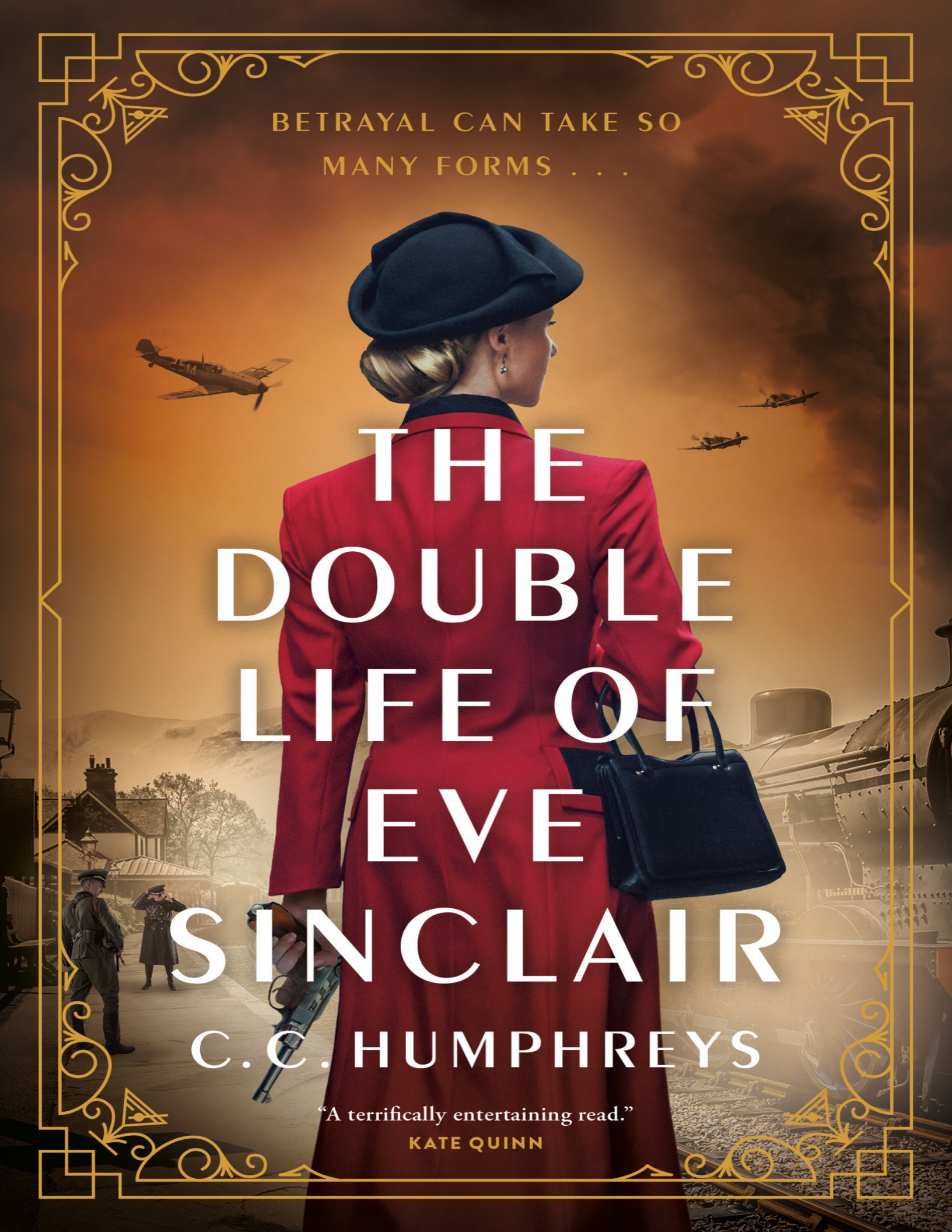


BETRAYAL CAN TAKE SO
MANY FORMS . . .

The background of the cover features a woman in a red coat and blue beret, seen from behind, holding a handgun. She is looking out over a landscape that includes a steam train on the right and a small town with soldiers in the distance. The sky is filled with biplanes. The entire scene is framed by an ornate gold border.

THE DOUBLE LIFE OF EVE SINCLAIR

C.C. HUMPHREYS

"A terrifically entertaining read."

KATE QUINN

PRAISE FOR
THE DOUBLE LIFE OF EVE SINCLAIR

“Both sweeping and intimate, *The Double Life of Eve Sinclair* weaves a love story for the ages and an addictively propulsive tale of espionage that will keep you guessing until the final page, inspired by the heroic exploits of courageous Scandinavian resistance operatives and how they helped the Allies win World War II.”

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—Kate Quinn, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Alice Network* and *The Astral Library*

THE
DOUBLE
LIFE OF
EVE
SINCLAIR

A NOVEL

C.C. HUMPHREYS



DOUBLEDAY
CANADA

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To Alma Lee

*If there's another world, [she] lives in bliss;
If there is none, [she] made the best of this.*

ROBERT BURNS, "Epitaph on my own Friend"

*Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
A Midsummer Night's Dream



*Run when you will. The story shall be changed:
Apollo flies and Daphne holds the chase;
The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind
Makes speed to catch the tiger.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
A Midsummer Night's Dream

PROLOGUE

Gamle Rolvsøysund, Norway. May 9, 1944

THE WOMAN WITH BLOOD on her hands pressed her face into the earth, praying for the soldiers to pass. If they stopped they'd see her and then she wasn't sure what she would do. Running wasn't much of an option, since her ankle had not fully recovered from the jump, the bad landing. Besides, she was on a slope, and these men had Schmeissers.

They got closer, preceded by cigarette smoke. The soldiers were discussing soccer, their rival teams' merits. Ribbing each other, like men anywhere.

Now they were just below her, two body-lengths away. If they glanced sideways, they were certain to see the top of her head in the bush. Look straight up, and they couldn't miss the wire that ran to her explosives. Those were seventy metres away, packed around the central stanchion of the bridge.

She held her breath. Then something touched her head. She heard the faintest hiss of burning hair before she felt the sting. The men passed on, but she waited till they were ten paces further down the path before she reached up and patted the place where her scalp burned from a German's flicked cigarette butt.

The men's voices carried clearly up the gorge. It was not that deep there, the reason why the bridge had been built in this place. All too soon the guards would reach the riverbank. Which is why she still didn't rise, only did now what she'd failed to do before because she'd been careless and they'd come upon her so suddenly—reached slowly back to her feet where she'd laid her Sten gun, and pulled the weapon up into her arms.

She lay still again, listened. She hadn't had time to properly hide the body of the soldier, had simply slipped him into a bank of reeds that lined the river there. She'd had fifteen minutes before the patrol came round again. Fifteen to climb the trestle and place her explosives. Barely enough.

Breathe, she told herself. She'd need breath if the soldiers found the corpse. To stand up, shoot, run—*limp*—away. She'd die then, almost certainly. Or she'd be captured and then she'd die anyway because she had a contingency for that—the cyanide capsule sewn into the cuff button of her shirt. Worse than dying, though, was that the bridge would not get blown. The train, its cargo, would reach the enemy. Her mission would be a failure, and men would die because of that. Many men.

She waited for the cries of shock, for the yelling that would follow the discovery of the body. Yet all that came was conversation that had moved, in the way of men, from soccer to women. She risked a look and watched as the two guards climbed the slope and stepped onto the small road bridge that ran beside and just below the larger railway one. They were making for the old fort on top of the opposite hill, their voices soon lost to the gurgles of the fast-flowing Glomma River, swollen with snowmelt. Other sounds returned then: a thrush singing the joys of spring in the branches of an alder above her. A distant car horn. Her sudden, harsh breaths.

They'd missed him. Relief brought an instant craving, and she immediately looked for the butt that had caused her pain. German cigarettes might be foul, adulterated by anything that could bulk out scarce tobacco, but it was the only game in town right then, since she'd had to leave her Lucky Strikes in her locker back at Fawley Court, beside her farewell letters. When she found the butt, though, it was smoked to a stub and had gone out, of course. Adulterated tobacco had to be constantly re-lit.

Which only left her thoughts to return to. They had not been pleasant. In one way, she'd almost been grateful for the patrol's sudden appearance. She looked at her hands. All her rubbing had only spread and deepened the bloodstains. Each fingernail held a scarlet crescent moon. "Why didn't you just leave?" she murmured again, a desperate appeal to a dead man.

She'd heard the young soldier's voice so clearly. Feared she'd always hear it now. He'd told the guards he was going to fish beneath the bridge, and they'd teased him—lewd comments about what he could catch in the brothels of the nearby town of Fredrikstad. He'd gone to sit right under the trestle, at the very place she would have to climb up, between patrols. She'd watched him, urging him with prayers to every saint she remembered from school to move on. But he just kept casting and reeling in, casting, reeling in. Caught nothing, yet it did not seem to matter to him. So when after half an hour he still sat there, she'd crept up behind him, wrapped an arm around his head and dragged her Fairbairn-Sykes knife across his throat.

These knives were so sharp they'd never been allowed to train with them in Scotland, using a piece of stiffened rope instead. Now she'd seen what they could do, she knew why. Killing was different from how they'd explained it, too. She'd been trained to rationalize it, this other...necessity of war. *Do it, Corporal, then dismiss it. Move on.* She wondered if she'd ever be able to move on. Be able to dismiss the terror. Forget the reproach in the young man's eyes above her silencing fingers, as she held him as close as any lover. Until he died.

A train whistle brought relief from thought. She snatched up her binoculars—she had a clear view down the tracks into town. Two trains had passed since she'd planted the explosives. Neither had the cross painted on the caboose that her fellow SOE operative had said he would daub upon it. He could have failed, of course. Then she'd have to look for other ways of telling if it was the right one.

In her lenses, she saw a column of white smoke. Another whistle sounded as, four hundred metres away, the train rounded the bend...and there it was. A cross. She was surprised. She had thought it would be a crucifix. This was one you'd use in tic-tac-toe.

She put down her binoculars and shimmied back to where she'd placed the small car battery. One wire was already attached to the negative terminal. She picked up the one meant for the positive and glanced back to the bridge. Now it was a question of timing. It was an inexact science, of

course. But the rule of thumb was to blow the bridge just before the locomotive reached it—when it would have no chance of stopping.

Two hundred metres now. Slowing down, as trains did when approaching old wooden bridges.

It was when she raised the wire that she heard it. A sound so strange in the context of what she was about to do that she thought she must be imagining it.

Children singing. Singing a song she knew because Swedish children sang it too.

“Pål sine høner...”

The chorus was coming from the opposite bank, the direction the train was heading. A phalanx of schoolkids had reached the small car and pedestrian bridge. In threes, arm in arm, they marched out onto it. Singing.

She looked back to the train. It was now one hundred metres from the bridge. When she blew that, the locomotive and its trucks would plunge into the Glomma, taking the little wooden bridge with it.

“No,” she muttered. “No. No!”

She heard them then. Those other voices, drilling into her, over and over, about the necessity of war. Not only the enemy must die. Innocents must too. Did, every day, thousands, as both sides destroyed their enemy’s cities with bombs. It was as sad as it was inevitable. All that mattered was the long-term. All that mattered was her mission, which would end the massacre of so many other innocents by shortening the war.

You are not a judge. You are a soldier. Do your duty.

Her mission. Four years of training had brought her to this moment.

As the train driver sounded his whistle, as the children’s voices rose in chorus, Eve Sinclair raised the wire.

A decorative rectangular border with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork and floral motifs at the corners and midpoints of each side.

PART ONE

**BEST-LAID
PLANS**

ONE

*Five years earlier—Montreal, Canada. May
18, 1939*

IT ISN'T EVERY DAY, Eve Sinclair thought, dropping another flaming letter into the grate, *that you burn your past and meet a king*.

She looked to the window. The weather had been a major concern for most of Montreal's citizens this past week—it was certainly the first item her neighbours in Westmount turned to in *The Gazette* over their breakfasts. While on the other side of Mount Royal, in Outremont, and despite some complaints at the expense of it all, most residents were avidly scanning the weather column in *La Presse*. For like their English-speaking equivalents in “*les classes supérieures*,” most of the Québécois elite would be attending the parades at least, and many of the social events too.

There had been a scare the week before when someone talked of a snowstorm, not unheard of in the city in May. That had changed to rainstorms as the temperatures rose. But what Eve saw through the tall, half-opened shutters of the family living room was a day defying those forecasts. There were some clouds, but not the rain-filled kind. The temperature, the old oak Admiral FitzRoy barometer in the hall had informed her, was a balmy fifty degrees at 10 a.m. and destined to rise another ten at the least by 2 p.m.—the hour when the “royal” train would pull into Park Avenue station. It appeared that King George VI and his consort, Queen Elizabeth, on their first-ever royal visit to their Dominions of Canada, had brought spring across the Atlantic with them.

Eve frowned, then immediately imagined her mother telling her to stop doing so. “If the wind changes, that crease between your eyes will become

permanent,” Marlene always said, another one of her strange Swedish-childhood sayings. Eve eased her face—yet the thought remained. Because the forecast she’d read had spoken of rain showers returning come Saturday.

Isn’t rain on your wedding day meant to be lucky? she thought. Or was that just one of those things people said to mitigate bad luck? Like when that pigeon had pooped on Richard’s camel-hair coat on Sainte-Catherine last week and he’d laughed, saying it was a good thing.

Richard’s laugh, she thought, and smiled. It was distinct, delighted—always sudden, as if he was taken by surprise. By bird poop. By something she said.

She looked down at her hand, at the letter it held—and realized her frown had returned. Easing it again, she turned both to the grate and to the task that, in a way, Richard had set her the day before.

“Love letters?” He’d been looking down at her vanity table, at the pages spread across it that she’d foolishly left out. He’d crossed his eyes, a trick he had, then clutched at his heart. “You mean to tell me that the woman I love has been loved before?”

“Don’t be silly.” She’d waved her hand across the papers. “Boys trying out romance for size. Terrible poetry likening my eyes to, oh...Arctic lakes. And my voice to the cry of a loon.”

His eyes uncrossed. “Oh dear.” His voice was now serious. “But those are the exact same metaphors I used in the poem *I’ve* just written for you.”

She grinned. “Idiot!” She smacked his outstretched hand.

He’d feigned hurt, then laughed that laugh, before taking her elbow and carrying her off on another adventure. Skiing at Saint-Sauveur that day. He hadn’t even glanced at the topmost letter—the one written by a man, not a boy, and where the poetry was none so bad.

She was holding that letter now. She’d reread them all before burning them: the one she’d received from Per, a neighbour at her family’s country home in Sweden, who’d stolen both his and her first kiss, and was smitten for the summer they’d both turned fourteen. A few from brothers or friends at The Study, and from tennis players and dance partners when she was

sixteen, seventeen. Boys, as she'd told Richard. She'd smiled as she read them and again as she watched them burn.

There was no smile for the last letter. The crease was back between her eyes, and this time she didn't try to make it go away. Tears came at his words, at his terms of endearment. At the memories they brought. They surprised her, those tears. She had no doubt she loved Richard, now. But she hadn't read this letter since their engagement.

Cuore mio, Gian Franco had written...

May I describe you as I saw you that last time? The one before you turned away from me, climbed into the train and slammed the carriage door? Your golden hair was whipping around your face by that sudden wind off Montagne de Chateau. Your pale-blue dress set off your eyes. Eyes whose colour I'd failed so many times to name in my poor English, making you laugh every time I tried.

Now they have gone from me. Now I fear I will never gaze into them again. So only now I realize that there are no words for that shade in your language. There are some that are close in Italian. Because Italian, as you know, is the only true language for love.

Azzurro chiaro.

