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**Ritchie Girl**

Novel

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with a short explanatory interlude

## **MAE WEST**

She would never forget that wave. Paula could feel it rolling towards them even before the lurching bow of the ship rammed headlong into it; a vast mass of soulless elemental power, forged purely for the moment when it made the steel of the U.S.S. Coleman quake and grind, turning the lower deck into a grandstand spectacle of contorted faces.

She stared into the eyes of Violet on the berth above – wondered, *how is that possible* – and realised that she was lying on the floor. Violet’s mouth gaped open for a scream, silently, because the hammering of Paula’s heart drowned out everything else. Chubby Violet, same age, not yet thirty, whose grandparents and aunt had waved her off so lovingly at the pier in New Jersey that Paula, with not a soul to bid her farewell, had felt a pang of envy.

In that moment, as the ship’s hull clanged like a giant bell struck by King Kong and a second wave, now one of pure fear, raced through the six hundred people stacked up in three layers, Violet’s wide gaping mouth filled Paula’s entire field of vision.

It felt as if she were suspended in mid-air, the levitating lady in a conjuring trick of the sea. Paula tried to hold on to a strut, reached out and grasped at empty space. Arms flailing, she fell against a heating pipe.

Something struck her. Everything went pitch black, then the two red lamps flickered, went out, flickered up again. Men’s faces flashed up in front of Paula. Crazy expressions, a stark white fist gripping the shaft of a bayonet. Not so long ago, these soldiers had been nonchalantly

stood by the railing while the ship took on coal in Gibraltar, where the harbour was black with British war vessels. With fags coolly hanging between their lips, they had wolf-whistled any passing girl.

But now, after three days of storm and the continuous fear of German U-boats, Paula saw the same question in all their eyes. The same question that was hanging over her like a dark cloud. Would they ever arrive in this war that most of them only knew from *The March of Time*, or would they die down here, in this prison that teemed with vermin and stank of diesel, oil, damp clothing and vomit.

When she woke with a start, from a sleep akin to unconsciousness, it was all over. Paula didn't know whether it was day or night. The ship swayed gently. Only the pounding of the engines told her that they were underway. Violet, who on leaving Camp Ritchie had resolutely declared there was no way she would go to war without make-up, was carefully redoing her lipstick. But her lustreless eyes were a reminder of the hellish past few days.

Paula ventured up on deck for the first time in ages. From the accommodation ladder she glanced into the second quarter, another six hundred, equally listless. Outside, the night was inky black. Soldiers leant against the railing. They all had *Mae Wests* around their necks, the life jackets no one was allowed to take off, not even for sleeping. The men were whispering, still crushed from endless days of praying.

The stars glowed bright like luminescent blobs, but there was no land in sight. Paula drew the clear salty air down into her lungs to wash away the taste of fear. She could feel the men's eyes on her. She and the other members of the Women's Army Corps aboard ship were probably the last American women these soldiers would clap eyes on for a long time to come. She understood this. But she needed to be alone right now. She longed to be rid of the repulsive smell that clung to her, didn't have the energy to hide her trembling behind banter.

Once again, she wondered where they were being taken to. Only the higher officers knew the destination, a mere First Sergeant like her could merely speculate. The last time she'd been on deck they were heading east; that could mean anything or nothing. Perhaps Malta, a sunny posting at the area headquarters that coordinated the American-British operations in the Mediterranean.

Or Sicily, where the war was long over.

Greece, if she was unlucky. From what Paula had heard in Camp Ritchie, the Brits there were fighting against communist partisans. The Allies exchanged their personnel according to requirements, nobody was asked for a wish list.

Paula looked up at the sky. She searched for the polar star, wondering which one it might be. Violet would know. In Ritchie, the men were trained in weather observations and Violet had been in charge of the teaching materials. Paula only knew her fleetingly, even though they had shared the same quarters for a while. She knew that Violet was from Texas and that her husband Dexter was in the Pacific with the bombers. When the time had come for Dexter to leave, Violet had seen him off at the bus stop in Galveston. Still waving, she was approached by a friendly woman dressed in the uniform of the Women's Army Corps. She had asked Violet if she wanted to help bring her husband back as quickly as possible. Violet had nodded and was promptly invited to provide her signature. She thought it was some kind of petition, but was soon put right when she found herself in Ritchie not long after.

"I was still lucky though," she explained after recounting the tale. "I'd only been here a week when hurricane *Surprise* paid a visit to Galveston and sent our house for a dip in the West Bay. Just imagine if I'd been in it. I can't even swim." She was one of those people who didn't spend too much time pondering the merry dance that life could lead you. Aboard the ship, Violet and Paula were the only typists; the other women belonged to the Army Nurse Corps, the *GI Nightingales*. Many of them would remain on the Coleman for the return journey, to care for the wounded due to be taken aboard in the destination harbour. The others would be sent to the front, no doubt.

Paula thought of Sam, her closest friend in Ritchie. How had he fared? She had received a letter from him at the end of November; lines sent in the hope that they would get through censorship. Ritchie had its own office for this, and Sam couldn't know that Paula had since been placed there, couldn't know that she had become one of the people who blacked out everything in the field post that might indicate the deployment area and the situation there. Her superiors believed that women had an intuitive flair for discovering hidden messages in the letters.

*As if snooping was in our blood*, Paula had thought.

But she couldn't deny that she was good at it. And Sam had in fact provided a hidden clue when he wrote that *the food is surprisingly good, almost like on that day in the camp when they gave the presentation on sexual health and we laughed so much*. This had told Paula that Sam was in France, for on the evening in question their new cook, a Frenchman, had served up a cracking cassoulet. The fellow had previously been head chef at the Waldorf Astoria and for that one hour, Ritchie was transformed into an almost habitable place.

Her task in the censoring office had just been a small part of Paula's work. She was fluent in French and German, so predominantly translated news from the French Résistance as well

as radio messages from other resistance groups such as the Rote Kapelle. It was the women in Ritchie whose husbands were fighting in the war that were hardest hit by the censoring of the post. Paula remembered many a bad night lying awake, wondering whether she had the right to keep from them how their loved ones were faring. These were the same women she was tasked with speaking to when their reply letters weren't patriotic enough. She had to drum into them not to mention any worries, however pressing they may be. Never to complain or burden their men with any sorrows, and instead to emphasize that all was well on the home front.

She had found herself unable to look these women in the eyes. Alice, whose father-in-law was ill with cancer. Florence, whose son had been ordered to appear in court over the theft of a laughable two dollars. Marjorie who'd had a miscarriage. There were many more. Some had despised Paula. And it was their right. At some stage Paula had started to decide for herself what she blacked out and what she didn't. But it made no difference to her dreams.

The Coleman rocked gently on the swell; like a child's cradle made solely to ease twelve hundred young people into a carefree sleep. On the blacked-out ship, the stars were the only source of light. Paula wrapped her arms around her, she felt cold despite the warm breeze.

As she went back below deck, she heard a GI say to another: "I bet it's gonna be Northern Italy. The Nazis have turned the Alps into a damn fortress and we're going to be thrown to the wolves there."

Down in the belly of the ship, time was at a loose end, it drifted and dawdled. As morning came, the women of the Army Nurse Corps cleaned the quarters with curd soap until all traces of the past few days were gone, apart from the sour smell. Paula joined in, glad to have something to do, no matter how revolting it was. None of the men lifted a finger. They would have sooner slipped on their own vomit than pick up a scrubber. With stoic expressions they read comics and played cards, as if to say: *That's women's work. You get an easy job at the base, while we risk our lives for you.*

There was another muster call for delousing, the third since New Jersey. Armed with some sort of oversized syringe, a corporal squeezed disinfectant into the collar of the blouse, into the sleeves, boots and finally the skirt hem. Afterwards, the itching was worse than before.

Paula couldn't understand that many were able to eat again. For her, every mouthful was a battle. But at least the few bites she managed to force down stayed there. It was dimly hot and airless below. With so many people in such a tight space, it was noisier than Times Square and Paula envied the men who went about in their vests, or not even that sometimes.

Every breath above deck was something to be thankful for. Still nothing but water. Seagulls scuffled over waste in the stern eddies, occasionally a droning was heard in the sky beyond the horizon. Probably scout planes, but not German ones. The Allies had long gained air supremacy, as they'd announced over the loudspeakers to strengthen morale.

Once, in the middle of the night, she heard Violet's quiet voice above her: "Are you awake?"

"Yes."

Violet climbed down and sat beside Paula. Her eyes glistened, she'd been crying. "You worked in the mail room, didn't you," she whispered. "Did it ever happen that letters weren't passed on to us? I mean, not even with lines blacked out?" Paula was still working on her answer when Violet blurted out: "I wrote to Dexter every week, but it's nearly six months since he last replied. And I don't know whether ... whether ..."

"If something had happened to him, you would have certainly been told," Paula reassured her. "That kind of information is never held back."

"That's not what I mean," Violet fretted. "He's stationed on Hawaii. I saw some footage once, part of a cinema newsreel. It all looked very informal there. The women in the film were ..." She sobbed. "I know I'm no beauty. In fact, I never really understood why Dexter courted me."

Paula put on a firm voice. "We were instructed to be especially strict with mail from Hawaii, because there are so many Japanese there," she whispered. "We had to mull over every sentence five times. In some letters, nearly everything was blacked out in the end, and the captain would say: 'We'll have to let that one disappear, otherwise his wife will think he wrote God knows what.'"

Violet's eyes were brimming with tears. "Really?"

"That's just between you and me," Paula murmured. "I'm not supposed to tell you that."

At first it felt wrong to lie, but when she saw the relief in Violet's face, Paula added: "I can even remember a long letter from Dexter. He loves you and misses you."

No matter how things stood with their marriage, if you didn't have something to hold on to in this war, you'd get sucked into the void. She was certain of that. And also that this would be the case for her.

## **PURPLE HEART VALLEY**

It was early morning when they were woken by the bellowing of the beefy master sergeant. "Everyone out! Grab your field kit! Women first!"

With no time to smarten themselves up, they staggered up on deck as they were. A British squadron thundered across the grey sky above them, so low that Paula could see the blue exhaust fumes. They were anchored a quarter mile outside a port, or what had once been a port. At first, Paula thought she saw steel barriers protruding from the basin. Then she realised they were the lacerated superstructures of burnt-out hulls, U-boat towers. A huge aircraft carrier blocked the entry, sunk into the water almost to deck level. Italy's colours gleamed on the command bridge, above them stood *Aquila*.

She addressed a major. "Excuse me, sir. Where are we?"

"Genoa."

Bearded men stood on fishing boats and greeted them with rattling salvos from their machine guns. Dressed in rakish bandit garb and red neckerchiefs, they raised their fists and laughed. It was oppressively humid, but one of them, small and bony like Stan Laurel, was wearing a fur hat; as if he'd just arrived from Stalingrad. The skeletons of cranes hung from the quaysides, half submerged in the water, their steel buckled by a tremendous heat. Behind them, Paula saw mountains of rubble, former houses and factories. Smoke columns rose on the horizon.

It was the same smell as back then, on the day of the big fire, when her portrait turned to ashes.

"Is this scrap heap from us?" she heard an officer ask another.

"No, that's down to the Tommies. The carrier was blown up by the Jerrys before they scarpered three days ago."

Orders burst forth from the loudspeakers: "Leave a passage clear by the sea ladder! Women in the first row!"

Paula saw barges zigzagging their way towards the Coleman, so heavily loaded they would have taken on water in a larger swell. She recognised American uniforms. Men were hanging over the bow, cautiously issuing directions.

"The port is mined," a guy behind her murmured.

The first barge was tied up alongside and the wounded were heaved on board with the winches. They were conscious but impassive. When they were carried past the women, Paula understood why the Nurse Corps had been ordered to form the first row. These men needed to see a female being, a friendly face. So she joined the others as they smiled and made witty remarks. "Don't tell me you're married ... We'll have you back on your feet in no time ... Hey, how about you buy me a drink this evening ... Hello, big boy, you must be Errol Flynn's brother."

The last one was barely more than a child, both hands amputated, the dressings across the stumps a deep black. She felt her heart constrict as she said: "Don't tell me you're going home because of a little scratch like that?"

Something had caused the line of medical orderlies to grind to a halt and the boy looked up at Paula. His left eye was so gummed up that he couldn't open it. There was no blood in his sunken lips. She bent down to him and kissed his icy forehead. He whispered something.

Paula put her ear right up to his mouth.

"Tell my fiancée."

She felt ashamed that she was shaking, felt ashamed that she could wipe away her tears, that she had equated a laughable storm with the war. Violet gave her a nudge. They had been ordered to board one of the barges. With grunted instructions the mine spotter dictated the course as the women silently covered on their kit bags shoulder to shoulder. Islands of yellow foam and oil floated on the water, between them animal carcasses, charred Bakelite, shreds of uniforms, every now and then a corpse.

As they approached the partisans' boats, Paula heard the battle chant they were belting out. It was a snappy tune, but she found herself thinking of a sad Sinatra song, the name of which she couldn't remember. *The loveliest day, the brightest sun is like a night without a star. These are the lonely, gloomy hours like only in love or at war.* The men waved and blew the women kisses. Paula wanted to smile, but the corners of her mouth wouldn't move.

"Where do you think we'll end up?" Violet whispered.

Paula shrugged her shoulders, she didn't care.

On the pier, hundreds of American soldiers sat on their kit bags, waiting to be taken aboard the Coleman. Their faces were grey and sunken, they looked as if they'd fall over if asked to stand.

Paula disembarked. There wasn't a single intact piece of wood or metal on land. No stone that hadn't been raked with bursts of machine gun fire. Even the sky hung in shreds. On a German military truck, corpses lay stacked like timber, all of them naked, some of them women. Swarms of flies had settled on the bodies. Paula retched. She had to look away and hold a handkerchief to her nose.

The master sergeant yelled: "Nurse Corps to me!"

As the others lined up in file, Paula and Violet stood there feeling lost, unsure of where to go. Then an army Jeep stopped beside them and a bullish GI jumped out. He had his sleeves rolled up; his face looked like hewn from dark clay.

"Is one of you Paula Bloom?" he asked.

“I am.”

