodox strike through the hilly, wooded Ardennes Forest. He eventually won over General Guderian, who refined the details of the prospective campaign and made them his own, nor did he forget to take credit for conceiving the entire operation.”

The cultured voice grew more strident, more insistent. James strained to hear the speaker say, “Now please attend me closely, Herr Zoltan! That particular extract amounts to not mere fortunetelling, but a feat of pure *magic* on the part of our ‘Friend.’ You see, no one who failed to attend OKW senior staff conferences could possibly have learned in advance of the tactical masterstroke employed to launch the western offensive. Let me repeat that: *no one!*”

“What we are praying to discover today, Herr Zoltan, is simply this: Would it be remotely conceivable — not probable mind you, but even distantly *possible* — for the, er . . . ‘science’ of astrology to grant an adept like you the ability to develop such refined, ultra-definitive, not to mention incredibly detailed, *accurate* predictions?”

After another wheezing, bubbling sigh, Zoltan said, “This . . . person, whoever he may be, claims his . . . gift to be an affliction that in some unknown manner produces . . . ‘visions.’ Also in his possession, so he claims, are ancient Greek manuscripts that profess a refined, less corrupted method of allowing the stars to —”

“No, no! Stop, Herr Zoltan! I did not request a lecture on arcana, only a simple, very straightforward yes or no. In your professional opinion, could the finest astrologer in all human history be able to do what our ‘Friend’ has been doing — and God help us! — *keeps* doing?”

“I . . . no, never, sir. I cannot begin to imagine how such accuracy could be —”

“Nor I,” declared the smooth voice. “What you probably should not know, but I intend to tell you anyhow — please keep your skin in mind — is that our superiors find it a very serious threat to the *Reich* for a purported mind reader like our ‘Friend’ to be dispatching one ‘visionary’ letters after another containing informations our leaders insist *must* be shrouded in deep secrecy. Officialdom, to be blunt, regards the writer as a genuine threat endangering national security . . .”

Leaning forward for minutes on end, his head pressed against the intervening door, James developed a cramp in his left calf, and shifted his weight. A floorboard creaked beneath the Oriental rug.

He whirled, dry-mouthed, rushed to yank open the parlor's front door, then closed it with a distinct thud. He called hopefully, "*Guten Morgen . . . ?*"

Concerted whisperings filtered from the back room. Seconds passed before an ashen-faced, bearded man emerged looking two decades older than the Great Zoltan pictured in the poster emerged, and firmly shut the door behind him. "Good day, sir. What can I do for you?"

"If you are available for a consultation, I should like to arrange a personal reading. I am a Sagittarian, faced with an extremely important business dealing, and it behooves me to —"

"Oh, do forgive me! Please do not be offended, but I must beg off. Another time, gladly, but I fear a reading today would not be possible." The Great Zoltan used the sleeve of his brocaded robe to pat dry the perspiration beading his brow. "I'm feeling somewhat indisposed this morning. I've decided to shut up shop and go home to bed."

Thinking the robe would have been more appropriate for a sorcerer than an astrologer, James did his best to look disheartened. "So sorry to hear that. Would tomorrow be convenient? I have a desperate need to obtain an up-to-date chart."

"Tomorrow will be fine. If you are comfortable with the hour, can you come about ten?"

"Surely, surely. Ten tomorrow. I shall be prompt."

"Very good. Please, sir; you really must excuse me now."

"I sincerely hope to find you feeling better on the morrow." James could not have fled Zoltan's zodiacal palace more resolutely if the building had been on fire. It was true — starkly unbelievable, but *true!* — Lustmann was forwarding Odessa's scheme to coach Nazification of the entire world via a thoroughly unbelievable tactic. Considering the ammunition at his disposal, it was small wonder that he was beginning to achieve success. How could it possibly be otherwise?

Exhilarated beyond measure he rode back to *zentrales Berlin*, and for want of anything better to do resumed his stakeout on a bench in *Pariser Platz* across from the Adlon. He sat there for two hours, thinking and scheming, trying to invent a practical method of countering Erich Lustmann's unbelievable scheme to ensure a Nazi victory in the war.

* * *

The door chime sounded promptly at nine o'clock. Still in robe and slippers, Lustmann had been smoking, sipping coffee laced with brandy, and reading the morning papers delivered as usual by gratuity-happy bellman Hans. Late the previous afternoon, someone announcing himself as Chief Inspector Fürstenburg had defeated the never-to-be-disturbed directive issued to the hotel staff by "Herr Klasse," and phoned to politely request a brief official visit.

Having readily agreed to "exchange a few words" as requested, Lustmann had gone about making everything in readiness. Street clothing laid out in the bedchamber promised a swift exit from the Adlon if such an extreme became necessary. The silenced Walther PPK automatic was within reach, tucked beneath a chair cushion. If any complications did arise, particularly an invitation to come to the police station for further questioning, he fully intended to slough off the invitation, or eliminate the detective, then snatch the carryall and disappear down the service stairs. Not that he hoped a disruption of that consequence would be necessary. Abandoning his suite could inspire potentially serious complications. Searching for a reasonable place to stay, and perhaps adopting another of his half-dozen furnished identities would be an added bother.

The chime sounded a second time. He rose languorously and took his own sweet time answering the door. Hats in hands, a pair of sober-faced individuals in business suits stood expectantly in the hallway. The shorter of the pair hung back, diffidence evident in his body language, while the taller gentleman bobbed his chin politely. "Chief Inspector Fürstenburg, Herr Klasse," he said. "This is Detective Kastel."

"*Hereingekommen.*" Lustmann reinforced his chilly reception with a look of stony indifference. "Will you take coffee, Chief Inspector, Detective . . .?"

"No thank you, sir." Fürstenburg displayed his credentials. Lustmann motioned for his visitors to make themselves comfortable and they sat down side by side on the sofa. "We apologize for bothering you at this early hour, Herr Klasse. I think you may already be aware of why this visit was considered necessary."

"The counterfeiting investigation?"

"Yes, just so, Herr Klasse."

"The hotel management informed me of the strange occurrence." Wishing to control the direction taken by the conversation, Lustmann added, "Shortly after learning what apparently had taken place, and of course wishing to find out more about the peculiar business, I contacted Frau Sharpe, the *Reichsbank* accounts manager with whom I've had business dealings. Tell me, Chief Inspector, has the culprit been arrested?"

Fürstenburg frowned. Sounding a tad uncomfortable, he said, "No, Herr Klasse. The case is no longer under investigation."

"What . . .?" Lustmann did not have to feign surprise.

"We have been attempting to discover the origin of the thousand-mark banknote included in your cash deposit at *Reichsbank*. Its existence is . . . The spurious bill puzzles every expert called in to examine it and, surprisingly, all validate it as genuine, with an exceptional difference I'm sure Frau Sharpe told you about, Herr Klasse. The consensus of opinion is that the spurious banknote must be a mistake on someone's part. That may sound ridiculous, but any number of professional opinions share the explanation. The bill had to have been officially printed and circulated during some calendar year, although naturally not one yet to come."

Lustmann nodded sagaciously. As if unfazed by the statement, he said, "That, gentlemen, is nearly word for word what Frau Sharpe told me. I do hope you will understand that a, well . . . such a 'mistake' leaves me at a total loss. I fear that I offended Frau Sharpe by refusing to take her seriously when she related the concerted opinion of experts called in by *Reichsbank*, which you have just confirmed. The serialization has to be the result of a printing or tabulating error or what have you. I fail to see how it could possibly be otherwise."

His expression neutral, Fürstenburg said, "A conclusion shared by everyone, Herr Klasse. Yet one by one all such eventualities have been ruled out. Microscopic examination of the paper, engraving and other esoteric features classify the bill as genuine, while faint creases and minimal wear also indicate that the banknote had been in circulation. Frau Sharpe assures us that it was indeed part of the large sum you deposited. May we respectfully inquire how, from where, and in what manner the monies were obtained?"

"No, Inspector," Lustmann surprised the detectives by saying, "you may not."

A penetrating look from Chief Inspector Fürstenburg. "I beg your pardon, sir."

“While I have no wish to do so, you gentlemen leave me no alternative but to confirm my bona fides.” Lustmann rose, pulled up the sleeve of his paisley dressing gown and held out his left forearm to afford the detectives a better look. “I’m sure you both recognize this mark.”

“*Schutzstaffeln* . . ?” said Detective Kastel. He took a small notepad from an inner jacket pocket, and unscrewed the cap of a fountain pen, preparing to record the tattooed data.

Lustmann quickly pulled down his sleeve. “It would not be unwise to do that, Detective. I make no bones about my *SS* affiliation, or the fact that Klasse is not my real name. Any alias will do. You may address me as *SS-Allgemeine Sturmbannführer X* if you wish. My current assignment calls for a number of sensitive monetary exchanges, each with a direct bearing on state security. I am charged with the additional duty of disbursing certain funds, tasks that make it necessary to pass myself off as a civilian. The purpose of my activities is of interest only to my superiors, and as for how and where the currency was obtained I confess to being as much in the dark as either of you gentlemen.”

Fürstenburg cleared his throat and cast an uncertain glance at his partner. “Then would you object if we were to contact your superiors and try to learn the bill’s origin?”

“Object . . ? No, certainly not, Chief Inspector. You have my blessing.” The roundabout way of asking the identity of his superiors irked Lustmann to the point of awarding each of the detectives a hard-eyed stare. “I myself am forsworn to say nothing specific about my assignment. What little information have permission to supply is this: I report directly to the office of the *Reichsführer-SS Himmler*. Before contacting and posing questions to that office, however, it might be prudent for you to consult with and gain the approval of your own superiors. In my opinion, prying into the movement of *SS* funds would not be, shall we say, productive, and could easily lead to grave consequences. *Reichsführer-SS Himmler* isn’t at all fond of making others aware of the organization’s inner workings, not even those engaged in law enforcement. While I recognize your obligation to meet the demands of the investigation, please believe me when I tell you the decision to go forward in such a manner has to be entirely your own.”

The unsubtle warning garnered blank expressions in both detectives. Lustmann could not help but glance at the chair cushion under which the silenced Walther PPK rested. He instantly dismissed the lethal notion, inanely wondering how, in a police state, even the most diligent sleuths could hope to solve a crime cloaked in government secrecy.

Looking put-upon, Chief Inspector Fürstenburg gained his feet. “You have been most helpful, Herr Klasse.” Not knowing what else to say, he punctuated the statement with a glance at his companion. “If Detective Kastel has no further questions, we’ll trouble you no longer.”

“Delighted to be of whatever help I was able to tender.” Lustmann made it a point to shake hands with Kastel as well as the chief inspector, and showed them out of his suite.

Closing the door, he smirked and opened an ivory-inlaid box, took out a cigarette and clicked the Dunhill and blew smoke at the ceiling, deciding it would be a frigid day in the netherworld before that pair *or* their superiors gave serious thought to posing their questions within the purview of gimlet-eyed, emotionally sterile *Reichsführer-SS Himmler*, or perhaps even worse his number one henchman, *Reichsprotektor-SS Reinhard Heydrich*, or for that matter any of dozens of lower-echelon *SS* functionaries.

FOURTEEN Audacity, still audacity, audacity always!

What to do, what to do . . . ?

The quest for Erich Lustmann had concluded on a high note, making James aware of the “what, where and how” of the man’s activities. Despite also learning the “why and when,” he found it difficult, if not impossible, to begin evolving a method of rectifying the direction and progress of Lustmann’s mission. He had literally racked his brain far into the previous night while prowling back and forth in the chilly attic room, doing his best to come up with at least a tentative answer of sorts.

Falling into bed overtired, his preoccupation with solving the problem had kept him wakeful into the wee hours, and he’d lain awake, his thoughts whirling and gyrating for another hour or more, awakening in the morning feeling groggy from the short night, still nagged by the fact that nothing had changed. After partaking of the widow Kraven’s less than satisfying breakfast consumed with little appetite, he had gone out to purchase the morning edition of *Beobachter*, and headed directly to his surveillance post on *Unter den Linden*, doing so more from habit than any actual desire or necessity. After a time, struck by the pointlessness of taking up station across from the Adlon when his man might emerge this morning, tomorrow afternoon, next week at midnight, or never, he wondered if such a vigil really mattered. Chances were that trailing Lustmann on foot, assuming he would be on foot, just to see where he went, to whom if anyone visited or spoke, might be a waste of time and energy.

Unfolding *Beobachter*, he scanned the front page columns, found himself reading words absent of meanings, went back to the top of the page and started over, with similar results. He gave up, rose stewing about the problem, discarded the newspaper in a trash bin and meandered aimlessly along the *Pariser Platz* sidewalk deep in thought, imagining, inventing and discarding one fanciful scenario after another. The electrifying conversation overheard during his bold eavesdropping session in the astrology parlor had confirmed the fact that Lustmann possessed encyclopedic details of the “real” war’s progress, plus insider information applying to current individuals and situations. The coming contest of wills, endeavors and actions would be totally one-sided and unfairly contested. The *Deutsches Weltreichsheld-to-be*, or hopefully never-to-be was operating on his home turf. He also owned every conceivable advantage when it came to proactively advising, counseling and coaching Nazi officialdom by touting his difficult-to-dismiss, reality-based “prophetic” visions. It had staggered him to discover the man’s method of using an obscure, unwitting fortuneteller to message the Nazi hierarchy, his role in the charade effectively nil except for being one end of a convenient pipeline to the Nazi leadership.

Unfortunately, in living, breathing nineteen-forty Berlin, the tactic was anything *but* absurd and laughable. It was all too glaringly *real*. What would ordinarily be considered ludicrous by normal, well-oriented individuals was *precisely* what Lustmann was doing, and he had to be stopped, or exposed as a fraud, or . . .

Or, *what* . . . ?

Walking about aimlessly, head down, only his mind alive, Silverthorne’s random progress took him into the path of a hurrying pedestrian, and they bumped shoulders. James excused himself to the glowering gentleman, touched his hat brim with two fingers and stepped aside.

He needed a place to go, a semi-isolated think-spot where he could get off the streets, plant himself in relative solitude and perhaps gradually bring the quandary into sharper focus. He had to find a way to surround the problem en toto and defeat it, worry it to death until some path to resolution revealed itself. What he needed was someplace familiar and quiet, restful. He briefly considering the zoo, and rejected the notion. He had visited Berlin's *Zoologischer Garten* several times during his wanderings, but it would be crowded with adults and clamoring children. What he desired was an island of sanity where he wouldn't be disturbed, someplace like . . .

The maison de plaisance of Friederich der Grosse!

The inspiration struck him as not only pleasing, but self-affirming. King Frederick the Second's rococo *Schloss Sanssouci* had no doubt undergone a lengthy sea change during the century and one-half since he had last set foot there. Even so, in his own era the palace and grounds where he'd lived and worked as a footman and usher had been preserved as a national shrine. *Sanssouci* should not be all that different from what it had been during his retrotemporal research venture, still the same pleasant, formerly familiar haunt.

Potsdam, on River Havel in Brandenburg, was no more than a twenty-five kilometer ride from central Berlin. He caught a bus to the *Zoologischer* Station, learned the next train would not depart for almost an hour, and sat down to read the newspaper. Even with a destination in mind, however, the problem would not get out of his head and let what he was trying to read penetrate.

Stepping down from the railcar in the Potsdam *Stadt*, it seemed appropriate to ease the short journey to the palace by spending a few of the *Reichsmarks* he'd earned serving his unwanted patron, *Reichsminister* Geobbel. He splurged on a taxi, taking in the sights along *Strasse Schopenhauer*, enjoying the ride, and asked to be dropped off farther along the avenue, near the southern entrance to the palace grounds.

He paid the cabby, tipping generously, and found that Frederick's *Lustgarten* had transformed itself into a park and tourist mecca. Walking west along *Hauptallee* through the landscaped plain below Weinberg Hill, he passed the smaller fountain and continued on to the much larger *Grosse Fontäne*, the centerpiece of a terrace ringed by statuary. Pausing beside the circular fountain, he scanned the outwardly unchanged surroundings, admiring the gardens and familiar landmarks: the Dutch windmill, the nearby *Neues Palais*, its domed *Marmosaal* rotunda inspired by Rome's ancient Pantheon. Next to it reared the *Communes*, a building once housing the servants, where he'd slept during the months-long retrotemporal junket.

Frederick the Great's "carefree" palace occupied the crest of Weinberg Hill. From below, it looked somehow different than in the late eighteenth century. Six curving *Weinbergterasse* terraces on either side of the long flight of steps leading up to the entrance, while elegantly landscaped, were no longer planted in the vineyards of Frederick's era. He decided it was the tourists and visitors marching up and down the steps in ones and twos and groups that lent the palace an impression of "otherness." He recalled with the vivid clarity of hindsight, how opulent, horse-drawn carriages had arrived at the foot of the steps, and recalled the dignity and ceremony with which crowned heads and lesser dignitaries had been received and escorted up those selfsame steps.

As European palaces went, *Sanssouci* was petite — an understatement — consisting of an elliptical marble hall with a center vestibule, and only four adjoining chambers branching off on either side. Ascending the steps slowly, he turned often, taking in each elevated view of the

grounds. Entering, he paused in the vestibule, impressed by the marvelous state of preservation, noting only minor changes from what he recalled in Frederick's day. Stepping into the library, the king's favorite room, he turned round and round, gazing up at the high windows, the rococo furnishings, and rich cedarn paneling. Filled with a nostalgic sense of "homecoming," he had no idea how long he'd been gawking when a conservatively dressed gentleman with a shock of flowing white hair appeared at his elbow and spoke, jolting him back to the present.

"Your pardon, sir. You seem to be enjoying the library."

An emphatic nod. "Very much. I can't imagine how anyone could not be fascinated." Words from his book came back to him in a rush. "One can almost see aged King Frederick leaning on a walking stick, stumping about in his faded uniform."

An appreciative smile. "Indeed, sir. Palace history obviously intrigues you."

"Absolutely," said James. "Are you by chance the curator?"

"Oh, no; merely one of the docents. You seem much more interested than most visitors. If you wish, I'll be delighted to show you around, answer any questions you might have."

"That's very kind of you, but I really prefer to wander about on my own."

"Of course; as you wish. Some descriptive brochures on a stand inside the northern entrance are there for the taking. Enjoy your visit." Hands clasped behind his back, the docent strolled out into the vestibule.

From the doorway, James glanced into the concert room but did not enter. As if it were yesterday, he vividly recalled ushering bewigged guests and jeweled ladies in eighteenth-century finery into the delightful chamber, attendees at one of Frederick's recitals and concerts. Today, however, his visit was driven by a motive he could not dismiss by reverting to sightseeing. It was time to concentrate on his reason for visiting *Sanssouci*.

He went back outdoors through the north entrance and roved about, strolling the pathways of the Dutch Garden in company with a thin sprinkling of visitors, subvocally repeating the name that kept echoing hollowly in his consciousness: Lustmann, Lustmann, Lustmann! What could be done to hinder, thwart or perhaps even eliminate the outrageous, world-changing schemer and the scheme he and his expatriate Odessa cohorts had concocted? What could he *himself* possibly do as a first step toward nullifying and redirecting the purpose of that scheme? He revolved tentative, previously occurring notions and the flaws in each quickly became apparent, so that in the end he came up empty. No practical way existed to intercept Lustmann's apocryphal letters and make changes — an appealing tactic that would be far the simplest, most subtle way to achieve his objective. A comprehensive hunt was obviously underway for whoever was suspected of detailing his "visions" in letters, yet the hunters in general, or particularly *Abwehr* agent Meisinger, would never believe who the author of the letters actually was, or any suspicion of why, from whence, or in this case from "when" he had come to Berlin, nor any inkling of his world-changing mission.

The more he thought about the problem, the more he admired the radical, fantastic, totally unorthodox method of gaining the Nazi leadership's collective ear, perhaps even the ear connected to the brain of Germany's demagogue Leader himself. Judging from the dialogue he had overheard in Zoltan's astrology parlor, Lustmann's "predictions" were designed to fit tongue-in-groove with Hitler's mystic concept of Nordic destiny, Aryan superiority and all of

that ethnic rot, which made including it in his letters a masterstroke topping all others, a virtual guarantee that the “Master Race” would indeed be victorious *uber alles*.

Yet what could a lone individual like himself possibly do that might turn to dust the admittedly ingenious scheme hatched by the Odessa brain trust in a future born in what to James himself was the past? That was the question of questions, a question that *demand*ed an answer. He glanced all around as if searching for a clue to some solution, taking in the geometric greenery, the statuary in the Dutch Garden. What, he asked himself again and again, would King Frederick have done to counter the tactics of Lustmann and his witless accomplice, a bearded astrological buffoon? He reflexively posed the question over and over again, and yet again, but it generated no trace of a new train of thought that might lead to an answer.

Frederick the Second, Prussia’s legendary ruler, was a thoroughly familiar figure, though entirely as a result of his retrotemporal research junket. His interest in Frederick and his reign had of course doubled upon being handed an opportunity to actually stand in the presence of the fabled, living, breathing monarch. Undoubtedly *the* most renowned Germanic prince in history, Frederick had done so much more than joining his troops on the battlefield and leading them under fire. An absolute despot, yet in many respects a benign one, he had been much more than simply a soldier’s soldier, and had also taken upon himself the self-bestowed title of “First Servant of the State.” The major force driving Prussia’s King Frederick had been a genuine, deep-seated desire to guide his people in whichever manner they themselves believed most beneficial. He had therefore promulgated domestic reforms that encouraged his subjects to move forward into the so-called modern age, and that devotion to Prussia, not to mention the entire Fatherland and its peoples, had done much to shape German history well beyond Frederick’s lifetime. His enduring, farsighted policies had later effectively aided in the establishment of a German nation actively seeking to bring itself into the twentieth century.

He continued asking himself over and over again what Frederick would have done to put a stop to Lustmann and his world-changing mission — not an idle question by any means. No matter in what direction the monarch’s decision might have taken him, it would not have been accomplished by timid, halfway measures. A truly enlightened monarch, he had proven himself more than merely a military genius, although that facet leadership, amply demonstrated during the Seven Years War, had doubled upon leading an invasion, making Silesia a part of Prussia.

Out of the blue, the sterling advice tendered during Frederick’s reign by a French legislator, and occasionally echoed by the monarch himself, flashed through Silverthorne’s mind. He murmured the phrase aloud: “*De l’audace, et encore de l’audace, et toujours de l’audace.*”

An audacious solution to Lustmann’s audacious attempt to change the world struck him as not merely unavoidable, but so critically necessary as to be inescapable, *mandatory*. There *was* no other way! It had been there all along, staring him in the face. He would have to find some audacious way to take Lustmann’s place and audaciously forge his own “Friend of the Reich” letters aimed at influencing and coaching and redirecting the course of the war *his* way, thereby obliterating forever the lurking specter of *Deutsches Weltreich*.