Ah, stella mia! Remember how I read to you Dante's words to Beatrice? We were in that forest glade, picnicking on the last warm day of the year. We finished that delicious white wine, then lay in each other's arms, listening to the wind in the treetops. You told me you could feel, even in Summer's final hot breaths, the first cool fingers of Autumn.

Cara, I no longer can read his love verses. I only can read his sorrows, in my sorrows. "Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria."

I am wretched without you, my heart. Mine does not beat the same way, because you are not here. Yet it pounds faster

now because I think, I dream, I pray, that you will read these two words and hear them as I said them to you in that forest, on that platform.

Marry me.

Do not write to me to tell me no. I could not bear to read the word. It is enough if I do not hear from you. Then I know, then I understand, then I make my way. My heart will settle again, someday. I hate it that I know it will.

*Ciao, amore mio. Per sempre tuo,
Gianni*

There was a streak on the page where a tear must have fallen. Eve added another, then wiped her eyes. “Gianni,” she murmured, because that’s what she mostly called him—occasionally “Gian Franco!” in reprimand when he was too outrageous, which he so often was.

From the moment his sister, Clarissa, her roommate at the Brillantmont finishing school, had introduced them—“My brother, Ernesto Giacomo Gian Franco Vitali, Cavaliere de Villa Chiusi”—how he had made her laugh! Then, quite soon, how he made her feel other things. Things she’d never felt before. Of course his title dazzled her a little, but his emerald eyes dazzled her more, as did his wild, fair hair—quite un-Italian, she told him, but he was from the north!—and broken nose. (“A skiing fall,” he’d explained, though Clarissa later told her it had been earned in a street fight, something political. She never said what, and Eve had not sought an explanation she wouldn’t have understood, since politics bored her so.) But the nose and the hair and his green eyes gave him a piratical look, like Errol Flynn in that movie she loved, *Captain Blood*. While his laugh, which he deployed all the time and at the most inappropriate things, was the most captivating thing of all, a thing of abandon. And even though she knew that he came from “poor nobility”—that she, the only child of one of the richest mining tycoons in Canada, was a catch many an impoverished European nobleman sought—she believed that what they had, what they made, was beyond all that.

The ways he'd touched her! Always asking permission for the next advance which, breathlessly, she always granted. Until that moment under the pines, after that wine, wrapped in that wind, when she thought, *yes, yes*, and he was the one who demurred.

"You know we cannot, *cuore mio*," he'd said, pulling away, though she could read the longing in his eyes. "Our faith prohibits it." He'd come to his knees then—and asked for her hand in marriage. And though she'd felt such heat in the hand he held, and matched the longing in his eyes with hers, she'd said no. Had *had* to say no, though a piece of her heart broke off when she said it. He was fifteen years older than she was, thirty-three, but that wasn't the problem. The problem was that he was divorced.

Her mother would never allow her to marry a divorced man.

Her mother. Whose heels Eve now heard clacking on the parquet floor of the hall. The sound was, as ever, almost military in its precision. Marlene Sinclair never made for a door or a person casually; she was always on a mission. Eve had heard her mother's approach all her life—knew when the door would fly open to the second.

She had three now. One to kiss Gianni's letter, one to hurl it onto the grate, one to watch the paper instantly crisp and blacken, tears and endearments and Dante's words all gone to smoke, vanishing up the chimney.

TWO

“OH, *THERE* YOU ARE, Eve.”

Marlene spoke as she always did. As if she were a little surprised—as if she hadn’t known precisely where to find her daughter. “Good. There are a few things I wish to discuss with you.”

Discuss, Eve thought. The word didn’t truly catch the flavour of their recent conversations. There was little discussion. Information was given—practicalities for the two great events taking place in Montreal that week. The first—the lesser, Eve knew her mother felt—was the royal visit. Since Jock “Bootstraps” Sinclair had pledged a hefty sum toward that night’s royal entertainment, his wife and daughter would be presented to Their Majesties at the Windsor Hotel at a small reception before the lavish supper. So these “discussions” had centred on dress, words to speak, how to walk, how to curtsy, with demonstrations required. Which annoyed Eve since these were the very skills she’d spent two years acquiring at the Swiss finishing school.

Satisfied at last, and only yesterday, her mother had moved on to the second, far more important subject: the wedding taking place two days later, in the Basilique Notre-Dame de Montréal, between Richard Gordon Spence and Eve Marie Sinclair.

Rumours had spread from Westmount tea rooms to Outremont cafés that Marlene Sinclair, on discovering that the event she’d been planning for a year would be upstaged by the royal visit, had harried her husband to make representations to the City Council and even to the Crown to change *their* plans. Even if the rumours were true—and Eve would not have been at all surprised—she knew her father. You didn’t rise from the slums of Glasgow

to become one of Montreal's, indeed, Canada's, richest men—dragging yourself up by your “bootstraps”—without recognizing the battles where you have at least a shot at winning, and those where you have none. So he would have told his wife he would absolutely sort that out...and then done nothing.

“What are you doing there?” Her mother had switched to her native Swedish. Which made Eve sit up because that usually meant that subjects of a more personal nature were on the agenda. Things that were not of concern to the man of the house. Marlene crossed the room, peered into the grate. There was a last flare, words turning to ash.

“Oh, burning love letters,” Eve replied, her tone casual. Lying was the ultimate sin in the Sinclair household. It was always simpler to tell the truth. Besides, she knew she would not be believed anyway. Though Eve was nineteen years old, her mother still treated her as if she were seven.

So Marlene's next words surprised her. As did the fact that she dragged a second stuffed ottoman over to the fire, dropped down beside her daughter and held her hands out to the flames. “Were they from the Cavaliere?”

“No.” Eve's reply was too quick and her mother stared at her. Eve coloured, looked away. She'd made the mistake, on her return from Europe, of considering herself so grown-up that she'd breezily answered her mother's questions about “amours” with Gian Franco's name and title. Marlene had grown excited. She herself was the daughter of a Swedish baron. She knew that the objective of many of the North American young ladies who attended Brillantmont was to snag a nobleman to marry, and she would not have been unhappy had her daughter done so. But her excitement had abruptly ceased on hearing of the Cavaliere's divorce.

If her mother had heard the lie, she chose not to pursue it. Instead, she bent, picked up a poker and jabbed it into the hearth, destroying the ash outline of paper still there. “Sit up straight, child.” Her tone was distracted—something so rote in the phrase it had almost lost its meaning.

Eve studied her mother. She was gazing into the flames, that same crease she so cautioned Eve against prominent between her own *azzurro chiaro* eyes.

Marlene hung the poker back on its stand. With a sharp inhale, she began, “You know, I am glad you experienced some, ah, passions, in your time in Europe. Experienced...and resisted.”

She gazed keenly at her daughter, who could only hold the stare for a moment before turning back to the grate, where Gianni’s words no longer glowed. She thought of the forest, the scent of pine sap, and how she hadn’t wanted to resist at all.

Her mother continued, “However I do wonder about the extent of your”—she raised her eyes to the ceiling, seeking words, and found them in English, switching easily to it—“knowledge of where passion leads.”

Oh, God, thought Eve, not *that* conversation. It was just so...nineteenth century! Not only had she taken Human Biology at Brillantmont, she’d also had many hushed conversations in the bedrooms there after lights out. Especially with Jeannie and Leanne, twins from Baltimore who had *no* restraint in that department. No restraint, yet also, it had occurred to Eve at the time, no great pleasure. They’d snagged a minor nobleman apiece, one French, one German. But at the glittering weddings that followed, both of which she’d attended, neither twin looked altogether thrilled as she walked down the aisle.

When she spoke, she went for breeziness. “Oh, I know exactly what to expect, if that’s what you mean, Mamma. The wedding night, and all that.”

Marlene regarded her, and Eve could tell she was not fooled. “I know you understand the essentials. Even the, ah, mechanics?” She sniffed. “However, it is not those I wish to discuss.” Suddenly she turned and seized her daughter’s hands. “I want you to be happy, child.”

“I will be. Richard will make me happy.”

“Perhaps. Yet I do not truly believe anyone *makes* anyone else happy. You need to find happiness for yourself. Sometimes, if they are lucky, two people find it within marriage, as our faith teaches us.”

“As you did with Father?”

“Yes.” The crease between her mother’s eyes eased with her smile. “Like us. We had the luck. We were so different, and yet...perhaps that is what has made it work so well.”

So different? They could not have been more so. The youngest child of eight born in a Glasgow slum, and the only child of a Swedish aristocrat raised in a castle. Eve had observed her parents' deep love all her life, often revealed in little moments. Like sometimes when they laughed with no restraint, like children. Or when her father took her mother's hand for a moment, his broad rough fingers entwining with hers, long and delicate. Or when she folded herself into him, at a mantelpiece, on a dance floor. They were such wonderful dancers because they danced together, immersed in each other.

"Richard and I are different too," Eve blurted, as if difference was suddenly the key to it all.

"Yes," her mother replied, though the word was coloured with doubt, "though not in the same way. You both come from this." And she waved her hand, not at the room, Eve knew, but beyond it, to Westmount, the privileged bastion of Anglo Montreal. "So, what I want to say to you is this." She still held her daughter's hands and squeezed them gently now. "Not everyone has the luck your father and I had. Passion can be brief, almost fleeting. Yet it can also be worked at. So do not expect"—she shook her head—"a fairy tale on your wedding night. Get through it, think beyond it, to the life you and Richard can have together, if you both try. Love can grow. Change, yes, with the years. But it must grow if it is to survive. Passion? Passion can grow with it. And the best in the world is the one found within a marriage."

She stood, drawing Eve up with her, then pulled her into a hug. She almost never did that. Eve gasped, found it hard to catch a breath. Then found that the tears that had come when she'd reread Gianni's letter came again now. Though this time it was her mother's affection that brought them.

From the hall came the shrill cry of the doorbell. Her mother released Eve and stepped back quickly, as if someone had caught them doing something wrong.

Saved by the bell, Eve thought. It was an expression she'd first heard the week before, when Richard had taken her to a boxing tournament at a

warehouse in the depths of the city's east end. The only Anglos there, they had dressed down and spoken only their impeccable French. But when one of the boxers had been dropped to the canvas at the end of a round and the referee was counting him out, the bell had sounded, and Richard had said that phrase in English, drawing dark looks from their nearest bench companions.

"There's Richard." Eve stepped away, smoothing down her dress. "He's come to take me to see the King and Queen."

"Where are you watching the parade from?"

"I don't know. Friends own an apartment on Saint-Hubert. There's a party."

"Ah, Richard and his French friends! He mixes with them a lot, does he not?" The tone implied a criticism, but then Marlene shrugged. "I suppose it is what will make him a good diplomat." The bell sounded again, a longer series of rings. "He is impatient, that one." As Eve moved toward the door, her mother called again: "Don't let him drink so much at the party. And make sure he brings you home by five. Five! The royal reception is at seven thirty, and it will take you an hour to get into that dress you have chosen." Another criticism in the tone. The warmth of the hug, the intimate discussion, were past. Her mother, the cool Swedish baroness, was back.

"Yes, Mamma." Eve crossed the hall to the front door, the bell now continuous and shrill. Sandrine had finally emerged from the servants' quarters and was halfway across the hall, but her aged shuffle was slow and Eve, waving her away, beat her by three paces. "Richard," she snapped, flinging it open, "will you stop that?"

He actually had his shoulder pressed to the doorbell. Now he stepped back, leaned on his silver-topped cane, flicked his crest of thick, black hair from one side to the other, and bowed.

"Hello, Scarlett," he said, straightening, and winked.

THREE

IT WAS A MISTAKE, Eve thought, as she contemplated the languid figure before her, to have confessed to this man her passion for *Gone with the Wind* and how much she related to Scarlett O'Hara. But she'd finished the novel the morning of a sailing party on Lac des Deux Montagnes two weeks before, and she'd been breathless from its story.

Still, "Scarlett" was better than the nickname he'd given her when they'd met at Oxford the previous summer. Then he'd dubbed her "Maggot." Simply because she'd made a justified fuss about one she'd found in the apple she'd been eating at a picnic on the grounds of his college, Magdalen.

"You'd better come in, I suppose."

"No, you had better come out, old girl." He waved his stick toward the city behind him. "They're closing off roads for this bally royal visit, and if we want to get to Saint-Hubert, we better shift."

"I'll get my coat." She crossed the hall again to the closet. *Old girl*, she thought. *Bally*. Richard had graduated from Oxford that same summer of '38 when they'd met. One year later, he still spoke more like the English toffs he'd associated with there than the Westmount crowd both he and she had grown up with.

As she put on her wool coat and scarf—the day was cool enough to merit them and her dress was cotton—she looked through the open door. Richard had his customary unfiltered Player's Navy Cut at his lips, his head raised and eyes closed to the sun that had broken through. He was leaning on his stick, his ankle still weak after he'd twisted it in an impromptu street hockey game with friends the week before. He was a great one for sports

and games—had actually won a Blue at Oxford for fencing. The accident was another source of discontent for her mother. “Will he be limping down the aisle of Notre-Dame next week?” she’d huffed.

But that was Richard, the man she loved. Spontaneous, enthusiastic and committed to whatever he was doing in the moment. And in those moments she couldn’t help laughing at that side of him, even if she was sometimes irritated that his focus was elsewhere, away from the two of them. Eve took a deep breath, then went to the door, closed it behind her. “Let’s go.”

He opened his eyes, looked her over. “Have you got a scarf for your head, Scarlett? Got the lid down on Dizzy.”

“Really, Richard? It is still only May.”

“Yes, but—” He waved his cane at the sky, more blue than grey now.

She sighed and pulled an Hermès scarf from the pocket of her coat. “Let’s go,” she said, putting it on as she preceded him down the front path.

Dizzy awaited in the street. A Jaguar SS100, shipped at great expense from England, she was a low-slung beauty, creamy yellow, his “dizzy-blond girlfriend,” hence the name. “Your only rival for my heart,” he’d told her more than once. Having seen her into her deep leather seat, he dropped into his, gunned the engine and took off at his usual speed. One eye focused entirely on the road, the other half closed to the smoke from the cigarette on his lips, he hummed as he went up and down through the gears.

She studied him as she so often did from this vantage as a passenger in his car and thought about the conversation with her mother. She had to admit—he was better looking than Gianni. If the Italian was the rakish Errol Flynn, Richard was the fellow she’d seen in that Western last week... Tyrone Power, that was his name. “Passion will grow,” her mother had said, or something like that. Richard certainly possessed all the gifts to inspire it. That profile! Eyelashes as thick and dark as the hair that fanned over his hazel eyes, opening fast again to reveal sudden delight, amusement. Other times they opened only to cross, his favourite trick. “Jawline and cheekbones...*for days*” was how Marcia, the family friend she’d been visiting at Oxford, had breathlessly described him as he’d crossed the college lawn to where they sipped Pimm’s under a canopy.

Poor Marcia! Eve thought. She'd had such a pash for him. He'd recognized it, of course. The budding diplomat was all solicitous kindness to her, giving scarcely a glance to anyone else there. Yet from the moment they'd met, Richard Spence truly only had eyes for Eve Sinclair.

He proved it when they returned to Montreal later that summer. Squirring her to all the events, from the last tennis and yachting parties of the year to the skiing, snowshoeing and glühwein parties of winter. The first time he'd kissed her had been on the terrace of the Ritz at the New Year's Eve party, on the stroke of midnight—her first kiss since her parting from Gianni at Lausanne station the May before. This kiss with Richard was different than that had been. Cooler, pleasant—a greeting, not a farewell.

As Richard dropped a gear and accelerated around a parking car, Eve thought back to the moment of the proposal, which had come just three days later. Another kiss then, more lingering. She smiled as she remembered telling some of her Westmount friends of Richard on his knees, the exquisite diamond in the Henry Birks box, soon on her finger. Oh, the jealousy they'd failed to quite conceal!