“Harvey Davis, ma’am. I have orders to collect you.” He unceremoniously grabbed her duffle bag and threw it onto the rear bench of the Jeep.

“Tell me where we’re going first,” Paula demanded.

Davis crossed his arms. He may have been a simple GI, a dogface, but he wasn’t going to take orders from a woman, even if she’d been a colonel.

“Go on,” Violet told her. “And write to me some time.”

They hugged. Strangers, who knew each other better than they knew anyone else in this country. As they drove off, Paula turned round once more. She saw Violet wave, suddenly no longer chubby, but small and delicate.

For half an hour or more, they criss-crossed the city’s harbour area. Davis was trying to pick a path on roads often so hemmed in by rubble that the Jeep could hardly fit through and its sides would scrape against stones and concrete and rusty iron girders. Occasionally, she saw an arm protrude from the ruins, or a leg. Bleached naked bones. Davis often had to stop because the street was completely blocked. There were barely any people. The few they saw were crawling around in the devastation, picking through rubbish, filth and scrap, looking for something or other. Once, they came across a Madonna lying headless in the middle of the road as if it had fallen from the sky.

Davis slammed his foot on the brakes. In front of them, a clamouring mob was pushing its way out of the shell of a warehouse. They had seized a load of useless stuff – electric irons, tableware, cleaning buckets, brooms. An emaciated man pushed over an old woman and tried to twist a duster out of her hands. When she defended her catch, whimpering but determined, he repeatedly kicked her in the head until he had hold of the utensil. He ran off, stopped, stared at it, then chucked it away. The mob uttered cries of triumph that sounded like wails of despair. Some of them dropped their conquests and stormed towards the Jeep with their fists clenched. Davis bared his yellow teeth. He went into reverse, performed a breakneck turn and sped off. His revolver stayed out until the shouts had died away. Paula realised her hands were hurting. She had dug her nails into her palms so hard they’d drawn blood.

Then, finally, the city lay behind them. The winding country road was undamaged, save for the deep gouges left by tank treads. Villages clung to the slopes amid withered vineyards. When Paula glanced back, she saw the grey sea, war ships dotting the horizon. A stream of nonsensical thoughts raced through her mind. She wondered whether Albert Einstein had ever been to Italy; whether picnicking on the lawn in front of the White House was still permitted; where Otto Dix



might be right now; and that as a woman she would not have to be treated in accordance with the Hague Convention if she was taken prisoner.

Paula noticed Davis staring at her legs and smoothed out her skirt. "Are you enjoying the view, soldier?"

He grinned, but more from insecurity.

"Where did the wounded come from that are being taken aboard in Genoa?" she asked.

"From the 34th."

Three words. As if a single more would be excessive.

"Are you afraid I might find you too talkative?"

"We were the first to be sent to England, in May 1942," he said by way of reply. "They took us to Algiers. There, the Vichy French used their eighty-eights to carry out target practice on us. We worked our way through to Tunisia. More than two thousand of us bit the dust for that. In September 43, they sent us to Salerno. The evening before, we were told the Italians had capitulated, so we hit the booze. In the morning we ran straight into the fire of three German divisions. Jim was the only one of my friends who survived."

Davis' voice sounded detached. "We headed north. It took us more than six months to cover less than a hundred miles. In the mountains, the supplies could only be brought in on mules, because of all the rocks and snow. The mud ate away our toes, and in the night, dogs fed on the dead. Back before we'd set off, Jim had said to me: 'War may be hell, but we're going to have a hellishly good war.' Now he's lying at the bottom of a gorge. We named it Purple Heart Valley." Davis offered Paula his pack of Old Golds. When she declined, he tapped one out for himself. "The following January, we were at the slaughterhouse of Monte Cassino. I read in *Stars and Stripes* that Hollywood is going to make a film about it. With a guy called Robert Mitchum; never heard of him."

"He was in *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*."

"Is he any good?"

"He's good at looking sad."

"Then he's the right man for the job." Davis held his cigarette like Mitchum would. "In June, we led the push towards Rome. First in line again for a chance to die. The general wrote to the War Department to demand that we were allowed home. Complete waste of paper. The day before yesterday, our convoy ran straight into a booby trap set by the red shirts ninety miles south of here. Did you see the boy without hands?"

Paula nodded.

"That was Benny Lawrence. Knew him three years, never saw him smile."

They continued on into the mountains. Paula saw the wreck of a Vickers lying in a valley, ravens rose from the broken glass turret. Blue and red flowers were in bloom, nameless to her, as she was unfamiliar with the nature here. “Did they tell you why I’m joining the 34th?” she asked.

“No. And I’m not taking you to the 34th, I’m taking you to IV Corps, stationed at Milan. The partisans beat off the Jerrys there a couple of days ago. What is it you do?”

“Type and translate.”

“You have an accent,” Davis commented. “German?”

“Yes. My father was American.”

“Mine was a Volga German; changed his name from Hans Drübnitsch to Harold Davis. My middle name is Fritz, after my grandfather.” Switching to German, he said: “Ich bin aus Hastings in Nebraska... German is virtually the official language there. So, how are things in the land of the Teutons?”

“Cold.”

“Can’t be colder than in Nebraska.”

Davis suddenly slowed down. Barefooted children emerged from the undergrowth, no older than thirteen. Carbines dangled from their puny shoulders, one of them was wearing a hugely oversized Wehrmacht helmet.

Paula felt herself go hot when she saw that the boy’s mouth was smeared with something red. It was only after he offered her under-ripe cherries from a snotty handkerchief that she exhaled with relief. Then she saw the other kids on the clearing. Six, also with guns. They were aiming at a German squaddie who was kneeling in front of them with raised hands. Tears ran down his dirty face. “I’m just an ordinary soldier,” he pleaded with them. His voice cracked with fear. The children eyed him with interest, not understanding a word he was saying. “I have a wife and two sons, same age as you. They’re called Jan and Martin. Wait, I’ll show you a picture.” Very slowly he reached for his breast pocket. The children fired. Without looking to see if the man was still alive, they searched his clothing for anything usable. One of them found the photo and threw it away.

Davis stepped on the gas. Miles later, he commented: “I’m not a Nazi, that’s what Hitler will say too when he’s facing the tribunal.”

Every so often, Davis had to swerve off the road to avoid bomb craters. Eventually the landscape flattened out into a plain where the road was still wet from heavy rain. Paula noticed a sign lying in the ditch, *Milano 35*. She heard a deep rumble, which rose to a deafening thunder until the entire Jeep was vibrating. Ahead of them, a tank convoy came into view. As they drew

level, she saw that the Shermans carried the *Old Ironsides* insignia and were decorated with pin-ups of Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth and Jean Harlow. Machine gunners dozed amid the infernal noise, their faces caked with an emulsion of sweat and mud. Others gazed at Paula with vacant expressions. All of them wore black armbands.

“Why are they wearing the armbands?”

“Roosevelt is dead,” Davis replied. “Didn’t you know?”

Paula wasn’t sure whether she was crying, but it felt like she was. “When?”

“On the twelfth. A stroke, they say.”

They continued on in silence until they reached the first outposts of the city, a war-ravaged castle and industrial plants with obsolete chimneys. Finally, they reached the camp of the IV Army Corps, three miles outside of Milan.

Davis handed Paula over to a corporal, who assigned her a bunk in a large tent without being able to tell her what she was here for.

“Sorry ma’am, I’ve just been told to find you quarters.”

## **GLACÉ CHERRIES**

Paula shared her accommodation with the women of the Army Nurse Corps. None of them took any notice of her. They came and went. Still wearing their blood-stained aprons, they collapsed onto their beds and fell asleep in their boots, never uttering a word.

The noise of the camp battered the tent like a sledgehammer. The last time Paula had been subjected to such a cacophony of loudspeaker bellows, howling motors and shouts was during her basic training two years ago in Fort Des Moines.

Eight hundred women from across the country had volunteered to join up, the first in the history of the US Army. Many of them had come straight from the armament industry, where they had assembled Liberator bombers, fitted Cadillac motors into M3 tanks and milled gun parts.

*Rosie the Riveter*. Everybody knew the posters with the gutsy looking all-American girl who flexed her arm muscles like Popeye. *Can you use an electric mixer? If so, you can learn to operate a drill*. But the women who heeded the call soon discovered that there were many men in the factories who couldn’t stomach standing next to a woman on the assembly line. As if bolt cutters and welding tools were bestowed upon men by a higher power and would become desecrated if touched by female hands.

In Des Moines, these women were joined by college graduates such as Paula. They in turn knew what it felt like to be the only woman in a university lecture hall, or even in the entire faculty, and then to be asked at a job interview if they could make coffee. But when the women joined the WAC program, they encountered pure hatred, partly fuelled by a smear campaign led by some of the country's principal newspapers. They were called hussies or worse and were alleged to have joined the army purely for the purpose of carrying on with men. It was said they drank too much and behaved immorally in public parks, and that the hospitals in Des Moines were having to deal with an increased occurrence of venereal diseases. The *New York Daily News* reporter John O'Donnell even started a rumour that vast amounts of contraceptives had been handed out to the Women's Army Corps during a top-secret operation.

The women in Fort Des Moines swallowed it all like a bitter pill, made to cure them of the illusion that men would respect them for their decision. At night, Paula became familiar with the sounds of despair. A groan during a dream, sobbing under the blanket, whispered prayers. But not a single one of them quit. They intended to demonstrate that they were more than just the quarry of an advertising crusade. They recognised the brutal physical training as an attempt to grind them down and demoralise them. But they got through that too. And then came the day on which Paula, dead on her feet, looked into the eyes of the harshest of the slave drivers, a man whose perception of women would have seemed antiquated even in Dickensian times. They called him Karloff, because even his skull was terrifying. He gave her a barely perceptible nod, which she pocketed without a smile.

At the end of the six weeks, the women learned that there were no intentions to send them overseas. The best among them became typists, in Des Moines or Camps such as Ritchie. Others served in the mail room, as switchboard operators, drivers or electricians. Some of them were allowed to provide instrument flight training to the bomber crews. Paula envied them. They came the closest to actually taking part in the war. But with her language skills, it had been clear from the start that she was destined to join the translators. Sometimes Paula wished she were Russian. Women in the Red Army fought on the front. There were female fighter pilots, pioneers, tank commanders, and snipers like Ljudmila Michailowna Pawlitschenko. Every single newspaper across the country had reported on her three hundred kills after Roosevelt received her at the White House.

Lying in their barracks in the evenings, the women told each other in whispers about the advances of their superiors. If they were lucky, it went no further than a few salacious comments. But most of them knew what an unbidden arm around their waist felt like, a face suddenly lowered to their neck, a hand on their bum. At the same time, they were urged to put

on make-up, do their hair up smartly, apply perfume and wear appealing civilian clothing while on duty. The insistence that it was their patriotic duty to strengthen the male soldiers' morale also felt like a hand on their bum.

Paula never used make-up while she was at Fort Des Moines, nor later in Ritchie. That didn't stop Major Keeling from casually brushing his palm across her bosom in the chart room. This she reluctantly interpreted as a mishap. But at the next opportunity, he did it again and instructed her: "You'll be staying late today, I still have some things for you to do." Her decision to report Keeling earned her six weeks of kitchen duties, the lowest grade of work in Ritchie. Paula repaid Keeling by making two breasts out of caramel pudding, garnishing them with glacé cherries and serving them to him in the mess. He went red as a beetroot while the other men just stared at him as she haughtily turned on her heels. She was never touched again.

In Milan, hours had passed but nobody had sent for her. She wandered about in the camp, an enormous mud bath with not a single quiet corner. Everything was in motion. Beating, stomping, rolling, surging. Yet everyone used the slightest opportunity to slump down somewhere and catch some sleep, even if it was just for a few seconds. One guy had nodded off on a munition's trunk, his face twitching in a dream. A tattered *Yank* magazine with a *Bill Mauldin Cartoon* lay across his lap. It showed two GIs crouching in a trench, up to their midriff in turbid sludge, above them flak fire, and the caption: *Wisht I could stand up an' git some sleep.*

She passed many Latin American looking types who spoke in a soft, guttural language. Her speculation on where they were from was resolved when she saw *Força Expedicionária Brasileira* emblazoned on one of the large tents. Below the letters were photographs of fallen comrades they were commemorating. Between the tanks, she saw men washing socks and underwear in their steel helmets. They had lit fires to dry their boots and gaiters. Some of them chucked tins into the flames and then dragged them back out with bayonets. They ate everything with their fingers, even if it was some kind of mush.

Paula had read reports while in Ritchie and had gained some insight into the course of the war. She knew of the tragedy on Omaha Beach, the unrelenting static battles in France, the successful airborne landing operation in Holland. She knew of setbacks as well as triumphs. But in this camp of the 5th Army, where the words *Sorrow Fields* had been painted on the hospital tent, she saw men who had been playing ice hockey or baseball just a few years ago and had grown old overnight.

In a far corner of the camp were the *cages*, shacks surrounded by barbed wire, where fascists, blackshirts and collaborators were interrogated. Many of them had smashed up faces, not a single tooth left in their mouth. There was an old man among them, his glasses broken, his nose a mere hump. A lieutenant was waving his dog tag in front of him and shouting: “Take a good look at this, you bastard! The H stands for *Hebrew*! I’m going to dance on Mussolini’s ashes, and tomorrow we hand you over to the partisans, so they can finish you off!”

As dusk set in, Paula noticed how hungry she was, but the thought of eating appalled her. Roosevelt had died without seeing Hitler destroyed. Further proof that there was no God.

She went back to the tent and laid down. Realising how lost she had felt since Genoa, she felt an immense sadness come over her. She longed for sleep and slipped straight into a dream. The squaddie was kneeling before her. He had Georg’s face and pleaded with her not to kill him. “I once had a sweetheart,” he beseeched her in tears. “She looked exactly like you. Wait, I’ll show you a photo.” He reached for his breast pocket and Paula shot him in the head without hesitation. She went through his things, found the photo. She looked at her likeness and threw the picture away.

In the morning, a major sat down beside her in the mess tent. “Walton Hyde. I hope you’ve settled in OK.”

“Sir?” she asked.

“Walt. I’m from the CIC, we’re not so formal there. You’re a Ritchie girl, Paula, so I gather you know what the CIC is.”