The sunlit grounds of Frederick’s *Holländischer Garten* had taken on a suddenly darker, more somber hue. He came to a full realization, accompanied by a bottomless sinking feeling, that if he were to accomplish the truly monumental task before him, the only remaining question demanded a truly audacious move. Did he himself, a professional academic who had never slain

anything higher in the chain of life than a deer or elk occasionally bagged with a longbow, have the courage and resourcefulness mandatory — and the *guts!* — to do what *had* to be done, and *kill* Erich Lustmann.

No alternative seemed remotely possible.

Catching the train back to Berlin, he left *Zoologischer* Station in a worried, deeply introspective frame of mind, his thoughts clouded with premonitions of failure and the ensuing disaster of a Nazi victory. Slowly making his way back toward the boardinghouse, he stopped and purchased a small bottle of *Schnapps*, carrying it upstairs to his dingy attic room, and set it in the closet with the cap sealed. The *Schnapps* would be reserved for an evening when he intended to open the bottle and down just enough to make him sufficiently glib-tongued to prepare for what might be the toughest night of his life.

And maybe the last, he thought.

* * *

He had worked until almost two in the morning, drafting a letter aimed at correcting *Luftwaffe* bombing objectives during the air war soon to begin in the clear summer skies over England, and the door chime startled him into full wakefulness.

Electrified, Lustmann sat up in bed; it was as if he had barely drifted off to sleep. Was someone actually calling at the door, or had he been hearing things in a dream? Preternaturally wide awake, he rolled to his feet and sought his robe, but did not switch on a table lamp beside the bed. Rummaging in darkness, his fingers touched the silenced Walther PPK in an end table drawer. Groping his way into the lightless parlor, he slipped the weapon under a chair cushion to muffle the sound and worked the slide mechanism, injecting a round into the chamber just as the chime sounded a second time.

Guter Gott! Who could it be? The police would never come at this hour, unless . . . Had the Gestapo, or another *Reich* investigative agency ferreted out his whereabouts? No way could it be the hotel's management, or that bellman, Hans. Weapon in hand, he edged to the door in darkness, felt for it with an outstretched hand, and looked through the eye level peek-a-boo lens.

Small amber bulbs in wall sconces some distance down the hallway in either direction provided illumination too weak for much of anything to be seen. He unhooked the chain, drew back the deadbolt and opened up a crack, and posted himself behind the door, his back to the wall. Through the crack between molding and the door edge, he saw a dark shoe, a trouser leg.

A faint, barely audible voice from the hall said softly, "Herr Lustmann, please let me come in. It is of utmost importance, I assure you."

Hearing his real name spoken shocked Lustmann nearly to the point of letting the silenced automatic pistol slip from his grasp. "Wrong . . . room," he muttered.

"Nein, nein! I must speak to you, bitte. A matter of grave urgency.

"Who are you?"

"A Friend of the Reich."

This response jarred Lustmann almost as badly as the first.

Standing in the hallway, his heart in his mouth, James heard a sharp intake of breath. He searched in vain for anything visible inside the darkened room, and began to gingerly edge into the suite, holding his empty hands in front of him, and holding his breath as well.

A violent one-handed shove sent him sprawling on the carpet. The door was kneed shut, and locked. A table lamp blazed alight.

Once his vision partially adjusted to the sudden brilliance, James looked up directly into the malignant eye of tubular silencer attached to the weapon a half-meter from his forehead.

“Sit up!” Lustmann backed away a half-step. “Now talk, or I squeeze off a round.”

James rolled very slowly to a sitting position, hands held shoulder high. “I have only the best of intentions, I assure you, Herr Lustmann.”

“Let me assure you of my intention. Knowing my name amounts to a death sentence. Has that occurred to you, Friend of the Reich?”

“*Jawohl*. A moment of your time is all I beg of you, sir!” Face to face with the man he had been schooled since childhood to think of as the greatest of heroes, a legend not merely in his own time, but forever, James had no difficulty appearing awestruck. “Please listen, sir. I was born February ninth, *Deutsches Weltreich-jahr* one hundred and four.”

“*Deutsches Welt* . . .” The automatic pistol wavered. The deceptively innocuous round eye of the silencer’s muzzle lowered only decimeter or so, then came up again smartly. “What crazy song and dance is this?”

“Please, it’s just . . . I hardly know where to begin, and feel so honored to be able to introduce myself to a *Reichsheld* of your stature that I, uh . . . I must somehow make you realize that in the world’s estimation you are second only to the memory of our noble *Führer*. That is why I find it so difficult to bring myself . . .”

“Damn you! Keep on talking in senseless riddles and I *will* shoot just to shut you up, then worry later about how to dispose of whatever is left. *Who are you?* Speak up! Be quick!”

“Three of us were sent back to cover you here in *Welthauptstadt Germania*, sir. It’s best for all concerned if you learn little or nothing about my companions.” Half-expecting a bullet in response, James did not think one word of his rehearsed spiel had been believed.

“Germania!” sneered Lustmann. “More nonsense! You’ll have to do much better than that, ‘Friend.’ I warn you for the very last time. You are running out of seconds. I will ask only once more. *Who are you*, and just as importantly *what are you?*”

“Shortly after conquering the Americas,” James said hurriedly, “*Der Führer* rechristened the capital *Welthauptstadt Germania*, after the ancient Roman term for *Das Vaterland*, Germania. Look out the window of the shrine consecrated in your honor, Herr Lustmann, and on down the *Unter den Linden*, close behind the Brandenburg Gate, you would see the government center — *Der Führer*’s magnificent tomb, and beyond it the Chancellory, then farther on the enormous hundred-meter dome of the Great Hall looming at the end of a kilometer-long reflecting pool.”

The ice in Lustmann’s eyes melted only a trifle. “All right, fellow ‘Friend of the Reich,’ I credit you with concocting a magnificent smoke screen, so I’ll give you one final chance, but *only* one, to blow aside the smoke and clarify whatever it is you are trying to tell me. My final question, upon which your life is hanging by a slim, unraveling thread, is quite straightforward. Does this drivel you are spouting intimate that I will succeed?”

“Gloriously, Herr Lustmann! At the conclusion of your sacred mission, you will instantaneously return to the *Deutsches Weltreichjahr siebenundzwanzig* timeline and find yourself welcomed by not only the celebrants but succeeding generations as an object of veneration exceeded, as I said, only by *Der Führer*’s memory.”

“Year twenty-seven!” The words erupted as a caustic grunt. “You’re still at it, my fellow ‘Friend’.” Despite the cynicism evident in his remark, Lustmann’s arrogant, self-satisfied features had wrinkled when he he’d drawn back and grimaced as in thought. “One flaw in your extraordinary tale,” he added, “was saying, ‘upon your return to . . . whatever year.’ I am all too aware that what you foretold is not hardly possible. I am condemned to live out my life along what the gentleman who devised the means of sending me here called the ‘present’ timeline.”

James opened his mouth wide, touched the false molar with a forefinger. “Advancements Dr. Lebe knew nothing about have taken place, Herr Lustmann. Twist this tooth clockwise, then suddenly bite down hard, and my accumulated temporal potential will snap me back to the Carlsbad Caverns reception center in *Deutsches Weltreichjahr hundert und zweiundvierzig*. My only risk of lacking that ability would be forgetting a need to chew only on the right side.”

The mention of physicist Alfred Lebe apparently thawed Lustmann more than anything else James might have said. Though still overtly very suspicious, he was intrigued in spite of himself, and growing more curious by the second. He licked his lips and decided on a fishing expedition aimed at resolving the issue. “There is no such magical device in my mouth.”

“Something similar will be furnished when it becomes necessary, Herr Lustmann.”

“You know this for a fact?”

“A firmly established fact. Unless my arithmetic is faulty, or I was misinformed, your retrotemporal transposition was relatively short — approximately two decades. Upon your return, you shall be welcomed in the identical time frame from which you departed.”

“Argentina,” demanded Lustmann, “nineteen-sixty?”

An affirmative nod. “In what was once called year nineteen-sixty of the Common Era, yes, but in New Mexico Province, not Argentina. To me, the equivalent year in question is DW-J twenty-seven, as reckoned from nineteen thirty-three, when *Der Führer* became chancellor and *Dritte Reich* was born.” James dared a fleet smile, and added, “You will find everything vastly changed for the better, Herr Lustmann. The whereabouts of your Odessa associates remains a mystery. Most historians believe they failed to survive the War of World Liberation in South America. If you wish it, arrangements can be made for transposition to whatever earlier or later era to which you may wish to return.”

Overwhelmed by a flood of information he could never dreamed of hearing, Lustmann thought the matter through at length. “*Mitfreund des Reichs*,” he said slowly, deliberately, “your demise is hereby suspended pending a further review of the evidence. Sit down, whoever the hell you are, and make yourself comfortable. Begin at the beginning, if you will, and tell all. Hold back nothing. You know far too much to be other than what you say you are, but I must be one thousand percent certain.”

James clicked his heels Prussian style, and took a seat on the sofa. “Gladly, sir. However, I can afford to stay only minutes,” he added by way of preamble. “Being in your suite places both of us in needless jeopardy.” Speaking rapidly, with what he liked to think was unmistakable sincerity, he described his background, enumerated the time jaunts he had undertaken as a tenured history professor holding a chair of retrotemporal research at a major university in North America’s Colorado Province. He explained that he and another historian at the University of Leipzig were the only individuals vetted by *Reichskounzel* to engage in closely controlled retrotemporal research.

All but speechless, Lustmann shook his head. "Extraordinary!"

James went on to relate how he and a pair of nameless associates had been serially dispatched from Carlsbad and Leipzig respectively, one parachuted to the east, and one to the west, while he himself had dropped into the southern Black Forest north of the Danube. They had converged on *Welthauptstadt Germania* — sorry, Berlin — from three different directions, their identities purposely kept from one another until they made contact at a predetermined rendezvous, a well known restaurant in Tiergarten. That way, had any of them been arrested and questioned, it would have been impossible to give up either of the others. "Working jointly," he concluded, "we spent months running down your whereabouts here in the capital."

A nod slow in coming let James know he was not yet completely out of the woods, although it was easy to see Lustmann was in the last stages of wavering, beginning to accept the tale by displaying a degree of sudden interest. "You say you're a history professor?"

"Yes, Herr Lustmann."

"And time traveler to boot? Tell me again, where and to, uh . . . when have you gone?"

"Most recently to the court of Frederick the Great in seventeen eighty-two of the Common Era. While search for your whereabouts, I gave in to nostalgia on a revisit to Potsdam. *Sanssouci* is now a public park full of tourists. My book on the junket was well received."

Lustmann's eyes lit with heightened interest. "You are a writer?"

"Why, yes."

"A *published* writer?"

James nodded. "My real name is Silverthorne, James Silverthorne. Here in what is once again Berlin my papers identify me as Hans Steyr, an Austrian journalist."

Lustmann stared at his visitor openmouthed. "This is absolutely fascinating! Isn't posing as a foreigner a bit chancy, however?"

James dared another fleet smile. "As you may recall, Herr Lustmann, roughly two years ago on this, our common timeline, Austria was annexed to the Reich."

"*Ach, ja!* Of course, of course. A writer, history professor *and* author. Will my blessings never cease!" The other's lingering suspicions had evaporated, giving way to overt enthusiasm. He laid aside the silenced Walther automatic pistol. "Listen, I've been going stark, raving mad trying to compose one never-to-be-sufficiently damned letter after another. Can you be of assistance in that regard? Again, the name you're using is . . .?"

"Steyr, Hans Steyr. Naturally I'll be delighted to covertly help you in every way possible. That is why we — the others and I — were sent back in order to . . . Wait, I must warn you that assisting you here in the hotel could invite disaster."

"Were you seen coming up to my suite?" asked Lustmann.

"No, I don't believe so. But it shouldn't matter, either way. I met one of my nameless associates at the trysting place we arrange each week by leaving a chalk mark high on a specific lamppost. He accompanied me to the hotel. The lobby was deserted at this hour, and he distracted the security man as well as the night deskman while I slipped up the stair. I mean to leave through the service entrance. Now for the good news, Herr Lustmann."

The other leaned forward. "Good news . . .?"

“The best, the *very* best. It should make you the happiest gentleman in the world, even more so than I myself. Your letters to that astrologer, Zoltan, are beginning to make an astonishingly deep impression on the *Reich’s* hierarchy.”

Lustmann looked startled. “How did you learn of the astrologer?”

“Once we located you and where you were staying, sir, it was quite simple.” James related the way he had trailed Lustmann from the postal substation, and afterward had bribed a postman to get a peek at the address on the letter he’d posted in a sidewalk letterbox. He described venturing into the astrology parlor, where he had risked detection by eavesdropping on a hushed conversation between the seer and what he was sure were a pair of *Abwehr* agents, one of whom had interrogated him over a suspicion that he himself might be the mysterious Friend of the Reich. “Your letters,” he concluded, “have inspired more than one team of investigators to run in circles searching for you.”

“Steyr, this whole thing grows more marvelous every time you open your mouth!” The last vestiges of suspicion vanished from Lustmann’s pale blue eyes. “Why were you questioned by someone from the *Abwehr*? How did that come about? How did you come under suspicion?”

James explained how Meisinger’s visit had probably come about at the instigation of his nosy landlady, but his inquisition had brought with it an unsuspected boon.

“A boon?” questioned Lustmann.

James explained how the *Abwehr* agent, Meisinger, had seen an article written by “Steyr” to establish his cover as a journalist, and had showed it to an editor at the Goebbels propaganda ministry, where “Herr Steyr” was now semi-employed. He also warned Lustmann that Herr Meisinger, a most impressive individual, had asked if “Steyr” wished to be addressed as a friend of the Reich. “That was the clincher,” concluded James, calling it a positive indication that the *Abwehr* was chasing down every conceivable lead in an all-out attempt to locate the letter writer. “That is also why,” he added, “I took the chance of coming here tonight.”

The revelation did not sit well with Lustmann. “Fortunate,” he said, “that your landlady tipped off *Abwehr*, and not Himmler’s people, most especially Heydrich’s Gestapo fools. They would not have been put off so easily, believe me.”

James glanced at his cheap wristwatch. “I really must go. But, first, here’s the secondary reason I have spoiled your sleep.” He handed the other a slip of foolscap listing his phony identity, the boardinghouse address and phone number. “Think of my quarters as a bolt hole, a safe house to scramble into if things should go sour. Have you had any difficulties to date?”

After a frustrated grimace Lustmann told of the furor caused by the nineteen forty-two banknote, how it had inspired visits by the hotel manager and a pair of detectives chasing a counterfeiting rainbow. He explained how he had discouraged them from further snooping.

“Carelessness!” James pulled a face to emphasize the gaffe’s seriousness. “How could your associates have that lax?” He shot another glance at his wristwatch. “Now please listen carefully. Should your phone ring three times, stop, and seconds later ring three more times, then stop again, grab only the bare essentials, dash out of the hotel and do not look back. Get to my boardinghouse as fast as you can. If I’m not in my room, tell the landlady you’re from the Goebbels ministry and must see me the instant I return. She’ll let you wait upstairs in my room.”

“Good, good.” Lustmann wagged his head as if it had all been too much for him, and took Silverthorne’s arm with unwonted familiarity. “It will take more than one sitting to absorb

what you've told me, popping from nowhere like some guardian angel. I owe you and your friends an enormous debt. You've made victory in our battle *and* the war vastly more assured."

"Victory in the war," said James, retaining his sober mien, "is of ultimate importance, and our current battles no more than milestones. Except in a true emergency, never try to contact me, Herr Lustmann. Let me contact you. May I say what an unimaginable pleasure it has been to meet and serve you. *Wiedersehen*." James clicked his heels and bowed.

"Until later, Steyr."

Cautiously descending the hotel's service stairs, James breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief. He had entered the Adlon wondering with good cause if he would survive the encounter, and had somehow managed to pull it off. Never before had he ever lied so consistently and dramatically, at such length, for such a noble purpose.

Triumphant over what had transpired, he reached for the bottle of *Schnapps* the instant he stepped back into his drab attic room.

FIFTEEN The Letter

With "visions" of letters printed by hand in green ink arriving like messages from some hellhound prophet in an asylum, what little patience Admiral Canaris retained with regard to finding the ultra-elusive "Friend of the Reich" had all but deserted him.

"Earlier today, Himmler, his pet monkey Heydrich, and that motherless imbecile, Hess paid me a visit," he told Meisinger, "I was assured that *SS* experts had deduced our 'Friend's' letters to be the work of some Jewish espionage genius. No surprise, since *their* 'visions' reveal Zionist conspirators lurking under every bush. Hess, on the other hand, tried to convince me the prophecies were indeed the result of what he had the gall to term 'sound astrological science.' What in the name of God are we coming to, Ulrich, when masterful intellects like those gain senior leadership positions?"

Meisinger tilted his head toward the door. "Softly, sir. You can't be sure of every staffer."

"*Ach*, I'm well aware of that! No worry, they won't inform on me. A far more likely fate awaits me. I'll be thrown into a rubber-lined room and left to rot, a befitting reward for being one of the few sane persons left in government service."

Canaris paused to let his temper cool. "One thing I must say in favor of our phantom seer," he continued. "His Dunkerque letter may have opened Hitler's eyes to the wisdom of loosening the reins on his field commanders, perhaps even allowing the professional military to take advantage of opportunities if and when presented. Of more than three hundred and thirty thousand allied personnel in Belgium waiting to be relieved by sea, nearly a quarter-million are now prisoners of war, or casualties, a success that may have resulted from prophetic counsel, or perhaps not, who's to say? Nowhere is it written that radically different orders might have been issued had we lacked the gratuitous advice offered in our 'Friend's' letter.

"Yet that is looking more or less on the bright side," added Canaris. "Something less palatable than the *SS* 'Zionist spy' plot involved a discussion of Hitler's belief in the 'Aryan nature' of our British brothers, a 'racial tie' supposedly binding the separate cultures that may eventually turn the Englishers against the Soviet swine and become allied with the *Reich*. Hess has apparently taken that idiotic notion to heart. He mentioned speaking to Borman about it, and

speculated about what might be done to encourage such an alliance if someone in authority — someone like himself, naturally — were to ‘sneak’ into England and gain Churchill’s ear.”

“He couldn’t be serious,” said Meisinger.

“Who can say what a hollow man like Rudolf considers serious? God in Heaven! He’s no less than Hitler’s anointed *deputy*, and to our misfortune has his master’s ear at all hours, day or night. I hope to hell Borman told dear Rudolf to go ahead and *do* exactly what he’s of a mind to do. It would rid us of his presence, but I hate to tell you there was worse.”

“Himmler . . . ?”

“*Ja, ja!* Who else? That bland, bespectacled jackanapes believes the benign personality he wears like a cloak fools everyone, when at heart he’s a conscienceless demon incarnate. He spoke of the coming ‘war of extermination’ in the east, encouraged Heydrich to spare neither man, woman or child after the *Wehrmacht* clears the way for the *SS-Totenkopfverbände* animals commanded by *lieber* Reinhard to march in and begin their mass extermination campaign.”

“Did you,” asked Meisinger, thinking to prod Canaris into sounding off more tactfully there in his own office, “mention our nonaggression pact with the USSR?”

“Pact, bah! To Hitler and Stalin, think of the pact as a mutually convenient postponement device. Warring on the Soviets is a matter of when, not if, Ulrich. When it comes, Hitler, who has not one iota of respect for *wahrer* Heinrich, also realizes he will need the craven bastard and his *Schutzstaffeln* slaughterhouses to consummate the Judeophobic ‘cleansing’ pogrom. I myself conceive the *SS* to actually be an NSDAP religious order. Adherents pray to their private god, a bespectacled ex-chicken farmer who responds with preachments about loyalty, honor, and above all else personal allegiance to the sacred, sublime person of *Der Führer* alone, and no other.”

His own tirade had transformed Canaris into the poster boy of indignation. Meisinger found his vehement ranting and dangerous loose talk deeply disturbing.

“Most worrying of all,” said the admiral with almost as much rancor, “are reports filtering back from assets who have infiltrated the Ukraine and the nearer reaches of European Russia. After subtly canvassing random elements of the populace, the general impression I received in reading the reports is that many if not most Soviet citizens in those regions would not merely tolerate, but perhaps even welcome our invasion. Stalin’s well known mass deportations and intolerable abuses have apparently caused gross numbers to question their allegiance to the Communist regime. Yet once Heydrich’s *SS* death angels begin to indiscriminately burn, torture, slay and imprison civilians any faint hope of sympathy for our cause will vanish.”

The admiral paused, eyeing Meisinger keenly. “Ulrich, ordinarily I wouldn’t dream of saying this to another living soul, but after a semi-sleepless night I halfway came to a decision about our ‘Friend.’ I’m thinking seriously about calling off the hunt.”

Meisinger had difficulty believing what he’d just heard. “I don’t . . . understand. With *Der Führer* calling at all hours, demanding that he be found, interrogated to learn firsthand what makes him tick, and exactly how he devises his incredibly accurate predictions.”

“That in a nutshell,” declared Canaris firmly, “is precisely why I hope it might be best to leave well enough alone. Whoever the hell he is, I find myself praying our balmy ‘Friend’ stays hidden and keeps on sending us foreknowledge obtained in his balmy visions, or whatever. No, strike ‘balmy.’ Whoever the hell he may be, and no matter how crazy his purpose, I’ve developed a sneaking suspicion the fellow may in fact be on our side. Thus far, in my opinion, his messages

have been benevolent, and in no way diabolic. I grew curious, went back and analytically reread the transcripts of every letter received to date. Dollops of astrological aside, between-the-lines in every *verdammt* letter all that remains is a crafty lesson positive in tone and substance, and more to the point a lesson pertaining to what has been envisioned: a more sane, logical, proper conduct of the war than the political amateurs presently in charge can begin to imagine.

“The Dunkerque letter,” pursued Canaris, “is an excellent example. We are told what a horrendous mistake it would be to let an entire allied army be sailed away across the Channel to fight another day. Offhand, can you imagine a more sound and sensible piece of advice than *that*? Why, it’s the Voice of Reason shouting meaningful, helpful jeremiads in the wilderness.”

At first perplexed, Meisinger began to appreciate the admiral’s reasoning. “Your rationale is beyond argument, but you might think twice about calling off the hunt, Admiral. Do that, and Himmler will assign Heydrich’s Gestapo to talk over the case. You know how *that* would go.”

“Um, yes, if he hasn’t already done so behind our back.”

“Himmler would instantly ordering Heydrich to institute *his* search methods.”

“True, true; it’s something I had already considered. Very well,” grudging Canaris, “that grim eventuality sways me to the extent of tempering what I had in mind. Here’s what we shall do. To keep up appearances, have your team to go through the motions as if the ongoing investigation wasn’t merely continuing, but intensifying per a *Führer Richtungweisend*. Have your assets mill about and look busy, but make sure they understand that if perchance a serious lead should turn up they are to get in touch with you before making any move, or else ring me directly. Call it intuition or anything else. I truly believe the wind has changed direction due to our ‘Friend’s’ letters, and be damned if I don’t appreciate it. The last thing we should want is for our ‘Friend’ to be found and subjected to Heydrich’s ‘gentle’ interrogation. Someone once philosophized that a prophet should never be too specific. But, *he* is. Christ, is he ever!”