Many kisses followed during their engagement, especially at reunions and farewells—for Richard was always off somewhere, especially Ottawa, receiving the training he would need for the career in the diplomatic corps that his PPE at Oxford had pointed him toward.

There'd been a good-night kiss only last night, and she'd felt so strongly how much she'd wanted to progress beyond it! They were to be married at the weekend, after all. But he'd pulled back when she'd tried to move his hand.

"I am a gentleman, remember." He'd lifted her hand, kissed that. "But once we are wed, my sweet..."

He'd left the promise unspoken. Yet later, back in her bedroom, she'd wondered about it. His restraint. How it was...different from Gianni's. When Gianni had pulled away from her, up in that pine grove, she had seen yearning in his eyes. A yearning for her that had brought colour to her cheeks, heat to her body. She hadn't noticed yearning in Richard's eyes. It wasn't that they were cold. It wasn't indifference. It was...yes, it was an

absolute control. And she'd wondered if control was always what they'd want in their life ahead. Though in the end she'd concluded that it was simply a difference in national temperament. Did Canada even have a love poet like Dante? She didn't know of one.

A sudden jerk of the car drew Eve's eyes from Richard's face and her thoughts from their past into her present—as he dropped gear, whipping out fast around a milk truck, accelerating hard, making her gasp as he pulled in again in the nick, a car coming the other way, a glimpse of a furious moustachioed face and the blare of irate horns. “Honestly, Richard!” she exclaimed, clutching the armrest at her side. “Are you trying to kill us?”

He glanced at her, grinned, and she could see the excitement in his eyes. He lost himself in the speed of this car! Though, she remembered, he was the same on skis on an impossibly steep slope, or at the helm of a racing yacht. Speed was his true...*passion*.

That word her mother had used. Maybe, she thought, that's how it will be on our wedding night. We'll lose ourselves in the blur of it. In the speed. Eve coloured, wishing that day were now.

“Here we are,” Richard said, gliding head-on into the small space another car was trying to reverse into. Its driver lowered his window, shouted in French. Richard answered in the same—something obscene to do with horses. The man shook a fist and accelerated off.

“Close as we can get to Gilles’, I think.” He was out of the car and around her side in moments, opening her door, offering his hand. As he drew her out, he glanced up at the sky. “Hang on while I get the lid down.” Clouds hid the sun now; it was colder again. It didn't feel like rain but in May, in Montreal, you never knew.

When he'd finished battening down the leather top he came to where she stood shivering on the sidewalk. He had a bottle in his hand. “Come on, Scarlett.” He offered his arm. “Brisk walk'll warm you up.”

They were on a side street, a tributary to the river avenues that lay ahead, the bigger road down which the royal motorcade would pass. People streamed alongside them, many jabbering excitedly, all in French—for this was the heart of the east end. She'd wondered if the Francophone citizens

of Montreal would turn up in numbers, show enthusiasm for someone many thought of as a foreign king. But she'd read in *The Gazette* that Cardinal Villeneuve, head of the Catholic Church in Quebec, had commanded his flock to show respect, even enthusiasm, for the monarchs. He liked order, did the cardinal. Hierarchy. A king was at the apex of that. Besides, this was a street party such as Montreal had never seen. On a Thursday, too, with citizens and their children given at least part of the day off from workplace and school. Almost all the people around them, kids and their parents, were clutching flags—the majority, she noticed with surprise, the Union Jack, though there were also plenty of the tricolour of France, and the yellow and white of the Vatican.

The closer they got to Saint-Hubert, the thicker the crowds. But just before the main street, Richard pulled her by her arm down an alley. Three houses in, they climbed the back stairs to the third floor. The noise from above doubled on every landing.

“*Richard!*” shouted Gilles, as they entered a small apartment packed with people, blue with smoke. After enfolding Richard in a bear hug—very east end, not very Westmount—he turned to Eve, seized her hand and kissed it, keeping it while gazing deeply into her eyes. “*Et sa fiancée si belle,*” he murmured—then released her, shouting, “*Vermouth!*”

“Or this,” said Richard, holding out his bottle.

“*Champagne?*” Gilles took it, scrutinized the label. “*Et Cordon Rouge? Merveilleux!*” He looked at her again, spoke English. “But zis I think we keep till your King is passing ze ’ouse, no? Maybe we, uh, bip him on the nose with the cork, hein?” He laughed, then seized Richard’s arm. “*Allons, Richard,*” he said, “that fellow you wished to meet is in ze kitchen.”

He dragged Richard away, though her fiancé did at least look back and apologize with a shrug. She waved him on. She was used to this. He had an ease with people of any class, any nation, that she envied. It would make him a good diplomat. She rarely saw him for most of a party, but she didn’t actually mind. She enjoyed watching people, trying to guess their stories behind the masks of their faces.

The smoke truly was heavy, but she managed to make her way over to a window and occupy a sill someone had just vacated. She pulled out her own cigarette case, lit up a Lucky Strike, took a deep drag and sighed. Far smoother than those ghastly Navy Cuts Richard preferred.

The avenue below was already crammed, yet still more people were pushing in from every side street. Awash with reds, blues and whites, waved and blurred in a way that made her feel slightly dizzy. She turned back into the room and looked at the people around her—so different from the crowd she usually ran with. The women's dresses were far less expensive but somehow, annoyingly, chicer. There was one young lady actually in trousers and a shirt, with a red cravat at her neck. Eve was not allowed to wear trousers. At Brillantmont they even made them climb the nearby mountains in skirts!

A *Bohemian* crowd, her mother would have termed them, lips curled in disapproval. Eve liked them. Yet she wasn't completely comfortable with them. Wasn't quite sure how to behave. It wasn't a subject taught at her finishing school. But in the household she and Richard settled into, what she had been taught *would* be useful: how to be the perfect hostess, look after the guests, manage the household staff, oversee menus and place settings and crystal. *A far cry from here*, she thought, *these people. Far away, too.*

In Sweden. His first posting, at the legation in Stockholm. They were due to arrive in three months, after some time in London for Richard to get up to diplomatic speed at the embassy there.

London. Embassies. Legations. The diplomat's wife. Her stomach started to do little flips, and she wondered if she should seek out a washroom. Then she saw her fiancé pushing through the crowd, inevitable cigarette on his lips, a teacup in each hand.

"I managed to convince Gilles to open the champagne straightaway," he said. "I told him vermouth was not good enough for my princess. Sorry about the receptacle—they've run out of glasses." He handed over the teacup. "*Salut!*"

She sipped, he gulped. She expected it wasn't his first. He wasn't really a teacup kind of drinker. "Honestly, Richard, I'm not the princess type. Vermouth would have been just fine."

Perhaps she said it sharper than she meant to. He looked down at her, eyes narrowed against the smoke. "You alright?" he asked.

"Yes! I—" She shrugged. "I was just thinking about how different our lives will be in two weeks' time."

"In Europe? Are you worried?"

"Not...worried exactly. I just want to...do a good job for you there. Support you. Make sure you look good."

"Darling, when I walk into a room with you on my arm, you make me look good. I hear people say all the time, 'How did a dullard like him land a corker like her?'"

"Oh, nonsense!" She laughed. "You are such a fool."

"A fool for love! Yours!" He drained his cup. "I'll fetch more."

"I'm fine."

"Will you be alright here for a bit? I should talk to that chap Gilles invited."

"Who is he?"

"Actually, he's the fellow we saw fighting last week."

"The boxer?"

"The winner!" He grinned. "Raised on the docks, but a surprising mind to go with that powerful frame."

He was gazing above her then, lost in a memory perhaps. Maybe the same one as she was having: the fighter unleashing a final flurry of blows, dropping his opponent to the canvas—no bell to save him then. She'd protested at the time at the brutality. But she'd woken that same night from a dream of which she remembered very few details. A man's bare torso, moving through a room. Someone, maybe even her, falling slowly back.

He looked down. "Sure you'll be alright?"

"Go. I'll be fine."

He saluted with the cup before moving away. She turned back to the crowds. *Honestly*, she wondered, *can they get any more people onto this*

street?

There were more churches per square mile in the east end than anywhere in Montreal. At 3 p.m. their bells began pealing simultaneously. Not merely announcing the time, but also something far more exciting. There was a rush for the windows. Eve managed to hold her position, though she was squished into the corner. She looked for Richard and couldn't see him at first, then noticed him slightly ahead of her, on a small balcony that topped metal stairs running to the streets below—the type that fronted many of the houses in the area. Richard was not small but he appeared so, squashed between the hefty Gilles and a man with a bandage above his left eye. They had their arms around each other like old comrades and were cheering as the first horses appeared.

It was a troop of cavalry—*hussars*, she thought—and a standard-bearer holding a black canvas flag with a gold *17* on it. They were followed by two limousines. In the second was a man she knew because she'd met him on a few occasions: the very fat and very ugly mayor of Montreal, Camillien Houde. Next to him, a man she'd only seen in photographs: the Prime Minister of Canada, Mackenzie King. Yet she only glanced at them because, like everyone else, she was there to see the people in the first car.

Their Majesties.

She didn't consider herself to be a fervent monarchist. Her father, the Glaswegian, was noncommittal—her mother...well, Swedish nobility. But Eve found herself on her feet without telling herself to rise, found that like everyone within the building and without, she was cheering, shouting. First in English and then, since it was the universal cry on Saint-Hubert, in French.

“Dieu sauve le roi! Dieu sauve le roi!”

His Majesty King George VI, in a naval uniform, with medals bedazzling his chest, circled one wrist, head and hand slowly turning, acknowledging the acclamation to either side. Beside him his consort, Queen Elizabeth, in a beautiful black lambswool coat and with an ostrich feather in her velvet hat, did the same.

“Dieu sauve la reine! Dieu sauve la reine!”

They passed slowly, yet were gone so fast. The cheering faded, though more came from further down the street, like waves up a beach. Spectators on both sides now slipped onto the roadway, hastened to follow along, a cavalcade of flags. The bells kept pealing—and the party recommenced.

After a while, when Richard failed to rejoin her, she went in search of him. Found him in the small kitchen, deep in conversation with the boxer, who bowed when she was introduced and excused himself. “We must go, Richard. I have to dress for tonight.”

“Of course.” He drained the teacup, looked into it as if the contents had somehow betrayed him, then set it down. “I know your mother is always going on about slouching, but my advice is this: When you meet the royals tonight, don’t stand too tall. Quite a small chap, isn’t he?”

FOUR

“NIGHT, SCARLETT.”

“Night, darling.”

Eve closed the front door, leaned against it, shutting her eyes. Through the oak she heard his footsteps on the gravel path, then Dizzy firing up, the squeal of tires on rain-slick pavement, the fading roar. Her fiancé was going on to yet another party. He’d wanted her to join him, which was why he’d picked her up at the Windsor when the royal reception ended—late, as ever, her parents had left for home half an hour before. But she’d pleaded exhaustion, which was the truth. It had been a very long day. Besides, his many friends, both English and French, were waiting to entertain him, knowing he was not long for these shores. She knew he would have more fun without worrying about her as she sat off to the side somewhere, observing. The next time she saw him would be in two days, standing before the altar of Notre-Dame Basilica, as her father walked her down the aisle.

“Quite the day,” she murmured, turning into the hall. The party at Gilles’ had been easy compared to what followed. It had taken nearly two hours for her mother to be satisfied with her dress, her hair, her makeup, her jewellery. Two hours on her feet in recently bought evening shoes, turning like a fashion model. Then it appeared they would be late; the city streets were still crowded, and despite her father’s swearing at his driver, Georges, it took an age to reach the Windsor Hotel. They made the reception room with a minute to spare before the door opened again and the King and Queen entered. There were only twenty couples selected to meet them, and

Eve was the sole “child.” Her father’s contribution to the evening’s expenses must have been among the largest.

Richard had been right—they were small people, the royal couple. So Eve did stoop a little, as Richard had advised, or at least failed to rise fully from her deep, somewhat wobbly, curtsy. Her nervousness swiftly passed, as Their Majesties were so charming. He, with his stammer, let his wife lead the conversations, joining in to compliment, to inquire. Elizabeth was all ease, her silver brocade dress simply stunning—making Eve’s and her mother’s very expensive Schiaparellis look plain by comparison. The Queen’s diamond tiara caught the light, as did her eyes. She was delighted to hear of the forthcoming nuptials. Only wished they could attend—the idea making Marlene let out a little gasp. Then they were on down the room, greeting, conversing, before the doors opened again, and the banquet began.

Eve crossed the hall to the closet, took off her coat and hung it. Felt gas rise and let out a little burp. The food had been sumptuous and so rich—turtle soup, squab in wine sauce, baked Alaska—and the wines ever flowing. She’d had to drink beyond her limit because there’d been so many toasts! To Their Majesties. To the Dominions and the Empire. To the pledge of support that such ancient ties guaranteed. There was no direct mention of it, yet all knew what lay underneath such sentiments. If the war that many were predicting did come, the Crown’s loyal Canadians, French and English alike, would rally to the Union Jack, as they had in 1914.

“Eve? Is that you, love?”

The door to the living room was open. She smiled. Though her father always claimed that he stayed up late because he had things that needed attending to, the truth was that he would never go to bed until his daughter was safely home.

She crossed the hall and stepped into the living room. “Hello, Papa.”

Jock Sinclair was in his usual spot: sunk into the deep, worn leather armchair that Marlene was always urging him to get rid of. He’d pulled it closer to the fire he’d built, a merry blaze against the May Montreal night that had turned cold again with the rain. Though Jock was known to build

fires in summer if he felt the slightest chill. “Eight of us snot-nosed brats crowded around the tenement’s slate coal grate,” he used to say to excuse it. “I vowed that the day I had the money, I would never freeze again!”

He gestured to the ottoman where she’d sat only that morning. After a moment’s hesitation—she truly was exhausted—she sank down, pulled off her shoes, rubbed her cramped toes. This was something they’d done often since her return from Europe—whenever she came home late. She relished it, truly, this time alone with him. In a way, she’d gotten to know him better this last year than she ever had before. She also realized, as they looked at each other, that this might be the last time they did this, for in two days’ time her title would change from daughter to wife.

The last time, she thought, and turned her head swiftly to the fire so her father would not see her sudden tears. Which he did, of course, but did not comment upon.

Saying instead, “Will ye take a wee dram? A nightcap?”

She sniffed, turned back, saw where he was gesturing—to the chair-side table, and a bottle, one she’d never seen there before. “What’s that, Papa?”

“This?” He reached for it and held it up to the fire. She saw flames reflecting in facets of cut glass, the words “Crown Royal” embossed on the label.

“It’s Sammy Bronfman’s latest tippie. A rye whisky created special for the King’s visit. It comes in this fancy purple thing, I’ll have ye know.” He lifted a small velvet bag with a gold drawstring from the table, turned it in the light. The whisky’s name was written on it in gold script. Dropping it, he uncorked the bottle, poured a tot into a fresh crystal tumbler and another into his own, then added a splash of water to both. “’Tis said that Seagram’s has put ten cases aboard the train that’s taking the monarchs across the country. Hence ‘royal,’ ye ken?” He handed her one glass, then raised his own. “Canny. But the Jews must suck up to royalty just like the bloody English and the fucking French. Pardon my language! *Slainte!*”

He pledged her, gulped. She took a small sip. Watched him as he slipped the bottle back into its soft bag. There they were, the three tribes in the same sentence—the three so-called “enemies” who, he claimed, had

conspired to hold the thirteen-year-old Scottish orphan back when he'd arrived in Canada thirty years before. He'd been down the coal mines since he was ten, was illiterate, had rickets. But quite quickly he'd overcome every obstacle these establishment rivals had set for him. Indeed the competition spurred him to "pull himself up by his bootstraps"—which is where he got his nickname. "Though the first boots I had were more strap than boot, if ye ken my meaning," he'd once said to her, before this very fire.