“*Counter Intelligence Corps*, the army’s secret service.”

“They send good people from Ritchie,” he commented, “In Le Havre I had dealings with a guy called Stefan Heym. He works for the Second Mobile Radio, writes splendid leaflets.” With pathos, he continued: “*Germans, what are you still fighting for? A strong man has no need to fear the truth!*” He laughed. “Heym could have gone far. Pity he’s a communist. Do you know him?”

“Fleetingly.”

She thought of the evening when *Hostages*, the film version of his first novel, was shown in the camp cinema. Stefan Heym must have felt proud and excited, but he didn’t show it at all. He was as introverted and quiet as always. Afterwards, he stepped in front of the screen and explained: “I want you to forget that I ever stood here. In the army, nothing is more disagreeable than playing a special role.” Right from the beginning, he’d made no secret of the fact that he was a communist. That was probably only possible in Camp Ritchie, Maryland, the US training

centre for propaganda and psychological warfare. It was a labyrinth of lost souls, a Babylon of refugees from all corners of the earth, among them poets, academics and philosophers. Paula and Heym had talked about Germany once. About what it would be like if they were to return. “God decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sins,” Heym had said. “But he promised Abraham to spare Sodom if ten righteous people could be found within it. Do you think that ten of those could be found in Germany, Paula?”

She pushed away her tray. “Not hungry?” Hyde asked.

Paula shook her head.

“I know the feeling,” he said, grabbed her plate and tucked into the cold scrambled eggs. He was in his mid-thirties and sported a strawberry blond moustache trimmed as neatly as a boxwood hedge. Hyde smiled at Paula as if she were a little dog or a cute infant. She had no doubt he could have guessed her weight to the last gram, as well as her cup size and what Eau de Cologne she used. If Hyde were to claim he was still a virgin, she wouldn’t believe a word of it.

“Did you come across Sam Yaeger?” Paula asked. “He was in France too, I think. Tall, lean, around thirty, with prematurely grey hair.”

“Not that I remember,” he replied. “But if you find a man without grey hair in this war, then he’s only just got here.” He pushed the cover sheet of a file towards her. “This is who we’re going to be dealing with.”

**Subject: SS Colonel Walther Rauff**

**Age: around forty**

**Medium size, slim, blond, dark eyed**

**Languages: German, poor English**

“Milan has fallen,” said Hyde. “But apart from a few reconnaissance patrols we haven’t yet set foot in the city. Rauff and two hundred of his SS men have entrenched themselves at a hotel, the Regina, which served as the Gestapo headquarters. The partisans have it surrounded. Rauff wants to negotiate with us.”

“Sir, why ...”

“Walt.”

“Walt, why didn’t they simply storm the hotel?”

“The situation is complicated. Even though the rebels have assured us that they’ll place themselves under our command once the army marches into Milan, it’s debatable whether they

actually will. That became abundantly clear yesterday.” He saw Paula’s blank look. “Haven’t you heard yet? The Duce, his lover and three companions have been executed near Lake Como, even though we insisted that Mussolini should be handed over to us.” Hyde hoovered up the cold bacon and continued, his mouth still full: “The Resistenza has been hugely important for our campaign, but now we have to get them under our thumb, to prevent the communists from influencing the future government. To be quite honest, we could have advanced north faster than we did, but there’s quite a few in Washington who counted on the Germans making short shrift of the partisans. What do you think of that?”

Paula was silent.

“I don’t condone it either. I’m just stating the facts. In any case, we have to show strength. High command considers it a matter of importance that Rauff surrenders to us and nobody else. Official handover of the city will be the day after tomorrow. That’s when Chief Crittenberger will be photographed with Cadorna, the leader of the liberation army. Everything will have to be wrapped up by then. You’ll be my interpreter for Rauff.” Hyde smiled at her surprise over how honest he was being with her. “You will treat this confidentially. Anyway, Rauff is an extremely dangerous man. I want you to know who we’re dealing with and what’s at stake.”

“Why did you take the trouble of fetching me from Genoa? Surely you know that I don’t have any experience with such negotiations.”

“We had thirteen German interpreters,” Hyde replied. “Unfortunately, a B-17 decided to lose a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound bomb right above their tent three days ago. This won’t sound very flattering, Paula, but we simply don’t have anyone else available at the moment.”

“Why was counterintelligence put in charge of Rauff?” Already it almost felt normal that she was permitted to ask such questions.

“He’s the head of the Sicherheitsdienst, the security service of the SS, in Northern Italy. They’re the Nazi counterpart to the CIC, you could say. That makes us his natural point of contact.”

Hyde briefly excused himself. When he returned, Paula was surprised to see he was wearing the uniform of a colonel. “We’re dealing with an SS Standartenführer,” he said. “You can’t negotiate with an officer if you are a rank below him. That’s the same with the Jerrys as it is with us.” And with a grin he added: “Anyway, I think it suits me.”

**BELLA CIAO**



They left immediately. Paula, Hyde and a corporal from Sicily who was going to act as an interpreter with the partisans. He was as short as he was fat, with bulging eyes to rival Peter Lorre. Hyde had simply introduced him as “Sal”, no surname was mentioned. Harvey Fritz Davis drove the Jeep, which reassured Paula a little. They were followed by five lorries carrying two hundred infantrymen, whose task it would be to disarm Rauff’s men and guard them as they pulled out.

The city must have been beautiful once. Now it looked as though a giant fist had ripped out entire blocks of houses, ground them into gravel, grit and sand and strewn it all about. Milan, birthplace of fascism, had turned into a still life by Braque. None of the shapes seemed to fit, every straight line had been severed; crushed geometry was all that remained.

Occasionally, Paula heard distant shots, screams, once the rumble of artillery. On some of the streets, all the cobblestones had disappeared. War slogans were painted on walls. “*Death to the blackshirts!*” Sal translated one. And right next to it: “*Red rabble rot in hell!*”

Ragged flags of both sides lay in the dirt, alongside dead mules, dead people, dead matter. A bus overtook them with its horn blaring. It was black with soot, the windows just empty caverns. Men sat on the roof, bellowing out the same song that Paula had heard in the port of Genoa.

“What song is that?” she asked Sal.

“*Bella Ciao*”, he replied. “*Ciao, my beauty, ciao! This is the flower of the partisan who died for freedom!*”

They entered the inner city and abruptly arrived on an elegant boulevard that was completely intact. No more Braque, now Liebermann. A place from another time, overlooked by war, lined by fashionable shops with displays that seemed to indicate they were just closed for lunch. It reminded Paula of Paris, where her thoughts now involuntarily turned to. Paris and the honeymoon with Georg that she had pictured for herself as she stood in front of the mirror in her best dress, impatient for her date with him at the Bristol, her heart spinning like a music box with a ridiculously fast and entirely new melody, because she was certain that Georg was going to tell her that he loved her.

Hyde tapped Paula on the shoulder. Beside a kiosk offering post cards, newspapers and souvenirs, a woman was sat on a chair, immaculately dressed, her hair done up smart – another rift in time. Two steps away from her lay a Wehrmacht officer with a jagged bullet hole in his forehead, still clutching a German magazine. The Jeep slowed down. The woman stood up, wrenched the paper out of the officer’s hands and offered it to them with a radiant smile.

Moments later the cathedral sprung up right before them. By some miracle it had defied the attacks, but one of the delicate spires was bent over like a stalk, as if still trying to duck away from the shower of bombs.

Davis stopped at a partisan roadblock. Paula saw the Hotel Regina a little further down the street. The Belle Époque palace was barricaded with antitank barriers and sandbags.

Hyde signalled to her to stay in the Jeep. Accompanied by Sal, he went over to the partisan leader; a beefy fellow who scrutinized Hyde and carefully mulled over every word without taking his finger off the trigger of his machine gun. Davis kept a keen eye on the man. He stuck an Old Gold between his thin lips. It seemed to Paula as though he didn't exhale the smoke, as if he wasn't breathing at all.

When the beefy guy made a lewd gesture in front of his roughly two hundred men and made them roar with laughter, Paula knew she wouldn't be interpreting anything here today.

Davis put the Jeep in reverse. "I've seen fellows like them laugh like that before," he muttered between his teeth.

Hyde ordered the infantry men to pull out and came back to the Jeep with Sal. "My new friend Alessandro wants us to go on a little trip with him."

The partisan leader and six of his men drove off in a Fiat and Hyde instructed Davis to follow.

"What does this mean?" Paula asked.

"He's informed me that Mussolini and his whore Petacci needed to be executed by Italians, that it was necessary for the dignity of his people. And he wants us as representatives of the US army to recognise this with a symbolic act."

"I don't understand," Paula replied.

"We're driving to the Piazzale Loreto," Sal explained. "That's where the Nazis shot fifteen hostages last August."

They made good progress at first. But then the street filled up with more and more people, a human river flowing north under the glaring sun, and soon it was impossible to drive any further. A million shouts echoed between the walls of the buildings, intermingled with singing and screaming and gun shots. Alessandro and his people left their car standing and slipped into the stream without checking on the Americans. Hyde told Davis to stay behind. He pulled Paula along, with Sal in tow. They ran until they had caught up with Alessandro. Men paraded alongside them in suits thick with dirt but of a fashionable cut. Paula spotted tie pins and even pocket squares. One of them had a perfect crease in his Borsalino hat, as if he was off to La

Scala. They may have been shopkeepers, apothecaries and professors once, but now they were freedom fighters with ammunition belts across their chests like Wild West heroes.

In a doorway, Paula saw a mob of young men beating up a man with wooden slats. She saw him sink to the ground, saw his skull burst open. Nobody took any notice, apart from a young girl with bonny plaits who held her mother's hand and giggled.

Paula broke her stride, but Sal hissed at her: "He's a collaborator, don't even think of helping him."

A woman smiled at her. As if it was nothing, she had shouldered a machine gun that two soldiers would have struggled with. She continued to smile, even when the footsteps began to pound the pavement and the march turned into a stampede.

Ever more people flocked onto the street to join the crowd, pulled along by a torrent that now filled the entire boulevard. Paula struggled to breathe, the air around her felt icy cold. It was the same agonising feeling of confinement she had experienced in the belly of the ship. She was no more than a ball being tossed about in a powerful surge of frenzy, hate and longing for salvation. With relief she realised that Hyde had gripped her around the shoulder to prevent them being separated.

Then she heard a thunder that sounded like Niagara Falls on the day she had stood on the deck of the tourist steamer and the captain had gone so close that she was soaked through by the spray.

Somewhere ahead of them, the stream had met an obstacle, causing it to back up. The crowd was a seething, bubbling mass. Alessandro fired two rounds into the air with his machine gun. Paula felt the immense pull of this tide of bodies in which she was just a tiny drop. She swam along with Hyde and Sal, drifting in the wake of Alessandro's men, who carved a channel with shots and punches. Through a haze, she sensed that they had arrived on an enormous square, pitch-black with people. Some had climbed up lampposts to see. Others stood on carts that rose like islands above the stream of anger and elation. But they soon succumbed to the surge of human bodies crashing against them and toppled over into the current that was pulling everything along. Just in front of Paula, a woman fell to the ground. In terror she stretched her hand out towards Paula, her eyes pleading. For an eternity, and yet less than a heartbeat, she was alone with this woman, the roar and thunder no more than a distant whisper. Paula tried to grab her hand, almost reached her with her fingertips, but was pulled away by the tide as she watched the surf crash over the bundle and engulf it. They had long since lost Sal in the sea of bodies. Paula screamed at Hyde to get her away from here, her voice so loud that it rang in her

ears despite the inferno around them. But all he could do was to strengthen his grip around her shoulders, the same fear showing in his eyes because there was no way out.

Suddenly Paula caught sight of photographs mounted on a wooden wall – memorial pictures showing the victims of the August executions, killed in this square. Before this altar, seemingly spared by the surge so as not to desecrate it, people knelt and prayed, crossed themselves, kissed the ground.

Then she saw the five bodies, right in front of her.

At first, she wouldn't have been able to say whether they were men or women that lay there. Their faces were horrifically disfigured, nothing but lumps of blue and green flesh. Then she saw a dress. Clara Petacci. Next to her Mussolini. His mouth was open. His rigid hand clasped a kind of commander's staff, placed there in mockery. His right eye bulged from his shaved skull, still frenzied even in death.

Men with weapons formed a ring. They linked arms to brace themselves against the relentless swell of hate. It was a pointless endeavour given the crowd of thousands that rolled towards them with such might. The cordon was ripped apart. The panicked men signalled to the fire-fighters positioned in front of a fuel station with their trucks.

Paula saw people kick the corpses, stab them with knives, beat them, spit on them, heard them call out the names of children, mothers and fathers, heard them curse Mussolini as if he could still hear. Suddenly hard jets of water shot from the fire hoses and hit the human swell. Paula was pushed away from the corpses, as one with all the other twitching bodies. The roaring sea pulled back, only to build into a new wave, even mightier than before, that rushed forward and threw Paula onto the ground in front of Mussolini.

Images shot through her mind from a newsreel she'd seen at Berlin's Prater cinema in 1934, showing Hitler's visit to Venice. Welcome by Mussolini at the airport, the Führer demure like a lackey, bashfully kneading his hat in the presence of his role model. Then the ride across the Canal Grande in the Vaporetto water bus, Mussolini all casual in a field-grey suit, Hitler incongruous in a creased coat – a sorcerer's apprentice and his master. This was just a few years before he devoured the world, made Mussolini his stooge and destroyed everything that was dear to Paula. All because the man whose hideous face she was now looking at had shown him the way.

It was impossible to think all those thoughts, to see all those images, within the space of a few seconds. Yet when Hyde dragged her to her feet, they were so clear in her mind that she wrenched herself free from him and kicked Mussolini's body and screamed and screamed until her face was drenched in tears.

All sense of time evaporated, became meaningless in this Hades that engulfed Paula as the corpses were hauled up feet first and suspended from the roof of the petrol station. A thousand shouts rang out that drowned her own and caused her to shake and sob, ablaze with an anger that she had only experienced once before, on the street in Berlin, on the night she threw away her happiness.