Meisinger looked troubled. “Hope you know what you’re doing, Admiral.”

“In these times, does *anyone*?” asked Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. Coming from him, the question sounded anything but rhetorical to Meisinger.

* * *

“Yoo-hoo, Herr Steyr!” called Frau Kraven from the stairwell, “telephone.”

In early afternoon, James was busily two-finger typing a piece he considered sheer drivel, though lucrative. Herr Stampfl had already called twice, interrupting him to inquire when the prospective article might reach his desk at the ministry, and urging him to finish it with all due haste and carry it over in person. He rose behind the Olivetti and went to the door, thinking of some way to firmly put off Herr Stampfl. “Who is it, Frau Kraven? Did they say?”

“*Ja, ja*. A gentleman, but not the one who called earlier, Herr Klasse.”

Silverthorne’s pulse rate jumped. Having warned Lustmann to contact him only in an emergency, he supposed something of that nature had occurred. Leaving the attic room hurriedly, he clumped downstairs two risers at a time, and excused himself for brushing past the descending landlady. His hand unsteady, knuckles white on the hall telephone’s earpiece, he said, “Steyr.”

“*Guter Tag*. Sorry to bother you, Steyr, but I —”

“What is it? What’s gone wrong?”

“Wrong . . ? Why, nothing,” said Lustmann, “except for my perfectly rotten way of trying to cope with the, er . . . with the tract I mentioned. I find myself desperately in need of your assistance. Can you find an hour or two free this evening, and drop by?”

James calmed down. “I . . . yes, certainly. It doesn’t seem practical, however, to meet in your . . . Where you are. It might complicate publishing the tract.”

“*Nein, nein,*” denied Lustmann. “I take your meaning, but not to worry. Everything that has to do with publication can be handled with the usual discretion. There is something else, too,” he added. “Please do not take offense, but on your previous visit you looked like a lost ragamuffin. Can’t have that, can we? I gave the address of your boardinghouse to my driver. Peek into the street in, say, a half an hour from now, and a black Mercedes should be parked at the curb. The driver has instructions to take you the haberdashery I patronize. I want you to treat yourself to few suits off the rack, some decent shirts, ties, a hat, whatever else you may need. Nothing fancy, merely items suitable to make you presentable here in the, uh . . . With me. Naturally I’ll be delighted to reimburse you for the purchases.”

At a loss for words, James had difficulty coming up with a response.

“Are you there, Steyr . . ?”

“Oh, yes. You are sure about this, Herr Klasse?”

“Why, yes. My . . . source material is . . . I would feel distinctly uncomfortable carrying my notes and reference materials elsewhere, whereas privacy here is guaranteed.”

On uncertain ground, James responded affirmatively. “Right you are, Herr Klasse.”

“Good. After making your purchases, my driver will bring you straight here. Have the desk call me when you arrive. We shall meet in the bar in, say, two hours, have a drink together to establish your bona fides as my guest, then dine upstairs before getting down to business.”

“As you wish, Herr Klasse. I’ll be there.”

“Until then,” said Lustmann, and rang off.

James puffed his cheeks, revolving the development. Absently hanging up the phone’s earpiece, he went to see his landlady in the kitchen and explained the necessity of attending an important evening session at his workplace. Since he might not be home until late, he requested the loan of a latch key to the front door — a necessity, since the widow Kraven invariably locked up when she retired to her room at the witching hour of nine o’clock after leaving a standing order that she was not to be disturbed for any reason.

Twenty minutes later James cracked open the front door. Glistening in the afternoon sun, a gleaming black Mercedes-Benz sedan was at the curb, its engine ticking over.

* * *

Admiral Canaris had left an order that he was not to be disturbed. Despite that, he was in the midst of lecturing a senior analyst accused of doing less than was expected of him, and could not help but feel annoyed to be alerted by the intercom’s insistent buzz. He answered irritable, and an aide informed him that none other than Herr Martin Borman was calling on line three.

His expression wry, Canaris lifted the phone, punched a button, and said curtly, “Yes?”

Borman’s dead, monotonic baritone grated in the admiral’s mind more harshly than in his ear. “Canaris, I’m calling on behalf of *Der Führer* to inform you that *Reichsführer-SS* Himmler has been instructed to have his people join forces with *Abwehr* in an augmented search for the mysterious letter-writer who has become a genuine cause for concern to us all.”

The admiral blanched, closed his eyes tightly. "I see," he said, seeing only a magnificent disaster in the making.

"*Der Führer*," continued the lifeless voice, "also wishes me to encourage the *Abwehr* in its name to make the best possible use of every scrap of aid necessary to resolve this extremely peculiar affair in a satisfactory fashion, with all speed. He has also asked me to convey his best wishes to you, and say that while he is certain you have not only done, but are doing and will continue to do everything humanly possible to bring this odd business to a fruitful, successful conclusion, having additional hands, eyes and ears available to augment those of the personnel working in your excellent organization cannot help but facilitate matters."

Fuming internally, Canaris said, "Anything else?"

"Not at the present time, Admiral."

"Please thank *Der Führer* for his consideration," said Canaris. "You may also assure him that his wishes will be carried out." He caged the phone with enough force to crack the instrument, then turned and glared redly at the analyst he had been counseling. "Get out!"

The middle-aged staffer scurried out of the office.

"What in the name of Jesus Christ incarnate," muttered Canaris, "is our country coming to?" Every day, without fail, one self-important idiot or another managed to interpose himself and incurably skew the right way of doing anything and everything, and institute in their places the *wrong* ways. *No*, he thought, correcting himself, *whatever the hell he is, Borman may be self-important, but he's not an idiot*. Who and what he actually was baffled everyone. The seldom seen figure hovering in the shadows behind Hitler was an unknown quantity wrapped in an enigma. Yet if Hess and Himmler had t *Der Führer's* ear, Borman had gotten his hooks into the man's mind and soul as well, if indeed a soul was something Hitler happened to possess. What could he do to rectify this latest, partially anticipated fiasco in the making? He pondered, but was unable to think of anything offhand.

Ulrich Meisinger came into the office hours later to inquire about about another matter. Canaris didn't hesitate to tell him of the development.

All the *Abwehr's* star investigator could do was close his eyes, sadly shake his head.

During the wee hours of the following morning, when most Berliners were peacefully asleep, pounding footsteps could be heard on dozens and dozens of stairways. Senior Gestapo agents supervised raid after raid after raid. People were snatched from their beds and whisked to Gestapo headquarters on *Niederkirchnerstrasse*. Many of those arrested, mostly Jews whose names and addresses had already found their way into voluminous *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* files, were subjected to close encounters of the worst kind, when numerous helpless civilian "suspects" became intimately acquainted with truncheons, hobnailed boots, red-hot pincers, repeated electrical shocks, or the special pliers built specifically to efficiently crush testicles.

* * *

After finishing dinner in Lustmann's suite, a meal Silverthorne considered his finest by far since leaving Colorado Province, his host had rolled the cart into the hall for retrieval, then locked and chained the door and brought the aluminum carryall into the parlor. Grounding the taped-together flashlight batteries, he had demonstrated the fail-safe method of opening the case by sparking a slightly off-color rivet on the underside, and then unlatched and opened the lid, revealing stacks of bundled, high-denomination *Reichsmarks* bound with paper straps. His first

glimpse of the accompanying flash paper documents fascinated James, exciting him to the point of fighting an urge to bludgeon his host, snatch the carryall and run off with it.

Lustmann casually extracted and handed over a sum sufficient to cover ten-times-over the cost of his accomplice's newly purchased wardrobe items, took out a legal tablet filled with scribbles, scratched-out phrases and sentences, and suggested getting right to the task at hand.

"Look here, Steyr," said Lustmann a moment later. "I believe this to be the gist of it." He indicated a paragraph in the encyclopedic flash paper account of the war. "It calls for a letter aimed at firmly encouraging a turnabout in *Luftwaffe* tactics, informing us the, uh . . . 'coastal radio detection and ranging towers,' whatever they are, were built to alert England's air defenses of approaching aerial strikes, and thereby cue their command centers about when and where to send aloft interceptor aircraft. Göring has to be informed about how vital it will be to eliminate these, uh . . . towers prior to each aerial assault."

James uttered a single word: "Radar."

"What was that you said?"

"Radar, Herr Lust . . . forgive me, Herr Klasse. Radar is the common contraction for a technical usage known as radio detection and ranging."

"You are familiar with this . . . technique?"

"Only the basics. Projected electronic pulses radiate, strike any solid object such as a ship or airplane and return reflected energy — I believe the correct term is 'backscatter' — which provides a visual indication of where it is, its elevation, direction of travel and velocity."

"Visual . . . ?"

"Correct, by means of electronic illumination in a CRT. Each electronic sweep shows not only where an object is, but defines its —"

"What might this cee-rrr-tee mumbo-jumbo mean?" demanded Lustmann irritably.

"Letters standing for cathode ray tube, an electrical picture tube."

Lustmann scratched his temple. "Very well, let it pass," he grumped. "You make it amply clear why the Englishers often knew when our fliers were coming in, and where to meet them. These towers must be destroyed in order to kill warnings of *Luftwaffe* attacks, and later to ensure making a practical endeavor of Operation Sea Lion."

"*Übungs-Seelöwe* . . ."

"*Ja, ja*: crossing the Channel, a key first step in conquering the British Isles."

"Ah, I see." James filed away the unfamiliar nomenclature, then hesitantly asked his host if he might read the radar installation data. Without questioning the move, Lustmann handed over several sheets of flash-paper covered with single-spaced, typewritten text.

James did not make the mistake of trying to do more than skim the first few paragraphs, although his desire to read every word was all but overpowering. He scanned the material aimed at coaching revisions in the conduct of the coming summer's air war over England more closely. When he looked up, Lustmann was staring at him, a question in his pale blue eyes.

James reluctantly handed back the documents. "Unfortunately, destroying the English radar towers may have to be done more than once."

"How so?"

"Reconstruction may be fairly simple. That aside, our duty obviously will be to politely admonish *Reichsführer* Göring, assuming he will ever see it, about the vital need to deal with the

radar installations before each *Luftwaffe* bombing raid. There is an unavoidably negative aspect of doing so, however. Knock out specific towers, and it will alert the British to where and when a strike is due to take place just as effectively as leaving them in place.”

Lustmann thoughtfully stroked his cheek. “Not sure I completely understand.” He replaced the flimsy sheets on top of the short stack in the carryall. “In any event, urging Göring to change mind about anything may be futile in itself. It might be best to concentrate on directly influencing Hitler. Fat Hermann is said to listen closely to every word coming from *Der Führer*’s mouth. Yes, I believe you have the proper course of action in mind, Steyr. We’re obligated to do our damndest to shift Göring’s views to something more productive. Have you any specific ideas along that line?”

“I think so. First, may I read what you’ve already written?”

“Yes, but you may find little of practical use. The main impetus of redirection suggested by Odessa would be counseling bombing targets limited to British industrial centers, shipyards, ships at sea, and airfields, and not waste efforts by wreaking civilian casualties in the cities. A century of bombing wouldn’t begin to intimidate the stubborn Englishers.”

James did not hesitate to voice total agreement with that line of reasoning. He briefly tried making sense of Lustmann’s scribbles. Even when trying to compose a simple declarative sentence, the man plainly fell into the category as an average German schoolboy. Busy trying to make head or tail of the disjointed sentences, interlinings and crossings-out, he was startled to hear a light tap on the door.

Uttering sibilant curse, Lustmann came to his feet. “Could it be an associate of yours?” he whispered, eyeing James with an accusative air.

“No, no. Never,” whispered James. “Neither would dare come anywhere near the hotel.”

The legal tablet was snatched from Silverthorne’s hand. “Take the case in the bedroom,” whispered Lustmann, hurriedly jamming the tablet and loose flash-paper sheets into the carryall. He slammed the lid closed, but did not latch it, passed it to James and reached under a chair cushion, withdrawing the silenced Walther PPK automatic.

James did as he was told, eased the bedroom door shut and pressed his ear to it.

Lustmann peeked through the small lens in the entry door, stepped back in surprise and opened up. “Gerda! I don’t believe it.”

Frau Sharpe eyed the weapon in his hand. “Planning to shoot me, Herr Klasse?”

“Sorry, it’s second nature. I get welcome very few callers. Come in, come in. You look absolutely ravishing. I was terribly hurt to hear you say you never wanted to see me again.”

“Believe it or not, the problem has solved itself, Erich.” She smiled, sat down primly on the settee. “Herr Funk called me into his office this morning and told me a peculiar tale. It seems your famous nineteen forty-two banknote has vanished.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I said. Herr Funk believes it has either been misplaced, lost, or stolen.” She treated Lustmann to a reprise of her smile. “He’s been wondering why the police were no longer pestering him with questions he couldn’t answer. This morning he learned the reason.”

“The . . . evidence, it’s truly gone astray?”

Gerda said, "On purpose, Funk believes. He's convinced all the tail-chasing became such an aggravation that those in authority burned or otherwise disposed of the 'impossible' banknote. He's also sure it didn't just blow away in the wind, yet grateful to have it gone."

"Lord save us!" said Lustmann with feeling. "I loudly echo his sentiment. Here, would you care for a drink, Gerda?"

"No, I can't stay. Didn't want to phone, and just dropped by to give you the good news."

Having heard enough, James took advantage of the unlatched carryall, opened it and began avidly speed-reading a partial account of the real war. Absorbing details with much more interest than could ever be accorded most historians, he became thoroughly entranced by the text, and carelessly allowed the carryall's lid to fall closed with a distinct click.

In the parlor, Gerda Sharpe glanced toward the bedchamber. "Entertaining a fresh new *Schatze*, Herr Klasse? I would dearly love to act surprised."

Lustmann forced a smile. "You misjudge me, dear one. I'll always be true to you, Gerda."

"In your fashion," Gerda said more snidely than she might have been intended.

Lustmann's chuckle was meant to lighten the sudden tension. "Lest you think ill of me, I confess that a business associate decided it wise to stay out of sight when you tapped on the door." He called, "Come in, Steyr, and meet a most charming lady."

Figuratively kicking himself for his carelessness, James left the unlatched carryall resting on the bed. Opening the door, he made a feeble attempt to look sheepish.

"Hans, allow me to introduce Frau Gerda Sharpe. She and I have been acquainted for some time. Gerda, this is Hans Steyr."

James dipped his head. "*S'tut sehr gleich*, Frau Sharpe."

"Happy to meet you," she said, examining James analytically. My," she told Lustmann, "you certainly do have a handsome business associate. I assume Herr Steyr is also of the SS."

His lofty manner that of someone knowing himself above the fray, Lustmann drawled, "Unfortunately, Hans is not a member of our organization but a journalist employed by the Goebbels Ministry. He came to see me in the interest of gathering background material for an article he plans to write about a hoped-for rise in Swedish steel production."

"Fascinating," said Gerda, outwardly believing Lustmann's characterization of James, but inwardly conflicted. "Well, you two probably have much to discuss. I'll be running along."

Instantly apologetic, James said, "Frau Sharpe, please don't rush off on my account. We had all but finished. What little remains can be taken care of another time, not so, Herr Klasse?"

Lustmann had been eyeing Gerda hungrily. "Absolutely, Hans." He casually laid a possessive arm around Gerda's waist. If you don't hear from me, call tomorrow afternoon. We'll sit down and hash out the details, eh?"

"Right." James lifted his new fedora from an end table. Bending gallantly over Gerda Sharpe's hand, he said his farewells.

Descending the service stairs, he readjusted the three folded sheets of flash-paper he had not replaced in the carryall, slipped them into an inner jacket pocket. Pilfering the documents had been dangerous, something he would never have dared to do, except for quickly deciding the informations they contained he simply *had* to have, and assuming from the way Lustmann stared at the woman that he would be too amorously occupied to bother with data from the carryall.

Alone in his attic room, he read and reread, and yet again reread accounts of event after event during the early stages of what he could not stop thinking was the “real” war. However, the sheets he had snatched at random lacked continuity, and offered no more than disjointed accounts of happenings in the spring and summer of some future calendar year, plus months of another.

He learned that a U.S. President named Roosevelt, of whom he had zero prior knowledge, had signed a “Lend-lease” agreement, whatever that was, with Great Britain. As a consequence, a number of American minesweepers, destroyers and other warships had been delivered into Royal Navy service. Roosevelt had also approved the overhaul and repair of His Majesty’s warships in U.S. ports. He read about the upcoming *Wehrmacht* invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece, the airborne landings in Crete, and learned how Germany’s gigantic battleship, the *Bismarck*, had decimated allied shipping while prowling the South Atlantic waters. He learned the Americans had not only moved roughly a quarter of their Pacific Fleet to the Atlantic, but that between thirty-five and sixty ships belonging to what the document mysteriously labeled “The Axis” had been taken into U.S. protective custody in an act the Fascists called “piracy.”

Although he had managed absorb only unsatisfying bits and pieces of the overall puzzle, a start was a start. Yawning, he went downstairs to visit the second-floor hall bathroom, then came back and prepared for bed. Certain Lustmann would summon him again on the morrow, and if so he would be obligated to dutifully help the bastard with at least one letter designed to improve and enhance the Nazi cause, and possibly another, after which he vowed to change each and every aspect of their supposed collaboration in one swift stroke.

SIXTEEN Schemes and Schemers

On the fourteenth day of June, nineteen forty, after only three and one-half weeks of sporadic, weakening resistance, the *Wehrmacht* had overwhelmed all French forces in full retreat. Highly disciplined troop formations marched into Paris, the jackboots of regiment after regiment pounding in cadence through *Place Charles de Gaulle* and beneath Napoleon’s *Arc de Triomphe de l’Étoile* in a parade that endowed the monument with entirely new meaning for the Frenchmen and women sobbing in despair along *Champs Élysées*. On June twenty-second, in the bitter depths of despair, General Henri-Phillipe Pétain signed a peace agreement, surrendering the French Republic to the “Boche” invader. Shortly thereafter, the puppet French government erroneously and blatantly calling itself *État Français* was stillborn in Vichy.

Admiral Canaris, also came close to sobbing his heart out, if for a vastly different reason: stark, unmitigated incredulity. “Look at it, Ulrich!” he cried. “*Look* at the damned thing, would you!” The wire photo he waved in front of his star investigator depicted tan-uniformed Adolf Hitler, a faint smile showing through his signature mustache, performing a little hop-foot-stamp of victory alongside the identical French railcar in which the nineteen-eighteen Armistice had been signed, ending the so-called Great War to End War.

“Our ‘Friend’ predicted this artfully staged event weeks ago. Weeks!” exclaimed the admiral, his faulty diction a result of abject disbelief. “It was no general, off-the-cuff prediction, either. The letter described a vision of Hitler’s little dance of elation to a tee, and that amounts to a feat far surpassing anything one might understate as incredible. It is a stark impossibility, a *miracle*! How in the name of all that’s holy can such things occur in this, the real world?”

“Cause and effect may have apparently been reversed,” suggested Meisinger.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Could it be a self-fulfilling prophecy? *Der Führer* may have seen the letter before the armistice. If that explanation does not hold true, I can’t imagine how to account for what has happened. As you said, our visionary prophet’s accuracy exceeds all bounds of reason.”

“By leagues and leagues!” Snorted something vile under his breath, Canaris slipped the “impossible” wire-photo back into the dispatch case on his desk. “Here we are, Ulrich, trapped between a gigantic rock which persists in grinding us against a diamond-hard wall. Pressing their Jewish pogrom night and day, Heydrich’s misfits have taken full advantage of Hitler’s directive to grossly expand the widespread search for our ‘Friend.’ People are talking, wondering what the hell is going on, while our noble *Führer* bloviates in his usual manner, and *never* shuts up long enough to let any of us do our work. He shouts at me over the phone, screams at me much louder each time I’m called into his presence, and pounds the table, demands to know why no letter has arrived, then in the very same breath demands to be told *why* the prophet has not yet been found and dragged before him for questioning.”

“Can you tell him anything at all?” asked Meisinger, knowing it an empty query.

“One does not ‘tell’ *Der Führer* things, least of all things he might not wish to hear. One listens and pretends to pay rapt attention to his neverending monologues, and then one nods as if taking to heart the curative measures he spouts right and left, high and low, or his schoolboy lessons on how to fill every chink, no matter how slight, in the armor of National Socialism. He goes on at an unwholesome length to describe Nazidom’s glorious, foreordained future.

“Admiral,” pleaded Meisinger, “you owe it to yourself to be more circumspect about voicing criticisms. No telling what big ears could have been slipped into your organization.”

Canaris nodded. “Astute you are, Ulrich, and absolutely correct about that. If I were still in my right mind I would suggest to our noble Leader that the *Abwehr* be handed over into your care, then I’d take my *Kriegsmarine* uniform out of mothballs and go back to sea. It would be a far better thing to go down on the bridge of an honest vessel than to keep trying to do my job while fending off the ‘helpful’ attentions of lying, backbiting scoundrels and madmen.”

“Softly, softly,” said Meisinger, knowing it useless to try and quiet the admiral’s rants.

“Go, get on with your charade,” said Canaris. “My only request is to make damn sure it’s not *your* team who collars the seer. Who can say? In the final analysis, our ‘Friend’ may indeed be the greatest friend our *Reich* can ever have, *or* its worst enemy. Choose one, no in between. If his letters keep coming, the vision-happy bastard may indeed become Germany’s savior.”

* * *

The expected phone call came just before three in the afternoon. Dressed in his new double-breasted gray suit and dark-blue tie, James confidently entered the Adlon forty minutes later walking tall to project an impression of owning the lobby. He was surprised to come face to face with Frau Gerda Sharpe stepping out of the elevator compartment. She greeted him with a little half-smile, and they exchanged the sort of pleasantries relative strangers seem to feel it necessary to exchange, and went their separate ways. Seeing her there at the Adlon confirmed his suspicion that she and Lustmann were more than casual acquaintances.

His host had been waiting and watching for “Steyr,” now and then peeking through the lens in the door, and wrenched it open before James could reach out and tap, then went through

the locks and chain drill to make certain the suite was secure. "Have you been thinking about how to best frame our message," he asked without preamble.

"I slept on it. This morning something pertaining to the issue occurred to me." James laid his new hat on an end table. The aluminum carryall stood on the table, its lid tilted back. Seeing it disheartened James; one of his major concerns of the day was finding a safe way of replacing the purloined flash-paper sheets without Lustmann's noticing. "During our first meeting," he said on inspiration, "I only had a brief opportunity to tell you bits and pieces about my former . . . That is, my future, former life if that makes any sense."