It was one of the reasons she loved these late-night sessions alone with him: to hear his stories. She knew he sometimes exaggerated for effect. "After the morning bowls our ma poured the porridge into a kitchen drawer, you ken? It set and we'd cut a slice to take for our lunch, have one for our tea, washed down with some gruel—if we were lucky, and our da had not drunk his wages away."

If half of it was true, it was a rough start to life—and it had made him both tough and determined. By fifteen, Jock "Bootstraps" Sinclair could read and do sums. By seventeen he was out in the field as a mining engineer, in coal first. Until the day a surveyor whose life he saved—from a bear attack, if that story was to be believed—died and left him some money in his will. Jock set up his own company, Newbattle Mines Ltd., named for somewhere in Scotland, the coal faces where he'd slaved, and for the "new battles" he fought every day in the New World. He went from coal to nickel, then literally struck gold in Val-d'Or, Quebec. Now Newbattle mined everything on every continent on earth.

Jock held up his glass to the fire, swirling the amber liquid against the light. "Nae bad," he commented, "though I am more a single malt man myself." He looked at her. "Did you enjoy yourself tonight, lassie?"

"Yes. I know you are not a great royalist—"

"Idle German scum," he commented, though it was the rote saying of the socialist he'd been when he worked down the mines.

"But they did bring people together. French and English, united here for once."

“Aye, they did that. ’Tis no mean feat,” he acknowledged. “And you shone in their company. I am so proud of you.”

“Why?”

“What?”

She turned to him. “Why are you proud of me?”

“Well, ye looked so beautiful in that gown and...”

“So because I dress well, and know how to do makeup, and am marrying into society, you are proud of me?”

He put down his glass, leaned in and took her hand. “What’s all this, lass? What’s got to you?”

“Oh, I don’t know! I—” She tipped her head back and looked at the ceiling, at its wide oak-lined lozenges, the Scottish thistle centred in each one.

“Do you...regret the marriage?”

“No. I...no. I mean, you like Richard, don’t you?”

“He’s a fine young man. A little too English for my blood sometimes, perhaps.” A faint smile gleamed in his eyes. “Though the point is not whether I like him, but whether you do.”

“I do! Of course I do. It’s just—” She glanced into the hearth. “Do I love him? Usually I think I do. Other times I wonder if I even know who he is. If I love him just...just because I am meant to. Because all our friends and you and mother want me to.”

“The only thing *I’ve* ever wanted is for you to be happy.” He grunted. “This may be pre-wedding nerves, ye ken. Everyone gets them.” He grinned. “When I was to marry your mother, I spent most of the wedding morning down at the Stockholm docks, looking for a ship to take me to Africa.” He shook his head. “I am so glad I didn’t find one. Not least because I would never have gotten to know you.” He shook the hand he still held. “However, if you’ve changed your mind, we’ll call off the wedding first thing in the morning.”

She laughed. “But it would cost you a fortune!”

“I have several of those. Give them all to make sure my girl is happy.”

“No, Father.” She squeezed his hand. “I do want to marry him. I do love him. I just wonder about my, uh, my purpose afterwards.”

“Purpose? Well, yer man is canny, and connected and will rise through the ranks of the diplomatic fast, I am certain. He’ll be an ambassador before he’s forty and you...”

“Will be an ambassador’s wife. Not an ambassador myself.”

“Well, no.” He chuckled. “They’ll never make a woman an ambassador. But do not disparage the power behind the throne. It is mighty!” He pointed to the world outside. “Look at yon Queen tonight. How much of the burden she carried for her shy and stuttering lord. I may not be much of a monarchist, but I saw the strength of her, the charm, the will. A hardness like”—he picked up the whisky bottle in its bag—“like glass within velvet.” He put it down again. “You have that too.”

“How do you know that?”

“I know because you are my daughter.”

“But when have I ever been tested?”

“You will be. Sooner than you think. A new country, a new role”—he took her hand again—“and Europe going again to war.”

“You think so?”

“I know so. Everywhere I have mines, which is almost everywhere, I hear it. Hitler, Mussolini, their crews? They will not stop until someone stops them.” He noticed the crease between her eyes, reached out to smooth it with a thumb. “But *dinna fash* too much, lass. Sweden, where you’ll be, should be fine. I think the Germans will get more from them neutral than invaded.” His face lightened. “Speaking of Sweden, I meant to ask you a favour. There’s a lad from my Stockholm office. He’s been in Montreal and in the field learning some ropes. Now he’s heading home on the same boat as you. We need him back at the office there pronto, so I pulled some strings and got him into a crew bunk. So he’ll nae be dining with you at the captain’s table but you might bump into him all the same from time to time. Be nice to him, eh? He’s a good man. Bright.”

“Of course I will, Papa. What’s his name?”

“Henrik Ridelsson.”

A silence came, comfortable, easy. Her father was gazing into the flames, lost to some other thoughts, so she studied him, as she so often had right there by the fire. Relaxed in his shirt sleeves, top buttons undone, one of his braces slipped off his shoulder. His huge engineer's hands making the tumbler look like a toy in a children's kitchen set. His red-tinged eyebrows and big shaven head. This was the last time she'd sit there as only his daughter. Aside from when he walked her down the aisle of Notre-Dame, and at the reception afterwards, the next time she saw him would most likely be in Europe because he visited his businesses there often—and then she'd be another man's wife.

"Tell me an old story, Papa," she said.

"Which one?"

"You know. When you first saw Mamma."

"Auch, lass, you've heard it so many times before!"

"I know. I want to hear it again." She put on her approximation of a Scottish accent. "'So there I was, dressed up in a monkey suit, this wee tyke from the Gorbals with nae right to be at this fancy ball, when this vision in silk walked through the door of the Windsor Hotel—'"

"Ye cheeky! I was a Haghill lad, not scum from the Gorbals." He smiled. "But, yes, you remember correct, she was a vision indeed. So I asked whoever brung me her name, and he said that it was Marlene, and I'd better be on my best behaviour for she was a class far above me, daughter of a baron no less, and I thought, 'Well, laddie, you've pulled yourself up by your bootstraps in business, how about gi'ing it a go in love.' Luckily, I'd taken a few dance lessons, ye ken, and the band struck up a foxtrot, my particular speciality, so I crossed the room, cut in front of some posh git and said..."

"My dance, I think!" she chorused with him.

They laughed together. As he continued, Eve dropped to the floor to rest her back against the ottoman and listen further to this tale of love. She was so caught up in it, so enraptured by the memories moving across his face, in his eyes, that it was only when her father paused to take a sip that she

glanced into the hearth. Another story of love had burned in it that morning. But all traces of the letter, and its words, were, of course, long gone.

FIVE

Empress of Britain liner. May 21, 1939

EVE SINCLAIR SAT ON the edge of the bed, waiting. She couldn't fuss anymore. If she tweaked her hair again, it would end up curling the wrong way. She'd applied, removed and reapplied lipstick, foundation and blush, while her eyes certainly looked larger than she'd intended because she'd also attacked them one time too many.

She'd tried to be sparing with the perfume Francesca had given her as a parting gift. Tabu was sold as the most sensual scent yet created, its vanilla and patchouli so different from the drop of Je Reviens she usually dabbed behind her ears. Her matron of honour had whispered that it drove her David "crazy." ("Honestly, on our honeymoon in New York, if I put it on before we were in the cab heading for dinner, we'd have to call the restaurant for a later reservation!") So Eve had thought she'd try it; now she was stuck with it. No getting it off without a full scrub-down in the shower—and then everything would have to begin again.

She looked at the clock on the mahogany bedside table. Ten fifteen. She'd told Richard to give her one hour, no more. So he'd gone to the Knickerbocker Bar for a "bracer," as he called it. But that was an hour and a half ago. Apart from fussing with herself, she'd fussed with the room again and again, which it hadn't needed since Cabin Number Three on the *Empress of Britain* liner was already quite stunning. She'd played with the lighting. Would he want a lot of light or only a little? Perhaps none? One moment the thought of him seeing her naked appalled her. The next, she thought it would be just what he'd want. So she'd settled for a blend—a lamp lit over the bathroom door and a tall muted standing lamp in the

corner opposite the bed. After the fortune her mother had spent on the Vionnet lingerie set—the step-in, the robe, the lacy knickers, all in peachy silk, they should be seen, appreciated. At least at the beginning.

A noise in the hallway. *Richard*, she thought, and arranged herself in the way she'd practiced—head back against the satin pillowcase, one knee raised, one arm flung back above her. Waited. But the door did not rattle, the noise faded. A neighbour passing along.

"Richard!" she snapped, and sat up again. Now she was just getting annoyed. The night before had technically been their wedding night. But the ceremony in Notre-Dame, and the reception afterwards at the same Windsor Hotel that had hosted the King and Queen, had exhausted them both. They'd slept beside each other in their suite at the Windsor, a strange enough thing for her. When they'd woken in the morning she'd thought, *Perhaps*. But they'd had a train to catch to Quebec City to make this sailing.

"Tonight, Mrs. Spence," he'd said, kissing her on the nose before rising to throw back the curtains. "Let's not rush this."

There is rushing, Eve thought, *and not rushing*. This was clearly the latter.

And then she heard it—the rattle of the key in the lock. She just had time to assume the position—one arm back, one knee up—when the door opened, and Richard came in.

"Hello, old girl."

She heard the slight slur in his words. Perhaps he'd had more than the one "bracer," on top of the wine he'd drunk at dinner. And why did he need a bracer anyway? Was he as nervous as she?

She'd never asked him if this would be his first time too. There'd been hints that it was not—that his time at Oxford had not been entirely spent in lectures and tutorials, in punts and on the fencing piste. Nothing definite. Now, as she regarded him in the doorway, she wished that she'd allowed herself more than her usual single glass of wine at dinner. Braced herself. She felt entirely sober—and more than a little frightened.

He smiled. "Be a moment," he murmured, moving past the bed to the bathroom. The door shut; she heard noises that were as strange to her as

lying beside him last night had been. A toilet seat banging up, a man peeing for a long time, the seat banging down. A flush, then more water flowed in the sink. There followed a long silence, until the door opened again.

“Bit too much light, you think?” He turned off the one outside the bathroom, leaving on the one inside and the door ajar. As he crossed the room, she saw that he was wearing his silk robe and that his legs beneath were bare. He switched off the standard lamp. The room’s dark deepened, but by the spill from the bathroom she saw him drop the robe before he threw himself onto the bed. Onto her.

She’d been told the essentials. Her mother had warned her of the pain, which might be prolonged. Francesca, and some of the racier set at Brillantmont, had told of the pleasures that may or may not be there the first time, but would swiftly follow.

In the end, she got no pleasure and only the briefest, sharpest pain. She cried out twice—first when he abruptly laid all his weight on top of her, and again when he pushed aside her knickers and entered her. That second cry preceded his by not very much. He lay still, pressed to her for a long moment, then rolled off to lie beside her.

“G’night, old girl,” he murmured. Within moments his breathing had slowed. Less than a minute later, he began to lightly snore.

Eve didn’t know how long she lay there staring at the ceiling. Numbness held her, body and mind. Until, suddenly, sensation returned, her guts roiled, and she ran for the bathroom. She made it, just—throwing herself down at the toilet and voiding her stomach, which didn’t contain much since she’d eaten so lightly. Acidic wine lined her mouth. She rose, went to the sink, rinsed with water. Looked in the mirror—her eyes drawn not to her face, which she was avoiding anyway, but to the scarlet blotches that had stained each piece of her silk lingerie: step-in, robe and knickers.

Soda water, she heard in her mother’s voice, so she went out to the cabin, to the drinks table, grabbed the siphon, returned to the bathroom, took off all the items, then stood at the sink naked, scrubbing. The stains faded, blended into the fabric. Was that why her mother had picked peach as the colour? Because she knew her daughter would be standing at a sink,

trying to eliminate the traces of what had just happened? It would be just like Marlene. The forethought!

She laughed, looked up—and laughter died in her reflection. No wonder Richard had wanted the lights off. Look at me! Her makeup smeared like some hussy's on Sanguinet Street after a busy night. Her body, so skinny after the dieting required to get into that wedding dress. No wonder he'd wanted to get it over with so fast...

The scrubbing had distracted her. Now she felt the pain again, a sharp stab of it. So she went to the bath and ran a few inches, enough to wash herself. After climbing out and drying off, she folded herself into one of the thick white robes emblazoned with "Empress of Britain" on the breast pocket. She took off her makeup, thought about applying night cream, couldn't be bothered. Turning out the light, she felt her way back to the bed, barking her shin once on the desk chair and stifling her yelp.

She lay down. Put her forearm over her eyes. Began to softly cry.

Why, in all the conversations she'd had, practical and naughty, had no one told her that this might be what happened? No, wait, her mother had said a phrase once: "Get it out of the way." Is this what she'd meant?

They'd gotten it out of the way. Now she would wait for her husband to wake up—surely with tenderness to follow: gentle touching, holding, a caress? She listened for any change in the noise beside her. Richard slept on, snored on. She wiped her eyes, closed them, tried to relax. But sleep wouldn't come. His noise, his presence, her mind moving too fast. Planning, what she must do, how she must proceed. They had five more nights aboard the *Empress* until they reached Liverpool. *Before we get there*, she vowed, *I will get this right*.

Still, she couldn't sleep. At some stage she felt the ship stirring, the distant hum of engines dropping a note. She went to the bathroom with her wristwatch. Five a.m. The steward had told them that they would cast off at six. *I'd like to see that*, she thought. *Bid Canada au revoir*.

She found day clothes in her trunk—black slacks, a blouse and sweater. Pulling on her wool coat, she wrapped her hair in a scarf. No makeup was required. She wasn't planning on meeting anyone.

SIX

SLIPPING FROM THE CABIN, quietly closing the door and leaving it unlocked, Eve paused, looking up and down the oak-panelled, carpeted corridor—uncertain how to proceed. On arrival, while their trunks were being taken to their suite, they'd been given a brief tour of the upper decks—the dining rooms, lounges, theatres and cinema—and they'd passed through a service deck to reach their cabin. So if she wanted to see the shore she must go up and forward.

She climbed the stairs at the end of the corridor. On the next deck there were many people, most in uniforms, scurrying about. A young officer stopped to ask if she needed help, but she only shook her head, kept moving forward. Another staircase took her to a bigger bulwark door. It was heavy, but with some effort she swung it open. A cold gust hit her as she slipped out. Two sailors with hoses approached, washing the side decks down. Beyond them, she saw “civilians” like herself, in day clothes, gathered at the starboard railing. Others had obviously had the same idea as her, to watch the departure.

The last thing she wanted was to talk with strangers. Though it was indeed possible that she knew several people on board—and that would be even worse. They would know why she was there. Might look, smile knowingly, even comment. She couldn't bear that. So she turned right, followed the hose men as they moved down the ship's starboard side, heading aft. Eventually they reached the rear deck, coiled their hoses and departed below. She went into the roofless space beyond. But there were also people on that deck, so she took stairs down, then down again. Though

she suspected she'd already passed beyond the realm of passengers into that of crew, she kept descending until she reached another platform.

This one was dark and, happily, deserted. Folding herself into a corner where metal stanchions and railings met, she looked first at the dock below where men scurried about with ropes and chains, then up at Quebec City looming over the river, shrouded in pre-dawn shadows high atop its hill. From this angle the cliffs looked immense, sheer. But she knew her history. Knew that, in 1759, British soldiers had scaled these cliffs in the middle of a September night. Taken the French garrison by surprise, helping to win the battle that followed upon the Plains of Abraham. Which was why Canada was English, not French. Which was why the elites of her nation were feting the monarchs of Great Britain across the country. Cementing ancient ties in preparation for another war...