## **BREATHING, DREAMING**

Not a single word was said about what had happened; not on the journey back to the camp, not when they got there and went their separate ways. Hyde just briefly asked her to come for a meeting at eight that evening. Paula wearily fell onto her bunk. There was no satisfaction, no sadness, not even exhaustion. Just nothing.

Hyde had his own tent. When Paula arrived, he was pouring whisky into two tin mugs. He chucked in some ice cubes and held one of the mugs out to her. She shook her head.

“I had to bribe our quartermaster with a month’s pay to get the ice,” he said. “Are you telling me I’ve bankrupted myself for nothing?” Hyde indicated a folding chair. When she’d sat down, he raised his mug to Paula. “Well, did it feel good to kick the son of a bitch?”

“Yes.”

“Perhaps I should have joined in.”

“You were just as afraid as I was,” she said.

“I’ve been afraid many times. And today most certainly won’t be the last.”

Outside, engines continued to howl, shouts rang out; the camp never came to rest.

“What about Rauff?” Paula asked.

“Tomorrow morning at ten.”

“You must know much more about him than the little you’ve told me,” she said. “Are you allowed to talk to me about Rauff?”

“No, but I will. He was in Tunisia in 42, we’re not sure about his exact role there. What we do know is that he pilfered a hundred pounds of gold from the Jews on Djerba. From September 43, he was in charge of the crackdown on partisans in Northern Italy. The execution of the hostages on the piazza was carried out on his orders. He called it an ‘atonement measure’. Everyone in Milan knows the Regina. It has two hundred rooms, many of them served as torture chambers.”

“And you want to negotiate with someone like that? Over what?”

“That’s a very good question,” Hyde replied soberly. “But one I’m really not allowed to answer. Let’s just say, he appears to be a forward-looking man. When it became clear that we would take Milan, Rauff was given orders to blow up Northern Italy’s hydroelectric plants – but he didn’t. He was in the loop on secret negotiations that took place between the Vatican and Karl Wolff, his immediate superior and commander-in-chief of the SS for the whole of Italy.”

“What was the aim of these negotiations?” Paula asked.

“We don’t know. What’s clear is that the conditions under which incarcerated priests are held have improved. In some cases, they’ve been handed over to the Vatican.”

She was silent for a moment. “But surely that doesn’t make up for what Rauff did previously.”

“No, but it’s certainly interesting.” He smiled. “Don’t worry, I have no illusions whatsoever concerning Rauff. To use Roosevelt’s words: No man can tame a tiger by stroking it. Just recently, Rauff hosted a party at the Regina to celebrate Hitler’s birthday, even though the Russians are already in Berlin and Hitler has crawled away into some hole or another. As far as we know, Rauff was also the last German who saw Mussolini alive. There’s a photo of their meeting. They look like the best of pals.”

“What do I need to watch out for tomorrow?” Paula asked.

“The most important thing is to relay everything word-for-word. Let Rauff finish what he’s saying before you interpret, unless he starts getting cocky. That’s all.”

Paula set down her mug. “If there’s nothing more to discuss, I’d like to retire.” When there was no reply, she stood up.

“Your surname caught my eye,” Hyde commented. “Are you related to the Washington Blooms?”

“My father’s family,” she replied stiffly.

She thought of the marble palace on Kalorama Circle, of the plates of solid gold that everything was served on, even breakfast. Paula could have forgiven the Blooms for that. But not for the cold disdain with which they treated her mother, who’d been a seamstress in a tailor’s shop when she met Paula’s father. The fact that he had broken with his family for her sake was something Paula admired him for to this day.

“So you’re rich?” Hyde asked.

She hoped her smile looked assured. “I’m afraid not. We aren’t in contact.”

“How come you grew up in Berlin?”

By now, certainly, Paula was no longer obliged to answer, but she sat back down. “My father met my mother there before the Great War.”

“What did he do professionally?”

Actually, Paula never really saw him work. As a little girl, she’d once asked him what he wrote in the blue notebooks that he kept in a wall safe in the drawing room. He said he was helping to grow American funds in the Reich, and that he was keeping records on that. How disappointed she’d been. She had imagined her father was a writer and that his notebooks contained the most wonderful stories. Sometimes, he would goof around so boisterously. Other times, he could be like a stranger for days.

“In the twenties, he ran the Berlin branch of an American advertising agency. Later he represented several US corporations in Germany,” Paula replied.

Her father had always met with his business partners in exclusive restaurants like the Horcher or in establishments in the Quartier Latin. He didn’t have an office. He didn’t even have a study in their villa in Berlin Grunewald, where her bedroom window looked out onto the Hundekehlesee and the old tree with the swing on which she flew to the moon, but also onto the forest she was so afraid of as a little girl. Her father had laughed at her for it. During her childhood years, he didn’t yet know what fear was. If she saw shadows flit across the lake at night, she’d flee into the bed of her governess. Henriette was elderly already and smelt a little musty, but Paula was very attached to her and continued to visit her after she’d retired.

That was what this war predominantly meant for her – not knowing the fate of those she’d had to leave behind. This unease that was always with her, whether she was eating, drinking, breathing or dreaming.

Her Berlin grandparents were staunch social democrats, her grandfather a welder at Siemens. Paula had tried everything to get them to leave with her, but it was no use. “Hitler is the one who should leave, not us,” her grandfather had said. All that remained of them for Paula was the farewell, the last hug she sometimes still felt in the dark hours, a waft of Pitralon aftershave, a suitcase of prayers.

“Paula?”

“Sorry – what did you say?”

“That your father must have had good contacts.”

She was aware of the implication and didn’t answer straight away.

Her father knew everyone who was anyone in Berlin, including many aristocrats who kowtowed to the Nazis. He was on first-name terms with Prince August Wilhelm of Prussia, who always dressed in full SA paramilitary garb. At the time, Paula never understood why her father hung around with that mob. And with men like von Ribbentrop, the champagne trader who had bought his title and had brokered the Munich Agreement in 1938. With Armaments

Minister Albert Speer. With Minister of Economics and Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht, the financial brains behind Hitler's arms build-up.

There were few who Paula had found as repulsive as Schacht. As a child, she'd called him the badger, because that's what he looked like, only with glasses. She also remembered his fat wife, who always came to receptions with the diamond-studded swastika he'd given her pinned to her bosom.

Paula could have told Hyde about all or any of this. Instead, she said: "All sorts of people visited our house for soirées and afternoon teas, even a Russian revolutionary, Ilja Ehrenburg. But mainly they were Americans. Randolph Hearst, Thomas Wolfe, Charles Lindbergh, Allen Dulles."

She dropped that last name intentionally, to see his reaction. Hyde topped their mugs up with whisky. "Dulles now works for the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services. Our competition, so to speak," he said casually.

Paula put on a surprised face.

"He heads up their intelligence station in Bern, which acts as a contact point for Nazi defectors. They say he's got a bright future ahead. The same goes for his brother John Foster Dulles, who runs New York's biggest corporate law firm and is tipped by some as the next Secretary of State." Hyde didn't seem inclined to delve any deeper into the topic. "So, what was Lindbergh like?"

"He came to a dinner in 36. I heard him talking with a full mouth to the lady beside him: 'The American Jews have amassed such a vast amount of assets that one has to call it a hostile takeover. They control everything – film, press, the economy and the government.' I'll forgive him for leaving out the weather."

"Was he wearing the three-pound cross of merit that Hitler had awarded him?" Hyde asked.

"No. Probably for fear it might fall into the soup."

Hyde laughed. "Compatriots like Lindbergh are a disgrace. He became even more vocal later on. No doubt you'll recall the odd snippet."

"You mean when he called the Jews war mongers?"

"Yes. He was the spokesman of the *America First Committee* when he said that. A truly disagreeable bunch. I'm not Jewish, but I know what Mischpoke means."

For the first time, Paula liked Hyde.

"What was Berlin like before the war?" he asked.

"I always want to believe that it was the best city in the world. But if I were to describe the Berlin of my childhood, it would probably have just as little to do with reality as *Gone with the*



*Wind* does with the Southern States before the civil war. The happy, innocent Berlin never existed; or if it did, I never knew it. Everybody saw the disaster loom, but they all pretended it had nothing to do with them. One morning I woke up and it was as if someone had blown out all the candles on a cake and wished for beauty to be turned into muck.”

Occasionally, her father would turn up outside her school, the Lycée Français, in his Mercedes Roadster. Then they’d drive to the Adlon, where they served the best hot chocolate in Berlin. It was also where the Berlin office of the *Chicago Tribune* was located, which meant there were always Gestapo men loitering about. One day, her father cautioned her to talk more quietly.

“You’ve got the ‘German look’ too now,” she’d said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Peering over your shoulder all the time, to check whether anyone is listening,” she’d retorted.

“Where is your father now?” Hyde asked. “Back in the States?”

Images flashed through Paula’s mind of them leaving the fashion show at the classy racing club, her father with a Dom Pérignon induced spring in his step. He had taken her out for the night after she’d refused to talk to him for days, out of desperation over his persistent refusal to leave Germany.

Paula recalled the two drunk SA men, how they punched him when he didn’t return their Hitler salute. How they didn’t stop, didn’t stop, didn’t stop. How he was lying on the rain-drenched pavement, that last look, that hand that opened, without having stroked her cheek once more.

“Yes, he’s in the States,” she replied.

“And your mother?”

“She died when I was little.” The memory of her drifted into her consciousness like a forgotten scent. Again, she wanted to get up, but didn’t.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Hyde, in German.

And then, in response to her look: “It’s enough for a bit of chit chat in a bar, but that’s all. Rauff would use it to his advantage in the negotiations. Besides, my accent sounds like a bad case of pharyngitis. Another drink?”

She shook her head.

“I was interested to see you studied American history. At Columbia, I believe?”

“I wanted to understand my new home country.”

“And – do you?”

“I try,” Paula replied. “Much as it goes against the grain at times. Jefferson prohibited the importation of slaves but thought nothing of keeping slaves on his own tobacco plantation. Woodrow Wilson is seen as a great president, even though he allowed the congress for Washington’s federal agencies to reintroduce racial segregation. And Lincoln was less concerned about black people than about the survival of the Union.”

“What about his Gettysburg Address? *That from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.* Does this not get your blessing? No, I know what you’re thinking. In Lincoln’s world there were no death factories yet.”

“You’re wrong,” Paula replied. “After the Civil War was won, Lincoln visited Libby Prison in Richmond, where he saw Union Army soldiers who were starved to the bones. The conditions were horrendous. Many of the prisoners died miserably of hunger; there and also in other Confederate camps. All the east coast newspapers reported on it; prompting calls for retribution. But for Lincoln, revenge was a snake that bites off its own head.”

“Wise man.”

“There’s also plenty that I admire about the States,” Paula added. “The unbounded optimism, the neighbourliness, the ambition without envy, Roosevelt’s fearlessness, the uninhibited laughter of children, the privilege to always speak one’s mind, even if what you’re saying is dreadful.”

“But?”

“But then there’s this self-righteousness. The fact that nobody wants to hear criticism. The shoulder shrugging that you see so often. The belief that prosperity is a sign of virtue. And of course, the films with Esther Williams.”

They both laughed and Paula felt how much it cheered her to chat with Hyde. Throughout their conversation, he’d managed to avoid revealing even the slightest detail about himself. But that was fine with her, she didn’t want this to come across like a date. In any case, Hyde would probably have little to say about himself, bar the few things she already knew. It was clear he was a pragmatic. Someone to whom moral stances are entirely alien, even if his remarks about Lindbergh and *America First* appeared to suggest the opposite. Paula wouldn’t have been surprised if Hyde had dropped those comments purely because he thought she was a Jew. He was a man without qualities, like the protagonist in Robert Musil’s novel; unwilling to risk anything, be it for a good or a bad cause.

“Are you Jewish?” Hyde casually asked.

She was about to say no, but then she remembered that day at the Athletic Club in New York, when Allen Dulles invited a rich attorney to join them at their table. He'd said things like: "There's no doubt that the Jews have a particularly keen sense for business matters." Or: "Some of my best friends are Jewish, but ..." And then there'd been situations such as the one in Fort Des Moines, when a corporal had mimicked her German accent and snarled: "It seems you're in the wrong army."

"Yes, I'm Jewish," she said to Hyde. It felt good.

Paula expected him to make some sort of compliment along the lines of *Jews are generally great*, an elegant version of anti-Semitism, but Hyde said: "You were born on 29 May 1919. A very special date, did you know that?"

Paula was so surprised that it took her a moment to reply. "Yes, it was the day on which Einstein's Theory of Relativity was proven. My father told me about it. Not that I know what it actually means."

"It's pretty easy to explain," Hyde told her. "According to Einstein, the sun has such an enormous mass that it deflects the light of a distant star. This means that we see it in a different position than it is actually in. The minute divergence can be measured during a total solar eclipse, and one such eclipse took place on 29 May 1919 in Guinea. The astronomer Sir Arthur Eddington travelled there and proved that Einstein was right."

Paula was speechless.

"I studied physics at Princeton under Einstein," said Hyde. "Are you surprised? You have a degree in American history. This war allots each of us a place, whether we like it or not."

"In Berlin I once saw Einstein on the Museumsinsel. It was February and freezing cold, but he wasn't wearing a hat or even a coat."

"You should hear his English. It sounds as if he's making fun of it. But the things he says are remarkable. Things like: *Every time science takes a step forward, God takes a step back*. Sadly, I didn't have the honour of getting to know Einstein more closely. I wasn't the sort of student that would have attracted his attention. When I took the job at the CIC, my wife said: 'The intelligence service will suit you. They deal with simple equations and at most one unknown.'"

"Such as Rauff."

"Such as Rauff," Hyde agreed. "Have another drink with me and I'll explain Heisenberg's uncertainty principle to you."

"It really has been a long day."

"My *divorced* wife, I should have added."

Paula almost laughed at the sheer crudeness of his attempt. She stood up. “Thank you, but I need to be well rested tomorrow.”

“Pity,” he replied.

She walked through the camp in the dark. More units kept arriving, lorries and tanks, men staggered in on foot. It was a mystery to her where all these soldiers and vehicles would find room. Splashes of light flared up here and there. She could feel the whisky. Above her, the full moon appeared to have been sprinkled with glowing crystals. The image of Georg came to her out of nowhere; that sad glance over his shoulder at the Bristol. She knew she mustn't think of him, never again, otherwise she'd go under.