Anxious to get busy on the letter, post it and have the onerous task over and done with, Lustmann lit a cigarette. "Don't bother, Hans. It has no bearing on our present effort?"

"I'm afraid it has direct bearing," Silverthorne assured him. "I was born and raised in Greater Denver *Gauleitung*, and educated there. Later, after earning a doctorate at Goebbels Institute, I eventually became a tenured professor."

"A *school* is named for that rat-faced pipsqueak!"

"An accredited university," said James with pronounced solemnity. "Not long ago at the ministry, the *Reichsminister* granted me a personal interview. Since then, four of my articles have been published in *Angriff*. Please take no offense, but I sincerely believe disparaging Goebbels' propaganda ministry, or for that matter the man himself, is a mistake."

"Why do you say that?"

"Influencing the way people think is a vital element of our cause. It is something the propaganda ministry does exceptionally well, hence there is a good deal to be learned from his methods. To cite an example, if half-truths and outright falsehoods are stridently repeated often enough, people will gradually begin to believe them true."

"Fine." Lustmann tilted back and floated a smoke ring toward the ceiling. "I take back what I said about the rat-faced pipsqueak, even if that's what he is. Stick to the subject. We have to get on with inventing our own half-truths and falsehoods."

James smiled to acknowledge the other's feeble witticism. "Agreed. First, however, let me explain that shortly after the conquest of the Americas in my timeline, *Der Führer* began to distance himself from Goebbels until eventually their once-close association soured. Put on the shelf out of the way so to speak, Goebbels used his newfound leisure to write or dictate a thirteen-volume compendium entitled *The War of World Liberation*. As an undergraduate, I assiduously studied the wordy, overwritten volumes, each replete with holograms, flat photos, interminable footnotes and innumerable references, and was forced to do so again in greater detail as a doctoral candidate."

"What are holo . . . whatever you called them?"

"Electronic three-dimensional pictures reproducible on a flat page."

"Umm-m-m, sounds very unlikely. Listen," said Lustmann, "before the war's outcome we are attempting to rectify comes about, you have my permission to get to the point."

James ignored the other's sarcasm. "Last night, just before Frau Sharpe interrupted us, I was reading about the coming summer's air war over England, and a realization gave me a minor shock. In my head, you see, not the real war, but Goebbels' *account* of the war. I am intimately familiar with a narrative dealing with the War of World Liberation, but *not* the war fought valiantly by you and so many, many others in what to me will always remain the long ago."

“Ah, now I hear what you’re trying to tell me.” Lustmann stubbed out his cigarette. “An easily remedied that is. Lifting from the carryall the entire flash paper document, he handed the stack to James. “Read the first few pages quickly so we can get to work. Later you can steep yourself in the remainder. While you’re reading, I’ll order dinner sent up around seven o’clock. How does Rouladen sound to you, with perhaps a decent Cabernet to wash it down, eh? The hotel chef does Rouladen exceptionally well.”

“My mouth’s watering already,” said James with a smile.

While the other was on the phone, his back turned, Silverthorne flattened the creases in the pilfered flash paper documents, checked the page numbering and slipped the sheets back in their proper places. With that bump in the road crossed, he began speed-reading the text.

In the so-called “Battle of Britain” — fifty-seven days and nights of constant aerial “Blitz” from August to October, nineteen forty — most *Luftwaffe* bombs had fallen on London, some on Coventry, a few on Manchester and other cities large and small. The account informed him the British had lost more than eight hundred fighter planes in the air battle, while the *Reich* had lost roughly six hundred difficult-to-replace medium bombers and fighters in what was broadly hinted to be, if one read between the lines, Hitler’s pristine defeat. The tract bitterly condemned American aid to Britain for positively influencing British military successes, most especially the defeat of Mussolini’s forces in Egypt by a General Wavell, who subsequently capitalized on the victory by invading Libya, capturing Tobruk and other North African towns.

Sensing he had missed something, James went back and reread the first few paragraphs. The range of *Luftwaffe* medium bombers operating from French airfields was described as too limited, extending not far north of London, although secondary strike capability against England’s east coast as far north as York had been achieved by dispatching squadrons from the Baltic coast, or sites in occupied Scandinavia. What the *Luftwaffe* needed very, very badly, he read, was a substantial fleet of heavy bombers, not squadron after squadron of Dorniers and Heinkels, two-engine mediums affording only modest payload capacity, and limited range.

Lustmann put down the telephone, lit another cigarette and decanted brandy, neglecting to offer any to Silverthorne.

“You mentioned,” remarked James after further reading, “that your Odessa confederates provided some sort of guideline for correcting wartime errors, deficiencies and so forth.”

“A comprehensive set of suggestions.” Lustmann got up, removed a second stack of flash paper documents from the carryall, and passed it over.

James reluctantly handed back the priceless record of wartime events. Gifted with 20-20 hindsight as they had been, Lustmann’s mentors had strongly advocated German production efforts to be heavily diverted toward long-range bombardment aircraft, citing the move a vitally important turnabout in war materiel made especially necessary due to the need of traversing the vast distances to be overflown within the hemisphere-spanning Soviet Union. The document insisted that the *Luftwaffe* be urged to forget London and other English cities, to concentrate all aerial assaults on coastal radar stations to pave the way for hitting airfields, shipyards, docks, and any vessels intercepted at sea. The Odessa brain trust described these redirections of effort as compulsory if Operation Sea Lion were to be successfully undertaken, and troops landed on England’s beachheads. How could *Kriegsmarine* hope to accomplish its objective — a caveat posed as a question — if its warships were outgunned in the Channel by an intact Royal Navy?

Retrieving the actual wartime record from Lustmann, he learned how Hitler had resolved that quandary by scrubbing Sea Lion in its entirety in favor of turning his attention eastward. Failing to consolidate the western European holdings was cited in the “correction” document as by far the most egregious error of the early conflict, a mistake contributing directly to Germany’s eventual defeat.

Having plodded through Geobbel’s pluperfectly insipid volumes not once but several times, James recalled page after page devoted to the acclaim showered on Hitler for having had the foresight to ensure the consolidation of Europe en toto — the British Isles, Denmark, Norway, the Balkans, Greece and Yugoslavia, in addition to allowing Portugal, Switzerland and Sweden to retain neutrality — before loosing the restrained *Wehrmacht* dogs of war on Stalin’s USSR. Apparently that had not been the case in Lustmann’s war on his own timeline, a major difference James knew he would have to digest more fully. He was certain there would be many similar and diverse differences.

Finishing his brandy, Lustmann chain-smoked while James learned as much as possible about the first full year of death and destruction during “authentic” World War II. His host interrupted asking out of the blue, “Tell me, Hans. What part, if any, do the Jews have in the proud, miraculous *Deutsches Weltreich* you keep boasting about?”

Taken aback, James asked with pretended ingenuousness, “Jews . . . ?”

“Ja, ja, Juden. Weren’t they around in your, um . . . future era?”

James eyed his host levelly. “Sorry, not sure who you mean.”

“Jews, Jews,” emphasized the other. “The followers of Jehovah, members of an ancient religious sect, a vile order of —”

“Oh,” exclaimed James as if a light had suddenly come on, “a *religious* sect. Yes, I recall reading something about the Jews. You must realize that in my era most religious orders were only historical footnotes. Aside from a few secretive religious orders and cabals too insignificant for *Reichskounzel* to order chased down and eradicated, Jews, Christians, Muslims and others who adhered to divine beliefs were all but nonexistent.”

Lustmann’s pleased smirk inspired James think eliminating him might not be such an oppressive task after all.

They sat down after dinner and went to work in earnest. James played the role of a tyro, acting as a sounding board for Lustmann’s often disjointed proposals, on occasion making an effort to temper the other’s opinionated notions about how a reported “vision” might best translate into an inoffensive redirection of effort. They labored over the message for hours, and all went well until the topic of astrology came up. James claimed total ignorance of the subject, insisting that the zodiacal mishmash necessary to maintain the theme and tone of earlier letters would have to be inserted by Lustmann.

Yet when it came to inventing a “vision” aimed at changing the strategic and tactical outlook, opinions and objectives of self-serving *Reichsführer-Luftwaffe* Hermann Göring about how to improve waging the air war against England, James did his damndest to talk Lustmann out of employing blunt statements. He emphasized the power of suggestion, citing it as having two or three times the effectiveness of concrete statement, and proposed forwarding an encompassing “vision” of bombing *results*, not a “how to” on conducting a successful aerial campaign. Drawing a word picture of collective British helplessness, he described a Royal Navy

seriously weakened at sea, docked in port in the wake of wave after wave of bombings, and then followed it up by suggesting a “vision” of *Wehrmacht* armor and mechanized infantry sweeping through the English shires in typical *Blitzkrieg* fashion, with major government officials confined in the Tower of London, and huge black-and-red swastika banners rippling in Piccadilly Circus.

Lustmann thought it an enchanting “vision.” In a fever of genuine enthusiasm, he waxed verbose over the reworded fifth draft of the letter, but nevertheless called for several minor revisions — a change of emphasis here, a rewording of this or that there. When the letter finally met with his satisfaction, he closed and latched the carryall, and put it away in the bedchamber. James twiddled his thumbs impatiently while the other filled a fountain pen with green ink and began laboriously hand-lettering the missive. He had all but finished when James glanced at his wristwatch.

“Damn! Nearly eleven o’clock. I won’t be able to get into the boardinghouse.” He related his landlady’s penchant for personal privacy and boardinghouse security.

“No matter,” muttered Lustmann, preoccupied with his painstaking endeavor. “Sleep here on the sofa, Hans. I’ll get you a blanket and pillow. Now let me finish this damned thing before my hand cramps to a point where I can’t even scratch myself.”

James poured himself a brandy without asking permission. Another half-hour went by before Lustmann hand-lettered his pseudo-signature, “A Friend of the Reich.”

Midnight had come and gone by the time James dosed down on the sofa, his blood stirred by a notion that popped into his head while he undressed. Here he was, alone with the once and future *Weltreichsheld* in a deluxe suite at the Adlon. Would a more opportune moment to do away with Lustmann ever present itself? He could rid the world of the never-to-be-crowned *Deutsches Weltreich* savior, snatch the carryall, dash into the night and assume the role of seer.

All through the evening, the task of coaching Lustmann in ways and means designed to aid the Nazis’ militant effort to conquer the world had brought along with it a sense of self-betrayal. Wasn’t a Nazi triumph expressly what several generations of Americans had lived and died for in order to send him back across the decades to avert, not encourage? There was a catch to dispatching Lustmann in an impromptu manner, a large one. Frau Sharpe had seen him here in the suite, as well as others in the bar downing an apéritif with Lustmann to cement the fact that he and a hotel guest were acquainted, and he “belonged” there. It was probable, too, that he’d been seen going up to or leaving Suite 204. No, doing the deed then and there would be a foolish error. He would have to bide his time until the opportune moment came.

* * *

In early morning Lustmann emerged from the bedchamber in a red paisley robe, feet bare in open-toed mules. Greeting his guest with a yawn, he lifted the phone, ordered breakfast sent up while James put away the blanket and pillow, then rearranged the settee cushions.

After he and James downed a breakfast of coffee, a buttered sweet roll and dish of fresh fruit, Lustmann lit a cigarette and sat down at the drop-leaf *escritoire* in the parlor. He hand-lettered the Great Zoltan’s name and street address on a plain white envelope, slipped the folded letter into the envelope, licked the gummed flap to seal it and pasted on a postage stamp. “There, good riddance! I never want to see the blasted thing again.”

“I should be on my way.” James picked up his hat just as the door chime sounded.

“Not wise for you to be seen,” said Lustmann. “Relax in the bedchamber. It’s probably the morning editions. The bellman who delivers them runs on clockwork.”

James waited in the other room until he heard the entry door close. When he came out, Lustmann was standing at the window, gazing down at the light early morning traffic on *Pariser Platz*. “A pleasant morning,” he remarked. “I feel like taking a stroll, mailing the letter.”

“Isn’t your car waiting?”

“Always,” said Lustmann, obviously in better spirits now that the “blasted letter” was out of his hair. “Sunny morning, Hans. I’d like to stretch my legs. Come, we can stroll together toward your boardinghouse. I’ll slip the letter into a sidewalk box along the way.”

“I’m all for it, Herr Klasse.”

“Enough of this ‘Herr Klasse’ formality,” the other said pleasantly. “Since we are now business associates, you shall address me as Erich, and to me, you will be Hans.”

“A good idea, Herr . . .” Pretending chagrin, James said, “I mean . . . Erich.”

His supposed pleasant expression more a smirk than an indication of goodwill, Lustmann disappeared in the bedroom. Dressing quickly, he came out carrying a stylish tan homburg. “Shall we . . . ?”

Brilliant sunshine leavened the chill of early morning. Concerned to think one of his few acquaintances in Berlin, *Abwehr* agent Meisinger, might spot him with Lustmann, put two and two together and arrive at a dangerous conclusion, James kept his head lowered, the brim of his Fedora pulled down while strolling beside his tall, long-striding “accomplice.”

Full of himself, Lustmann chatted about nothing in particular. Gazing at the street scene all around him with a proprietary air, he asked James what future Berlin was really like.

“*Welthauptstadt Germania*, Erich.”

“Ah, yes. Getting used to the name won’t be necessary. Today it remains Berlin.”

“In the era you’ll will be welcomed into as a living saint,” said James guardedly, fearful of being overheard, “you’ll discover a city even lovelier than Paris, so magnificent it will literally take your breath away. — broad, tree-lined boulevards, numerous parks and greenbelts, riparian esplanades along the waterways. The enormous dome of Albert Speer’s Great Hall, the *Reichschancellery*, Göring’s former palace and Hitler’s Tomb dominate the skyline. I was privileged to visit the capital twice, once for a convention hosted by the *Deutsches Weltreich Historische Gesellschaft*, then again in DWJ one thirty-six for the Nordic World Games. Seeing it for the first time, you will not *believe* Speer Stadium. Seating a quarter-million people, it’s larger than the one in Nuremberg.”

“Fascinating! Twice you’ve mentioned a name, Speer. A relative, I take it, of Hitler’s War Production and Armaments Minister?”

“The same person, an architect befriended and all but adopted by Hitler.”

“*Ach, selbstverständlich!* I should have known. A genius in his own way. As armaments minister, he managed to put bombed-out factories back on line overnight.”

Halfway down a side street blocks from *Unter den Linden*, a red letterbox came in view. Lustmann slipped a hand inside his jacket. In the act of pulling out the letter to post it, James suddenly seized his wrist, tugged him to a halt.

“What are you doing?”

“Ahead of us,” said James, low-voiced, “in a thigh-length black leather jacket, wearing a derby”

“What of him?”

“Let’s go on past the letterbox,” urged James. “Don’t look at him way. Ignore him.”

“Why?”

“His black leather jacket,” said James, “is almost a Gestapo uniform.”

“Nonsense! What sort of Gestapo fool would go around wearing a bowler?”

“A Gestapo fool,” said James, “who doesn’t wish to be recognized as a Gestapo fool. Look, he’s turning, coming back this way and keeping the letterbox in view. One of my other . . . you know who, warned me of suspicious looking individuals lurking near postal boxes and substations.”

“You’re dreaming, Steyr! It isn’t possible to watch thousands of city postal drops.”

“I don’t pretend to know what is or isn’t possible,” said James. “We’ll walk to the end of the block, stop there and pretend to discuss something, see what he does.”

The suspected “Gestapo fool” approached moving slowly, staying close to the front of a building to allow a few early morning pedestrians to pass, then paused to survey the sidewalk scene before ambling back toward the letterbox.

At the corner, James mouthed a few meaningless words loud enough to be overheard by the man in the derby hat. Mounting alarm had jelled Lustmann’s aristocratic features in a stolid mask. He nevertheless took his cue, and denied whatever it was James had said.

“Let’s cross over,” whispered James, “watch from the other side of the street.”

Standing on the sidewalk opposite the letterbox facing Lustmann, James tracked the man in the black leather jacket with peripheral vision, his suspicions elevated by the way he tried to remain inconspicuous while making slow passes back and forth on either side of the letterbox.

Not at all sure if James knew what he was talking about, Lustmann said, “He could be what you believe, but there’s no way to find out.”

“There may be, Erich. Give me the letter.”

“I’ll do no such thing. Mailing it under suspicious circumstances is too risky. I need you, and sacrificing yourself simply to learn whether —”

“Self-sacrifice never occurred to me,” assured James. “The letter has to be posted.”

“We can find another, safer way.”

James was silent for a number of heartbeats, thinking. “I’ll cross, wait till the fellow turns the other way, then follow along behind him and drop the letter on the sidewalk between the letterbox and the nearby trash bin. Then we’ll watch, see if anyone spots the letter, picks it up.”

Lustmann looked at his accomplice with new eyes, and handed over the envelope.

“Give me a cigarette, too,” said James, “and matches, or your lighter.”

“You don’t smoke, Hans.”

“I need an excuse to pause near the waste bin to let the letter fall.”

“Ganz gut!” “Your ingenuity is of a high order,” complimented Lustmann.

Once Silverthorne had done the deed, he strolled back across street.

“I watched closely, but didn’t see you drop it.” Lustmann sounded perplexed.

“When your lighter flamed out, I made as if to throw a match in the trash bin and at the same time slid the envelope down my trouser leg and let go of it.”

“You teach valuable lessons, Hans. There’s much more to you than meets the eye.”

“If we stay put without staring over there, we may learn something.”

Five or six minutes went by. Like a conscientious Berliner who hated clutter, a dowdy middle-aged woman threw a wrapper of some kind in the trash bin, moved on, then hesitated. Bending down awkwardly, she picked up the letter, held it close to her nose and made a myopic inspection of the envelope. She was in the act of depositing it in the letterbox when the man in the black leather jacket seized her wrist, snatched away the letter with his other hand.

“Satisfied, Erich?”

Lustmann nodded. “Worried, too. How the devil can we hope to post another letter if every postal drop in the city is covered?”

“There are ways,” James declared confidently.

The woman’s shrill protests were beginning to draw a crowd of gawkers when Lustmann and his newly prized confederate turned the corner and left the scene at a brisk pace.

SEVENTEEN Crisis

At one time or another Meisinger had seen the admiral in an ebullient mood, but never before had he displayed such exuberance.

Canaris guffawed. “This time,” he said, his eyes bright with mischief-laden glee, “the gentleman our *Führer* fondly calls *wahrsten* Heinrich has simultaneously stuck both feet in his mouth, then pulled them out and stepped down hard on his own privates.”

Meisinger asked if the woman had been roughed up.

“Ulrich, really! How else could one be treated by the Gestapo turds? I suspect it a gross understatement to say Heydrich’s tender mercies resemble the persuasive techniques of the goons he employs. They worked the woman over fiercely, then directed their delicate attentions to the halfwit who collared her and he was treated even more strenuously. The woman’s confession consisted of repeating the tall tale she stuck to like glue, screaming that she had found the bloody letter on the sidewalk, and like any good Samaritan tried to drop it in a letterbox when the Gestapo gorilla grabbed it, and her. One unwholesome footnote to the incident only came to light the following morning. Talk about embarrassment! It seems the woman’s only son, a *Whermacht* junior officer wounded during the western campaign, is being brought back from some French hospital to comfort her.”

It was Meisinger’s turn to chuckle. “Admiral, you can’t be serious,” he scoffed.

Canaris grinned and explained that he was perfectly serious. “To my everlasting regret, I was elsewhere, but someone in attendance told me Hitler chewed *wahrsten* Heinrich’s arse into raw hamburger. More to the point, the root message in our ‘Friend’s’ latest letter is driving Hefty Hermann to drink, not that he needed any urging. By now the *Luftwaffe*’s eagle, ace and whatever else he is has no doubt rolled up his sleeve, gotten out his needles and little vials of otherworldly delights, and dipped his wick in more than one user-friendly lady in his vast acquaintance.”

Meisinger had read a transcript of the ‘Friend’s’ latest letter. “It’s less direct than most. ‘Suggesting’ a change in bombing tactics couldn’t help but badly ruffled Göring’s feathers.”

Canaris said, “That can be safely said. I don’t believe the over-tailored, underbred ace of aces is regaling anyone just now with his salacious or seditious jokes. The good news is that I

believe *Der Führer* has partially swallowed whole the changes counseled by our 'Friend.' He supposedly lectured Göring about what had to be done in order to more successfully assault the Englishers, as well as what *no longer* needed being done. But on the face of it, the tendered advice on the air war won't matter a whit. Hitler knows even less about directing air power than about micromanaging any phase of the ground war. If you don't think so, ask any field officer."

Meisinger said thoughtfully, "In your opinion, will Göring give in to pressure from on high, perhaps adopt the redirection, a different tactical philosophy?"

A caustic snort. "Who can say? For all his grandiloquence and bombast, Göring is exactly like the rest of us, and perhaps more so. When Hitler says jump, he doesn't ask, '*Wie hoch, mein Führer?*' He just jumps! Once again our letter-writing 'Friend' proves to have the right of it. Years of bombing raids aimed at demoralizing the obstinate Englishers would do nothing to pave the way for an invasion of their precious isles. This recent letter confirms my opinion of our 'visionary' prophet, seer, charlatan, whatever the hell he may be. It does much to convince me he *must* stay right where he is, hunkered down somewhere in total obscurity. Left to his own peculiar devices, he may be the sole hope of persuading our leadership to, uh . . . Sorry, scratch 'leadership.' What little there is of *that* is to our great misfortune faulty. I should have said the sole hope of persuading Hitler — who else would dare calling every shot? — to prosecute the war in a sane, sensible manner instead of issuing one intuitive *Führer* directive after another everyone from the chief of staff to his valet disagrees with, or flying into one of his classic rages if anyone shows sufficient spine to take his life in his hands and voice a single syllable of disagreement."

Tilting back in the chair behind his desk, his manner speculative, the admiral toyed with a fountain pen. "Every ounce of competence and ability we can muster must be exerted to make certain our 'Friend' stays under wraps. That translates into a desperate need to keep him from falling into the hands of Heydrich's Gestapo turds. He would be destroyed, and every vestige of whatever it is he's trying by some outré method to accomplish would be lost."

Meisinger's uncertain nod looked forced.

"After his beloved master subjected *wahrsten* Heinrich to an ice water douche," pursued the admiral, "Himmler swung about head to toe and put the fear not of God, but of Adolf Hitler into the collection of witless bastards he keeps under both thumbs. Every Gestapo clown and all of Heydrich's other turds will be on their tiptoes, alert for the slightest, least significant hint or clue of our 'Friend's' whereabouts or identity. What worries me so very deeply is that rounding up anyone and everyone in sight for interrogation could eventually turn fruitful. As they say, even a blind hog now and then roots up an acorn."

Canaris rocked forward in the high-backed executive chair. "Ulrich, you'd best leave me to shuffle these meaningless papers," he said dismissively. Be prompt at tomorrow's staff conference; I added your name to the admittance. Gehlen tells us his latest report from assets inside the USSR is ripe for discussion, and the usual, endless argument and conjecture."