She shivered, kept staring up, though now she was not really seeing anything. The chilly wind blowing up the St. Lawrence found the gaps in her clothes. Even so, she didn't want to go back in. What she wanted was a cigarette! She always kept a packet of Luckies in her coat pocket. So now she reached for it, tapped a gasper out, put it between her lips. Rooted in the same pocket, then in the next, then in her slacks. *Damn and blast!* She'd forgotten her lighter. She saw it clearly where she'd left it: on the table in the cabin. It was a gold Dunhill and lay next to her fawn-leather and gold-monogrammed cigarette case—both presents from Richard on their engagement. It was too far to go and return in time, to—

“May I?”

The words were not spoken loudly. Still they made her jump, cry out, step backwards. There was a man she hadn't noticed, who must have been folded into another set of shadows further along the railing.

He moved into the light spill cast by an onshore lamp. “I am so sorry,” he said. “I should have greeted you as soon as you arrived—not startled you like that.” He held up his hand. In it was a lighter. “May I make it up to you?”

Eve took a deep breath. “You may indeed. Thank you.”

He struck a light. The flame wobbled in the wind and went out, so he took a step nearer, sheltering the lighter with his other hand. The flame was still precarious, so when he brought it close, she added the shelter of her own hands to either side of his. Unlike hers, his hands were warm.

She inhaled deeply. "Thank you. Would you like—?" She offered the Lucky Strikes.

"Most kind." He took one, lit it.

They both stepped back. Stood looking at each other. It was dark, but she got the impression of a man perhaps only a little older than herself, a little taller. Fair hair cut short. Sharp cheekbones and jaw. He'd spoken English but with a Swedish accent, a little like her mother's. She had the immediate sense, only to be confirmed in better light, that he'd be good-looking in that Nordic way, like several of her cousins.

Their mutual survey lasted only a few seconds before he spoke again, bowing his head slightly as he did. "My name is Henrik Ridelsson." She went to reply but he continued, "And you are Miss Sinclair."

"You know me?"

"I know you. Though we have never met." He took a deep drag, exhaled it above him where a breeze swept away the plume. "I was in the office once when you visited your father."

It came back then, what Jock had said in that last, late-night talk at home. "Oh, of course. My father talked about you, Mr. Ridelsson."

"Henrik, please, Miss Sinclair."

"Henrik. And I am Eve."

She held out her hand. He took it in one of his and placed his other on top of it, in the way she'd often observed in Europe. He'd left his cigarette in his mouth, and the smoke curled up over pale teal eyes into white-blond hair, a razor-sharp parting, glistening with a little pomade. She'd been right. This close, his features were, if anything, even more clean-cut than Richard's. A true Scandinavian. The only thing that marred their evenness was a scar that ran white from the middle of his forehead, slashing through his left eyebrow. *Though "mar,"* she thought, studying it for a moment, *is not really the right word.*

He still held her hand. Then, just before it became uncomfortable, he squeezed briefly and released her. "I apologize again—because of course I have gotten your name wrong. You are no longer Miss Sinclair. You are Mrs. Spence." He bowed from his waist. "May I be the last to congratulate you."

She laughed. "I doubt you'll be the last. There will almost certainly be people I know on board. People who were not invited to the wedding. They will not congratulate me nearly as nicely as you just did."

He laughed too then, for the first time, a rasp in it, as if he'd been shouting recently. It was not unpleasant.

"Will it be your first time in Sweden, Mrs. Spence?"

"Eve. And no, I have visited perhaps half a dozen times before."

"Of course, your mother, the baroness. I knew her father, Baron af Tumba, a little."

"*Farmor?*" She used the Swedish term. Her grandfather had died three years previously. "Are you also of—?"

"The nobility? Ha! No, no. Our paths crossed. We met, oh, here and there."

The ship's horn startled them, three deep blasts. They both turned to the dock. Men were now gathered fore and aft of the ship, hands on the giant chains which had links as thick as their thighs, and tethered the vessel to land. Others stood by the one remaining gangplank amidships. "I must go," said Henrik. "I asked, since I am an engineer, if I might witness how a great ship like this gets going from the heart of it—the engine room." He took a last pull at his cigarette, dropped the butt into the water between the ship and the dock, turned back to her. "I hope we meet again, Mrs., ah, Eve."

"We must. My father asked me to look after you." That wasn't exactly what he'd said, but she couldn't remember what he had. "You must join us for dinner one night."

He shrugged. "That might be difficult. I am not truly a passenger, but travelling with the crew. Your father arranged my berth and—"

"Do you have evening dress?"

"Well, yes, I do. But—"

“Then it is not difficult at all.” She smiled. “I’ll leave an invitation with the purser. Tomorrow night?”

Henrik straightened and bowed again from the waist, clicking his heels. “I would be honoured.” He moved past her, then paused in the hatchway that led into the depths of the ship. “And since you are so gracious aboard ship, you must allow me to return the favour in Stockholm. It is my city, and I know it well. I am sure, what with the situation now in Europe, your husband will be too busy at the legation to be able to really show you around. Allow me”—he paused, seeking above her for the words—“to look after *you*.”

The slightest of head bows and he was gone.

Eve pulled another cigarette from the packet and lit it from the end of her first which, like Henrik, she dropped over the side. She leaned on the rail, smoked it, and then another as the ship cast off, as the chains were drawn up, as the last crew members scrambled aboard and hauled up the gangway behind them, as the whistle sounded again, as the tugboats took up the strain and pulled the *Empress of Britain* into the mid-channel of the St. Lawrence.

There, the ship began to make more steam. Soon she was under her own way. Dawn gilded Quebec’s rooftops—the Chateau Frontenac, with its twinkling lights, the most prominent. All were swiftly left behind, as were the docks, the waterfront warehouses, giving way to cliffs and forests.

Eve watched her province, her country, slipping past. *When will I see it again?* she wondered. *And what lies ahead?*

It took her a moment to remember why she was there—on the deck, on the ship. “Richard,” she murmured.

Maybe it was the light in the sky. Maybe it was the tobacco, and some kind words. But she found she now felt a little less overwhelmed. She would not be the first bride who’d encountered such a situation. Patience and reading the signs would help her deal with it. *By the time we reach Liverpool*, she determined, *we will truly be man and wife*.

Taking a last drag of her cigarette, she flicked the butt out into the water and headed for her cabin.

SEVEN

May 23, 1939

“AH, HERE HE IS, Richard. The fellow I was telling you about.” As Eve spoke, she rose, waved. Henrik spotted her, made his way across the dining room to the table. She saw that his evening dress was old but immaculate—his crisp white cuffs projecting a perfect half inch from his jacket. The only strange thing, she noticed, as he weaved between waiters toward them, was his tie. Instead of formal black, it was a rather electric blue—and, she noted when he reached the table, patterned with small horses.

Taking Eve’s outstretched hand, he bowed, heels clicking, then rose. He was a little breathless. “I apologise for my lateness. I’d buried my formal wear deep in my trunk, which was lodged in the hold since I had no thought of needing it. I found it. But of the tie there was no trace! A friend leant me...this.” He jabbed a finger at his neck. “Gentlemen, I appeal to you. Have any of you ever tried to make a Windsor knot from an ascot? This horror is the result!”

Everyone laughed. Richard rose, came round the table and extended a hand that Henrik took. Richard shook, retained the hand, putting his other on Henrik’s shoulder. “I think you’ve shown the most remarkable courage,” he said. “If I’d lost my black tie, I doubt I’d have left my cabin for the entire voyage.” He turned to the table. “May I introduce Henrik Ridelsson from Stockholm.” He gestured to the couple to the left of his empty chair. “Mr. and Mrs. Brooks-Mickelson, from Chicago.”

“Good to meet you.” The man’s voice was a deep burr, his hair a mat of thick grey.

“And I’m Pearl, please.” His much younger wife spoke in an accent that carried strains of the Bronx. “Brooks-Mickelson makes me sound like I own a pharmacy.” Over the laughs she continued, “Which he does, of course. A whole heap of ’em!”

Richard continued to their left. “Monsieur et Madame Charpentier from Hull, Quebec.”

“*Ravi de vous recontrer*,” a black-haired man in his mid-forties said, half-rising, as his wife tipped her head.

“*De même*,” Henrik replied, nodding.

“And last, but far from least—Lady Agatha Soames.”

The lady referred to was in her late sixties—her ivory dress, string of pearls and silver hair adorned with a diamond clasp and feather a testament to a previous era. The only other unoccupied chair was next to her, and Henrik immediately recognized his duty. Moving around the table, he took her hand, raised it close to his lips. “*Enchanté*,” he said. “May I?” He laid his hand on the chair-back and when she nodded, sat.

Richard returned to his place. “I am afraid you’ve missed cocktail hour, old chap. Wine alright?”

“Perfect.”

Richard waved over a waiter carrying two bottles. Henrik pointed at the red. As the waiter walked away, Henrik said, in a low voice, “He has a far better tie than I do. Do you think he’d swap?”

Everyone laughed again—except for the American, who leaned in. “Nice to have an actual European at the table. Oh, aside from Lady Agatha, of course.”

“I am not in the slightest European, young man.” She withered him with a glance. “I am English.”

Pearl let out a snort of a laugh, and Lady Agatha withered her with a glance too.

Unfazed, the American continued, “Be good to have your perspective, Mr. Ridelsson. We were just wondering what our countries will do, if this war everyone is talking about breaks out.”

“Oh, Max, come on! Lighten up!”

“No, Pearl. Be good to hear from someone who might be fighting it.”

“Unlikely, in my case, Mr. Brooks-Mickelson. Because I am not truly European either—except in my appreciation of claret.” Henrik took a sip of his wine, smiled. “I am Scandinavian. And my country has not been at war since Napoleon was alive.”

“But doesn’t it take two sides to respect neutrality?” Richard asked.

“Exactly,” chimed in Brooks-Mickelson. “Look how Hitler has behaved so far. Austria, annexed. The Sudetenland stolen from Czechoslovakia. Why not Sweden?”

Henrik tipped his head toward Eve. “Are you sure that the ladies, ah...”

Eve smiled. “Oh, I am sure we can wrap our pretty little heads around it, Mr. Ridelsson.”

“I apologize. I did not mean...of course. Well then.” He took another sip of wine, put his glass down. “I think Herr Hitler will get what he wants from us with trade. War is expensive and we both have lots of things that each wants from the other.”

“Like iron ore?” Eve nodded at Henrik. “Mr. Ridelsson works for Newbattle Mines, my father’s company.”

“Precisely, Mrs. Spence. Ore and other precious metals. Along with ball bearings...and herring! I understand der Führer is inordinately fond of herring.” Another ripple of laughter. “Besides, when we had enemies, Russia was always the main one. We fought them often, and we have borders with them which are always in dispute. Then there’s our fellow Scandinavians in Finland. The Soviets are showing signs of wanting that back.”

“And Joe Stalin’s a bigger shit than Hitler.”

“Max!” warned his wife.

“Pardon my French,” said Brooks-Mickelson, looking at Lady Agatha. “But he is. Starved all those people to death in the Ukraine a few years back.” He nodded at Henrik. “I think you’re right to worry about him. The trouble I have with commies at home! Trying to unionize my employees. Over my dead body. Bolshevik bastards!”

This time his wife didn't reprimand him. While he spoke, waiters had approached the table and laid a green soup before each diner. Everyone picked up spoons as Richard said, "*Bon appétit*, all." There was a murmured chorus, then everyone tucked in.

Charpentier slurped fast, finished first. "Neutrality, *hein*? Exactly. Why should everyone sign up to fight just because of old loyalties? Canada is a sovereign nation."

"Part of the Dominions, sir." Lady Agatha's gaze was as frosty as before. "We share much, including a king and queen, who I watched you greet so loyally in Montreal last week. And in the Great War Canadians served so valiantly." She wiped a trace of soup from her lips with her napkin. "Most of them feel a deep allegiance to the old country."

"I do not." He glowered. "And my father was killed in that war. For who? For what? Please tell me!"

His vehemence brought silence. Waiters came and cleared the soup dishes away, while others brought the next course. "My goodness!" Richard said. "There's a coincidence. Herring! Loathe it, personally." He pushed his plate away. "If only we'd invited Herr Hitler! He could have had mine!"

It broke the tension. Everyone picked up forks. Only Charpentier did not; whatever mood he'd gotten into remained. "I wish he *was* here. So I could commend him on how he is handling the Jews. Except now most want to come over and live where I live." He shook his head. "We could sure use his help in Quebec." He said it loudly. Some people at nearby tables looked over.

"Really, Monsieur Charpentier." Richard's voice was soft, but firm. "Enough politics for one dinner, don't you think?"

The Québécois grunted but sat back.

It was someone else who spoke. Quietly. "I'm Jewish," said Pearl Brooks-Mickelson.

"Half Jewish," muttered her husband, looking embarrassed.

"Jewish. My ma was, so, so am I." She threw her fork down. "And with this new information, I've just gone right off herring." She pushed her seat back, stood, looked at Eve. "Care to come and powder your nose, honey?"

“Absolutely,” replied Eve, rising too.

They wove their way through the tables to the front of the dining room’s entrance hall. On either side of the checkerboard-tiled floor was a door of dark wood. One marked with a man in a top hat and monocle, the other with a lady in a tiara. Pearl led the way in and crossed straight to the huge mirrors over three deep sinks. “Boy!” she said, slamming her clutch down hard onto the counter. Since it was made of silver mesh it made a good loud sound that caused a woman standing at the last sink to snap her compact closed and leave in a hurry. “How I’d like to punch that sonofabitch Frenchie!”

Eve laughed. “I suspect you’d know how to do it, too.”

“You betcha!” Pearl spiralled up a lipstick she pulled from her clutch. “You grow up in the Bronx with five brothers, you learn to take care of yourself. If you want to eat, that is.” Her accent had grown stronger away from the table.

Eve opened her bag, rummaged for her own lipstick. “You said you were from a Jewish family?”

“Ma was. Came over as a baby from Poland, fleeing the Russkies. Pa was Black Irish, family from Donegal.” She made a moue of her mouth, was about to apply paint, when she grinned widely. “Don’t tell Max—my husband—I told you this. He hates people to know. But every time he raves about commies forming unions I gotta smile. Because Pa was a card-carrying member and organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World. You know, the Wobblies?”

“I don’t think I—”

“Extreme radicals.” She leaned into the mirror, began skilfully applying some scarlet. “Makes me choke when I hear these guys. ‘Don’t let any more Jews in! They’ve come to steal our jobs!’ Even the unions stateside are saying it too. As if they’d all come over on the Mayflower, ain’t just the latest immigrants to change their surnames and call themselves American.” She picked up a paper handkerchief, blotted, then held up her lipstick. “You want to try this, honey? Jean Harlow wore it in her last picture.”

The red was a deep scarlet. “Maybe a little much for me.”

“Suit yourself.” Pearl surveyed Eve’s reflection. “How old are you, sweets?”

“Nineteen.”

“And just married, huh?” On Eve’s nod Pearl turned back to the mirror and began applying powder. “Nineteen, jeez. No, you don’t need so much makeup. It’s old broads like me have to slap it on, keep their man interested.”

“How...how long have you been married?”

“Fourteen years. I’m the second Mrs. Brooks-Mickelson, of course. First one died.”

“How did you meet?”

“I was dancing in a cabaret in Manhattan. We was encouraged to mingle with the audience. Max had lost his wife six months before. Saw me, took a shine to me. Quite a shine!” She flashed the ring which Eve had noticed before—a giant diamond set among several smaller ones; it made her own hugely expensive one look less so.