## SUNRISE

In the morning, Paula was relieved to find Hyde carefree and bright, with nothing in his manner intimating how they had parted the night before. He was neatly shaved and rosy-cheeked and smelled of Clubman Pinaud.

“Rauff comes from a town called Köthen,” he informed her on the way to the Jeep. “Do they speak a dialect there that might cause problems for you?”

“I don't know where that is.”

“It's in the region of Anhalt.”

“In that case I'll be fine.”

This time, the lorries with the infantry men drove ahead. Davis steered the Jeep, with an Old Gold between his teeth as always. He saw that Paula was nervous and gave her an encouraging nod. “It's a good day today. I get to go home tomorrow.”

They found Alessandro and his men positioned at the roadblock. Sal got out with Paula and Hyde and exchanged a few words with the partisan leader. “All quiet at the Regina,” Sal relayed. “Rauff's men have a good view of the surroundings, they can see you. It will be fairly dark inside; the electricity has been cut and the shutters are closed.”

The infantry men jumped out of their vehicles and took up position. Hyde beckoned over the sergeant major who had command of the unit. “If any shots are fired, storm the building,” he briefly instructed him.

Paula wished she hadn't heard that sentence.

Alessandro fed a few lines to Sal and smiled at Paula. “He wants to know whether you enjoyed your visit to Piazzale Loreto,” Sal explained.

“A truly beautiful piazza,” she replied. “I shall always remember it with affection.”

On the way to the hotel, it felt to Paula as if her upper body and her legs belonged to two different people.

“Stay calm,” Hyde said to her. “Rauff won’t do anything rash. He’s intelligent enough to know that he wouldn’t make it out of the building alive.”

When they got to within twenty metres of the Regina, ten SS men stepped out onto the street. Their black uniforms looked as if they were fresh from the laundry. Unaccustomed to the sun, the men narrowed their eyes to slits. They formed a mute line and let them enter the building without searching Hyde for weapons.

In its elegance, the lobby reminded Paula of the Berlin Savoy on a rainy Sunday afternoon. Aside from the gloomy light and the instantly noticeable smell of burning, everything seemed as though a diligent concierge was about to come hurrying towards them to ask about their requirements. They followed an SS officer across a hallway lined with damask wallpaper. Still nothing to indicate that this had ever been anything other than a luxury hotel, in which the guests’ every wish was taken care of. Nothing to indicate that two hundred heavily armed men had entrenched themselves here.

Two adjutants waiting in an ante-chamber let them pass. The room behind the thick door was so dark that Paula could only make out contours. A shadow rose, one of the shutters was opened a crack and pale light poured in.

She saw Rauff.

Smartly clad in a dress uniform of the Africa Corps with cross of merit, he raised a hand to his peaked cap. “Standartenführer Walther Rauff. Group Northern Italy West.”

Hyde returned the military greeting. “Colonel Walton Hyde. IV Corps.”

There was nothing about Milan’s most feared man that caught the eye. Rauff was one of those people Paula might sit opposite in the train for hours, only to then forget what he’d looked like shortly after. Even his pointed nose, which lent his face an air of arrogance, wouldn’t leave a lasting memory.

Rauff indicated two seats and they sat down opposite him. He held a silver cigarette case out to Hyde, who helped himself. “I’ve been informed that you were at the Piazzale Loreto,” Rauff commented, primly smoking with a cigarette holder. His voice was rough and brittle, marked by extreme tiredness. “It would be fascinating to know, how many of those who came to us bowing and scraping just weeks ago, keen to offer their snooping services, were there yesterday joining in with the jubulations. And concerning Mussolini – it needn’t have ended like that for him. At our last meeting, I offered to arrange an escort for him. I’m sad to say he declined. If he had followed my urgent advice, this country would still have an intact government. But

yesterday the communists and chaos triumphed, and for president Truman the situation in Italy has just become distinctly more difficult. Germans and Americans stand against the same enemy, even if that information doesn't seem to have trickled down to every last section of your army.”

He had paused three times to give Paula opportunity to interpret. She relayed Hyde’s reply. “Yesterday was only in part aimed at Mussolini and his puppet regime. It was mainly aimed at *you*. Do I need to remind you of last August?”

Rauff picked a document up from the desk. “I issued this directive in the summer of 44. I quote: *It is to be prevented under all circumstances, that measures taken by us drive the population into the arms of the gangs, thereby increasing their power.* I was not in Milan at the time of the executions you allude to. They occurred against my strictest orders.” He placed the sheet in front of them.

“I’m absolutely certain,” Paula interpreted for Hyde, “that there is no longer a single document to be found in the Regina that incriminates you. Especially none that would provide information on your role in the deportation of Jews. I could smell that you’ve been burning files the moment I stepped foot through the door.”

“Regarding that tiresome matter, I’d like to direct you towards Obersturmbannführer Eichmann of the Reich Security Head Office. He proved to be very dedicated in that regard,” said Rauff.

When Paula relayed this, Hyde didn’t answer. His mouth was quivering and there were beads of sweat on his forehead. His lips were so blue he looked like he was suffering from hypothermia.

“Sir?” she asked.

“I’m not going to discuss with this son of a bitch what he has or hasn’t done. That’s a matter for the judiciary,” Hyde rasped. “I want to know what he hopes to gain from negotiating.” It sounded as if he had to prise each word out with a crowbar.

Rauff studied him with the cool eye of an archaeologist appraising the value of a damaged artefact. “Are you not well, Colonel?” he asked.

“I just need a minute,” Hyde muttered so quietly that Paula could barely hear him.

“Of course,” Rauff declared impassively. He left the room and pulled the door closed behind him. Paula heard muted laughter coming from the ante-chamber.

“It's just my circulation,” muttered Hyde. “In Épernay, we interrogated some Germans in a filthy hovel. I picked something up there. I'll be OK in a bit.”

But his voice was unsteady.

“Wouldn’t it be better if we broke off here?” Paula suggested. “You can ask for someone else to take over, can’t you?”

“That’s out of the question. There must be an important reason why Rauff believes he can negotiate from a position of strength. He thinks he’s God, which he undoubtedly has been for the past two years. But remember what I said yesterday: *Sometimes God takes a step back*. And I’m going force him to do that.”

Paula realised that she’d been wrong about Hyde. He was perfectly willing to take risks. It seemed he wasn’t going to hand the negotiations over to anyone else, even if he was about to have a heart attack. You can throw yourself into the path of a wanted criminal’s bullet in order to save the life of an innocent person. And you can do the same to cash in on the reward. Paula had never read Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto*, but from what she knew, Hyde was not unlike the novel’s main character Hendrik Höfgen, aka Gründgens.

“Feel free to provoke Rauff,” Hyde now said. “We need to rattle him by whatever means we can.”

“The Obersturmbannführer that Rauff mentioned, Eichmann, have you heard of him before?”

“No. I can’t know every single bastard.”

Rauff returned, his thin lips set in a mocking smile. “Shall we continue our little chat – provided your health permits?”

“What makes you think you’re in a position to negotiate?” Hyde demanded.

Paula sensed how much effort it cost him to make his voice sound as forceful as if he were in top shape. She relayed what he’d said.

Rauff didn’t answer. Instead, he asked her: “Where did you learn to speak German so perfectly, young lady?”

“Where did you learn to miss the obvious?”

Rauff took a silver box from his trouser pocket and held it out to Paula. The sweets inside were embossed with swastikas, a popular accessory even when she still lived in Berlin.

“If I were you, I wouldn’t be too wasteful with those,” she observed. “You may still need them, when you get hungry in your cell.”

Rauff sighed as he popped a sweet in his mouth. “My cute interpreter with the doe eyes is a daughter of the chosen people. And I thought the foot rot I acquired during the Africa campaign would be the worst thing to befall me in this war.”

“I suggest you get off your high horse.” Paula was surprised by the steeliness in her voice. “Any allusion to the chosen people will be noted in my report. The interrogators you shall soon face will be very interested in that.”

Rauff’s expression darkened.

Hyde grinned. “My German is better than I thought. You’re doing fine, carry on.”

“First of all,” said Rauff, “I request to be handed over to the Americans, not the British.”

“Why?” Hyde asked. “Because of Djerba? Are you worried the Brits might ask about the hundred pounds of gold you extorted from the Jewish community there? Was that also one of those tiresome matters? And what causes you to assume you can impose conditions for your capitulation?”

“On Djerba, my main task consisted of keeping the ants away from the provisions. I spent the rest of my time solving crossword puzzles in *Volk und Wehr*. Himmler’s cat, four letters: *Loki*. Would you have known that?”

Although not requested by Hyde, Paula had started to interpret only short sections of what Rauff was saying and interrupted him with an insolent hand movement when he wanted to continue talking. With satisfaction, she saw that he struggled to contain his anger.

“Have another sweet,” she suggested.

The walls of the room started to shake. At first, Paula thought it was her agitation, then she heard the thunder of tank treads. Rauff looked out the window. “Your reinforcement is here. Two tanks? Is that all I’m worth to you?”

“They’re here for your safety while you pull out of Milan. You should be thankful.”

Rauff’s voice grew energetic and direct. “I said at the outset that we now stand against a common enemy, communism. Thankfully, there are sensible men who have realised this in your ranks too. My superior, Obergruppenführer Wolff, and I are engaged in constructive talks mediated by the Vatican.”

Paula saw Hyde’s eyes grow dark as night. “What kind of talks?” she relayed.

“I’m speaking of negotiations over a separate peace between our troops stationed in Italy and your army. Heinrich von Vietinghoff, commander-in-chief of our Heeresgruppe C, anticipated a successful conclusion. If my telephone connection hadn’t been cut two days ago by the partisans, I might have already had confirmation that the German side has signed.”

Hyde endeavoured to keep his voice in check. “Who on our side are you supposedly talking to?”

“Allen Dulles, representative of the OSS in Switzerland. He has been given a free hand by the US War Department. On your side, the operation is running under the name *Sunrise*.”



Hyde's expression told Paula that she didn't need to interpret this. Dumbstruck as she felt, it was just as well.

"As I have not been informed of any such negotiations and I currently don't have the means to check the veracity of your information, this is of no relevance to me," Hyde countered. "You are now going to tell your men to lay down arms and to surrender unconditionally."

As Paula repeated this in German, it seemed to her as if she was sitting in front of the radio in New York, hearing the shrill voice of the presenter announce a *braaaaaand new episode of the Allen's Alley Show*.

*But first an advertisement from Campbell.*

"I demand to be seen as the negotiator of an honourable peace and to be treated accordingly," said Rauff.

*Hmm, Campbell's turtle soup. Just how we like it.*

Hyde stood up and pulled his uniform jacket straight. "Let me make myself absolutely clear. You will capitulate or die. There are two hundred infantry men lined up behind the tanks and another two hundred members of the Resistenza. If I'm still in the hotel in quarter of an hour, it will be blasted to bits. That may also spell the end for Sergeant Bloom and me, but we are expendable. As are you."

It was grotesque to translate her own death sentence.

"Is that your final word, Colonel?" Rauff's eyes darted around in the grey light penetrating through the gap between the shutters.

"My final word," Hyde replied, in German.

Rauff stuck out his chin. "You will have my answer shortly." He left the room with a measured stride.

Paula saw Hyde sink back into his chair and gather up the pieces of his grand battle plan, even though it was pointless. "You met Dulles, didn't you," he said quietly. "Would he be capable of such a thing?"

"It was just a meal. And anyway, I was still a child."

The lie came very easily.

[...]

Camp King, Frankfurt, morning:

"Are you familiar with the name *Seven*?" Sam asked.

“Everyone knows who *Seven* was,” Paula replied. “The best agent at the German Abwehr. Somewhere on the Balkan, Bulgaria or Hungary, there was an air-intelligence hub, a radio station, operated by *Seven*. He passed on the most incredible findings on the red Army and its operations from there. He was the Houdini of his trade – and Stalin’s nightmare; they say he slept no more than three hours a night because of him.”

Sam nodded. “I’m not a fan of exaggeration, but *Seven* was without doubt the best agent of the entire war. When the last shot was fired it was as if he had dropped off the face of the earth; he was presumed dead.”

“Was?” Paula asked.

“There is a man here at camp who claims to be *Seven*.”

[...]

## COMET

Taking a stroll through Camp King on a summer’s day like this, with the air so sweet and warm, could have been pure pleasure, if it hadn’t been that every sentence, every nuance, every hesitation was of possible significance. Paula couldn’t relax for a second while in the company of Kupfer. She knew Knox to be ten steps behind them, while the man who claimed to be *Seven* told her about his background.

“My mother was the only daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant. She wanted for nothing as a child. They lived in Hietzing, one of Vienna’s poshest districts, with domestic staff and all the trimmings.” Kupfer lit up another Lucky. “Do you know Vienna?”

“I was stationed there until four weeks ago. We were based in the military barracks in the 7th district.”

“Ah, a magnificent building. After the Annexation, the Wehrmacht set up camp in those hallowed halls.”

“So, you know it from the inside too?” Paula masked the loaded question with a relaxed conversational tone.

“I had dealings there once or twice,” Kupfer replied. “The staircases and hallways still have all the grandeur of the former cadet school. Of course, the establishment has always wanted to impress the cadets with pomp, to make them believe the military is the true aristocracy. I liked

the dark red floral ornaments in the courtyard passages.” A smile spread across his lips. “Not that a dirty old Jew like me would have been permitted to wander about in Vienna’s central Wehrmacht base just like that – unless I was *Seven*. But perhaps I simply picked this information up at some point. Or I had a girlfriend who was employed as a cleaner in the barracks. Or a cousin of mine was a plasterer who worked on those ornaments. I could also describe Vienna’s head office of the Abwehr intelligence agency to you. Would that carry more weight?” He stopped and looked over to the Cooler. “If you were to ask me what it looked like in *there*, I wouldn’t be able to tell you.” Kupfer tapped on his heart. “Only what it looked like in here after your colleague had rolled up his sleeves.”

“Who was your father?” Paula asked.