* * *

Frau Kraven had no reason to summon James to the telephone for the best part of a week. He passed the time speculating about the lack of a call from Lustmann, and wrote another opinion editorial he promptly posted to Stampfl at the ministry. The piece pointed out how

extremely fortunate were the great cross-section of German workers who earned honest pay for honest labor, contrasting their wholesome, patriotic industry to workers belonging to the counterproductive German Socialist- or Communist-leaning unions now demanded premium compensation for the extra work-hours spent in the factories, foundries and mills.

In the article, he held up a virtuous example consisting of *Porsche* employees in Stuttgart, many of whom had signed up to purchase via periodic payments a *Volkswagen* auto if and when any came off an assembly line, although some were beginning to wonder if “when” would ever become “now.” The factory was all but exclusively devoted to spitting out battle tanks and a military version of the little rear-engine auto called the *Kübelwagen*. He condemned the incredible selfishness shown by by unionized and non-organized complainers for petitioning to receive pay increases, or for that matter autos of their own to joyride in, when the *Reich* was engaged in an all-out, life or death struggle to forever free those selfsame complainers from oppression by traitorous, Communist-leaning Germans, or the stranglehold of greedy, money-mad overlords who guided the British industry, or the disdain of la Belle France, now an occupied nation sensibly governed in Vichy, not Paris.

So enthusiastic over Steyr’s latest journalistic effort that he’d called the boardinghouse minutes after reading the opinion editorial, Herr Stampfl urged James to drop by the Leopold Palace and receive the sprinkle of holy water with which *Reichsminister* Goebbels wished to personally anoint his fair-haired stringer.

Begging off, James had fibbed about a mythical appointment with a gentleman he’d been taking to who had mentioned the wholesome effect Swedish steel imports were having on German war materiel production. The executive editor sounded disappointed, but nevertheless agreed that first things always came first, and said he hoped to see another article shortly.

James grimaced wryly and hung up the earpiece, amused by the irony of having inserted in his article the Swedish steel story actually related by Lustmann himself. He started up the stairs, and heard the phone ring again. Busy using a feather duster to redistribute the dust in her parlor, Frau Kraven peeked into the hall. “Can you please see who that is, Herr Steyr?”

“Glad to.” He went back and lifted the earpiece. “Hello.”

“I would like to speak to Herr Steyr, *bitte*. ”

“Erich, it sounds like you.”

“*Ja, ja*; the same. Forgive me; I didn't recognize your voice. Listen, can you come by this evening. I need your assistance to, uh, line up our ducks for. . . what we agreed to do next.”

“So soon after the last one?”

“I believe it necessary, yes. I’m sure it is pertinent to our . . . I fear the subject is not appropriate to discuss over an open line, Hans.”

“I can be there around six?”

“Earlier, if it’s convenient. We can have dinner here, then get to work.”

“Fine. I’ll see you then.”

* * *

Kurt, the acerbic leader of Meisinger’s team of investigators, had accompanied his superior on yet another fruitless visit to Zoltan’s astrology emporium, and learned nothing new, heard nothing worth hearing except the Hungarian seer’s repetitive vow to dedicate his entire existence toward aiding in every way the ongoing *Abwehr* search for the “visionary” Friend of

the Reich. In midmorning, wearied by another fruitless session with Zoltan, they had stopped for coffee at a sidewalk café, where Meisinger listened with half an ear to Kurt grouse about the lack of progress, sipped coffee, and waited for him to stop griping

“Ulrich, you lecture us,” complained Kurt, “about keeping our eyes and ears open for anything unusual, anything the least bit out of the ordinary, yet seem to pay no attention when I tell you of just such a happening. Yesterday, I learned of a thief arrested at the zoo for exposing himself to distract a woman, and then snatching her purse.”

“A most inventive purse snatcher,” remarked Meisinger.

“Irrelevant, no doubt, but . . . Alright, how about this? Over in *Wannsee*, the police picked up some idiot shooting at swimming ducks with a bow and arrow.”

“Remarkable!” said Meisinger. “Do try being serious, Kurt.”

“Serious, you ask for, and serious you get. Recall the counterfeiting scam I mentioned a week or two ago?”

“Don’t believe so, no.”

“It had to do with an oddly postdated banknote nobody could account for.”

His mind elsewhere, Meisinger sipped coffee. “Still doesn’t ring a bell.”

“One of our best men, Karl, was chatting up an acquaintance, a detective who told him an offbeat tale about going with a chief inspector to the Adlon and trying to question the gent who deposited the funny-money bill mixed in with the *SS* cold cash bundle. Guy claimed to be *SS* himself. A brassy bastard, he *threatened* a pair of detectives.”

“*SS* lizards,” observed Meisinger, “do that when browbeating falls short of the mark.”

“Amen!” said Kurt. “But there’s more. The dick told Karl that when they tried to find out the origin of the large *Reichsmarks* bundle, including the *Hundertkennzeichen* bill, the *SS* turd not only refused to open up, but claimed he took orders straight from *Reichsfuhrer-SS* Himmler’s office. Hew invited the dicks to pulse *them* if they were serious about getting answers.”

“Far the worst idea anyone could have,” said Meisinger. “It would be like asking a fox why it raided the hen house.”

“That’s for damn sure! Anyhow, Karl said the guy irritated the detectives to the point of running the notion of approaching the *SS* past their *own* leaders. They were not just told no, but *hell no*! Most likely means nothing, but it does fit the, uh. . .” Kurt shrugged and shut up.

Somewhere in the course of the other’s narrative, Meisinger had begun to pay attention. “When did you say Karl talked to this detective?”

“Six, seven . . . don’t know how many days ago.”

“This purported *SS* officer, I assume he verified his status, his credentials?”

“No idea. Why?”

“At the Adlon, you say? Did Karl mention the *SS* officer’s name?”

“If he did, I don’t remember what it was.”

Anything odd, thought Meisinger, replaying the admiral’s words in his mind. *Any outlier beyond what might be called ordinary, any abnormal occurrence*. Canaris had drummed into him the notion of watching for any variety of singular, difficult-to-explain incident or occurrence crossing the path of him or his investigators. It probably meant nothing, yet . . . “If we’re anywhere near the Adlon this afternoon, we might stop by, check the *SS* gentleman out.”

Kurt shrugged “Can’t hurt, unless we step on some tender *SS* toes.”

* * *

James descended the boardinghouse steps at five o'clock on a pleasant early summer evening. He took his time strolling up and over the Oberbaum Bridge, gazing over the balustrade at the turgid waters of the Spree, speculating about why Lustmann had been leading a hermit's life for days on end, and then suddenly summoned him. The answer was undoubtedly Frau Sharpe. It would be hard to blame the gentleman he thought of as never-to-become *Deutsche Weltreichsheld* Erich Lustmann for succumbing to the charms of a wholly feminine, feline distraction like Gerda Sharpe. Celibate for real-time months himself, his blood had been stirred a second time by briefly catching sight of Gerda emerging from the Adlon elevator.

Reaching the major intersection on *Pariser Platz*, a block down the divided boulevard from the Adlon, he had to wait in a queue of five or six pedestrians for the white-uniformed traffic *Schupo* to blow his whistle, signal it was safe to cross with a bent-armed gesture.

Two or three steps into the broad boulevard, he glanced over at the hotel entrance and halted, his curiosity triggered at sight of a black Audi sedan pulling up and commandeering curb space reserved for arriving and departing guests or taxis. Hesitating again upon reaching the sidewalk, he saw two men get out on either side of the vehicle and approach the hotel. The taller of the pair flipped open his wallet, showed what James assumed were his credentials to the doorman, gestured toward the parked Audi and led his companion into the hotel.

Recognition seared James. *Meisinger!*

Rooted to the spot, torn by indecision, several possibilities flashed through his mind, all striking him as likely. Making up his mind, he hastily jogged toward a public phone booth down the block, near the corner of *Wilhelmstrasse*. A young woman inside the booth held a phone to her ear, gesticulating while she talked.

James yanked open the door, took the woman by the elbow and literally tugged her out on the sidewalk.

Forced to drop the telephone, the woman opened her mouth to scream.

"Gestapo!" he said harshly. "Don not interfere, *Fraulein!*"

Acute indignation fueling her temerity, the young woman closed her mouth without a sound, awarded James a dirty look.

James seized the dangling phone, popped down the double-pronged hook with a forefinger, released it, and dialed the Adlon. He politely asked the hotel switchboard operator to put him through to Herr Klasse in Suite 204 who he assured her was expecting the call. After the phone rang three times at the other end, he hung up, then immediately repeated the process, explaining to the operator in agitated fashion that he'd been disconnected. The phone rang three more times. Banging the earpiece back in the hook, he slipped out of the booth.

The young woman had pouted and watched Silverthorne's performance. "Some conversation!" she said angrily

"Mind you own business, Dearie! Here, take this for your trouble." He slapped a few *Reichsmarks* in the young woman's palm, and hurried back toward the boardinghouse, walking as fast as he could without attracting undue attention.

* * *

Although it had been accurate, James had no way to confirm his snap judgment about a Lustmann, Gerda Sharpe relationship. "Herr Klasse" had urged Gerda to beg off from her labors

at the back, and she had phoned, complaining of a minor stomach upset. They they had enjoyed one another's company during her impromptu day off, riding about the city in the leased Mercedes, wandering through Tiergarten and lunching at the outdoor café. Most of the afternoon had been consummated in a lengthy, satisfying bedroom session, a perfect cap to what Lustmann had considered a perfect day. Sated, he could not have felt more wonderful, more on top of the world an hour earlier when they had lingered over saying goodbyes, and he had ordered his driver to take her home.

Not long out of his leisurely bath, Lustmann was preparing for Steyr's visit when the phone rang three times, then fell silent before he could wind a towel around his middle, go into the bedroom and pick up.

Couldn't be Gerda, he thought, having escorted her downstairs, helping her step into the leased Mercedes less than an hour earlier. It had to be Steyr. Who else, other than that chief inspector and his doltish partner? No one else knew where he was staying. If it was important, he was sure his accomplice would call back.

The telephone did ring again — once, twice . . . then after the third ring, fell silent.

In the sudden deafening stillness, Lustmann sucked in a deep breath of panic. Dashing into the bedroom, he dressed with frantic haste, yanked the aluminum carryall down from the high closet shelf, slipped into his suit jacket, and with fumbling haste unscrewed the silencer from the Walther PPK with nervous fingers, jammed the weapon into one jacket pocket, the tubular silencer into the other. He grabbed the carryall, and was out the door in seconds.

Descending the narrow rear service stairs two risers at a time, he hustled through the hotel's utility corridor, rushed through the kitchen earning looks of surprise from the culinary staff, and charged out the service entrance, emerging in the alley connecting with *Wilhelmstrasse*.

At the corner, he briefly considered using the nearby phone booth to call for his car and driver, but the idea of waiting for the Mercedes to arrive made him rule out that option. Walking fast for several blocks clutching the carryall, he kept watch over his shoulder at the light flow of traffic, and eventually hailed a passing taxi. Breathlessly giving the driver Steyr's boardinghouse address, he slumped back in the rear seat breathing heavily due to the recent exertion.

The middle-aged veteran cabbie knew Berlin inside out and upside down. The taxi made left and right turns, negotiating streets leading to the arched, double-deck Oberbaum Bridge over the Spree crowned by dual Gothic towers, carrying pedestrians, tram and auto traffic on several levels. On the bridge's far side, not many blocks from the railroad tracks, the cabbie turned into a side street and deposited him on the sidewalk in front of a moderately rundown two-story house, where a special swastika banner signified that a family member must have fallen while serving in the military.

A woman in late middle-age answered the doorbell, her frizzy hair done up in a bun; a no longer clean apron covered much of the faded, green-flowered dress she wore. She peered myopically at the tall, hatless gentleman at the door, her air one of vague suspicion. "Yes . . . ?"

"Is Herr Steyr in, *bitte*? I really must see him on a matter of great urgency."

"No-o-o, I believe Herr Steyr went out a while ago."

"When do you expect him back?"

"That I cannot say. Like most other guests, Herr Steyr comes and goes as he pleases."

"Would you mind terribly if I were to wait for him to return?"

“Why, no. Not at all. Please come in and make yourself comfortable in the parlor.”

“*Viel Dank*. I would never dream of bothering you if seeing Herr Steyr was not so very important.”

“Think nothing of it, sir.” Frau Kraven saw the gentleman seated. She returned to her kitchen duties, telling herself the journalist she had come to admire certainly did consort with a number of handsome, mannerly, distinguished looking gentlemen.

* * *

Trotting back toward the boardinghouse, James had also considered flagging down a taxi, but was unable to find one quickly. Slowing his pace to a fast walk, he hurried along the streets, crossed the bridge and was greatly relieved to find Lustmann leafing through a dog-eared magazine in the boardinghouse parlor, with the all-important aluminum carryall resting beside his leg on the landlady’s moderately worn carpet. Across the room, the elderly, hard-of-hearing lodger was using his ear trumpet listening to the blaring radio.

Lustmann tossed the magazine aside. In a low voice, he said, “What’s gone wrong?”

“Later,” cautioned James so softly the other could barely hear him over the blathering radio. “Is there another identity you can use, Erich?”

“Several, yes. I take it Herr Klasse has passed on.”

“*Er ist nicht mehr mit uns*,” informed James. “Choose another, anything will do. It will be safer if I introduce you to the landlady. She’s an abnormally suspicious woman. It wouldn’t seem right for a mysterious stranger to visit without pleasantly giving her your name, treating you like an editor, publisher, or whatever.”

Lustmann said, “My papers are in the carryall. Is it safe to open up here?”

“No need. Pick a name out of the hat, Erich. Any name at all will do.”

“Anders,” said Lustmann, Klaus Anders, my best friend as a kid was Klaus Anders.”

“Good.” James led the way into the kitchen. At sight of them, Frau Kraven left off washing pots and pans, and dried her hands on the apron. James presented Herr Anders as a business associate. “Klaus and I have worked together for some time.”

“*Freucht mich sehr*, Frau Kraven.” His manner courtly, Lustmann dipped his head in gentlemanly fashion.

All smiles, Frau Kraven fawned coquettishly over the tall, blond haired gentleman, told him how pleased she was to make his acquaintance.

“Herr Anders and I must go up my room, if that is agreeable, Frau Kraven.”

“Oh, really? Surely you gentlemen would be more comfortable in the parlor.”

“That is so, but there is some written material I must discuss with Herr Anders.”

Lustmann followed James up the creaking staircase. He glanced quickly around the dreary attic room. “You’re live *here*?” he said with obvious distaste. Setting down the carryall, he sank back in the rickety ladder-backed chair. James knelt close beside his guest, his mouth close to the other’s ear. He described the appearance of two *Abwehr* agents at the hotel.

Looking grim, Lustmann said, “You are sure?”

“Positive.”

“For *that* you phoned in a panic signal, urged me to bolt?”

“Under the circumstances,” assured James, “the very *last* thing you should want would be to undergo questioning by Herr Meisinger. He is some slick article, believe me.”

“What, I may ask,” requested Lustmann irritably, “led you to believe the *Abwehr* had come to the Adlon specifically to talk with me?”

“No way to know. None!” said James defensively, surprised by lustmann’s indignation. “The only safe course seemed to be not taking a chance. Why run the risk just to see if the *Abwehr* was there because of you, or had other business at the Adlon?”

“*Ach*, this is sheer foolish!” Lustmann said. “You cry ‘wolf’ for no good reason, Hans. I’m going back to my suite.”

Growing moderately warm under the collar himself, James said, “I won’t try to stop you. But before placing yourself in what might be serious jeopardy, wouldn’t you like to find out what might be waiting for you back at the hotel?”

“Nothing, I assume,” was the other’s sharp reply. “Back off, Steyr! Perhaps learning what their visit was all about could’ve been the wise course. Now it’s too late.”

James described smooth-talking Herr Meisinger as someone he considered a serious threat to their presence and purpose. “If you’re determined to willingly court danger, at least agree to wait until they leave the premises to seek an answer to the question of why they came to the hotel.”

“Bah! How can that be determined after they’ve gone?”

“Leave it to me and my . . . friends. There are ways; bribing the bellman you mentioned, the one who serves you regularly could be the simplest.”

Lustmann mulled the prospect of sitting around in the sleazy attic room with the heavy Walther and silencer bulging his jacket pockets. Withdrawing both items, he laid them on the end table beside the Olivetti, and doffed the jacket, his expression a mixture of unhappiness and uncertainty. “Fine, Hans! On further thought,” he said, nodding brusquely, “I’m forced to agree that it’s the smartest move. How long it will take you and your, er . . . friends to . . . ?”

“Hours, more than just a few. We’ll go out in early evening, get something to eat, then I’ll slip over and put a chalk mark on the proper lamp post at this week’s trysting place, and shortly after midnight we shall . . .”

“Midnight!” Lustmann reached for his jacket. “Nonsense! I’ll go down and call for my car, leave this hellhole.”

James looked the other squarely in the eye. “Your impatience distresses me greatly,” he said harshly. “Erich, have you no conception of how paramount *your* safety *is*? It far outweighs all other considerations, no question. What you came her to accomplish is more than simply important, it is absolutely *vital*. My task is of no consequence whatever except to provide any and all varieties of aid I can. Isn’t there *some* method of talking you out of innocently returning to the Adlon, knowingly placing you yourself — your sacred mission — in grave jeopardy?”

The speech swayed Lustmann only a trifle, no where near enough in Silverthorne’s judgment to make him change his mind.

“Hans, I know you mean well,” conceded Lustmann. “After what you’ve already done for me, I have no doubt of that. Yet I have successfully bluffed the authorities in the past, and I’m certain I can do so again.” Lifting his jacket, he thrust his right arm through the sleeve.

His mind churning like a millrace torrent, James was overwhelmed by a realization of the vast gulf that existed between running a bluff on ordinary detectives, and attempting to dupe someone owning the inborn intelligence, style and grace of Herr Meisinger. He could *not* let

what was about to happen, to happen. If Lustmann were to take the priceless documents back to the hotel it would at one stroke write finis to not only the current "Friend of the Reich" letter-writing campaign, but in all probability the prospective campaign he himself intended to engage in later.

James whipped about as if in sudden alarm, and put a finger to his lips, motioning to Lustmann for silence. Stepping to the door, he leaned against it as if listening attentively.

"What is it?"

"Someone's coming upstairs." James whirled, snatched up the tubular silencer resting beside his typewriter; twisting hastily, he began threading it into the muzzle of the Walther PPK.

"What are you doing?"

"Shh-h-h! Get over against the wall, beside the door. I have to do whatever's necessary."

Jarred by his accomplice's sudden transformation, not to mention his terse instructions, Lustmann did as he was told.

James opened the door a slit, then closed it quickly as if jolted by what he had seen.

"Who is it?" whispered Erich Lustmann.

In reply, James raised the Walther. At close range, he squeezed off two rounds.

The would be *Deutsche Weltreichsheld* slid downward to a sitting position, leaving a smeared red stain on the wall behind him. Mouth agape in disbelief, he slumped over on his side and pawed futilely at his chest.

In less than a minute, the pale blue eyes glazed over while staring into infinity.

EIGHTEEN The Real War

Quaking like a hillside of breeze-ruffled aspens in hopefully never-to-be-born *Amerikaner-Colorado-Provinz*, Silverthorne let the silenced automatic pistol slip from his grasp and thud to the frayed, crimson-bordered area rug covering all but the fringes of his attic room. Weak-kneed, all but in a trance, he sagged down on the floor next to the weapon.

After a period of heavy breathing, he closed his eyes, blinked repeatedly and struggled to his feet. Moving like a sleepwalker, he tugged the quilt from his narrow bed and draped it over the corpse. Two or three gulps emptied what little remained in the bottle of *Schnapps* in the wooden wardrobe that did its best to imitate a closet.

The *Schnapps* did nothing to still the palpitation in his hands. He sat down again, this time planting his back against the door to keep anyone from entering, and tried to think. It had been purely a spur-of-the-moment thing, a reflexive response to a threat, anything but a planned act. What it had actually been was an act of desperation now too late to rectify, second-guess, or in some distant way regret. He doubted if anyone downstairs could have heard the silenced weapon discharge twice. The problem would be to find some reasonable method of disposing the remains. He tried to think clearly, tried to weigh the few existing alternatives in straightforward fashion, and found it next to impossible.

The simplest answer would be to twist the false tooth, bite down hard and abandon the mission. Unfortunately, a quick return to DWJ 142 would leave behind vital unfinished business, a cowardly solution to his immediate problem but by no means an answer to the enormously larger problem he'd been sent to solve. His best bet might be to leave the corpse where it was,

wait until the wee hours, tiptoe downstairs with the carryall, open the front door from the inside and slip away into the night. Impossible! A temporary solution at best. How much difficulty would the authorities have rounding up an Austrian journalist employed as a stringer by the Goebbels propaganda ministry? He thrust the problem aside. Any version or derivative in the nature of a firm resolution would have to be put on hold until he could think more clearly.

Prior experiences had made him intimately conversant with retrotemporal mechanics. He'd held his breath for seconds immediately after murdering Lustmann, anxiously waiting to see if the body would vanish from the nineteen-forty timeline. It should have happened instantly, a nanosecond after Lustmann's heart stopped and his essence amalgamated with that of his "coexisting" younger self. In accord with the firmest of firm rules laid down by Mother Nature, the apparent if false temporal paradox he had encountered should have been solved by virtue of two nine-millimeter slugs. To his great misfortune, the inevitable alternative had no doubt occurred when youthful Erich Lustmann had ceased to exist on the "now" timeline.

Reluctant to look at the shrouded figure slumped beside to the wall, he gritted his teeth, forced himself to lift a corner of the quilt. What he had once been, and would have again become in a divergent timeline the preeminent *Weltreichsheld* of all time, was enduring the first hour of eternity with total aplomb. What James realized he definitely *did* have to do was think and rethink the no longer a latent quandary, and resolve a reasonable way to handle the inevitable upshot of killing Lustmann. It would be imperative to devise some facile means of taking the man's place, hand-lettering in green ink his own 'visions to negatively influence and redirect the course of the war, thus effectively undermine and in the end obliterate Goebbels' version of a Nazi victory. With that in mind, he stared numbly at the aluminum alloy carryall sitting alongside his bed, its lid closed and latched. An inane thought occurred to him. Here in his chilly attic room was an inviting Pandora's Box, but the commandment of Zeus to *never* open it had been reversed since, instead of releasing all the evils of the world it contained vital, informative data he had to retain in order to change the world for the better, and therefore would be much more difficult to leave closed than to open.

Fired with more curiosity than Hesiod's Pandora, and a sudden rush of overpowering enthusiasm, he clambered to his feet and opened the stand-alone wooden wardrobe furnished by Frau Kraven. Removing one of the dress shirts acquired at the late Erich Lustmann's expense, he took out the wire hanger and bent it back and forth in his hands until it weakened and broke cleanly, and then did it again. Straightening the length of wire, he burned his fingers unscrewing the hot bulb from the room's only table lamp.