“That’s beautiful.”

“Ain’t it, though?”

“And so you fell in love.”

“Love?” Pearl laughed, started to pat powder around her cheeks and nose. “Kid, these lines you see me frantically covering up were already in place then. I was twenty-nine and the cabaret manager kicked out anyone he found out was thirty. I saw a life ahead in the garment factory, like my ma. Then Max come along—and I takes my chance.” She smiled. “He ain’t a bad guy. He’s self-made, you know, a plumber’s son, so when he gets with rich people in monkey suits he feels he has to, you know, adopt positions. ‘Commies!’ ‘Unions!’ Even ‘Jews,’ if I wasn’t around. Besides, doesn’t take too much to make him happy. Look good on his arm. Lie back once a week and think of Cary Grant.” She glanced over and her eyes widened. “Wow, either you went hard on the rouge or you’re blushing.” She put the pad back into the compact, snapped it shut. “Hark at me, old broad, gabbing on. To a newlywed! Still in love with love, eh?” She lifted her bust high,

emphasizing her substantial cleavage, then blew herself a kiss in the mirror. “Tits up,” she said, and laughed again. “You ready?”

“I, uh, I just need to—”

“Yeah, of course,” she said. “Oh, and I’d appreciate it if you didn’t share my pa’s revolutionary past. Kinda embarrasses Max.”

“I promise.” Eve shrugged. “I don’t understand much about politics anyway.”

Pearl, who had started to head out, turned back and looked Eve straight in her mirrored eyes. Her voice hardened. “You betta learn, kid. As my old pa used to say, with what’s coming down the pike, everyone’s going to have to learn real fast. And then pick a side.”

She left, the door swinging open again immediately on another woman who went straight into a cubicle. So Eve was alone and able to focus on herself in the mirror. Pearl had been right. She’d certainly blushed at the talk of...making love, if that *was* what she’d been talking about. What she’d described didn’t sound very romantic. Yet it did sound...simple. And looking into her reflected eyes, Eve realized that, after a second night of a brief fumble, a little pain and a rapid snore, simple would do just fine.

She looked at her dress, a smoke-green haltered gown by Worth that exposed her smooth shoulders and shapely arms. She’d chosen the most modest item in her trousseau because the rather risqué low-cut Schiaparelli she’d worn the night before had not enticed Richard. Perhaps modest was what he liked, she’d thought. She locked eyes with her reflection. “Tits up,” she murmured, and headed for the swing door.

EIGHT

WHEN SHE GOT BACK to the table, the controversial herring was gone, replaced by a plain beef Wellington—with hockey replacing politics as the subject of conversation. Richard, she had no doubt, exercising his diplomatic skills. He was allied with Charpentier in adoration of Les Canadiens, whereas Brooks-Mickelson of course was a Blackhawks fan. Henrik, it seemed, had played some hockey in Sweden.

So the men were animated as they ate and drank—the women less so. Eventually Lady Agatha yawned so openly that Henrik—her partner after all—broke off to talk to her of the time he'd spent studying engineering in Sheffield, England. When the main course was cleared, the three other men shifted into a huddle while Pearl conversed with Mrs. Charpentier. So Eve was able to sit back and observe everyone—including herself. She noted that when the wine waiter returned, she did not turn down her third glass of claret as she usually would.

A quintet had played throughout the meal, a bland selection of show tunes and light operetta, ignored by all. Yet when the lemon chiffon pie had been cleared away and coffee served, the lights in the dining hall lowered, while the ones on the stage focused into a wide pool. Two people entered it, struck poses. The man, who wore a short, braided jacket and tight black trousers, came with his arms lifted high, his wrists bent, his eyes downcast. The woman, her thick hair held by a scarlet bow, was in a flounced black dress and a bodice studded with appliqué red roses that opened to emphasize a considerable bust.

The band struck a run of notes all recognized. Henrik leaned across toward Eve. "I love a tango. Do you not?"

She nodded and took another swig of wine. She did indeed. Of course she'd danced it herself. Any well-bred girl had to learn it, along with the polka, the foxtrot and, of course, the waltz. Her mother had had her in dance classes since the age of ten, and her finishing school had completed her education in that area. She and Richard had waltzed at their wedding, him cutting in and taking her from her father. The married couple, who had practised beforehand, danced beautifully, to murmurs of delight. What a handsome couple, everyone thought. How perfect for each other.

Eve shook her head. She didn't want to think about any of that now. She wanted to concentrate on what was happening before her. The magic a man and woman were making ten feet away.

She'd read in the brochure for the *Empress of Britain* about the high quality of its entertainment. There were two theatres, three orchestras. Dance teams. If the pair before them was representative, the quality had been undersold. Because they were superb. *Cortes*, *ochos* and *cruzadas* succeeded each other seamlessly. Though it was the way the pair blended that truly entranced. They barely looked at each other, and then only when they touched—briefly, at shoulder, hip, thigh. She'd seen dancers in nightclubs who were more overtly passionate. But this was an elegant cruise ship, its passengers from the upper echelons of society, with an older average age. Somehow, though, their restraint made their performance even more sensual. They were touching even when apart, connected by the energy they made together.

The tempo built. The dark-haired guitarist, so restrained while accompanying the food, began to cut loose, as if he made up a third participant in what had become a seduction. The man spun the woman close, then twirled her out before pulling her into a slide—one long, satiny leg slipping bare from her dress, flying at him like an arrow. Then she was up, in his arms; his mouth was now near her neck, exposed because she'd thrown back her head, as if offering him a bite. It was vampiric, like from the movies. Eve leaned forward, lips parted, some part of her hoping that he would sink in his teeth, conjure blood on that ivory neck. But instead, he

spun the woman out again, then she sank to the floor while he stood above her, glaring down, a moment they held, of cruel rejection.

Eve shook herself. She felt eyes on her—and turned. Richard was still talking to Charpentier, Lady Agatha was dozing and Pearl had her mouth at her husband's ear, whispering something that made him laugh. It was Henrik who was watching her. When he saw her look back, he smiled and tipped his head to the dance floor in appreciation.

Where the dance was reaching its climax. Tango was a story—of love sought, found, rejected, rediscovered. The man who'd flung her aside now swept the woman up, and they moved around each other in a dazzle of interlocking steps. Until she arched back, her hand sweeping the floor, and he pulled her tight to him and they touched, for the briefest of moments, almost everywhere. As the last note sounded, he bent and kissed her fully yet tenderly on the lips.

A moment of silence before an explosion of applause. Smiling, the couple took their bows, she twirling each way to curtsy. Then there was movement all around. Waiters were politely cajoling those sitting nearest the band to rise and move back—their tables cleared to expand the dance floor. Eve's own party was among them, so she waited with the crowd while everything was rearranged. In moments all was in order. Those who wished to found new perches at empty tables or at the bar.

When the band struck up, Eve knew exactly where she needed to be. "Richard," she called, seizing his hand, "let's dance."

There was the briefest of resistance. Then he looked back at Charpentier and said in French, "We will speak more of this later, Monsieur." Eve could tell, by the expressions on both their faces, that they were no longer discussing hockey.

She pulled him to the floor. Other couples were already there, moving to a polka—it wasn't a tango, but at least it wasn't a stately waltz. They glided around the floor, the youngest couple there. It was crowded and at one point they nearly bumped into the Brooks-Mickelsons, with Pearl executing an evasive manoeuvre that displayed the dancer she'd once been.

The polka ended; a waltz struck up. Some people left; others joined. She glimpsed Henrik leading Lady Agatha to the floor. Then she focused on the man whose arms she held. Her husband.

He was an excellent dancer. Better than she was, if truth be told. So she relaxed into him, let him move her about. Enjoyed the slight dizziness that came with the spinning. That, and the extra glass of wine, made her appreciate again the handsome man who held her. She felt truly connected to him for the first time since they came aboard. When the music ended, and they applauded the band, she put her mouth near his ear and whispered, “Shall we have an early night, darling?”

She pulled back to see his eyes. Wasn’t sure exactly what was in them. Hesitation, certainly. Something else.

His smile displaced whatever that was. “Wonderful idea, darling,” he said. “I just have to finish my conversation with Monsieur Charpentier. It’s quite important. Then we’ll go.”

It was as if he’d doused her in freezing water. She wanted heat. She wanted the tango. Not this...cold response. As he led her off the floor, she replied, with the same ice he’d chilled her with, “Oh, important, is it? How so?”

“He’s a major player in Québécois society. You heard how he spoke about ‘European wars,’ about not getting involved. If we do go to war, as seems likely, Canada will need Quebec, its men, its resources.” They’d nearly reached the table their party had occupied—only the Québécois couple still there.

“So you’re working? Is that what you’re saying?”

“Always, I’m afraid.” He put his hand under her chin. “I warned you about marrying a diplomat. Never off the clock. I’ll be swift, I promise.”

He lowered his hand, turned away, said something in French that she didn’t catch. She dropped into a chair, furious. Reached into her clutch, opened her leather and gold case, put a Lucky into her mouth...then realized that, yet again, she’d left her lighter in their cabin.

A flame struck up before her. “Maybe I should just give you this,” Henrik said, lighting her cigarette. He snapped the Colibri shut and held it

out. “Would you like it?”

“Certainly not.” She spoke on the exhale, squinted down. “It’s monogrammed, isn’t it?”

“Yes. But the person whose initials it bears left my life a long time ago.”

She didn’t need to ask. She knew he was talking about a woman. “I’m fine—thanks, though. But would you like one of my ciggies?”

He nodded, took one, lit it, before slipping his lighter back into a pocket.

“Lady Agatha?” she asked.

“One dance finished her. She’s gone back to her cabin.”

They smoked in silence, watching the dancers. It seemed to her that the music had slowed. Older people clutched each other, moving gently around.

“Bit dull, isn’t it?” It was as if he’d read her mind. When he turned to her now, there was a light in his eyes. “You know, there’s a band playing right now in the Cathay Lounge. They have, uh, *Negro musicians*.” He almost whispered those words. “More my kind of dance music, actually. Not so...dreary.”

She knew the music he meant—and the dances that went with them. She’d learned them after lights out in the dormitories at Brillantmont. One wild night in Turin, she’d danced them with Gianni. “Let’s go.”

“Oh, but your husband. I should ask—”

“I’ll ask.” She turned. “Richard! There’s another band playing in the Cathay Lounge. Want to come?”

“Ah. Perhaps later?” He glanced at Charpentier, then back. “Or...I say, Henrik, old fellow, would you mind taking my wife there? Maybe run her around the floor?”

“I—” The Swede looked between them. “Of course. Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.” Richard rose, leaned in, gave Eve a peck on the cheek. “You go have some fun, darling. Let’s rendezvous in the cabin a little later.”

“Okey doke!” Eve rose, a bright smile on her face. Snatched up her mink stole, walked swiftly away. She didn’t know which made her angrier. The fact that he’d rather stay and talk politics—or that he’d so casually passed her over to another man on their honeymoon.

Henrik caught up with her at the door. “Ah, are you sure this is alright?”

“Perfectly.” She stopped by a standing ashtray, exhaled a long plume of smoke, stubbed her Lucky out. Looked him in the eye. “Let’s dance.”

NINE

AS SOON AS THEY entered the palm-lined corridor, they could hear the music. The door of the Cathay Lounge may have been shut but there was no containing the yowl of a trumpet, the heartbeat surge of a stand-up bass.

Henrik paused, placed his hand on the stained-oak panelling. “Feel this!”

She laid hers beside his. The music pulsed within—tingles ran into her palm, others shot up through the thick carpet into the soles of her evening shoes.

“Shall we?” Henrik asked.

“Let’s.”

The door they pushed swung in...onto mayhem. This was quite a different place from the *Empress*’s dedicated smoking room where Eve had taken coffee her first morning aboard. It looked the same: decorated like a palace of the East, with Chinese motifs and patterns running over the dark walls and huge lacquered vases placed all around, some of which had been converted into lamps that cast a reddish glow through their shades. Now, though, all the lighting was low, the ceiling lights extinguished—coupled with the thick smoke, this had made it hard to see at first. But Eve’s gaze was swiftly taken by a crowd moving frenziedly to the fast, syncopated beat produced by the five-piece band.

The musicians were not on a stage but on the floor with the dancers. The trumpeter had a metal bowler hat over the end of his instrument to contain its roar. The trombonist was beside him, letting rip. The pianist was standing, hitting the keys hard—as was the bass player, who was slapping his strings as much as plucking them. The drummer was using brushes and

still was loud. They were all Negroes indeed, as Henrik had said. The noise they made in that small space was incredible. The floor before the band was filled with gyrating bodies, none of whom were more than twenty-five years old. Quite the contrast to the waltzers in the other hall.

Henrik was saying something. She shrugged that she couldn't hear. He leaned in. "Drink?" he shouted.

She shook her head. "Dance," she yelled, threw her stole over a chair and kicked off her shoes.

Dance they did. They walked onto a floor in full "swing," in both senses of the word. So they swung, mainly apart but connected, their feet moving fast and close to each other's. The music, already at a height when they'd joined, kept building. They danced faster, sometimes aware of others, often not. It wasn't truly a couple's style—Eve found herself in front of a few different men, and some women too. Meeting Henrik again at one point, she mimed at him to take his dinner jacket off. He did so and then reached for his tie. "It must die," he shouted, but she read that on his lips rather than heard it. She laughed when he ripped it off, snatched it from him, then hurled it into a corner.

He took her hand. They kept dancing, as one number blended into the next. She lost him for a while, then he was back with two drinks, frosty and pale. He gestured to the side of the floor and she joined him, took one glass, gulped. "White Lady," she cried. "How did you know?" He raised both hands in an "isn't it obvious?" gesture. Then the trumpeter let rip a final peal of notes, unmuted, before the entire band cut out. Though there was no real gap because under the shouted acclaim, the applause, she could hear the drum. Sticks were being used now on a very distinct beat.

She knocked back another swig, then put her half-empty glass down. Since only the drum was being played, she didn't need to shout. "The lindy hop," she said. "Have you tried it?"

He grinned. "Once or twice."

He pulled her out onto the floor. He was a good dancer. Not as polished as Richard. Less formal. Like everyone around them, they began a little apart, holding hands, swinging out and in. But as the beat and the heat built,

as the music soared, pairs got closer, passing each other with their backs almost touching. And then Henrik moved tight, gripping her left hand in his right, his other at her waist. He spun her suddenly, moved to the side, spun her again. And she decided right then to surrender, to let him lead her, guide her—taking joy in reacting and adapting instantly to whatever he did next. When he twisted low, she did too. When he leaned back, she matched the length of his arm with one of hers, their other arms pointing to the ceiling, hands shaking at the wrist. At some point other people fell back, formed a small circle. Eve and Henrik had become the focus.

Which was when he worked the big moves. Lifted her onto his hip—her legs straight out—then swung her around. Pulled her into a jump so she soared like a bird, like a ballerina in a pas de deux, her chest placed on his. When he signalled her to drop, she read it and did so he could swing his legs over her, before pulling her between them, up and onto her feet.

It was...exhilarating! Everything she'd felt, everything she'd worried about, had fallen away. Lost in gin, music and moves.

It was also the final dance. Though the crowd cheered, clapped, pleaded, the band just smiled shyly and packed their instruments away. Eve fell into a chair and finished her cocktail in one pull. "Damn," she said, as Henrik flopped into the chair beside her, rubbing a shirt sleeve over his sweaty brow. "I'd have gone on till midnight."

"You did. Nearly." He tipped his wrist toward her and she saw on his watch that it was 11:45. "I am so sorry I lost track of time, Mrs. Spence. Your husband must be frantic."

"Eve. And if he was frantic, he'd have come and found me. He knew where we went." She shook her head. "He's probably still deep in conversation with that fearsomely ugly Frenchman."