“He was a regimental doctor in the imperial army; from a good Jewish family, as my mother always emphasized. Jews weren’t allowed to hold positions above that of a Hauptmann. That was probably why a year after I was born, my father insisted on being christened a Catholic, together with my mother and me. At the time, he would have still seen my mother as an excellent catch. Unfortunately, my maternal grandfather went bankrupt and shot himself, which put an end to my father’s privileged situation. My mother raised me on what she earned as a washerwoman. She scrimped and saved so that I could attend college. I regret that I didn’t pay enough attention in English. But my Russian is quite passable, and I know a few sentences in each of the Slavic languages. I even speak Hungarian tolerably well.”

“I’ve heard it’s even more complicated than Chinese,” Paula said.

“For the Chinese, certainly. My favourite Hungarian is Hódmezővásárhelykutasipusztá.”

“Let me guess, it means ‘Hello’?”

“It means a place in the Pusztá where there is a fountain, beavers, meadows and a market.”

“One could hardly put it more concisely.”

Kupfer smiled, but his eyes looked as tired as if they’d last seen sleep before the war. “In those days, we had many Jewish neighbours in the Favoriten district. I was friends with some of them, long before I knew that I’m a Jew myself. Whenever I was invited by an Orthodox family, I would soak up the curiously beautiful rituals and sayings. You know, they clear away all the knives before the mealtime prayers, because the table should be an altar of peace. And when they smell a lovely perfume, they say: *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates fragrant oils*. I must admit, I was tempted to greet you thus today. But I don’t want you to think I’m an oddball.”

Nothing about him was crude. He could have said: *I saw you naked in my dream*, yet it wouldn't have sounded the slightest bit lewd. She could imagine women giving themselves to him without thinking about it for a split second.

"You don't need to feel embarrassed," Kupfer said. "Compliments are only inappropriate if they are untruthful. But perhaps you're Jewish too and already know all of this."

"No."

"Well, you'd cut a fine figure as a Jewish woman. One shouldn't speak of bitter things when visiting a sick person. I'm grateful to you for that."

"Is that what you are – sick?"

"You mean because I make jokes?" he asked. "The thing is, we Viennese have such an insatiable greed for happiness that we're actually permanently depressed. Emperor Joseph II even issued an edict stating there must be no more dying in plays. Many a person who went to see *Romeo and Juliet* returned home with the comforting knowledge that the two got married in the end."

"A Jewish Catholic," said Paula. "Which of the two religions are you closer to?"

"Judaism is too complicated for me," Kupfer replied. "As lovely as the customs are – I'd be dead before I could memorise them all. And kosher meat just tastes awful. Concerning Catholicism, it's worth noting that almost every great advancement of humankind was achieved despite, not because of, the Catholic church. Galileo had to let the sun carry on orbiting the earth to avoid execution. He wasn't as brave as Giordano Bruno, who was burned at the stake for his bold claim that the universe is infinite. Do you know why Bruno's teachings were so blasphemous?"

"No."

"In a world without beginning and end, there can be no divine creation and no last judgement," he replied. "That's problematic, is it not? Even as Bruno was taken to be executed, they tied down his tongue for fear he might corrupt the onlookers. These hypocrites would have burnt Einstein and Darwin too, if they'd got hold of them. Would the Enlightenment have happened if it had been up to the church? Would we know about Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant? About psychoanalysis? Of course, Catholicism also has something in common with Fascism – the leader principle. Perhaps that's why our mass murderer from Braunau was so warmly welcomed by the pope; by him and his puppets with their shiny little shoes and their little pederast mouths. One day, Pius will be canonised, like his namesake Pius V, who had Jews put in ghettos to 'protect' the Christians from them. Anti-Semitism gets the highest blessings at the Vatican. An upstanding Catholic would undoubtedly counter this by citing examples of

clergymen acting with bravery and humanity. And yes, these people existed. Just as you might find an unspoilt apple on a stinking rubbish heap.”

“So you don’t believe in anything?” Paula asked.

“I believe in Diderot’s words, that humanity will never be free until the last ruler has been choked with the entrails of the last cleric. And perhaps in the providence that has enabled me, a little christened Jew, to be pulling on this cigarette with relish, instead of having gone up in smoke.” He was silent for a while. “It’s much easier not to believe in anything than to believe in God. One New Year’s Eve around ten years ago, I firmly resolved to become religious. But on New Year’s Day it took so much energy just to get out of bed in the afternoon, that I left it at the good intention not to drink before five anymore.” He shrugged his shoulders. “I’m not even ruling out the possibility that there’s a Maker. But if that’s the case, he’s a cynic and has looked the other way for a thousand years, so I don’t care.”

Paula thought of those six wintry weeks in Berlin that now seemed as surreal as the memory of a film from which she could only recall individual images. The group at the table in the Continental. Graham, who spotted Paula at the bar, came over and bowed. “There’s thirteen of us at our table, an unlucky number. Would you do us the honour?” Then a day at the Belvedere Museum, frost flowers in Graham’s eyes as he spoke about his time in Africa during the war. Walks across ice-covered rubble heaps, dotted with crosses for fallen Russian soldiers, in the background the bomb-damaged Ferris wheel in Prater Park. The thrumming of drilling machines in the central cemetery, where they were breaking up the ground in the bitter cold, so that the dead could finally be laid to rest. That last night; Graham’s fingers brushing across her back. Him whispering: “We all have scars.” The following morning, when Paula woke up to find the bed was empty beside her and she felt ashamed because she hadn’t thought about Georg. Not for a second.

“A cigarette for your thoughts,” she heard Kupfer say.

“What you’ve said reminds me of a friend in Vienna.”

“Do you want to tell me about the friend?”

“His name was Graham. He was an English writer, not famous at all, who had come to Vienna to do research. He had been given an advance for a film script, even though he didn’t yet know what the film would be about. All he had was the title. ‘The Third Man’ – does that sound like something set in Vienna?”

“Oh, the title is irrelevant,” said Kupfer. As long as the Ferris wheel is in it and there’s Schrammel music.”

“My unit in Vienna was investigating penicillin smuggling; it’s a lucrative business. I told Graham about it and he liked the idea.” Paula was silent for a moment. “One day, standing by the burnt-out Stephansdom, we saw a Catholic procession. Graham said: ‘How pointless. The Nazis were highly accomplished scientists. They carried out a twelve-year experiment and proved that God doesn’t exist.’”

The wind was playing chess with the clouds. Paula wondered what the Jewish eulogy for this might sound like. *Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who moves the clouds across the sky?* She looked at Kupfer. “What did you do after you left school?”

“Nothing notable happened in my life until I turned 30. I studied, then I worked as a structural engineer. There are houses in Vienna that I helped to build, but I wouldn’t be able to name them. There were women, I didn’t love any of them. I hadn’t fathered a child, hadn’t held anyone’s hand in consolation, hadn’t mourned anybody. One morning I cried without knowing why. My structure was out of kilter. Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes.”

“I got married because I thought that was what was missing in my life. She liked nice things more than she liked me and I was lonelier than ever before. Recently, I racked my brain trying to remember her name. It was a divorce without dirty laundry. She took the jewellery and left me the debts. I got to know a man who traded with plots of land in the Balkans. There wouldn’t have been anything underhand about this, if the land had belonged to him or had indeed been up for sale. It wasn’t long before he offered me a partnership. I didn’t have any qualms. People meant nothing to me. I saw them, shook their hands, chatted and joked with them, but in truth they were simply there, like cars, houses and street lamps. I bought a flat for my mother in the Döbling district. It was nice to see her happy. A lot of German Jews were washing up in Vienna at the time. Some sought safety in Austria, others hoped to continue on to Hungary, where there was a sizeable Jewish community. Which, incidentally, led the Nazis to rename Budapest to Judapest.”

“Just as Vienna is represented as a hotbed of incest in *Mein Kampf*,” said Paula and saw Kupfer’s astonishment. “You’re surprised that I’ve read *Mein Kampf*?”

“I don’t know anyone else who has inflicted that upon themselves.”

“Then you have missed one of the most outstanding humoristic works of the century. In a thousand years’ time, they will laugh about it. Or let’s say two thousand.”

“In obeisance to the German Reich, Hungary only took in very few Jews before the war,” Kupfer continued. “Desperate, they hung about in Vienna’s coffee houses and approached anybody who looked like they might be able to help them. I was frequently in Budapest on

business and also knew a forger there. His visas and passports looked more genuine than the originals. And the money-grabbing official at the German-Hungarian chamber of commerce in Budapest was only too happy to stamp them, in return for a hefty bribe. I was expensive. If one of the Jews couldn't pay the requested sum, I sent him away. The fact that I was a Jew myself never even entered my mind once. You will despise me for this, and I don't blame you. But would it change anything about my self-loathing if I kept it from you? My travels took me across the Balkans and as far as Turkey and Russia; and everywhere a person like me was met with open arms. I was amused at the stupidity of the world, as if I lived in a different one." After a prolonged silence, he added: "You will have read the statements I made during the interrogation."

"No, they didn't want me to."

"You wouldn't find a single word about any of this in there. See it as a sign of my trust."

Paula could have sworn there was nothing but truth in his eyes, if she hadn't known that it was a complete lie. In the file, it said: *Subject roamed around the Balkans and the Near East, carrying out various scams, including forged visas for Jews. Subject had no qualms.*

"This was all before the Annexation?" Paula asked.

"Yes. When Hitler marched into Austria, the churches were decorated with swastika flags. On arriving in Vienna, he put up at the Imperial, where I usually stayed. I didn't have any particular plans, so I went to the Heldenplatz. Half a million people were there, screeching at the emperor's new clothes. *Hereby I announce in front of history the entry of my homeland into the German Reich.*" Kupfer heaved a deep sigh. "*I announce in front of history ...* That linguistic fiasco upset me the most. A woman beside me fell to her knees. Stammering, she stretched her hands towards the sky. 'The star of Bethlehem! The star of Bethlehem!' Do you know what she meant by that?"

"No."

"When I was six, Halley's comet with its tail of fire crossed the sky above Vienna. Half the city was out and about. My mother took me up to the Kahlenberg, where there was a huge fair. I've forgotten what the comet looked like, but the taste of the candy floss is still on my tongue today. You may not believe this, but it was 20 April 1910, Hitler's eleventh birthday. Many remembered this later. The man must surely be the saviour if the same comet that crossed the sky at the time of Christ's nativity, the star of Bethlehem, also lit up the heavens in honour of the Führer. You should have seen the people on the Heldenplatz, their ardent faces. It's a mystery to me how anyone can keep their arm outstretched for such a long time without getting cramp."

“Two hours, eleven minutes, three seconds,” said Paula.

“Hitler’s record in Nuremberg?”

“No. It was an unemployed electrician who set it. Afterwards he was put in a mental asylum.”

“Surely no one was sent to the madhouse for the Hitler salute.”

“It was this January. On the Broadway in New York.”

He laughed. “I briefly visited Vienna after the war. From beggars through to generals – all dissidents. Every one of them had kept a Jew hidden in their home. As if their boys had never played with tin Wehrmacht soldiers. As if the ‘Greatest Field Commander of all Time’ hadn’t been the Lord of Misrule at their crazed orgy. They didn’t even want to be seen taking their German Shepherds out for walkies any more. Until then, I had thought our biggest lie was the assertion that we speak German.”

“That’s changed. In Vienna, even the rich and well-educated now use suburban dialect, to show that they’re Austrians and not Germans. I’ve had professors sit opposite me, grouching: ‘Them folks bleedin’ well screwed right up. I ain’t got the foggiest what they saw in that old jerk Hitler.’”

Kupfer laughed again, heartily this time. “This is what I don’t understand: If they were all victims, how is it possible that I dealt almost exclusively with Austrians at the Vienna Abwehr station, after they got me on their radar?”

“How did that collaboration come about?” Paula asked.

“Isn’t that noted in your file?”

“That’s not a very clever answer, is it?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t feel the need to act clever with you.”

*And yet that's exactly what you've been doing all along*, she thought.

“Well, shortly after war broke out, the lavish lifestyle of my man in the German-Hungarian chamber of commerce attracted attention. That caused the immigration authorities to stumble on the fake visa that the sucker had stamped for me. They gave the Foreign Organisation of the NSDAP a nod. During the three days I spent in a cell in Vienna’s former Hotel Metropol, the interrogation officers proved that you can break somebody’s nose any number of times and each time hurts more than the last. Then they dragged me to the Abwehr intelligence agency on Stubenring, where Oberstleutnant Alfred Lantz explained to me in the broadest Viennese dialect that I had two options. I could either immediately be handed over to the Gestapo together with my mother, or we would both be spared from all persecution. In return I simply had to assist the Abwehr and use my numerous contacts in the Balkans to set up a network of agents. Lantz offered me a coffee with lots of cream and gave me five minutes to consider. It was a tough



decision of course. But as tempting as Gestapo imprisonment was, I still chose the latter. Lantz congratulated me and said: ‘Sometimes it’s better to play the game.’”

“Where did they train you?” Paula asked.

“At an instruction centre for agents in Breitenfurt, west of Vienna. The school was housed in a Gründerzeit villa with garden, not all that dissimilar to my current abode. The training lasted a little over four months and encompassed the coding and decoding of messages and the use of invisible ink.”

“Is that all? Do I need to be disappointed by the Abwehr?” Paula asked.

“There was a pub in Vienna’s Alsergrund district; the Wimmerling. It was the stomping ground of newspaper hacks, news peddlers, Yugoslav secret service agents, shifty blokes from all walks of life. One of the tasks entailed going to the Wimmerling to recruit a ‘Stirler’, as we called them in reference to the Viennese expression for ‘rubbish pickers’. They were petty criminals and spivs, with whose help you could get hold of almost any information through pick-pocketing, burglary and such.”

“They’re still referred to as Stirlers at the CIC now,” said Paula.

Kupfer smiled. “Nowhere is tradition as firmly ingrained as in Vienna.”

“Didn’t you consider fleeing?” she asked.

“How far would I have got with my mother? She was seventy and suffered from asthma. I didn’t want her to die while hiding in a wet, cold cellar somewhere. I finished the training with flying colours. They gave me a passport and put me and my mother on a night train to Budapest. Have you ever been there?”