It was still daylight outside, with dusk closing in. The filmed attic window provided enough light to let him insert one end of the wire into the lamp socket. A tingling electric shock coursed through him upon touching the other end to the carryall's off-color, underside rivet. He dropped the wire, screwed the light bulb back into the lamp socket, unlatched the lid and opened the carryall. Ignoring the bundles of high-denomination *Reichsmarks*, he hungrily eyed and then lifted out a short stack of flash-paper not merely priceless, but literally beyond price.

The door to his attic room had no lock, a fact of no particular concern to him until that minute. Neither Frau Kraven nor any of her lodgers were liable to bother him, not that anyone but the nosy woman had ever ventured into his room. The opportunity to finally learn the truth, the whole truth and nothing short of it was too overpowering for he or any other professional

historian to resist. The scenario concocted by exiled Odessa fanatics included remedial messages designed to coach and hopefully revise various wartime “errors” and oversights, but for the time being was of only minimal interest. He meant to turn head to tail the “advice” tendered by the renegade Odessa expatriates, and *encourage* the self-styled Leader and his Nazi minions to destroy not only the vile police state they had created, but if practical *add* to the mistakes and lapses which would permit the so-called Allies to overcome and defeat *Dritte Reich’s* mighty military machine. His abiding interest of the moment, however, was the flash paper chronicle of the actual war, particularly the nineteen-forty segment. Setting the typewriter on the floor, he crouched on the lumpy bed and scanned the first pages relating to events that had already transpired, then put those sheets aside he began voraciously speed-reading the remainder, and became totally engrossed in the stark, datelined, sequential narrative.

The first item to catch his intense interest, a sidelight pertaining to the terror-bombing of London, related how a *Luftwaffe* bombardier had triggered his release mechanism prematurely, and the bombs had fallen into the city instead of a neighboring industrial target — an accident he meant to keep to himself. He read an account of *Luftwaffe* frustration during the Battle of Britain, while another cited details pertaining to a battle at El Alamein in North Africa which hastened the defeat and eventual demise of Rommel’s *Afrika Korps*. He absorbed a lengthy dissertation centered on Operation Barbarossa, the *Reich’s* all but semi-suicidal plunge into the vastness of the USSR, plus accounts featuring the ensuing bloodbaths during the sieges of Stalingrad and Leningrad, the truly monumental tank battle at Kursk, the subsequent gradual erosion of *Wehrmacht* effectiveness as supply lines stretched interminably in the face of stubborn Soviet resistance as well as frequent, ever-increasing counterassaults.

He was shocked to learn of the atrocious methods employed by the Imperial Japanese Army during the slaughter and maiming of innumerable Chinese civilians subsequent to the invasion and occupation of Manchuria by Imperial Japanese forces. He learned of Japan’s surprise attack at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, a sneak, below-the-belt punch that drew America into the global conflict, and inspired heretofore victorious Nazi Germany to boldly declare war on the United States. The document informed him how U.S. arms production and waxing manpower in the field began gradually making itself felt on all fronts in every theater of the conflict.

He found out American and British forces had landed in North Africa, and later in Sicily, then later still in Italy, and had inevitably overcome fierce *Wehrmacht* resistance. He read on and became immersed in a staggering account of the massive Allied landings on Normandy beaches, and the subsequent Allied rampage across France and into Germany, with Stalin’s Red Army coming in like a scourge from the east.

He read about the U-boat campaign against Allied shipping, about the American daylight aerial assaults and British nighttime raids which literally turned many German cities into mounds of smoking rubble. He learned of the bloodbath in the Pacific incurred by America’s island-hopping marines and infantry, how American tenacity and resolve had resulted in the step-by-step reacquisition of Japan’s former holdings, how American naval forces had turned back and decimated Japan’s Imperial Navy at Midway and the Coral Sea prior to fighting off suicidal “Kamikazi” attacks in Leyte Gulf and the seas around Okinawa. He learned how incendiary raids conducted by America’s long range, high-altitude bombers had incinerated the Japanese cities.

Horrificed, he learned of the *Reich's* conscienceless slaughter of millions of innocent Jewish men, women and children, plus thousands of Slavs, Gypsies, homosexuals, mentally defective unfortunates and other noncombatants incarcerated in concentration camps, or slaughtered in facilities where the one and only purpose was extermination.

There were accounts of numerous attempts on Hitler's life, including a notorious satchel charge planted in his East Prussian headquarters by a ranking, highly decorated *Wehrmacht* officer, and how the suspected conspirators had been hanged or spitted on meathooks, while Admiral Canaris, former chief of the *Abwehr*, had languished and starved to death in a concentration camp. He found out how, when *Götterdämmerung* finally became inevitable, Adolf Hitler had not died of cancer after all, but had suicided along with his "bride" of a day or two, and had then been joined in death by one time *Reichsminister* Goebbels in an underground bunker near the burned-out chancellory. Göring had suicided much later, during what the stark document referred to as postwar Nuremberg war crimes trials. He read of the unconditional surrender of the *Reich*, of the nuclear obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that finally pushed Japan's emperor warlords over the edge, and paved the way for the total surrender the Allies demanded. The eye opener for him was a brief description of a relentless "Cold War" that began between Western Europe and America on one side, and on the other by the USSR's ruthless hegemony dominated by the steel fist of Josef Stalin.

Sometime long after midnight, his vision blurring badly, James replaced the stark documents in the carryall, closed the lid but did not pop over the latches, and knuckled his burning eyes. The account of World War II, while explicit and concise, raised as many questions in his mind as it had answered. Yet its revelations, while linear, grossly overflowed with highlights and sidelights and details which, despite owning an excellent memory, were impossible to piece together and integrate into a coherent whole. Disregarding the late hour, not to mention eyestrain and an audience consisting of Lustmann's corpse sprawled beneath a quilt, he retrieved the stack of flash paper, went back to the beginning and doggedly started rereading the entire document front to back, striving to assimilate the contents in order to ingrain as many details and side issues as possible in his historian's memory.

Upon finishing a second time, half blind, the narrative struck him as so utterly fantastic and all-encompassing in scope that its total impact could never be felt even after assimilation in two sittings. Most of his adult life had been spent studiously assimilating, examining, and often reexamining the published ins and outs and whys and wherefores of the so-called War of World Liberation, and now that he'd been provided with unique, indisputable knowledge of the real war, he would be able to make excellent use of it to hopefully prevent *Deutsche Weltreich* from ever becoming a reality.

Utterly exhausted, he was not at all surprised to see dawn light dimly illuminate the filmed attic window. Carefully replacing the document a second time, he closed and latched the carryall, then fell on the bed fully dressed and pulled a blanket over him.

He awoke in what had to be late-morning feeling groggy, even more tired than when he had finally gone to sleep. He yawned, rolled over, rubbed his eyes and sat up with a start.

Standing in the doorway, Ulrich Meisinger gazed at him, his expression neutral. He didn't speak, but his hard, persistent stare said in effect, "I never believed it was you."

NINETEEN Revisionist Doctrine

The premiere *Abwehr* investigator closed the door behind him, glanced incuriously about the dingy attic room he had seen once before, silently appraised the closed aluminum carryall, then bent and retrieved the silenced Walther PPK from the bloodstained carpet. Lifting one end of the patchwork quilt covering the remains, he said in a monotone, "I take it this is Herr Klasse."

James could only nod. "He's . . . SS."

"So I was told." Meisinger unbuttoned and pulled up the left sleeve of Lustmann's shirt. He examined the SS tattoo inside the corpse's upper arm, took a mechanical pencil from the inside pocket of his suit jacket and jotted down the data. "Himmler's people apparently found you first, Herr Steyr."

"Uh, you could . . . That might be said," faltered James.

"Try to understand that what has taken place is not in anyone's best interest. In fact it could be bad for all concerned. Were your identity and whereabouts made known to Klasse before he, er . . . turned up his toes?"

"I don't . . . I'm not sure. I don't think so. How did you . . .?"

"Under somewhat harsh questioning," informed Meisinger, "the driver assigned to take Herr Klasse wherever he wished to go recalled picking you up at this address. My man Kurt and I were lax about obtaining the information. We unfortunately took our own sweet time adding things up. We should have been here hours and hours ago."

"Am I under arrest?"

"Nothing quite so dramatic, Herr Steyr. Not for the time being, at any rate. Naturally we expect to sit down together for a number of heart-to-heart chats."

"There isn't . . . There's not much I can tell you."

"Oh, there I differ very strongly indeed. I'm *positive*," said Meisinger, "there is a great deal you'll be able to tell us. First, foremost and above all else, we wish to know who beside you yourself is responsible for the preposterous yet extraordinarily perceptive, supernaturally accurate 'visions' you've been peddling."

Fresh out of responses, except for the authentic one that would have kept him locked up in a mental ward for the rest of his days, James knew better than to try and dupe the intelligent, sophisticated senior *Abwehr* agent with a fabricated song and dance, or for that matter shade the truth. He needed to come up with a fairy tale that exhibited at minimum a semblance of logic, something that would hold together temporarily. He finally said, "Herr Meisinger, all I'm free to tell you is that a number of prominent, influential individuals inside and outside of Germany strongly favor the *Reich's* crusade against the capitalistic, imperialistic powers, but discontented over the way Hitler's stubbornness, willfulness, lack of insight and incredible demagoguery has misdirected the execution of the war."

"Intimating that you are in their pay?"

James dipped his head toward the carryall. "Millions in *Reichsmarks* are inside."

"Very well, I will accept that statement on a conditional basis, pending succeeding revelations on your part. Did your treasure chest once include the bogus thousand-mark banknote that created such a stir?"

"It did, sir, although I can't imagine the spurious date of issue as being other than an obscure clerical, printing or tabulating error."

"Nor I." Meisinger's brows contracted ever so slightly. "Who, may I ask, are these . . . monied sympathizers you mention?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"Cannot, or will not?"

"Either way you wish, sir."

"You surely appreciate the nature and variety of *SS* means and methods which never fail to inspire a prompt, truthful response."

"Not in my case." James opened his mouth wide, touched a fingertip to the false tooth which if actuated would allow temporal energy he had accumulated to instantaneously snap him back into DWJ 142. "It's laced with cyanide," he lied, delivering a glib falsehood he was not sure Meisinger would buy "All I have to do is bite down hard in a special way."

"You would be willing to do that?"

"My solemn promise to . . . To the brave individuals in question," said James, mentally kicking himself for making it sound overly dramatic. "Call it their secondary reason for underwriting my task with millions in *Reichsbank*."

"I see." Meisinger thought it over. "As a matter of purely academic interest, how in the world did you manage to 'envision' something as recondite and superficial as Hitler's little victory jig weeks *prior* to the actual French surrender signing in Paris?"

"By means of my vision, Herr Meisinger. Despite what you and most others may think, I am indeed blessed with psychic powers."

"How fortunate you are." Other than that droll comment, James could discern no other reaction from the self-contained *Abwehr* agent. Deliberating silently, he finally said, "Herr Steyr, please take to heart what I tell you next. What if I were to say my organization may be willingly to help you and your mysterious backers aid in returning the *Reich*' to . . . Shall we say a more logical and proper prosecution of the war, steering Germany toward, um . . . normalcy?"

"I fail to see how that would be remotely possible."

"Oh, do try," urged Meisinger dismissively. "Now then, let's address our current mutual problem? We have an obligation to invent an acceptable way to dispose of Herr Klasse's remains without raising too much fuss. You obviously felt it mandatory to kill him, else you would never have done it. What are your thoughts on the subject?"

"I'd planned to leave him where he is, walk out the door and disappear in the night."

"No, no! That would never do. Think of something else."

James sorted among the few possibilities that came to mind. "Call your people," he suggested, "and have them summon an ambulance. The attendants can roll the body out on a gurney, an oxygen mask over the face, with resuscitation equipment standing by. I'll tell Frau Kraven, the woman who owns the boardinghouse, Herr Klasse was taken ill in the night."

"Excellent! Not there's a 'vision' with which I concur heartily. I'll go downstairs and make the call, but first I'd like to see what in addition to money is hidden in your treasure chest?" He began to unlatch the carryall's lid.

Stop! The imperative crackled in James' consciousness like dry lightning. He choked back the word at the last second, and said nothing.

Meisinger popped open the lid, and sprang backward involuntarily when a bright, puff of light turned the flash paper documents to ash. Retreating to a safe distance, the senior *Abwehr* agent watched residual flames lick and curl around and through the bundles of currency.

"Close and latch it," suggested James. "Starved for oxygen, the fire will snuff out."

Meisinger did so. Turning, he regarded James levelly, eyes narrowed but otherwise outwardly nonplused. "Was that drastic precaution really necessary?"

"To me and my . . . friends, more than necessary. Imperative!"

* * *

Grossly out of sorts after enduring a venomous castigation by Hitler over the Gestapo's unsuccessful hunt for the mysterious "Friend of the Reich," *Reichsführer-SS* Himmler turned the full force of his bespectacled, owl-eyed stare on a nervous aide. "This is far and away the most outlandish report I have ever read."

"The Breslau *SS*-Academy commandant has attested to the facts in a sworn testament, Herr *Reichsführer*, and all witnesses thus far questioned concur."

"Facts!" sneered Himmler, drawing out the term. "If the commandant has let himself go to drink or drugs, hard punishment is a certainty. People do *not* vanish before one's eyes."

The aide squirmed. "The incident took place in the course of an evening meal, Herr *Reichsführer*, when the mess hall teemed with cadets, one of whom seated directly opposite the, er . . . victim swears he was conversing with the cadet, looking directly across the table at the man. Instantly, with no warning whatever, he was no longer there."

"I can read," declared Himmler in a tone acute displeasure. "What do you make of it?"

"I have no idea what to make of it, Herr *Reichsführer*. It's impossible to form an opinion about, well . . . a stark impossibility."

"Craziness! That's what it is." Himmler crumpled the report in his hands. "Have our *SS* legals look into the matter," he instructed. "I want a thorough investigation of the incident per se, as well as an in-depth background check on the commandant and every cadet deluded enough to believe he saw a fellow cadet vanish before his eyes. We shall also want everyone sworn as a witness to appear before the tribunal when it is convened. No exceptions!"

"At your orders, Herr *Reichsführer*!"

"Soonest! At once, if possible. We intend to find out what actually took place in Breslau, and when we do . . ." Himmler let the unvoiced threat dangle ominously. "Also, have the relatives of this . . ." He had to unfold the wadded ball of paper to consult it. "Have those related to the, er . . . absent cadet been notified?"

"Not to the best of my knowledge, sir."

"Well, that isn't good enough. Go find out!"

"*An Ihren Ordnungen*, Herr *Reichsführer*."

"If his family has not yet been informed," added Himmler, "instruct the commandant to keep his tongue well back in his mouth until we find out what brand of devious chicanery is at the root of this outlandish business. Also, firmly instruct the cadets about remaining close-mouthed, or suffer the extremely severe consequences. The *SS* image could be severely tarnished if a silly rumor like this were to be circulated."

"*Jawohl*, Herr *Reichsführer*."

"Dismissed!"

The aide clicked his boots, performed a stiff-armed Nazi salute, uttered a hasty “Heil Hitler!” and fled the office.

* * *

Silverthorne had no clue where they had taken him. After the ambulance departed carrying Lustmann’s remains in the guise of a patient bound for triage in an emergency room, there had been no hint of rough treatment until a close-mouthed pair had come into his attic room, rudely manhandled him downstairs and stuffed him into the rear seat of an Audi sedan, where he’d been deftly blindfolded and pushed down on the floor out of sight.

Not one word had been uttered during the drive. Though unable to see, James had heard a variety of familiar sounds as the Audi crossed the Oberbaum Bridge heading toward central Berlin. None of that, however, amounted to a hint of the unknown destination. Escorted roughly through what might have been a garage, judging by the taint, lingering taint of exhaust fumes in the air, he was half-assisted, half dragged going up a flight of stairs. In a bedroom of what he assumed was an *Abwehr* safe house, the blindfold had been personally removed by Meisinger.

For the better part of a week he had become acquainted with an annoying feature of his comfortable prison: closed, firmly secured bedroom shutters eliminated a view from any second-floor windows. Meals were brought to him at regular intervals, and his other needs were taken care of by a pair of indifferent, stone-faced keepers who spoke only if absolutely necessary. He was told to behave himself, sternly advised that attempting to leave the premises would be futile since stationed downstairs and outside were others who conscientiously tracked every person who entered and left what they called “the apartment building.” He had eaten and slept, slept and eater, between times leafing through magazines, listening to the radio whenever he wished.

An indication that his *Abwehr* captives expected him to become proactively reengaged in visionary letter-writing came one afternoon when Meisinger’s crusty assistant, a saturnine individual James had overheard addressed as Kurt, appeared carrying a box of unmarked stationery, a new Parker fountain pen, a bottle of green ink, two yellow legal tablets, and a raft of freshly sharpened wooden pencils.

Mildly amused by the “gifts,” James had asked Kurt dryly if he’d care to wait while he napped. “Who knows? Maybe I can rustle up a vision, write a prophetic letter for you to post.”

Not amused, Kurt paid no attention to any pleasantries, never stooping to engage in repartee. A snide grin accompanied his words during the only short, one-sided conversation they had: “If you’re as smart as we know you’re not, you’ll take advantage of the decent treatment. Being here won’t seem half so bad if the Gestapo turds ever catch up with you. Guaranteed!”

Bemused, James reflected on the encyclopedic insight related to current and future wartime events now locked in his historian’s memory, a treasure trove of foreknowledge bringing into sharper focus a serious quandary that *had* to be solved. Certain the “Friend of the Reich” seer had at last been unmasked, and who in custody would hopefully continue conjuring the prophetic “visions” deemed beneficial to the *Reich* by demonstrating a prescient, definitive foreknowledge of events to come salted with concrete suggestions about what might be done to expeditiously prosecute the war in a manner most advantageous to Nazi leadership.

A huge, ultra-significant flaw in his captors’ scheme had instantly become apparent. Unlike retro-SS-officer-Lustmann, the “seer” he’d replaced, he himself had no intention of coaching in any way, shape or form a single military, political or civilian Nazi success. That

meant a very thin line had to be walked between making subtle changes in the tone and theme of future letters aimed at denigrating Nazi actions and purposes, yet doing so with enough subtlety to cloak the “visions” in a manner designed to ensure an ultimate triumph by the “Allies.

His first opportunity to capitalize on the acquired foreknowledge had been presented on a plate. In an earlier letter, he had helped Lustmann cut the legs out from under Churchill’s scheme to rescue vulnerable British and allied forces trapped on the Belgian beaches, and again later, much to his distress, he’d aided in composing a subsequent letter aimed at correcting *Luftwaffe* bombing strategy, and posting it with the unwitting aid of an innocent woman passerby. To be effective, he decided his first “coaching” effort would be directed toward revising and correcting the prospective Sea Lion Channel crossing and subsequent conquest of Britain by discouraging the operation with a negative “vision” viewing as counterproductive to undermine the ambitions of Hitler and the OKW generals. From what he recalled of the “corrective” flash paper scenario Meisinger had inadvertently reduced to ashes, was Lustmann’s remark about how his Odessa confreres in Argentina had insisted that he retain a positive note in each and every message. Unfortunately, anything resembling a positive “negative” would not be impossible.

How to discourage Sea Lion? Actually, it was more a conundrum than a quandary. One way might be to vividly “envision” British sea power attacking en masse and sinking a number of transports carrying troops to England’s shores, not to mention *Kriegsmarine* warships, since even an egocentric, willful demagogue like Hitler had to be aware of British superiority at sea. Also something to be considered, tangentially if not directly, was the astrological “rationale” he assumed had been inserted in all of Lustmann’s prior letters. He personally knew of only one such instance, but admitted being an ignoramus when it came to elementary astrological lore. How could he hope to inject references depicting the influence of the stars on something as critical as averting the Nazi desire to effectively consummate Operation Sea Lion?

But, wait! Lustmann’s reason for addressing letters to Zoltan’s establishment no longer obtained. Meisinger had slyly indicated that the *Abwehr* might actually be sympathetic to the Klasse/Steyr propaganda line. If that should prove true, any letters he wrote would of course be picked up here and perhaps treated as if they had been posted to Zoltan’s astrology parlor. Assuming that to be the case, would inserting astrological nonsense be necessary?

Maybe so, maybe no. A practical approach might be to insert selective word-play that pertained to Hitler’s personal horoscope. Born in Austria on April twentieth during the eighteenthies, he would fall into the Aries or Taurus sector of the zodiac, indicating that it might be provident to invent a horoscope based on either of those signs so that framing an astrological indication of the unintended consequences of Sea Lion might . . .

Silly damned notion! Aimlessly stewing about the problem to no purpose, had caused him to begin thinking elliptically. Better, perhaps, to forget about astrology entirely and concentrate on the meaningful subject of immediate importance: to boldly discourage the prospective Sea Lion Operation.

He glanced at the writing materials in acute distaste, and lay back on the bed. A nap seemed the simplest way to evade the conundrum, quandary, or whatever the hell it was.

TWENTY Spy Versus Spy

Behind the wheel, Meisinger's team leader Kurt kept glancing at the rearview mirror as he navigated the Audi through spotty Berlin traffic. Half a block farther on he announced in a disgusted monotone that they had probably grown the usual tail.

"Are you sure?" asked Meisinger.

"Not certain, but I believe so."

Emil, the muscle assigned to accompany Admiral Canaris whenever he ventured beyond the clandestine walls of the *Abwehr Tirpitzufer* headquarters, turned around in the rear seat, craned to look back through the rear window.

"Don't look for them, Emil," warned Meisinger. "It's a dead giveaway."

The huge man obediently faced front. "Gestapo assholes," he said hoarsely, "like to follow you around like puppies, Admiral. That's so they can report doing something besides playing with themselves."

Canaris said, "What did you spot, Kurt?"

"Dark gray sedan two cars back. Keeps ducking in and out of sight. We may've been picked up leaving the garage."

"Turn down a side street and pull over," suggested Emil. "I'll beat the shit out of whoever's in their car, and we'll be on our way."

Meisinger chuckled.

Even the admiral smiled. "Go straight to the heart of matters, eh?"

The huge man grunted an obscenity. "Saves time."

"Is our follow-on tagging the gray sedan?" Canaris asked.

"Haven't seen it," said Kurt, "but it's there for damn sure."

Meisinger knew their primary escort "followed" a half-block ahead. Surreptitiously peeking backward, he said, "Kurt, time to lose the tail. Here, this next street will do."

Kurt obediently swung the Audi into a two-lane side street. Halfway down the block he came to a parking space at the curb, and pulled in. A minute later the gray sedan passed by, with both occupants visible in the front seats conscientiously looking straight ahead, and turned into a parking space four cars ahead of the Audi.