He laughed. "Perhaps. But we should still go."

She really didn't want the night to end. "I need to cool off," she said, reaching for her stole. "A last cigarette on the deck?"

"Fine idea."

There weren't too many people on the ship's foredeck—a few she recognized from the Cathay Lounge, also getting some air after their

exertions. But she cooled fast; this was May in the mid-Atlantic. So Hendrik draped his dinner jacket around her. Over her weak protests, he said, “Scandinavian, remember. This is a balmy summer day to me.”

They smoked, quiet now, staring at the passing waves. There was a slight mist. At one point, the lights of a passing ship glowed yellow through it. When she reached for a second cigarette, he shook his head. “Perhaps not, eh? Your husband really will be wondering.”

He walked her back to her cabin. At the door she slipped out of his jacket and handed it to him. He pressed his nose into it. “Is that Tabu I smell?” On her nod, he smiled. “I may never have it cleaned again.”

They stood facing each other. They were not as close as they’d been on the dance floor—and suddenly she wanted to be that close again. Wanted more than that, she realized. Wanted to kiss him.

There was a moment when she could have closed the small distance between them. But she hesitated...just long enough for Henrik to take a step back, away from her. “Thank you for a delightful evening, Mrs. Spence,” he said. “I hope to see you again soon.”

“You will. We’ve got two more nights aboard, haven’t we?”

“Yes, but I will be...occupied.” He looked around at the plush corridor. “Also I should not really be up here at all. According to my berth, I am part of the crew.”

“Well, that’s nonsense, if I say—”

“And truly, I must leave you to your husband.” He smiled. “I don’t think they allow duelling aboard the *Empress of Britain*.” He reached, took her hand, but in a different way than he’d done before—now keeping her at arm’s length. He kissed it briefly, then let it go. It was when he stepped away that she realized he’d left something behind.

She held it up. “Your lighter!” she exclaimed. “No, I couldn’t—”

“You must. I insist. A keepsake for a delightful evening.” He laughed. “And if the truth is told, I can’t bear the idea of another man lighting your cigarettes.”

He bowed from his waist, gave that little heel click again and moved away. He’d almost reached the turn to the other corridor when she called,

“We’ll see each other in Stockholm though, won’t we? We arrive there late August, after Richard has learned some, ah, ropes, in London.”

“I’ll be away myself for a time. In Newbattle’s northern mines. But I look forward to your arrival.” He gave a head bow. “You looked after me here, as your father kindly asked you to. As I promised before, I shall look after you there.”

He walked away. She stared down the empty corridor for a long moment, then shivered, and let herself softly into the room. Richard was there. But he was not waiting up. His gentle snores came from the bed. She wasn’t sure if she was angry—or relieved. What she was sure of was that she was exhausted.

Quietly she went to the bathroom, whose mirror revealed the ravages that wild dancing had wrought. She took off her makeup, put on some cold cream, followed by her silk pajamas, went out and slipped softly into bed. Lay there, listening to her husband snore. Though as her eyelids began to flicker, she remembered something. Rose again, went to the dressing room table, groped in the dark till she found Henrik’s lighter and tucked it away in her clutch.

A decorative rectangular border with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork and floral motifs at the corners and midpoints of the sides.

PART TWO

**THUNDER
OVER EUROPE**

TEN

*Kurpiowska Forest, Poland. September 4,
1939*

ERIK STROM LOWERED HIS face to just above the ashes and gently blew. The remnants of last night's campfire still glowed and the dry leaves he piled on top quickly caught. Now he added his collection of twigs and, when red flames danced along them, larger broken sticks. Soon there was enough flame for the small logs he'd split the day before. Once everything was burning well and the coals gleamed red, he placed the metal trivet in their middle, then his coffee pot on top of that, before sitting back to stare into the trees. Mainly alder, some were just beginning their change for autumn, leaves yellowing. The early-dawn light caught their tops, gilding them, flashing gold in the light breeze.

Erik smiled. He was never sure, as each season arrived, if this was his favourite one. In his homeland, winter was a delight to people like him who'd learned to ski soon after they could walk. Yet spring brought joy to the land, new growth, splashes of colour, crocuses pushing up through the snow, the wild strawberries on their tail, to be picked and guzzled with sugar. Summer always seemed to take an age to appear, yet when it did it came in a rush, bringing nearly twenty-four hours of sunlight and the endless pleasures of swimming, sailing, fishing.

He poked the fire with a stick, sending up a cascade of sparks. Autumn? The time to forage for mushrooms in the turning forests, to bag an elk for the winter cold-store and a hare or two to be skinned, jointed, stewed with carrot and juniper berries and eaten over a hunter's fire much like this one. *But I might have to spend some time back at the shooting range,* he thought

with a head shake. One of the Poles, Miroslav, who was an army reservist, had brought his rifle to the camp, hoping to hunt. He and Erik had managed to miss every single rabbit they'd aimed at.

Noises came from one of the tents. He sighed. Though it was indeed time the others got going, because they were breaking camp that morning, he always relished being the first one up. Once everyone was awake, the conversations would begin again. Important conversations, it was true—it was why this committee of the Confédération Internationale des Étudiants was there on a week's camping retreat. With the world in its current state, it was vital for the younger generation to come up with solutions that the old men in their societies had so obviously failed to.

Oh, how they had talked deep into the night, passions rising. Especially last night, their last in the forest. By midnight, however, with the world's problems still unresolved, his mind had turned to other passions, and he'd kept trying to catch Aleksandra's eye.

She'd ignored him. No, that wasn't true. To ignore someone is a choice. She was unaware of her lover's gaze, far too caught up in debates in which she was a prime mover.

He tipped his head back now and laughed. What did he expect? From the moment the previous year when he'd watched her give a speech at the congress in Prague, he'd known what she was: a firebrand. It was a huge part of her appeal, he had to admit. He was more cautious than she—deploying reasoned arguments like the lawyer he intended to become. She would grow incandescent at the slightest breath of contradiction. There was a haughtiness to her that some people hated. Understandable because, even though she was now a committed egalitarian, she had been raised as the daughter of a duke. So her manner was a part of her. And since Erik loved every part of her, he loved that too.

The pot boiled. Using the sleeve of his wool sweater as a mitt, he lifted it from the trivet, placed it in the ashes to the side, then, from his rucksack, pulled out his jug and the tin of coffee. It contained just enough for the morning's brew. If they hadn't been planning on going back that morning,

they would have had to anyway. No one could begin their day without coffee.

As he bent to tip the contents into the jug, a sound like thunder came from a distance away. The same sound had reached them the previous two nights, making some people nervous—since they knew it wasn't thunder at all. But Aleksandra, who had two older brothers in the Polish army, reassured everyone that it would just be manoeuvres. There had been tension for weeks now along the borders with Germany. The one with East Prussia was only ten kilometres away. Each side was “posturing,” she told them. Firing off their “big-boy, big-toy guns.” Even more reason their subcommittee should settle on a statement to present to the main committee of the Confédération at the congress next month.

He poured the water into the jug, stirred, then settled back to wait for it to brew. What had he been thinking about? Oh, yes, Aleks's passions. Joyfully they were in every area of her life. So when the yawning had gotten too obvious around the campfire, and they'd all returned to their tents, Erik and Aleks had made love. Gloriously. Trying to keep quiet added to the pleasure, especially as they took such delight in each other's bodies. Hers, as white as Carrara marble, could have been sculpted by Michaelangelo. The full moon had pierced the canvas walls, lighting her as she moved faster and faster atop him, his hands caressing every part of her...

He sat up. Memories had provoked some stirrings in his shorts! If they'd been camping alone, as they had done when she visited him in Norway back in July, he might have returned to the tent and woken her with more than a cup of coffee. But there were definite noises from others now. Soon the camp would be bustling. They must be on their way.

He glanced into his rucksack. Beneath the now-empty coffee tin was another, smaller container. Covered in velvet, it had a snap-up lid and held, Erik was convinced, the World's Smallest Diamond. He'd been thinking of proposing to her in some pretty spot in the forest, but they'd never been alone for long enough. So he'd do it back in Lodz, maybe even that night.

Nerves set his stomach fluttering. Shaking his head, he put down two coffee mugs, used a spoon to lift some floating grounds from the pot, then poured. Adding a couple of spoonfuls of sugar to each, he topped up the pot with more hot water, replaced its lid, put it nearer the coals to keep warm for the others, then carried the two over to their tent.

He'd left the ties undone so he was able to thrust his head straight into the tent. "Morning, sleepy one," he whispered, and her eyes popped open.

"I was just dreaming about you. Ah!" She stretched her bare arms above her, letting out a sound like a cat.

"A nightmare, then." He slid in and sat, holding her cup out to her.

"Hardly," she replied, sitting up. They studied each other for a moment, then both smiled, the memory of the night in their eyes. Eventually she took the cup with a whispered thanks. Then her brow creased. "What's that?"

That was the sound of a motor. They'd camped not far from a forestry service road. "More logging trucks probably." He let the flaps fall behind him. "Is that sweet enough for you?"

He never heard her reply. Her words were lost to the roar of engines suddenly, sharply nearer. "What the—"

He went onto his knees, thrust his head out of the tent...just in time to see the tank burst through a small stand of saplings, splintering them.

"Hände hoch! Hände hoch!" came the screech of a metallic voice.

Stunned, Erik looked to his right and saw where the tank was heading. Miroslav was standing in front of his tent. Perhaps he didn't speak German. Perhaps he didn't care. Anyway, he did raise his hands as ordered but they held his rifle, and he managed to get off two rounds before the tank's machine gun cut him in half. Instantly there were more shots, many more. Just before Erik hurled himself back into his tent, he glimpsed that the tank was not alone. There was another behind it, and a truck that looked like it was filled with soldiers in field grey.

"Out! Out!" He half-picked Aleksandra up, shoving her through the tent's rear flaps. They'd kept them open in the night to get a through-draft. *Praise God*, he thought.

People were screaming, some in terror, some in pain, voices mostly drowned by the staccato punches of machine-gun fire, the sharp *crack-crack* of rifles. He felt something pass his left ear, then something else his right. They'd camped in a glade, so the treeline behind the tent was only ten paces away. Make that and they might get out of this alive.

Aleksandra stumbled to her knees. He grabbed her under an elbow, got her up and moving again.

They made the trees. Bark exploded around them, off alder, off spruce, the sudden sharp tang of resin in the air. Splinters arced before them, into them, but they were both weaving now, dodging between trunks. He didn't know where they were going. He only knew that it was better than where they'd been.

He tripped on a deadfall. Aleksandra turned, reached a hand to him. "Come!" she cried.

Then she was picked up, hurled backwards. *She's fine*, he thought, *she tripped, she's OK*. But when he crawled forward to where she now lay, he saw that she wasn't, because there was no eye where her left eye had been. The other stared out, surprised.

"Aleks," he whimpered, as he bent over her. "No! No! No!"

Something hit him hard on the back of his head. The darkness it sent him to was welcome.



Voices woke him. They were speaking German. A language which, along with English, he'd studied since he was eight years old. Somehow, he could understand none of it now.

Maybe it was his head. It felt like someone had tried to take it off with a shovel and stopped halfway through the task. He reached up, felt a sticky mass of congealed blood. His stomach heaved. He thought he was going to be sick.

"*Obersturmführer*, he is awake."

That he understood. But it didn't mean he could open his eyes. He heard footsteps approaching.

"Are you?" asked another voice. Less gruff than the first. Younger. "Are you awake?"

Erik had no memory of where he was, or why he was there. Who these people were. The only way to find answers was to force his eyes open. It was a struggle—he couldn't understand why until he reached up and found there was blood on his lids too. After wiping them, he finally succeeded.

There were boots about a foot away, highly polished. "Good, good," spoke the man who stood in them. "Help him up, *Feldwebel*."

Hands dug into Erik's armpits; he was hoisted up to his knees. Immediately the world spun and he puked, sweet coffee acrid in his mouth. Whoever had lifted him cursed and stepped away.

"Good, good." It was that same young voice again, moving away. "You'll feel better soon."

Erik didn't think he ever would again. But he was taking things in at least. Dawn still lingered in treetops. He was in a forest—the forest, he realized, where they'd camped. He was sitting between the tractor tracks of two tanks. The young officer—"Obersturmführer," the other had called him—had moved back down the iron alley and sat behind...a small, ornate, folding wooden desk. It was incongruous, so out of place next to a tank in a forest, that it made Erik shake his head—which he immediately regretted. He thought he was going to be sick again.

"*Feldwebel*, send Kreutzer over with his kit. Tell him he'll need hot water."

"*Jawohl, Herr Obersturmführer!*"

The man walked away. "I am sorry we haven't tended to your wound yet, young fellow. To be honest, we were waiting to see if you were going to wake up at all."

The officer returned his attention to the papers before him. Erik stared at the ground. It was all he could do.

After a short time, a man joined them. He was carrying a basin. At the officer's command he knelt, soaked a cloth in the water and began,

surprisingly gently, to clear away the congealed blood on the back of Erik's head. That done, he applied some ointment, then wrapped his head in a tight dressing.

The *Obersturmführer* glanced up from some papers. He was sipping from a cup that seemed familiar. Then Erik noticed that on the table before the officer was his own coffee jug that he'd left in the coals of the fire for the others.

"Will he live, Kreutzer?"

"Most likely, sir. It's a deep cut more than anything, I think. There may also be a fracture. But he should see a doctor soon."

"Well, perhaps that will happen. You may go."

"*Jawohl, Herr Obersturmführer.*" The man rose, collected his things and left.

"Erik," said the officer. "Funny. My name is Erich too. Spelled differently of course. E-R-I-C-H."

"Eh?"

His confusion must have shown on his face because the man raised what Erik saw was his own identity card. "'Erik Strom. Norwegian,'" he continued. "Do you speak German?" Erik managed a nod. "Tell me: what is a Norwegian doing in a forest in East Prussia?"

"Poland," Erik mumbled.

The officer smiled. "Not anymore. But why are you here, my good young man?"

Why was he...wherever he was? "Camping. We are, members of, ah—"

"The 'Confédération Internationale des Étudiants.'" The officer held up another card. "Which explains why I have French papers here, British and Polish, of course." He gestured before him to the desk. "No Germans, though."

"You...you have your own organizations."

"We do indeed. The Hitler Youth, though we were a little younger than you." He looked at the first card again. "Twenty-one, yes? Another coincidence. Same age as me." He nodded. "But we did things like this. Camping. Hiking. Singing songs around a campfire."

“It is not...not all we do.”

“No, no. You are political, yes? Idealists! Drawing up plans to change the world?” He read from the paper he still held. ““We submit to the General Council our subcommittee’s findings on the question before us: How to maintain peace in Europe.”” He put the paper down. “I think this paper is a little too late, don’t you? Peace is over. War has begun. Now it is merely a question of choosing sides.”

A soldier ran up. There was a fast, low conversation of which Erik only caught a little.

“Good, good.” The officer waved his hand. The soldier ran off. “We got a little ahead of our comrades, but it seems that they have nearly caught up. We must move on. But what to do with you, eh?”

He stared, sucking air between his teeth for a long moment. Then he shrugged, leaned over his desk and wrote speedily on a piece of paper. Scrawling what had to be his signature, he folded the paper, slipped it into an envelope, wrote on that, sealed it, then called out. The same soldier returned—more rapid speech followed. When his commander rose, retaining just two pieces of paper, the soldier collected the rest, shoved them into a satchel, tipped out the remains of coffee from cup and jug, rapidly folded the desk and carried it all away.

The *Obersturmführer* came to stand above Erik. This close his uniform was clearer. He had two *Ss* in his collar tabs. Erik didn’t know what that meant. Some kind of unit designation.