“No.”

“It’s like Vienna, just without the Ferris wheel.”

“What was your code number?”

“60711.”

She knew from the file that Hermann Baun had confirmed this number.

It was possibly the most important indication that Kupfer may be speaking the truth, as the agents had it hammered into them not to disclose it to anyone.

Kupfer looked at Paula. “*Seven* wouldn’t be the first agent who failed to take sufficient care.”

“Why do you keep detracting from what could speak in your favour?” she asked.

“Perhaps because I don’t want to insult your intelligence,” he replied. “Or because I enjoy your company so much, I’d like to have the benefit of it for as long as possible.”

“You don’t like to pin yourself down.”

“I have to keep on the move, like a wildebeest in the Savannah. Otherwise I’m dead.”

“How did they arrive at *Seven* as a codename?”

“Those who know will know. There could have been six others before me who disappeared into some hole or another, never to be seen again. Or my handler was a proficient Christian. Jesus spoke seven last words on the cross and said seven times *I am*. He performed seven miracles and the Lord’s Prayer has seven petitions. Not to mention the seven sacraments and the seven plagues – and of course the seventh deadly sin, cowardice. Incidentally, I’ve been here seven weeks. A good omen perhaps?”

“Not bad for a Jewish-Catholic agnostic.”

“Not really. I asked a priest in Budapest, I was curious.” Paula looked over at the Mountain Lodge. “Shall we get a bite to eat?”

“Well, I had arranged to meet someone for dinner at the Ritz, but why not.”

Knox was leaning against a lamp post. “Enjoy your meal,” he said.

At this time of day, there would be at least twenty officers dining in the lodge and Knox’s presence would be laughably superfluous. But he knew, of course, what fabulous things were said about the food there. That it was altogether different to the fare available in the crew’s mess room, where the choice alternated between mashed potato with powdered egg scramble and powdered egg scramble with mashed potato.

“I’m afraid you’re going to have to come with us,” Paula told him. “Herr Kupfer is a dangerous man and we don’t want to take any risks.”

Knox beamed from ear to ear.

In the entrance hall of the casino, Kupfer stopped and contemplated the titanic brown Mount Rushmore. “Let me guess, Hitler’s paperweight?”

## **STRUCTURE**

If any further proof was needed that Kupfer was the most prominent prisoner at Camp King, it could have been found in the silence that spread across the room as they entered, the looks they got from the officers, including Lowell Baxter, the muttering that was heard when the liveried waiter, formerly a panzer engineer at MAN, asked about their wishes.

Paula spotted an older man at one of the tables, a Prussian nobleman from head to toe, one of those types who looked naked in civvies. She knew this was Franz Halder, former chief of staff of the German army. He had been hired by the US Army Historical Division to interpret the war from the German viewpoint. Now he was whitewashing the Wehrmacht and making Hitler solely responsible for every crime committed. As Sam had commented: “Halder is

erecting a memorial to the ‘near superhuman efforts’ of the German soldiers. Nobody here seems at all concerned that he issued a decree in 41, stating that no military jurisdiction was required for eliminating ‘suspicious civilians’, because the ‘Judeo-bolshevist’ ideology lurked within each one of them.”

The food arrived. Kupfer saw that Paula was eating with her hands and copied her. “What’s this called?” he asked.

“Hamburger.”

“So, a rissole with salad and tomato sauce in a bread roll.”

“That was a close contender when it came to choosing a name.”

“Well, it’s edible, but that’s never going to become popular in Europe.”

Knox was sat at the bar, wolfing down a pot roast that would have fed five miners handsomely. Paula saw Baxter sit down next to him and start a conversation.

“Your colleague over there is a master of his trade,” Kupfer observed. “I’ve been interrogated by many, but with him I soon no longer knew whether I’m a Jew or a Muslim.”

“Let’s talk about Budapest,” Paula prompted. “Hungary entered a pact with Germany, didn’t it?”

“Later, yes. But when I arrived the country was still neutral, though it went to great lengths not to rile the Nazis. There were lots of Germans in Hungary. All that area was formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of course. People’s sentiments towards the Reich were generally very positive, not least because Hitler helped Hungary regain some territories it had lost during the Great War. That was one of the reasons the Waffen SS was allowed to recruit volunteers there. In Budapest, I got lodgings in a very good hotel, the Astoria. When the concierge heard my Viennese accent, he kissed my mother’s hand.”

“What name did you use?”

“Max Gruber. Not particularly imaginative, I know. I posed as a sales representative for agricultural machines and rented commercial premises in the Franzstadt district, with views across the Danube, all the way to the Fisherman's Bastion.”

“You set up a radio intelligence centre. The file indicates that you hired staff for that.”

“I like how you phrased that,” Kupfer said with a smile.

“You do?”

“Your colleague over there would have worded it rather differently. Something along the lines of: If you were *Seven*, you would have needed staff.”

“Don’t get the wrong idea, I would simply find it far too laborious.”

"It's still nice to hear it put that way. Of course I had to find suitable people. Others might have made plans. But I'm not like that. I've always just let things come to me. I spent a few weeks enjoying life and the city, and meeting up with acquaintances. One evening, I went to a cabaret theatre, the Folies Caprice, where a touring troupe was visiting. There were magicians, trapeze artists, tap dancers, clowns and a dwarf, whose remarkable talent lay in giving renditions of Johann Strauss waltzes by means of flatulence; not very appetising, but amusing nevertheless. Dóra Horváth was the star of the show. She performed a fan dance. Do you know what that is?"

"She gave the men the impression that they were seeing her almost naked," Paula replied, "when in fact they only caught glimpses of her back, flashes of calf, a snippet of her hip."

"Yes. Dóra was so beguiling that even watching her take off her gloves was an erotic experience. I had flowers sent to her dressing room. Dóra was receptive to my flatteries and became my lover. I soon got to know the other artists too. Apart from Dóra they were all Jews. They lived in fear. It was just a question of time before Hungary entered the war on Germany's side. Anti-Semitic laws had already been passed, and were later tightened. As unbelievable as this may sound, Hungary managed to outdo the Nuremberg Laws. But I made these people an offer. If they agreed to work for me, I could protect them from prosecution and ensure they survived the war. That was a big promise, and to be honest, I rather surprised myself. As far as I knew, it was the first time that I hadn't just thought of myself or my mother. I have often asked myself why I did it."

"Perhaps because you had nothing left to lose. Or because you wanted to get your structure back into kilter. Those would be good reasons."

"Probably a bit of both," he replied. "And because the Abwehr had made it clear that I was a dirty Jew, someone they could break like a dry twig. When I made that promise, I didn't know if I would be able to keep it. All I knew was that for these twenty people, I, Johann Kupfer, was the only hope. And if I could save just one of them, it would be worth the greatest effort."

Men laughed somewhere, a glass fell on the floor and smashed, a beer tap hissed; all of it was outside the bubble of stillness and breath that surrounded her and Kupfer. Then her heart skipped a beat and she was back in the world with the others.

"Dóra was the only one of them that didn't need to be afraid. It wasn't my promise that tied her to me, it was furs and jewellery. I found ways to continue leading the life I was accustomed to, and I treated her like a queen. Now she regrets the day she got involved with me. And she's right. All I can offer her is imprisonment."

Paula made moves to get up, but Kupfer placed his hand on hers.

“Miss Bloom, like me, you know only too well what grave consequences a bad decision can have.”

She looked away. “What makes you think that?”

“We both talk a lot about faith, about the consolation of religion. That’s what people do who’ve suffered a loss or are questioning the path they’re on. You carry deep pain inside you, and you long to undo something.” Kupfer removed his hand. “Please forgive me, I know that I speak out of turn. But it makes me sad when I look into your eyes.”

[...]

## Postface

by Andreas Pflüger

I have taken liberties with weaving together fiction and actual history. Naturally. Even though, for an author, that is more of a pleasure than a burden. But many of the things that may surprise readers actually happened exactly like or similar to this.

Camp Ritchie in Maryland was a training camp for the US-American Defense Intelligence Agency from 1942 to 1945. Most of those “Ritchie Boys” were emigrants and they included Stefan Heym, Klaus Mann, Hans Habe and Georg Kreisler. They were turned into specialists for psychological warfare and employed as intelligence officers. Excellent read: *Die Ritchie Boys* by Christian Bauer and Rebekka Göpfert (Hoffmann und Campe).

Walther Rauff surrendered at Hotel Regina in Milan on 30 April 1945. SS-General Karl Wolff had involved him in *Sunrise*, the secret negotiations with Allen Dulles. Rauff’s involvement with the mobile gas chambers was uncovered in October of 1945.

He fled from the camp in Rimini in December 1946, two months later than in my book. He went on to become Pinochet’s advisor in Chile. The German Federal Intelligence Service also appreciated Rauff’s talents and recruited him, knowing full well who they were dealing with. Far too belated efforts on part of the German government to extradite Rauff failed, as did Mossad’s attempts to kill him in Chile. There is a certain irony in this, because Rauff is said to have worked for Israeli intelligence in 1949. He died in Santiago in 1984 without ever having taken responsibility for his actions. *Walther Rauff. Organisator der Gaswagenmorde* by Heinz Schnepfen (Metropol Verlag).

Allen Dulles’ life is the stuff of legends, albeit sombre ones. During his time with Sullivan & Cromwell he and his brother John Foster protected the interests of German companies. Allen’s position as chairman of J. Henry Schroder Bank in New York was useful in that endeavour. Sullivan & Cromwell was the main representative of IG Farben in the United States. After being forced to close the Berlin office, the law firm worked furtively for secret subsidiaries of the pharmaceutical giant and other Nazi companies. Standard reference work: *A Law Unto Itself. The Untold Story of the Law Firm Sullivan & Cromwell* by Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius (William Morrow & Co).

Later, Allen Dulles boasted about *Operation Sunrise*. Churchill details the war plan of employing the Wehrmacht to attack the Soviets, *Operation Unthinkable*, in his memoirs. Dulles compared Wolff, the mass murderer, to Goethe and protected him from prosecution in

Nuremberg. Historian Kerstin von Lingen describes this in *Allen Dulles, the OSS, and the Nazi War Criminals* (Cambridge University Press).

In the 1960s, Karl Wolff spent five years behind bars; in 1978, he was the best man at the wedding of *Stern* reporter Heidemann, for whom he attested to the authenticity of the Hitler diaries. One last feat.

Allen Dulles became director of the CIA in 1953. His name stands for the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion, for coups, assassination attempts on politicians and experiments with psychoactive drugs on human subjects. Dulles died in 1969. No charges were ever brought against him.

If you feel like you detected traits of Ivy Lee, the US advisor for IG Farben, in Paula's father Douglas Bloom, you are not entirely wrong. Lee is considered the founder of modern public relations; he liked to invoice the Hitler regime for providing his genius. But even Cicero couldn't have found a moral justification for the connections between American companies and Nazi Germany. Those managers weren't Nazis, they didn't contribute to the Shoah. They do not lessen German guilt.

They would say: We were merely conducting business.

The unholy alliance of IG Farben and Standard Oil is described by Joseph Borkin in *The Crime and Punishment of IG Farben* (Macmillan Publishers). Borkin was the head of the United States' Antitrust Division from 1938 to 1946 and knew his stuff.

Lieutenant Colonel John R. Dean Jr. was the handler of Gehlen and Baun at Camp King; Walton Hyde is based on him. Hermann Baun did not live to see Reinhard Gehlen's dream become true when he was made the first president of the German Federal Intelligence Service; he died, embittered, in 1951. The authority moved their headquarters to Pullach. That is where the Wenzbach, the small river that absorbed the ash of those executed in Nuremberg, has its source. More continuity is impossible.

Other than Reitsch and Hitler's dentist Blaschke, there were several other obscure figures held under arrest at House Alaska including Fritz Thyssen, Finance Minister Lutz von Krosigk and Giselher Wirsing, Goebbels' exemplary journalist, who was unmatched in his hatred for Jews and became editor-in-chief of *Christ und Welt* in 1954. I have invented the Nazi comedian Putz as well as Heinz Knapp, the failed builder of Nazi Mount Rushmore.

After she was released, Hanna Reitsch wrote books with titles like *Fliegen, mein Leben*. She remained Himmler's sweetheart to the end.

Prisoners in the Dulag Luft, which was located on the area of what would become Camp King during the war, were actually treated humanely. The Gestapo made efforts to bring

Commander Killinger to trial, but he was acquitted. Colonel E. Malström of the 356th Fighter Group undertook his flight in a Me 109; he landed safe and sound.

There are very good papers on Camp King and the Dulag by Manfred Kopp, which he wrote for almanacs of the Hochtaunuskreis. They can be found online. For their support I owe much gratitude to Herr Kopp and Sylvia Struck from the Association for History and Local History in Oberursel.

Every now and then, I enjoy throwing years into the air like balls and juggling with them. That is what I have done in the case of the delegation of the U.S. Congress with which Dulles and Nixon travelled to Germany. This actually didn't happen until 1947, a year later than in my story. (In 1946, the *Queen Mary* was still being overhauled after her deployment.) But then Kissinger wouldn't have been able to see Nixon for the first time in Frankfurt, because after two years with the CIC, which he spent in Bensheim and the Oberammergau, he returned to the States in June of 1947, two months before Nixon's arrival. And that would have been such a pity.

Many readers will notice that my description of Adolf Eichmann is very different from how we usually imagine him. Our perception of him has been shaped by Hannah Arendt's book about Eichmann and the banality of evil for a long time. But Arendt unceremoniously squeezed Eichmann, this pale, elderly man in the glass box, in her already completed sociological theory without ever questioning the spectacle that Eichmann was performing in Jerusalem for the world to see. No, he was not the subordinate clerk of the "Final Solution" that Arendt wanted to see in him. In his intelligent biography, the British historian David Cesarini portrays Eichmann as he really was: a fervent National Socialist, a cynical power seeker, a fanatic anti-Semite, a bon viveur and a sadist. *Adolf Eichmann, His Life and Crimes* (William Heinemann). The SS criminal Alois Brunner raved, as late as 1977: "Then came Eichmann, like a young god ... He was handsome back then, tall, dressed in black, a radiant figure."