A second black Audi made as if to pass the gray sedan, slowed suddenly and stopped alongside, where it double-parked, pinning the other vehicle against the curb.

In the driver's seat, Kurt ignored the honk of an irritated Berliner unable to pass the screening Audi, and expertly swung a three-point "U" turn, cutting off a taxi coming the other way. The cabbie leaned on his horn.

A quarter-hour later Kurt pulled to the curb a half-block beyond the safe house, parking behind the escorting Audi that had preceded them. Once the others were on the sidewalk, Emil settled his bulk behind the wheel. Meisinger told him to stay with Kurt, and come back in an hour to pick them up.

"Isn't it wonderful," remarked Canaris, exuding sarcasm, "to need a safe haven just to avoid being spied upon by Heydrich's pipsqueaks?"

"Wonderful!" agreed Meisinger.

“One way or another,” declared the admiral, mounting the apartment house steps, “I mean to find out today what this wizard of a prophet is all about.”

Upstairs, one of Silverthorne’s faceless keepers ushered the two visitors into a bedroom and closed the door, leaving them alone with the “guest.”

With no preamble, Meisinger made short work of introducing the admiral.

The name registered, causing James to flinch mentally. The flash paper war chronicle had informed him that Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, rightly or wrongly accused, had died a slow death in a concentration camp as a suspected co-conspirator in the wake of the von Stauffenberg assassination attempt at Hitler’s East Prussian “Wolf’s Lair” headquarters.

Noting the “seer’s” reaction, Canaris soothed him. “Relax, Herr Steyr. Nothing to be tense about. If we wished you any harm, you would not have been coddled in comfortable quarters. We came to speak with you because of something most unusual for which I’m certain you will have a simple, straightforward explanation. By the way, have you been troubled by any recent visions worth mentioning, or more importantly worth recording in green ink?”

“Not . . . lately,” stumbled James, his thoughts gyrating. “I’ve been . . . Had trouble sleeping. I suppose it has to do with being locked up here.”

“Regrettable.” Canaris clicked his tongue sympathetically. “We shall see that sleep medication is supplied. I imagine ridding the world of that SS officer has preyed on your conscience as well. To our mutual misfortune, he found you first after our own long, intense search. It could also be responsible for keeping you awake at night, not visions. Is that not so?”

“It was either him, or me,” said James.

“Oh, we’re convinced it was as you say,” declared Canaris agreeably. “Circumstances often limit one’s choices.” The admiral’s nod signaled Meisinger, who withdrew a set of eight-by-ten glossy photographs from a manila envelope and handed them over.

Deliberately, as if dealing out playing cards, Canaris spread the photos on a deal table inlaid as a chessboard of light and dark woods. “You recognize this gentleman, of course.”

James did his best to give an impression of calmly appraising a half-dozen morgue shots of naked Erich Lustmann, except that the body was stretched out on a sofa. Two entrance wounds were depicted, one centered in the lower sternum, directly over the heart, the other only decimeters to the left. After a second or two of introspective silence he said simply, “Klasse.”

“Ah, but *is* it?” asked the admiral, his inflection making the question sound anything but rhetorical. “How can we be sure?” He laid two smaller photographs alongside the other six. “An absolutely remarkable resemblance, wouldn’t you say, Herr Steyr?”

Silverthorne’s throat constricted. Twenty calendar years, plus the ravages of wartime and a decade of South American exile had added lines around the corpse’s mouth and eyes not there in a pair of black-and-white glossies depicting the imperious, self-satisfied features of a much younger Erich Lustmann. The prognathous jaw, full head of straight blond hair, complemented by an insolent gleam in the younger subject’s eyes acting to assure viewers that both subjects were unmistakably the one and same individual. Transfixed, James stared at the photos he had seen numberless times in a “future” that was now the major portion of his “past.” Blowups many times actual size of those young features had been — that is, *would* be — prominently displayed in posters advertising the annual *Heldengedenkttag* celebration honoring the hero of heroes in a

way that never failed to inspire near-idolatry, and had between times graced the dust jackets of a few books still being printed, and in articles and documentaries too numerous to mention.

Speechless for long seconds, James finally muttered, "I don't know . . . what to say."

"Come now, Herr Steyr!" chided Canaris. "As a true blue 'Friend of the Reich,' with visions of the future popping up to dance wildly in your head and ruining your sleeping habits, we were counting on you for a response considerably more apt than *that* feeble effort"

"In these photos," put in Meisinger, "the deceased was fortyish gentleman Erich Klasse according to the name and description obtained from the Adlon guest register, and subsequently corroborated by more than one *Reichsbank* employee, a chief inspector of police and his detective partner. The gentleman known as Erich Klasse, and the twenty-one-year-old SS cadet pictured here, Erich Albert Lustmann, share a physical resemblance so striking that it is starkly impossible for anyone to think them not the same individual at two different stages of life. Also, utterly beyond accountability both Klasse and Lustmann bear an identical SS blood tattoo."

"Vision or invention or accident or what have you," demanded Canaris, "how can you or anyone else for that matter account for what we are seeing with our own eyes?"

"I . . . can't," James replied haltingly.

"Ah, *cannot!* Hosanna! At long last, Herr Steyr, I'm able to wholeheartedly accept the truth of what you are telling us."

"Could this . . . Klasse," suggested James, grasping at straws, struggling to keep his voice level, "have been young Lustmann's uncle, perhaps his half-brother, or twin . . . ?"

"Steyr, really! In your eyes, are we are so incredibly dull that you believe us capable of paying any heed whatever to *that* fairytale? My good fellow, you just voiced the most abysmally hopeless evasion I have yet hears, in truth so incredibly lame hat it deserves no response."

After a moment Meisinger broke the thick, gravid silence. "I'm afraid there's more, Steyr. A *Reichsbank* employee, Frau Gerda Sharpe, swears it was Klasse, and not you, who opened a new account and on more than one occasion deposited very large sums of cash, the first of which included the incredible, non-counterfeit banknote issued . . . Pardon me, that will be issued and probably circulated in a calendar year yet to come. She testified to the fact of meeting you in Klasse's suite at the Adlon, and crossed paths with you a second time in the hotel lobby. The chief inspector and detective who spoke with this Klasse-Lustmann person, as well as the hotel manager, swore that they had been intimidated at gunpoint by whoever and whatever he actually was. What we insist upon learning is whether you, a purported Austrian journalist, were actively working with Klasse, helping him do whatever he was attempting to accomplish?"

"N-not . . . really," faltered James.

"It's quite simply impossible," said Meisinger flatly, "to believe you are being truthful."

"I almost hate to tell you," declared Admiral Canaris, "that even more strangeness exists for you to clear up, a '*more*' so totally preposterous and unworldly that it has everyone remotely connected with this affair beside himself with confusion." He tapped a photo of young Erich Lustmann. "The individual pictured here was a cadet peacefully taking his evening meal in the refectory of an SS advanced training academy in Breslau. Sitting in full view of other cadets, and in fact speaking with one of them, he is said to have instantly vanished."

"Vanished . . . ?"

“Zut! Disappeared,” affirmed Canaris. “SS legal attachés have engaged in a witch hunt with the objective of squeezing everyone concerned through multiple, extremely painful wringers in order to determine the actual circumstances surrounding the unheard of incident.” Despite his earlier resolve to question Steyr calmly, the admiral had been growing steadily more agitated. “Speaking of coincidence piled upon coincidence, or in this instance,” he added, an acerbic lilt in his voice, “yet *another* coincidence in a case already piled to the height of *Zugspitze* has lain in wait, and now confronts us with something even more bizarre and twice as puzzling. The inexplicable occurrence in Breslau took place on the *same* evening, at approximately the *very same* moment when you opted to put two nine millimeter holes in the chest of the gentleman allegedly passing himself off as Herr Erich Klasse.”

Mother Nature, thought James, his sinking feeling deepening, *had resolved the temporal paradox predictably*. Under the pressure of the moment, he sincerely wished She had seen fit to accomplish Her task while youthful Lustmann was alone, by himself. Feeling crowded further and further, tighter and tighter into a shrinking corner, he could think of nothing to say.

“Now, the *truth*, if you please,” requested Canaris, bearing down heavily on the word. “We really do insist on learning exactly what the hell has been going on, Steyr. Was it Klasse, and not you, who was responsible for inventing and promulgating this ‘Friend of the Reich’ craziness we’ve been coping with month after month?”

“Wh-what . . . makes you think that?” asked James, hating the weakness of his response.

“Above and beyond all else, the singular, most outstanding reason,” pursued the admiral, “is that within a drop-leaf secretary desk in the Adlon suite occupied by this Klasse, Lustmann, or whatever *verdammt* name uses on Thursdays, was a packet of stationery, a near-new fountain pen, and a partially filled bottle of green ink. Our forensic laboratory tested the ink against samples obtained from the original letters written by our psychic ‘Friend of the Reich,’ whoever and whatever he may be, or once was, or may yet turn out to have been. In every single instance spectrographic analysis has confirmed the constituents of all samples to be identical to those of the letters in our files.”

Not at a total loss for words, James felt the ground slip farther from beneath his feet. If the determined, inquiring stares of his inquisitors were any indication, he not only had to think fast, but also think very clearly. Inhaling deeply, he fell back on the flash-paper account of wartime happenings to come he’d committed to memory. “Admiral,” he said earnestly, “I have been reluctant to divulge what I have seen of the coming invasion of the Soviet Union called, er, Barbarossa if I’m not mistaken, yet I suppose under the circumstances it is —”

“*Lieber Gott! Where and when* did you hear that term?” demanded Canaris.

Silverthorne shrugged. “I don’t recall ever hearing it spoken except in reference to the twelfth century Holy Roman Emperor. Yet in more than one vision I clearly saw the General Staff congregated around a long table. A gray-haired officer with red *Wehrmacht* collar tabs was using what looked like a collapsible metal pointer to enumerate bulleted paragraphs on a blackboard listing three million infantry and more than three thousand *Panzers* slated to march into the USSR in mid-April, or sooner weather permitting, if the ground in western Russia had by then dried sufficiently to support tanks without the treads miring. The senior officer was referring to data on a large wall chart captioned Operation Barbarossa.”

Whey-faced, Admiral Canaris sank down in a chair and shot a stricken glance at Meisinger, then turned to James and stared at him in open-mouthed disbelief. "Of what use," he said very slowly, "is gathering human intelligence when *omniscience* is the order of the day?"

Severely shaken himself, Meisinger said, "What of Klasse? Who was he, Steyr? *What* was he? We really *must* know."

"My assigned aide," said James, wanting to bite his tongue over the false note that crept into what he'd said. "Hw disappointed me."

"Disappointed how? In what way?"

"Our . . . sponsors, the . . . patriots funding our attempt to rectify the conduct of the war, or for that matter governance of the *Reich* itself . . ." James fell silent.

"What of them?"

"Klasse and I worked together in his Adlon suite on only one occasion. We wrote and polished the letter aimed at influencing the conduct of the coming air war over Britain?"

"Only a single letter?" demanded the admiral. "Why just one?"

"Because Klasse had a far larger fund of knowledge concerning *Luftwaffe* operations than I did, or ever will. During the past few weeks, perhaps as long as a month ago, I became uneasy, receiving a strong impression that Klasse was becoming . . . well, extremely nervous about playing his part, mostly I think over the notoriety that accrued due to the bogus banknote. After being visited by the hotel manager, and later by the detectives, I felt that he'd begun losing his nerve. The man was terrified, deathly afraid of being found out, arrested and . . . interrogated. The carryall had to stay locked in his suite for safekeeping, and I was afraid he was on the verge of . . . I honestly believed he was preparing to take the money and run."

"So you shot him?"

"So I shot him."

"Steyr, your latest fanciful tale," accused Canaris, "is thin, full of holes. You killed your associate simply because you feared he was . . ."

Canaris broke off when the bedroom door was flung open without benefit of a knock. Hulking in the doorway, Emil said loudly, "Got some helluva problem, Admiral!"

His train of thought broken by the bodyguard's abrupt entrance, Canaris had been revolving the information furnished by James. He said dismissively, "Not now, Emil."

"Best you should listen, sir," Emil asserted hoarsely. "The gray sedan tagging us through the streets wasn't full of Gestapo turds after all. There's been a shootout right there in the street. One of our guys is a deader, and Kurt's been shot, hurt bad. *Real* bad!"

TWENTY-ONE The Dragon Lady

Admiral Canaris prided himself on what, in the estimation of his associates, was a semi-legendary ability to retain his composure under pressure. One of his other conceits was that none of the individuals among his pet peeves — Himmler, Hess, Borman and others belonging to the Nazi inner circle — had never seen him lose his temper even in the heat of a major controversy.

Pacing Himmler's spacious office, he was not at all shy about demonstrating the exception that proved the rule by angrily and repeatedly hammering *Gruppenführer-SS* Reinhard Heydrich, second in command of the *SS* and Reich Main Security Forces, with direct questions.

Further enraged by the unsatisfying answers he'd obtained, his harsh questions were unabated while he paced, vainly trying to keep Heydrich from recognizing how disturbed he really was.

"So you still maintain," he said, doing his best to control the volume and timbre of his voice, "that it was *not* your Gestapo thugs who were ordered to conduct surveillance on each and every occasion I chose to venture away from *Abwehr* headquarters?"

Head cocked attentively, as usual staying above the confrontational fray while listening closely, Himmler looked on in pensive silence.

Heydrich stared at the admiral down a long nose, the centerpiece of his thin, arrogant features. "Twice you've asked the same question, Admiral., and twice I have answered. I do not believe a third response will be necessary."

Taking a firmer grip on his temper, the admiral wanted to know if the attackers might have been of the *SD*, or other *SS* personnel, or perhaps the city police.

"I am not able to either confirm or deny those possibilities," intoned Heydrich, his manner defiant, above it all. "What I am able to say with total assurance, is something I am certain the *Reichsführer-SS* will corroborate. All of the personnel devoting themselves to service in the organizations under his direction have better things to do than follow you about Berlin."

Deciding the vicious bastard was being at least partially truthful, Canaris let him off the hook. "Very well," he said, more to assuage Himmler's antagonism than for any other reason. "Think ill of me if you wish, Reinhard, but ever since you performed in an outstanding manner as a *Kriegsmarine* signals intelligence officer have I praised your dedication and leadership qualities. Your word on the matter is accepted without qualification. I hope you understand why the gravity of the situation made it necessary for me to ask such indelicate, pointed questions."

"Your kind words are an inspiration," said Heydrich, making no attempt to conceal the snide undertone his words conveyed. "Should my aid in getting to the root of this affair be required again, you have but to request my aid through the good offices of the *Reichsführer-SS*, and I shall be happy to make myself available."

"I appreciate that," declared Canaris, in effect saying, "Thanks for nothing!"

Himmler sniffled, dabbed his nose with a kerchief. "I apologize for taking you away from your duties, Reinhard. I'll be with you in a few minutes. The admiral and I have something else to discuss."

Heydrich lifted his billed cap replete with the *SS* Death'shead insignia, insolently dipped his chin to Canaris, bowed stiffly to his superior and took his leave.

When the door clicked shut, Himmler said, "*Der Führer* screams for action on this matter, Wilhelm."

"So do I," Canaris told him, and meant it.

"A dark gray sedan with two men in it," remarked Himmler, "leaves us with practically nothing to go on. Berlin is awash in dark gray sedans."

An unhappy grimace. "I caught only a glimpse of the car as it passed. No license tabs."

"So we've been told. Coming out of the blue as it did, it could well be a foreign attack. A military intelligence operation gone wrong, or . . . The British are the most obvious suspects."

"No, I don't believe so," countered the admiral. "No whiff of an SIS operation sullies this confrontation. I'm familiar with how MI6 operates, usually a quiet, under-the-rose sort of doings, and seldom if ever violent. Their assets are competent, but their approach is invariably subtle,

intellectual, very rarely blatant. They favor planting a mole here, an asset there assigned to gather information over tea and crumpets so to speak, not a weapons-free operation conducted in broad daylight, with blood spilt on a relatively busy street, and scads of civilians about. Such a happening might occur in a dire emergency, or some other highly important reason. I can't imagine so much as an unimportant reason for what took place during this incident."

Himmler revolved the statement. "I'm told your man hasn't regained consciousness."

"Sorry to say, the surgeon told me Kurt may never come around."

"Then we can learn nothing from him, and the eyewitnesses were all too far away to provide a general description of the suspects." Himmler pursed his lips, adjusted his rimless spectacles, and then removed them. He made a project of breathing on the lenses, polishing them with a tissue. "Losing hope is the height of defeatism, Wilhelm. Your man may respond to treatment long enough to tell us something."

"I sincerely hope so," said Canaris, who believed otherwise. After a second conversation with the physician in charge, he had judged Kurt's survivability to be close to zero.

* * *

No longer in the first or second flush of youth, the petite Asian woman was shown into the basement of a nondescript house on Berlin's outskirts. Descending the stair's bare wooden risers with precise, dainty steps, the steady gaze of her almond-shaped dark eyes fastened on the group of men waiting below, two of whom rose deferentially at sight of her. The third man in the basement was securely bound and gagged, his torso tied to a straight-backed chair.

His mature Sinic features stolid, the more elderly gentleman of the pair bowed low. "We bid you welcome, Madam Quon," he said in Mandarin.

The woman paused on the stair to award the speaker a piercing look. "You will not forget yourself again," she declared, shifting languages. "Only German may be used while we are here, in private as well as public. I was told you fully understood that."

"*Ihre Entschuldigung*," said the other by way of apology. "Was your journey arduous?"

"Long and tiring," replied the woman. Removing her wrap, she draped it over the back of a chair. "The Nipponese passport seemed adequate beforehand, but the customs agent looked me over in an altogether critical appraisal, and convinced himself I was indeed a misbegotten child of the island race. More than one shipboard passenger also eyed me curiously, as well as others aboard the train bullet from Bremen."

"You have arrived safely," the other said, "and for that we are sincerely grateful."

"What of him?" She indicated the gagged, half-naked man lashed to a chair.

The gentleman to whom her question was directed did not temper his indictment. "Lim's impulsive nature led him to perform a most rash and unconsidered act." He briefly described what had transpired in the Berlin street. "Frustration apparently got the better of him. He jumped out of our vehicle in a rage and opened fire on an automobile presumably carrying German security personnel which had purposely blocked our vehicle."

Madam Quon's sudden intake of breath gave away the depth of her alarm. "Not with an energy weapon, one devoutly prays."

"Oh, no; he carried one of the German machine-pistols we . . . appropriated. He will be eliminated if that is your desire."

The woman pondered. “Disposing of the remains might be problematic. We have a serious obligation to let nothing be learned of our presence, and most particularly to leave nothing behind. Send him back.”

“Now?”

“At once.”

The man called Lim sputtered unintelligibly through the gag. Before he could do more than make unintelligible noises, the gag was removed. The eager fingers of four hands pried apart his jaws. His moaning attempts to protest were ignored.

His false tooth switch actuated, the man vanished and the ropes formerly binding him drooped limply to the empty chair along with the gag.

“During the coming affair,” declared the woman in a tone few would care to argue with, “laser weapons will be deemed free only if one feels targeted, and then *only* if no witnesses are present. Should any of our people allow a hand-laser to be seen in this era, he will be ordered to immediately activate his own return. Is should hope you are both clear on that?”

The group of men in the basement, with one exception, nodded in unison.

“You,” she said, turning to a tall Caucasian standing apart from the others, “apparently disagree. I assume you are the Schweitzer.”

“At your service, Madam Quon.”

“Assigning me to replace the former team leadership was a last minute decision,” she said, continuing to appraise the other candidly. “I became exceptionally curious upon learning of your last minute recruitment. What could possibly drive you, a Swiss national, to volunteer to aid in the consummation of our hypercritical mission?”

“The deciding factors,” he said with what passed for a twinkle, “were undoubtedly my handsome, inconspicuous features, and of course my acquaintance with the odious German tongue.”

“You will henceforth refrain from repartee of any kind,” said Madam Quon. “You will speak only when spoken to, and respond in the manner of an adult. In answer to my question, did you either neglect to mention the recompense that has been contracted, or purposely forget to speak of it?”

He smiled. “Oh, that. It was merely a secondary reason, Madam Quon.”

“One devoutly hopes you will survive in order to spend your newfound treasure.”

“Oh, I shall in one way or another.” Despite her warning, the Swiss gentleman injected a second note of levity. “The trust established in my name is inviolate. Should misfortune overtake me — a truly dreadful notion — my significant other can look forward to a life of ease and comfort.”

“Only,” reminded the woman, “if our mission is successful, which is something you should keep in mind at all times. To put it bluntly, you were characterized as an adventurer, and not an entirely serious player. Can this be true?”

“Think of me as a serious adventurer,” he said light-heartedly, “who happens to be very much in accord with the prospect of what you and your team are here to accomplish.”

Tiring of the banter, the woman clapped her hands, suddenly all business. “Now then, where are we as of this moment, gentlemen? I take it the subject was successfully located.”

“We know where he is within a matter of blocks,” announced the older Asian gentleman who had first greeted her appearance. “Tracking the movements and activities of whichever German *Sicherheitsbüros* we accidentally collided with in Berlin was of course terminated after the unfortunate incident initiated by Lim. Rooftop observers as well as others have been stationed along both routes we have good reason to believe lead to the hideaway. The next time an unmarked *Sicherheitsbüro* auto enters the district, the destination will be pinpointed.”

“Have you learned why the subject was moved?”

“No, Madam Quon,” informed the other. “It apparently was not of his own volition.” He went on to describe how, with the boardinghouse under surveillance and the team prepared to move in, the stakeout had phoned in the news that a tall, well-dressed gentleman caller had arrived carrying a metal suitcase, and how shortly thereafter the target himself had rushed into the establishment. And then an ambulance had arrived and a pair of uniformed paramedics had taken away someone obviously quite ill.”

“Go on,” said Madam Quon, impatient due to the lengthy explanation.

“Early the following morning,” he concluded, “an auto arrived bearing a pair of presumed *Sicherheitsbüro* people, only one of whom entered the establishment. We thought it might be the target, but it was a false presumption. The pair of German security assets escorted him out of the house later, and drove off with him.”

“You failed to learn where he was taken?”

“At the time, I fear so. The destination has been narrowed to a matter of blocks.”

“Why wasn’t the car followed?”

“Our man tried, but he was alone, parked too far away. By the time he reached his vehicle, the auto carrying the target had lost itself in traffic.”

“Who was responsible for this sloppiness?”

“He who . . . Lim, the excitable gunman who is no longer with us.”

“I see.” Madam Quon sniffed in acute displeasure and reclaimed her wrap from the chair. “The journey was . . . tiresome. We shall sit down tomorrow, more fully discuss our prospective moves, and establish a firm action plan.”

“Mei Ling will show you to your room and make you comfortable, Madam Quon.”

“Rest well,” added the Swiss gentleman.

The searching, disdainful glance she awarded the “serious adventurer” also contained an unveiled nuance of suspicion.

Once the woman was safely back upstairs the derided object of her suspicion said, “Some specimen she is! I see why she’s nicknamed the Dragon Lady.”

“If you are prudent, sir,” cautioned the elderly Asian spokesman, “it might be wise to regard her in a more respectful way. Her beloved uncle happens to be the Golden One himself.”

The sudden sag of his expression made it plain that the “serious” Swiss adventurer had indeed been given something very serious to consider.

* * *

On vigil in the intensive care waiting room, Ulrich Meisinger was leafing through a dog-eared magazine when a nurse came in and summoned him. “Sir, you asked to be notified if the patient stirred. The doctor believes he may be regaining consciousness.”

Meisinger dropped the magazine. "Thank you, Sister." Quick steps took him down the corridor to Kurt's private room. Pushing his way through the extra-wide door, he found the patient looking as pale and immobile as ever, except that his eyes were open slits. An oxygen mask covered his mouth and nose. An intravenous tube inserted in his left forearm looped up to a bottle of clear solution suspended from the hook on a metal stand.

Meisinger bent closely over his team leader. "Kurt, can you hear me?"

The patient's slitted eyes rolled slowly toward the sound of the voice, but his gaze remained an unfocused, a blind stare fixed on infinity.

"Who attacked you, Kurt?"

There was no response.

"Who was the shooter? Did you get a look him?"

The patient's mouth worked beneath the oxygen mask. Meisinger lifted the mask, stretching the elastic band holding it in place, and bent close, his ear next to the patient's mouth. "Who did it, Kurt?"

A barely audible whisper.

"Again, Kurt."

This time the whispered response was equally tenuous, but perhaps a bit louder.

After a sharp intake of breath, Meisinger straightened abruptly. Kurt's eyes were again closed. Carefully replacing the oxygen mask, Meisinger turned to the nurse with a look of inquiry. She moved her head slowly from side to side in a subtle negative.

Meisinger hustled out of the private room and went to the nurses' station, seized the telephone and called headquarters. Ordering the duty officer to put him through at once to Canaris, and to break in if the admiral happened to be on the phone.

When Canaris came on the line, Meisinger told him Kurt had come around long enough to whisper a single word.

"What word?" demanded the admiral.

"Asian," said Meisinger. "I asked who the attacker was, who had shot him. Kurt whispered 'Asian'."

"Are you sure of it, Ulrich?"

"Positive."

"Get back here. I'll set the wheels in motion. If need be, we'll pull in for questioning every person in Germany who so much as remotely resembles an Asian or Eurasian."

"On my way." Meisinger caged the telephone and headed for the elevator.

* * *

Wasting not a second, Canaris put through an urgent call to Himmler, and then a second call to a trusted executive he considered one of few responsible higher-ups in the city's police organization. Within hours Berlin was fully mobilized, and the word quickly spread to authorities throughout Germany. Members of the police, Reich Main Security Forces and *Abwehr* flooded the streets and began combing the capital's boulevards alleys, byways and public transportation systems in a concerted, all-out search for anyone and everyone of Asian or Eurasian extraction. Nor were the embassies, restaurants, hotels, transit stations, parks and other miscellaneous locales and establishments overlooked.

Dozens of ethnic Asian men and women, in addition to a doubtful few who happened to own other than classic Caucasian features which made them moderately conspicuous in a crowd, were rounded up. In an expensive *Wilhelmstrasse* restaurant the Gestapo embarrassed itself by arresting all four members of a Nipponese delegation as well as the Japanese charges d'affaire in residence who was wining and dining the visiting VIPs. Informed of the gauche presumption demonstrated by his minions, Reinhard Heydrich flew into a classic rage. Voicing endless apologies, he took it upon himself to soothe those offended and personally escorted the group back to the Japanese Embassy.

In a mixed residential district, a senior Gestapo asset armed with binoculars spotted a man he thought might have Asiatic features crouched at the parapet on the roof of an apartment building. He and his men charged up three flights of stairs and tore open a door leading to the roof. The suspect was seen to dodge around behind the small shed housing the egress door, but when the Gestapo team converged from both directions, weapons drawn, the suspected Asian was nowhere to be seen.

The senior agent in charge rushed to the parapet and looked down. "Gone," he said in amazement. "He couldn't have jumped or he'd be splattered all over the walkway down there. But if not, where the hell did he go?"

His question was never answered.

* * *

Looking distraught, Madam Quon ruminated before saying in German, "Should the media reports be halfway accurate, every corner of the city is being scoured. The shuttered second-floor windows of the apartment house, and the inferred *Sicherheitsbüro* agents posted outside the building tend to confirm the target's whereabouts. Learning where he's being held is of almost no use, however. We dare not make a move, not for the moment. Unfortunately, it might be equally risky to sit here biding our time, waiting for the frenzied hunt to die down."

After an interlude of pregnant silence, the now-truly serious Swiss adventurer spoke up. "There may be a way, Madam Quon."

"I will listen to no wild schemes," she warned.

Nonplused, the serious Swiss gentleman explained at length what he had in mind.

Displaying sudden interest, Madam Quon cogitated. "A suitable van is parked here in the garage," she mused, her mind working overtime. "Would it suffice, rather than going out to buy or rent an ambulance as you suggested?"

"I don't see why not," countered the serious Swiss gentleman. "In that case, all we'll need are half a dozen white lab smocks, surgical masks, plus miscellaneous medical trappings, stage dressing to make med team look authentic. I thought of it because . . . Well, the Germans provided a template by carting someone away in an ambulance from that house where the target was said to be. I doubt if anyone will question an emergency team going about its business."

Her brow wrinkled, Madam Quon said, "Damn Lim's impetuosity! He should have been stopped." She turned to the middle-aged Asian gentleman. "He was your responsibility."

"Lim flung open the vehicle's door," the other said defensively, "then jumped out without a word, weapon in hand, and started firing."

Madam Quon shook her head as if to dispel the image. Obviously on the fence, she tried to judge how practical the contemplated action might be. "Waiting for the search to conclude

could easily be a more fatal course than conducting the venture now, when the element of surprise is distinctly in our favor. Then too, if the subject is moved again we may have to begin searching for him all over again. How many of us are left?"

"Six here in the house, a seventh on rooftop vigil across the street from the apartment house, but for whatever reason he hasn't been heard from recently."

Madam Quon made up her mind. "To me seven is overkill. All but four," she directed, "are to activate immediate returns. As the sole Caucasian among us," she told the serious Swiss gentleman, only you can go into the street and not attract attention."

"True."

"Go now," she said, speaking to him less harshly than before. "Have Mei Ling look up the nearest medical supply store. Used the sedan; several bullet holes in the body and door have been repaired, and it was repainted. Buy the smocks, masks, and a physician's black bag for yourself, plus a stethoscope and whatever other paraphernalia you believe needed."

"Fine," he said. "I have one additional suggestion, Madam Quon. We'll need every possible advantage to pull it off, so I insist that you free our energy weapons for the operation."

Looking glum, Madam Quon revolved the ramifications of the stated condition. "You," she said, "are elected to lead the operation by default. Since our choices are severely limited, so be it. In this singular instance, all weapons will be free if and when you become convinced the situation warrants extreme measures, but *only* then. Is that clear?"

"Understood."

"When you arrive, in my name order the roof lookout to activate his return at once."

A bold grin in evidence, the other said, "Madam Quon, you may now refer to me as a seriously adventurous Swiss Doctor."

The Dragon Lady's lip curled, but her expression did not change.

* * *

The white van rolled up fast, braked to a halt with a faint screech of tires and double-parked in the middle of the street. Wearing a suit and tie, the "doctor" signaled his team, a quartet of white-smocked attendants with surgical masks covering their mouths and noses, billed caps pulled down screening their eyes, to exit from the van's rear doors.

Alarmed, the *Abwehr* agent on street duty hurriedly got out of his car and trotted to intercept them. "What are you doing?" he demanded, his right hand slipping to the weapon in his shoulder holster.

"Have you," asked the "Doctor" in fluent German, "recently visited the basement of this apartment house?" Hurriedly slipping a surgical mask over his own mouth and nose, he seized the black physician's valise from the seat, and slammed the driver's door.

"Basement . . ? No, I don't live here."

"Have you or anyone else noticed any rats in the building?"

"Rats . . ?"

"After phoning from this address," explained the "doctor" with a show of impatience, "a man was brought into the emergency ward who exhibited plague symptoms of Bubonic plague. Now stop wasting my time. I you don't live here, what're you doing here?"

The *Abwehr* man explained that he worked in the apartment building off and on.

The “doctor” beckoned imperiously. “Come to the rear of the van; it will take only a few seconds to see if you’ve been infected.” After a hasty survey of the all but traffickless street, he removed a small canister from his satchel, lifted it, held his breath and depressed a stud at the top. An aerosol spray of concentrated psychoactive medication took the *Abwehr* agent full in the face. He made a feeble attempt to draw his weapon, but was hindered by the “doctor” until he slumping backward loose-limbed, and was caught by a pair of white-smocked Asians who ungently shoved him headfirst into the van and closed the double-doors.

“If anyone is posted downstairs, don’t waste time, just take care of him,” ordered the “doctor,” his eyes sweeping the rooftop expanse of the building directly across the street. The purported stakeout was nowhere to be seen.

The *Abwehr* agent posted in the lobby had no chance to say anything when the “doctor” rushed inside, announced himself and breathlessly retold the story of suspected plague in the basement. The agent opened his mouth, but whatever he’d intended to say never got past his lips. Another “attendant” wearing a surgical mask sapped him hard, helped a second “medic” lift the limp victim and deposit him on the floor behind a sofa.

“Upstairs, and be quick! If anyone interferes, say nothing. Let me handle it.”

The “doctor” and his team arrived in the second floor hallway just as a fluffy-haired older woman carrying a Dachshund and a leash was preparing to descend the stair.

“Medical emergency!” The “doctor,” his voice muffled by the surgical mask, added, “Nothing to worry about. Best if you go back inside your apartment until the patient has been taken away. He may not be highly contagious, but there’s no way to tell.”

The woman stared for an instant at the surgical masks worn by all the “medics.” She turned and scurried back toward her apartment, the dog in her arms.

A pair of *Abwehr* agents lolling in the suite’s living room were given even less chance than their associates. Two men in the hallway put their shoulders down and, side by side, made a concerted bull rush. Their combined impetus all but ripped the door from its hinges.

Before either *Abwehr* asset could do more than turn toward the source of the noise, pencil beams of laser fire scythed them, chopping the nearest from shoulder to groin.

In the bedroom, James came awake with a start and sat up in bed, alarmed by the noise of the parlor door crashing in, followed immediately by odd, sizzling sounds. In the act of clambering out of bed, he froze when the bedroom door burst open and four individuals in white smocks, their features obscured by surgical masks rushed in to confront him. What he took to be a physician followed behind them carrying a medical valise. A faint melange of ozone and burnt flesh drifted inside along with the intruders.

“Who are you?” demanded James.

“Plague is suspected in the building, sir. All residents are being inoculated and quarantined.”

“That’s, uh . . . I’m not a resident.” James left the bed, backed away defensively.

The “doctor” ignored his objection, withdrew a hypodermic syringe from the black satchel, broke the seal of an ampule and filled the syringe, and squirted a few drops of clear fluid in the air to clear the tube of air bubbles.

Asked to pull up his pajama sleeve and bare his arm, James backed away farther. “What if I don’t want to be inoculated?”

“The health department considers it mandatory, sir.”

Two men wearing gauze masks seized James; a third unbuttoned his pajama top, bared his left arm, and used both hands to take him by the wrist. He struggled to no avail, then stood quietly, head cocked, watching the needle enter the flesh of his shoulder’s deltoid muscle.

Soon the bedroom and everyone in it grew fuzzy and indistinct. The last thing he remembered was how strange the doctor looked with only a swimming white blob where his face should have been.

* * *

Someone gently slapped his cheek on one side, and then the other. Between slaps, he felt himself being rocked by rough hands.

James opened his eyes, then closed them tightly, blinded by a naked light bulb dangling on a frayed cord from a mottled, cobwebbed ceiling rafter. “Where am I?” he mumbled, opening his eyes a slit.

A woman with dark, almond-shaped eyes bent to observe him closely. “Still in Berlin, if it matters,” she said in precisely enunciated schoolbook German. “But not for long. I had you awakened in order to say farewell, and to thank you for your cooperation.”

“I don’t . . .” he said groggily. “What . . . cooperation . . . ? What do you mean? Who are you?”

“It is of no consequence, Herr Steyr, or Herr Silverthorne, or however you wish to be addressed. Under heavy medication you have already informed us of the basics. Whatever else is left to tell will be taken care of later. Now we have work to do, and you can stay no longer.”

Lying helpless on a rumpled cot, James tried to sit up. It was then that he learned about about the plastic restraints pinioning his torso, arms and legs.

A baritone voice spoke from somewhere behind the woman. “We really must be on our way, Madam Quon. All is in readiness. Mei Ling left the van running in the garage.”

Looking pleased with herself despite being expressionless, the woman Asian woman said, “*Auf Wiedersehen!*”

Brusque fingers pried Silverthorne’s jaws apart. Languidly, with the underwater quality of a dream, he tried to lift his hands and fend off the assailant. The restraints defeated his effort, and fingers closed over the false molar, twisted sharply, pressed down hard.

The convulsive, visceral-crawling sensation of temporal transition surged through him. Instantly he was falling through space, struck and rebounded, bounced twice more on a resilient surface, then sprawled full length on deep foam-pads covering the familiar center of the reception chamber.

Groggy, he lifted his head and looked all around at the Big Room, its recesses lost in Stygian gloom. A vast natural cavern roofed and floored in literally acres of limestone, he could barely make out the dim, distant, bottom-lighted “Lions Tail” stalactite, and the illuminated collection of limestone “icicles” called “The Chandelier” pendant from the jagged ceiling, or beyond the enormous stalagmite known as the “Rock of Ages.”

He managed to sit up stiffly, striving to reorient himself in time as well as space, and began kneading his aching temples.

Conscious of the alarm klaxon’s distant honking somewhere in the surrounding darkness, a sound soon accompanied by the faint pounding of running footsteps. A half-dozen armed men

in baggy tan uniforms appeared and halted, standing poised in a line abreast dozens of meters away at the edge of the foram matting. A pudgy, balding individual no longer young pushed his way thorough the row of guards, stepped up on the padding and gingerly approached cautiously, moving slowly across the matting to retain his balance. Eyes narrowed, he regarded Silverthorne with unveiled skepticism, and said something tentative in what might have been Russian.

James shook his head.

The pudgy man snorted a barely audible profanity, and switched to German. “Don’t tell me another run-for-your-life Nazi time-traveler has fallen into our midst. Did the entire German population seek to escape disaster in this craven, last-ditch manner?”

“I’m . . . American,” muttered James.

The pudgy man hooted laughter. Turning to the guards, he disdainfully described the new arrival as, “*Americanetz!*”

One or two guards chuckled, the others merely grinned.

“Sorry to inform you, sir, but I am afraid no such animals as Americans have existed for . . .” The man broke off, moved a few steps closer on the padding, where bent and peered down at James intently. “One moment,” he said. “By any chance do I happen to be speaking to a gentleman named Steyr?”

“It’s a name . . . I once used, but —”

“Well, wonder of wonders!” exclaimed the other, clapping his hands loudly. “We were led to believe you were Austrian, Herr Steyr, not American. Hmmm-m, no matter. Permit me to issue a hearty welcome to the Sino-Soviet Peoples Republic. Our historical technicians often speculate about whether, or in fact *if* you might turn up.” He motioned abruptly to the guards.

Marched through the Big Room to a passageway, James was thrust into a claustrophobic limestone cell containing a rude bunk suspended from the jackhammer-scored wall by chains. An integral, one-piece stainless steel washbasin and commode, and absolutely nothing else, took up very little floor space of rough-textured limestone. An lock clicked when the steel-barred door closed with a clang. The footfalls of four tan-uniformed guards echoed hollowly, diminishing until only a thick, unnatural stillness prevailed.

Sinking down on the edge of the bunk, James clapped his hands over his ears to drown the sterile subterranean silence that had probably existed for only few million years. His mind writhed and seethed and gyrated until he came to a full circle, overcome by a truly horrifying realization of what had taken place. It was like looking into a hall of mirrors, where one is able to see only one’s own multiple, grossly distorted reflection stretching toward infinity.

After a time he began to laugh hysterically. Rocking backward on the thin mattress, he thumped his head painfully against naked, unyielding limestone. Holding his sides, he roared with laughter until tears streamed down his cheeks.

What had Chancellor Kästner’s warned about back there in vanished *Deutsches Weltreich-Jahr 142*? “The reflexive dangers of promiscuous time travel would be immense,” or words to that effect.

Oh, God, immense! At least as large, if not larger, than the universe itself. Oh, if the chancellor had only known!

Struggling for breath, he laughed uncontrollably at the futile idiocy of it all. It was one of the last times in his life he ever laughed.

Epilogue

Though far from certain, James thought he detected faint, shuffling footfalls approaching his cell. Still clad in the soiled, ill-fitting gray jumpsuit he had found neatly folded on the bunk in his cell weeks or was it months earlier, he apprehensively slid his legs off the edge of the narrow bunk and gained his feet shod in the cheap plastic sandals that passed for footwear. Keeping his eyes subserviently lowered in the way he had been harshly and painfully reminded to do, it did not feel like mealtime, but then who could tell? There was no way of knowing whether it was night or day aboveground, let alone any means of guessing the hour.

Surprised to hear the electronic lock click open, he grew uneasy when unseen hands swung wide the steel-barred door. A taser-armed guard wheeled into his cell a meal cart of a type he had never before seen, on it a compartmented plastic tray laden with the same weary staples: boiled rice, limp stir-fried vegetables, a stoneware mug of lukewarm tea, and two crumbly lumps masquerading as rice cakes.

The guard took his time retreating and closing the cell door.

When James dared to look up, an emaciated, white-haired Asian gentleman stood outside peering at him with the expressionless intensity of a naturalist evaluating a hitherto unknown anthropoid specimen. Clad in a flowing robe of pale gold gathered at waist by what looked like a twisted skein of golden rope, his feet in open-toed golden slippers, the elderly gentleman shook hands with himself and rattled a phrase in staccato Mandarin.

A much younger man with careworn Sinitic features came to stand at the elder's shoulder. "The Golden One," he told James in near-flawless German, "wishes you to know your stay with us has come to an end."

A bitter end, thought Silverthorne, who had not only longed for his imprisonment to end, but had *prayed* for it to be over. Perversely glad to hear it would no longer be necessary to stare for interminable weeks, endless months or however long it had been at the jackhammer-scored walls of his cell, he respectfully lowered his gaze. "May I humbly inquire who it is I have to thank for my deliverance?"

"The Golden One," informed the interpreter, "bears a truly celestial title it would not benefit you in any way to learn. You have The Golden One's permission to think of him as a commissar — an archaic term, yet in a distantly obscure way somewhat appropriate."

"Please tell the Golden One I deeply appreciate his consideration, and will gratefully accept the solace of oblivion."

The interpreter spoke to The Golden One, apparently relaying Silverthorne's words. The elder's pale ascetic features creased in a faint shadow smile.

"Nothing quite so barbaric as oblivion awaits you," assured the interpreter, not bothering to conceal his own amusement. "In parting, The Golden One wishes you to know that he and his peers mean to repay their indebtedness for the difficult task you strove so mightily to conclude in opposition to the global imperialists, yet through no fault of your own failed accomplish. The Golden One hopes you will enjoy this, your final meal as our guest."

James could not resist casting a distasteful glance at the meal tray. Oozing sarcasm, he said, "Please kindly Tell the Golden One I am not hungry at the moment, but convey my gratitude for this magnificent display of hospitality."

The interpreter conferred briefly with the Golden One before turning to James, saying with mock seriousness, "Had you come as a party of four, servings of Egg Drop Soup, Szechuan lamb, Shitake mushrooms and water chestnuts would have graced your last supper with us."

The Golden One gargled asthmatic laughter, abandoning himself to wizened hilarity.

"Now that everything there was to be learned concerning your retrotemporal escapade has been catalogued and filed away for the benefit of posterity," the interpreter said, "The Golden One wishes to bid you farewell."

With that, the aged dignitary dipped his head slightly, and turned around. His golden slippers produced scuffing sounds in the rough limestone corridor, growing fainter. He was trailed at a respectful two paces by the interpreter.

A guard entered the cell, pointed wordlessly at the food tray and mouthed eating gestures. He did not react to a negative head shake except to take Silverthorne's arm and escort him out of the cell. With a pair of guards preceding him, and two following, he and the quartet surrounding him formed a moving square marching along the passageway to a bank of elevators that on some other timeline had brought tourists into Carlsbad Caverns from the natural entrance.

The elevator compartment grounded with a slight jar. James was conducted through a jagged, arched entrance into the Big Room's familiar expanse, where on four previous occasions, upon returning from one retrotemporal junket or another, he had reappeared in the midair nexus of fixes defining three-dimensional spacetime orientation established with ultimate precision.

They're sending me back! The dreaded thought seared him.

But back to . . . when, and nearly as importantly, to where? Surely not the War Years.

A guard gestured impatiently, urging him to climb the steps of a wooden framework that supported a circular platform constructed of planks elevated two meters or so above the contiguous foam-filled mats covering the center of the Big Room's vast floor.

Given no choice, he ascended to the platform as if a headsman or guillotine awaited him at the top, turned slowly around in anticipation of what he knew would come next. The escorting guards, barely visible in the dense gloom enveloping the cavern's far reaches, had retreated a distance.

An instant later, the gut-wrenching sensation of retrotemporal transition swept through him like a mildly nauseating tsunami.

Falling through space, his arms windmilling in a hopeless fight for balance, he plunged into a row of dense, vinous growths that scratched his face and arms, landing heavily, clumsily, bruising his left shoulder and hip. Gasping for air, his diaphragm partially collapsed by the impact, he rolled over on his back, massaged his pain racked shoulder, breathing raggedly, and stared up into the empty, cloudless sky.

After a moment he struggled to sit up, blinking repeatedly, knuckling his eyes against the unaccustomed glare of either early morning or late afternoon. Less than a meter from the end of his nose, clusters of dusty green grapes looked ripe for picking.

Slowly, with considerable effort, he got his feet under him and came erect.

His heart skipped a beat.

Below the terraced vineyards of *Weinbergterasse*, an ornate, gilded carriage drawn by a pair of matched clip-clopping grays approached the foot of the long flight of steps leading up to the entrance of *Schloss Sanssouci*. Standing in front of a pair of bewigged, liveried servants rigidly erect behind him at the base of the steps, a stooped figure clad in a faded military uniform leaned on a silver-handled walking stick, preparing to greet the personages in the carriage.

His legs turned to jelly, James sobbed unashamedly and sagged down among the vines.