The Auschwitz album, about which I wrote on pages 376-377, is now found at Yad Vashem memorial.

Lucy von Anschutz-Weigel is inspired by Lilly von Mallinckrodt, a passionate collector of expressionist art, married to Georg von Schnitzler, a board member at IG Farben. He was arrested at his manor near Oberursel in 1945. Ten of the IG Farben managers that stood accused were acquitted in Nuremberg, the rest was released by 1952. The merchants of death built new careers as members of the boards of BASF, Bayer, Ruhrchemie, Deutsche Bank, Krupp, the Max Planck Society and the Protestant church. Two of them received The Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.



The fate of Albert Katzenellenbogen is true; I only invented his likeness, just as I invented all the paintings – and songs.

Johann Kupfer's story may sound the most fantastical, but he, too, is based on a real-life example. In 2015, historian Winfried Meyer presented a phenomenal biography on the Austrian Richard Kauder, who was Reinhard Gehlen's top spy and fooled German intelligence with made-up reports: *Klatt. Hitlers jüdischer Meisteragent gegen Stalin* by Winfried Meyer (Metropol Verlag). Richard Kauder was my inspiration for Johann Kupfer. Klop Ustinov, father of Peter Ustinov, entirely unknown at the time, was the British intelligence officer responsible for questioning him.

The meeting between Oskar Schindler, Samuel Springmann and Rezső Kasztner took place in November of 1943. The minutes are in the possession of Yad Vashem. I merely imagined Johann Kupfer joining them at Hotel Pannonia. Kasztner was later attacked in Israel because of his negotiations with the SS. He lost the lawsuit he started to save his honour. He was shot outside his home in Tel Aviv in 1957.

To protest McCarthy and the Korean War, Stefan Heym mailed the Bronze Star Medal he had received for bravery to Eisenhower in 1953. He returned to Germany to live in the GDR. He didn't write what the SED wanted to read but was nevertheless awarded the National Prize of the German Democratic Republic.

Klaus Mann committed suicide in 1949. He began his diary of that year like this: *I am not going to continue these notes. I do not wish to survive this year.*

Karl Anders became the co-founder of Nest-Verlag, which was the first to publish Chandler, Hammett and Abler in German translation. His book *Im Nürnberger Irrgarten* stands to this day.

Steffen Radlmaier presents a wonderful collection of reportages by international reporters in *Der Nürnberger Lernprozeß* (Die Andere Bibliothek).

Robert Kempner settled in Frankfurt in 1947. As the prosecutor in the Wilhelmstraßen Trial, he had to accept that his main defendant, the former State Secretary at the Foreign Office and war criminal Ernst von Weizsäcker, complicit in the deportation of French Jews to Auschwitz, wearer of the SS Skull Ring, who thought that democracy was nothing but a "canker," only received a seven-year sentence and was released after just three years. Weizsäcker's son Richard, the future Federal President, was a law student on his father's defence team. He refused to acknowledge his father's crimes throughout his life and defended him to the end.

Albert Speer was able to save his own life – despite causing the death of the hundreds of thousands of people whom he used as slaves. After serving twenty years in prison, his memoirs, which he scribbled onto toilet paper, became an international bestseller. Nothing sells as well as a seemingly repentant Nazi. Speer had the art auction house Lempertz in Cologne discreetly flog the paintings he had stolen from Jewish families in 1981. The fact that the expansion of the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau was known under the name “Sonderprogramm Prof. Speer” only came to light a few years ago.

Hjalmar Schacht only had to serve a one-year sentence and made his career as a financial advisor to authoritarian regimes afterwards. The question of his convictions is answered by his membership in the still active, right-wing extremist *Gesellschaft für freie Publizistik*. When he died at ninety-three, Schacht was able to look back at a sleek life.

Otto Dix was as indisposed to the Socialist realism of the GDR as he was to the abstract art in West Germany. He died, greatly honoured, in 1969. In the end, the young rebel had become an old master after all.

After Stalin’s death, Ilya Ehrenburg wrote: *There were many things we couldn’t even admit to our families; from time to time, we simply squeezed a friend’s hand with particular emphasis; after all, we were all taking part in the great conspiracy of silence.*

The quotes from the correspondences of the Reich Main Security Office are true to the original. This also applies, with necessary adjustments, to the statements made by members of the Wehrmacht, the SS and SD as well as members of special units and task forces. The statements may have been made elsewhere, but they represent the self-understanding and the ideology of those perpetrators.

Walther Rauff personally inspecting the mobile gas chambers in the kill centres is not historically documented. But in a novel, real people necessarily become fictional characters. The man in *Ritchie Girl* is my Walther Rauff. Just as it is my Robert Kempner, my Allen Dulles, my Hanna Reitsch.

I am grateful to Axel Fischer at the *Memorium Nuremberg Trials*, Christoph Strupp at *The Research Centre for Contemporary History in Hamburg* and especially to Bodo Hechelhammer, the chief historian of the German Federal Intelligence Service. The text on the following pages was written by him.

I have been researching National Socialism and the Shoah for thirty years, but I am not a historian. Mistakes are inevitable, so I appreciate every attentive reader who writes to me.

## **Bodo V. Hechelhammer**

### **SLEEK MEN**

When Truman, Stalin and Churchill met in the resort city of Yalta on the Crimean Peninsula in February 1945, they discussed military and political actions against the German Reich in the final phase of World War II. They agreed that National Socialism needed to be eradicated once and for all after its defeat. It was necessary to dissolve the National Socialist society, cleanse Germany's state apparatus and, most importantly, systematically punish those who had participated in acts of injustice and violent crimes. In order to democratise the German state and society in the long-term, the previous functional elites had to be replaced. Andreas Pflüger's *Ritchie Girl* is set during the early stages of this monumental task.

After the final collapse of Nazi Germany in May 1945, an abyss opened in front of almost all those who had made a career during National Socialism. The nation they had supported was defeated politically and militarily and its civilization was stigmatised. They themselves were left with nothing. This applied to the many followers as well as to accomplices and definitely to the perpetrators, many of which found themselves in the docks at the Nuremberg Trials. The allied forces quickly created a central register of war criminals and suspects, the Central Register of War Criminals and Security Suspects, CROWCASS. Up to 250,000 people were held in the camps established by the allied forces for many years. Some committed suicide, while others, like Adolf Eichmann, managed to flee to South America or the Middle East via rat lines, to a new identity. Roughly 4,000 functionaries of the Hitler regime had been sentenced by allied as well as German courts by 1949; 668 of them received a death sentence, another 6,000 were extradited to third countries.

This sounds impressive. But it wasn't. Soon after the Nuremberg Trials, influential circles lobbied for a comprehensive amnesty for convicted Nazi criminals. The cry of the unfair victor's justice started to spread, in a country in which individual guilt was being suppressed collectively. Old networks in the new departments and ministries provided financial and legal help to Nazi criminals. By 1958, almost all the convicted Nazi criminals had been pardoned or released. Thus, thousands escaped their punishment and old comrades became new colleagues.

In step with the war criminals' lobby, politicians also advocated for the criminals – even Willy Brandt splashed out. In the young Federal Republic of Germany, the final stroke was the preferred shortest connection to the Hitler regime. The Cold War was accompanied by a Cold Amnesty.

The majority of those criminals outright denied any personal responsibility for thousand years of terror and atrocities anyway; frozen in their self-righteous pose of performing duties to which they had no alternative. Many offered themselves up to the allied occupiers eagerly – and successfully. In the heated phase of the Cold War, the struggle with the East for the global expansion of the respective sphere of influence, staunch anti-communists were sought-after and often found in former Nazis.

Nevertheless, only few managed an almost uninterrupted career. One of them was Major General Reinhard Gehlen. The former commander of the *Fremde Heere Ost* (FHO), tasked with gathering intelligence on the Red Army for the Wehrmacht, even managed the feat of creating his own intelligence service in Germany with the help of the Americans. The *Bundesnachrichtendienst*, Germany's foreign intelligence service, emerged from the organisation named after him on April 1, 1956.

Immediately after the war ended, former members of the FHO and employees of the *Ausland/Abwehr* under the leadership of lieutenant-colonel Hermann Baun, formerly head of the *Frontaufklärungsstelle I Ost Walli*, led by Gehlen, began their work of gathering intelligence and espionage against the Soviet Union once more. In the beginning, they were supervised by the U.S. military counterintelligence, the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), and after the summer of 1949 by the civilian foreign intelligence service, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). After the summer of 1945, Gehlen and a few of his men, the so-called *Bolero Group*, began to compile initial studies about the Soviet Union in Fort Hunt, Virginia. That was part of a larger project, the *Hill Project*, which analysed German documents of intelligence value with the aid of experts. This endeavour was housed at Camp Ritchie – a nice aperçu to Pflüger's brilliantly researched novel. Simultaneously, Baun began intelligence work against the USSR in September 1945, and he did so in Oberursel, Hesse, Germany.

There, the allied forces were using a former POW camp of the German Luftwaffe as an interrogation centre for high-ranking Nazis, members of the Wehrmacht and employees of the secret service. The area was initially called Camp Sibert and renamed Camp King in September 1946. The military accommodated prominent prisoners in the former teachers' lodgings, called House Alaska.

In the summer of 1946, Reinhard Gehlen and his co-workers came to the Taunus from the United States, where the two departments of *Operation Rusty* had begun to gather intelligence for the USA on 15 July 1946; the procurement of information was supervised by Baun, while the analysis was Gehlen's part. Three houses were seized on Hohemarktstraße between the camp and House Alaska for the German intelligence officers and turned into safe houses secured by barbed wire and covered with tarpaulins. Over time, the Americans assembled more and more German intelligence officers in this complex called *Basket*. Space soon became scarce in the *Basket*, which is why the Opel family's remote refuge, their hunting lodge in the Taunus, was confiscated in mid-August 1946 so that the men led by Baun could conduct their operations from there. In the nearby village of Schmitten a hotel was acquired to serve as lodgings and worksite. In addition, Kransberg castle near Usingen, which had previously been used as an interrogation centre for the allied forces called *Dustbin*, was made available in the spring of 1947. Prominent representatives of the fields of science, economics, technology and the arms industry of the Nazi era had primarily been interrogated there. Kransberg remained in the possession of the BND, which conducted its communications intelligence in the East from there, until 1961. Since the mission and the staff were growing constantly, operations were moved to the former Martin Bormann settlement in Pullach, southwest of Munich, on 6 December 1947 and the new intelligence service command post was set up there.

The Federal Intelligence Service also recruited men who hadn't been mere followers but part of the Nazi regime: members of the Gestapo, SS and SD. Their Nazi past would become a political burden and a security risk. Heinz Felfe, for example, a former criminal investigator, SS-Obersturmführer and SD member at the Reich Security Head Office, found his way to Pullach, where he rose to the position of head of counterespionage against the Soviet Union. A wolf in sheep's clothing. Towards the end of 1961, Felfe was arrested and convicted for working as a spy for the Soviet secret service, the KGB, for ten years. It was the time of information traders and double agents. Nazi war criminals were shamelessly recorded as informers; one of them Walther Rauff, former SS-Standartenführer, Gruppenführer at the Reich Security Head Office and co-inventor of the mobile gas chambers, who had escaped to South America and worked for the Federal Intelligence Service from 1958 to 1962 before being dismissed for his lack of success. The intelligence services didn't even shy away from Klaus Barbie, the former Gestapo chief and "Butcher of Lyon". Barbie worked for the CIC from 1949 onwards and was aided in his escape to the safety of Bolivia via rat lines. From there, he also worked as an informant for the Federal Intelligence Service for a few months in 1966. Newly

declassified American and German documents show that after the start of the Cold War, numerous former National Socialists and collaborators were recruited by the military or by intelligence services not just in West Germany but also in the USA.

This sound pragmatism in dealing with National Socialists manifested itself already in the 1930s, especially where American economic interests were concerned. Thomas J. Watson, to name but one example, president of the International Chamber of Commerce and chairman of International Business Machines Corporation (IBM). Watson turned the German Reich into the second-largest market after the USA. IBM's punched card tabulating machines were used by the Nazis to identify and count the Jewish population, both within the Reich as well as in occupied Europe. Whether Watson knew what the machines were used for remains unproven. However, the contracts were not suspended even after the war had started.

Standard Oil, in cooperation with their long-term strategic partner IG Farben, continued to deliver fuel to the German Reich even after the USA had entered the war. Sullivan & Cromwell, the law firm of John Foster Dulles, the future Secretary of State, even tried to protect the capital of IG Farben and Bosch from being seized by the US justice system during the war.

The question of whether ethics can have importance in politics may be old, but it is nevertheless unresolved and current. Ethical norms, values and virtues serve to ennoble interests all too often and are ridiculed when tried to implement. And so, structures of a political understanding beyond all ideological schemata become apparent in the dealings with National Socialists as well. A pragmatic, interest-driven politics tries to adapt to the respective historical conditions and power structures. Political decisions are not apodeictic judgements about good or evil, right or wrong. They stand at the end of a search for the best means to solve problems, which can be ethically painful. And so, during the Cold War the value of certain elites of National Socialism in the West's fight against communism often outweighed the crimes against ethics and humanity that their work for the Nazi regime caused. In times of transformational processes those whose lack of a moral compass lets Pflüger's protagonist Paula Bloom despair often get the upper hand. It is, on the side of the victors as well as on the side of the defeated, the hour of the sleek men.

Bodo V. Hechelhammer has a PhD in history with a focus on the history of intelligence services and has been working for the Federal Intelligence Service for many years. By now he is the head of the Service's historical department and his work makes significant contributions to the research of the history of the Federal Intelligence Service. He has published numerous works on the subject including the following:

*Spion ohne Grenzen. Heinz Felfe – Agent in sieben Geheimdiensten*, Piper Verlag 2019; *Doppelagent Heinz Felfe entdeckt Amerika: Der BND, die CIA und eine geheime Reise im Jahr 1956*, Schöningh Verlag 2017; *Geheimobjekt Pullach – Von der NS-Mustersiedlung zur Zentrale des BND*, Ch. Links Verlag 2014; *Walther Rauff und der Bundesnachrichtendienst*, Berlin 2011.

*postfaces translated by Laura Wagner*