The man spoke. “You know, we wouldn’t have killed any of you students if you’d simply obeyed orders. But that fellow started shooting and my troops are so young, so easily frightened. It took a while to get them to cease firing.”

He bent and lifted Erik by his elbow. After a little sway, Erik found he could stand. Then the officer led him around the tank, whose motor had just fired up. “Speaking of camping!” His voice was different now, enthusiastic. “I camped so often with my parents in your country. Your beautiful country! The majestic fjords! The Jotunheim Mountains! The girls! Oh, how I loved it there!” He shook Erik gently. “We are the same people, you and us.

Northern folk.” He released Erik, took a step away. “So in the conflict to come, I know we are going to stand side by side.”

Placing one foot on a sprocket in his tank tracks, he hoisted himself up into the tank’s turret. Sat and looked back down. “Which is why I have decided to send you back to your beautiful country.”

He called a name, and a different soldier in thick glasses ran up, stood with his foot on the track, bending to listen, nodding all the while. Again, Erik only picked up a little. Something about who was to stay, who to return. The throbbing in his head was worse, not helped by the tank’s engines revving, the stench of diesel, more coming as it was joined by the other tank and two trucks.

The soldier climbed up, took the envelope, jumped down and ran off. The officer glanced at the one paper he now held. “You are lucky... ‘Erik Strom.’ Lucky that my young men didn’t kill you. Lucky also that your comrade, though he fired only two shots, managed to hit a member of the Wehrmacht with each of them.” He laughed. “We can only hope every Pole is not so accurate!”

He looked around at his assembled troops. It seemed that all were ready. “So you will return with the wounded to headquarters. My father is General Georg von Küchler. He is the commander in this sector. The letter I wrote is for him. I am sure he will agree with his favourite son’s suggestion. After all, he loved camping in Norway nearly as much as I did.”

He threw down the paper he held. It landed in front of Erik. It was his identity card. Then he turned to face front. Erik could see he was about to order the advance. “Excuse me, uh, uh, Erich!” he called, and the officer turned and frowned down at him. “What...what is to become of my friends?”

“The Frenchman and the Englishman are prisoners now, since their countries were foolish enough to declare war on the Reich yesterday. For Poland!” He snorted. “I’ve already sent them on. The two Poles will be arriving in prison soon. The two Jews”—he shrugged—“well, they are going somewhere else. The rest are dead.” His eyes hardened. “My advice? Go back to your country, Erik Strom. Tell them that we will be coming

soon, one way or another. And that they should prepare to welcome their friends.” He swivelled, raised a hand. “*Vorwärts!*” he shouted.

Erik stooped, snatched up his identity card, then stepped back as the tank moved away. The second one followed, and then the two trucks. He coughed, nauseated again in the cloud of diesel. When the vehicles had all cleared, he was able to see what they’d hidden from him.

There was little trace left of the camp. A small trail of smoke rose from the fire he’d made that morning. Beside that were the tents, but ripped from the ground now, laid flat. A covering for the bodies that pushed up the canvas at five points. At one end, a woman’s hand lay outside the covering. He recognized it because of the pink paint on the nails. Because he’d kissed each of those fingers only a few hours before. The hand was meant to be warm now and holding the World’s Smallest Diamond. Not turning blue under a broken tent.

He bent over, vomited again, though there was little to bring up, the liquid in his mouth bilious. He couldn’t believe that he hadn’t thought of Aleksandra till he saw that hand. But he now realized, because he’d taken a year of medicine at Oslo University before he’d switched to law, that he was both concussed and in shock. Would continue to be so for a while. Thoughts would be muddled, purposes unclear. Though even as he was commanded to board the truck where two green-faced, wounded young soldiers waited, as he climbed onto it, he did focus on one thing.

If he did make it back to Norway, he would indeed take the advice he’d just been given. If the Nazis did come, he would help his country prepare a welcome for them. Just not the one Erich von Kuchler was imagining.

ELEVEN

Stockholm, Sweden. November 13, 1939

“AND NOW, FINALLY, TELL ME, Mrs. Spence...” The journalist smiled and leaned forward, pen poised above her pad. “What is it actually like to be married to the most handsome man in Stockholm?”

Eve glanced at Richard sitting beside her on their small sofa. His Swedish had improved enormously in their two months in Sweden. But did he know the rather slangy word “*snygging*”? His blush seemed to indicate he did—highlighting what was, she had to admit, a very good-looking face.

She squeezed his hand. She’d been holding it ever since they had sat down for the interview. For once in their lives, she was the one in control. Richard had resisted the idea of being interviewed for the new ladies’ magazine, *Flitiga Händer* (“Busy Hands”). The chargé d’affaires at the legation, though, had thought it a good idea. And Eve had had dealings with such publications back home—especially in the lead-up to the wedding.

She replied—in English, in which most of the interview had been conducted—“Of course, I’m very aware of just how lucky I am. I married a diplomat who looks like a movie star. There are at least a dozen girls back home in Canada still nursing broken hearts.”

“Nonsense,” Richard grunted, then raised her hand and kissed it. “I am the lucky one.”

They glanced into each other’s eyes. Eve saw both his embarrassment and his amusement. They would have fun together dissecting this afterwards. Her husband, behind the diplomat’s mask, had one of the wickedest wits she’d ever encountered. One of many things she’d discovered about him in the six months since their wedding.

One of many, she thought, and her gaze faltered. She looked away...to Hettie, the journalist, now rising from her chair. Eve began to rise too, but the other woman gestured her down. "No, no, please. That look you just shared? The perfect photograph. Aage?" She turned to the man leaning against the mantelpiece. He'd taken several shots when they'd first arrived. Now he hefted his camera again, moved the light he'd set up a little closer, waited till they were staring at each other, then clicked five more times.

"Wonderful." Hettie was gathering her things, dropping pen and notebook into her bag. "It would make a marvellous cover shot, of course. Sadly, since this feature will only appear in our third-ever edition, we'll have to put Hollywood on the cover again. You want to sell magazines in Sweden, you go to Greta Garbo and Gary Cooper!" She slipped into her coat, paused with her scarf and gazed down at them. "Maybe in a year, we'll be able to feature what real love looks like."

Richard stood, murmuring modestly. Eve rose too, observing the other woman. She was probably in her fifties, and was stylishly dressed, lines about her eyes, grey in her hair. There was something slightly sad in the way she'd said that last sentence, Eve thought. Not jealously, exactly. More...more as if real love had passed her by some time before.

The photographer had packed up his gear and now preceded them into the apartment hallway. Richard got ahead of him, opened the front door, and ushered Hettie and Aage out. Thanks were exchanged, and Richard waited till he heard them descend to the next floor before closing the door, leaning against it and looking at her. "Oh my God, Evie!"

The laughter they'd both been restraining burst out. She ran to him and they clung to each other, sides heaving.

When she'd regained some breath, she asked, "My darling, was that torture?"

"Torture!" He gasped. "I thought I was going to pull a muscle trying not to laugh. I couldn't look at you most of the time or I'd have been doomed!" He put on a very exaggeratedly Swedish voice. "'Tell me, Mrs. Spence—do you *dress* your husband?'"

She did the same. ““Do you buy your lingerie at PUB or Svenska Kvinna?””

“And then...and then...what was it?” He raised his eyes to the ceiling. “Oh, yes! ‘Which of our Swedish hunting dogs do you find the most attractive?’”

They held each other, shaking. After a while he straightened and put her to arm’s length. “Darling, I know it’s a little early—but I sure could use a drink. You?”

His face was flushed. His dark eyes were sparkling. Eve suddenly felt just like she had in that moment when she’d stepped beside him at the altar of Notre-Dame de Montréal. When she’d gazed up into his face. Movie-star handsome didn’t come close to summing him up.

She took his hand off her arm and kissed it. “I’d rather have something else,” she whispered.

“Oh. Oh, yes. Yes, of course.”

Taking the hand she still held, she pulled him down the corridor to the bedroom.



“Richard?” There was no reply. Eve touched his naked back. “Are you...are you crying?”

A sob came then, followed by words spoken into his pillow.

“What, darling? What is it?” She sat up, switched on her bedside lamp. He groaned. “My love, tell me. Tell me what’s the matter.”

She knew what the matter was for her. What they’d just attempted. Again. This time, though, it hadn’t even progressed as far as him lying on top of her, entering her swiftly, finishing fast—the story of most of their few tries at this. This time, after lying on her for less than a minute, he’d rolled off, turned away. Started shaking.

She put her hand on his shoulder. “Tell me.”

He flipped onto his back. She saw the moisture leaking from his closed eyelids. Words came in a croak: “I am so, so sorry, Eve.”

They had never discussed their issue. Never. It was such a relief to have at least reached this stage. “Darling, it’s alright. It’s alright! I’m sure, uh, many couples go through this. We’ll manage. We’ll work at—”

“No!” His interruption was loud. “It’s not that, it’s...” He trailed off, then bolted upright. There was torment in his eyes. “I’m having an affair!”

“You...you...” She couldn’t speak. What he’d just said didn’t make sense. Through all their troubles, she was sure at least of their love. She’d rationalized it: perhaps passion simply wouldn’t be a part of their marriage. She’d overheard gossip at her mother’s teas, jokes made. What had that American woman said aboard the ship? “Lie back and think of Cary Grant”? Yet otherwise she and Richard had been happy with each other, hadn’t they? What they’d told that journalist had been true...mostly...

Now, though, all that was blown away by his admission. Her whole recent past rewritten. Thoughts cascaded through her head—none could be shaped into words. “What?” was all she could manage.

“I am so, so sorry,” he repeated, sniffing. Ran the back of one hand under his nose, knuckled his eyes, one after the other. “For everything. For all—” He gestured at the bed, and she knew what he meant, instantly. “You deserve better. Better than me.” He thrust his face into the arm that rested on his knees, mumbled his next words into it. “I shouldn’t have let you marry me.”

Her spinning mind was gradually slowing to a stop like carousel horses moving from blur to solidity. She felt a surge of fury. *No, you bloody shouldn’t have*, she thought. Then that anger dispersed, leaving her only with fear. The life she’d had, the life she’d planned—that had been planned for her—was over. *What now?* she thought, shivering, pulling the bedsheet up to cover her nakedness. She felt her own eyes water, took a breath, tried to suck back the tears. When she was ready, she asked, as calmly as she could, “Do I know her?”

“No.”

“Montreal or here?”

“Here.” He spoke into his knees. “When I came to Stockholm in ’38 to meet the minister at the legation, discuss what I’d need to prepare for my

move here, I met her.” He swallowed. “I thought it was just a summer fling. I’d already met you at Oxford, knew I wished to, ah, pursue that. Us. Besides, she was married.” He looked at her now. “I tried, Evie, truly. I tried. But a week after we arrived here, I ran into her on the street. We had a coffee and, and—”

“One thing led to another. What’s her name?”

“It’s...Ingrid.”

“Ingrid.” She was surprised by how calm her voice was. Cool, even. Ice in her next words, hot though they were. “So you manage to fuck *her*, yes?”

He started as if she’d slapped him. She’d never once sworn at him, never even cursed in his presence. “Eve, I—”

“No, no.” She threw back the sheet, got out of bed and grabbed her gown from off the vanity table’s chair. “I quite understand.”

“Eve.” He stood too and grabbed his own gown from the hook on his closet door. “Can we talk? I think...I think I may have a solution.”

“A...*solution*?” It seemed such an odd word. A word from his work. Diplomatic. “The only ‘solution’ is divorce, isn’t it?”

“You know we can’t.”

“Why not? Oh.” She tipped her head back, stared at the ceiling. “Oh, of course. Your career. Ruined.”

“Not that.” He came toward her. “The Church. It’s not allowed.”

“Church?” Another odd word, bringing with it a memory. The pair of them, standing before the altar of Notre-Dame again, making their vows. *Forsaking all others...*

“Darling.” He reached for her. She jerked her hand back, and he lowered his. “I do love you, you know.”

“Do you?”

“Yes, of course I do. I wouldn’t have married you if I didn’t. I believe you love me.”

“I—”

“So my solution means we can keep loving each other and—” He broke off. “Look, would you mind if I explained this over a drink?”

She shrugged. Taking that as a yes, he led her into their living room. It wasn't far away, in that small apartment in Södermalm, but she'd made the room comfortable, had enjoyed spending the small allowance the legation gave new employees. It was what a diplomat's wife did, after all.

Richard poured them each a cognac, then settled into the leather captain's chair she'd found for him in an antique store in Gamla Stan. She sat on the small sofa opposite. He started in again, without preamble. "I want you to be happy, darling. I know you're not. I haven't...I haven't found a way to pay you the attention you deserve. In there." He gestured with his snifter to the bedroom door. "So I wonder—" He hesitated, then took a swig of cognac before continuing. "I wonder if we might come to an arrangement."

"Which involves you having your affair?"

"And you having yours."

"Oh. Oh, I see." She took a gulp of the brandy. Too big, and she coughed. "And how do I set about that?"

"You are an enterprising woman, my sweet. And, may I say, quite gorgeous. If you put your mind to it, you'll have no difficulty." He glanced to the window. "This is not stuffy Quebec. This is Europe. And they do things differently here."

They certainly do, she thought, her mind immediately turning to Gianni, her Italian cavaliere. Saw him as she'd last seen him, at that train station. Recalled now the utter yearning in his eyes. A yearning she now realized she'd never seen in Richard's. Not once. Yet she also remembered how Gianni, despite his clear desire for her, had held back from acting on it... because they weren't married. Not all Europeans did things differently—immorally—it would appear.

Richard was studying her for a reaction. Seeing her in thought—mistaking her apparent calm for acquiescence—he pressed on. "We must be discreet, though. It may be Europe, but we are part of the diplomatic set. No scandals."

She thought she was going to explode—with fury, with pain. But she wasn't going to give him either of those. Not when he was so...assured. She

took a breath, made sure her voice was steady before she spoke. “So I must choose carefully, is that what you are saying?”

Perhaps her calm threw him. He even stammered. “A-a-as I have, yes.”

“I see.” She glanced toward the corridor, the bedroom it led to. “And do we—? I mean you and I—?”

He knew what she hadn’t stated. “As you decide, my love.”

“Well. You really have it all worked out, don’t you?”

“No, I really don’t!” He shrugged. “I’m just trying to figure it all out. I want us to be happy. I think we can be.” He held out his glass. “What do you think? Can we come to an arrangement?”

She stared at him. Suddenly his face didn’t appear as handsome to her as it had before. Her stomach was roiling as if a thousand ants were running amok inside her. She wondered if she was going to be sick. But if nothing else, she had her pride. She was not going to let him see what he had done to her. How he had destroyed her life.

She took some deeper breaths and, when she was ready, another sip of cognac. This time it didn’t make her splutter. Carefully, she put her glass down. “You’re going to have to let me think about this, Richard.” She was pleased at how even her voice sounded. “You’ve obviously been considering it for a while. To justify to yourself how you can break your marriage vows. It might take me some time.”

She stood, and he did too. “Evie!” he said, reaching for her again.

She stepped away from him. “No.” Her voice was still calm. “I said I want some time.”

“Of course. Of course! As long as you want. I’ll—” He ran his hand through his floppy hair. “I’ll go out.”

“To see her?” Her tone was sharper than before. She couldn’t help that.

“No! No, no. The legation. So much work. I—” He moved toward the door. “I’ll get dressed.”

He left the room. She didn’t move, only stood there, staring before her, seeing nothing. Still didn’t move when he called from the front door, “I’ll see you later.”

She didn't reply. After a moment, she heard the front door open and close.

She made the bathroom, just. She hadn't eaten much that day so there wasn't much to come up. Then, wiping her mouth, she busied herself. There was a small room they called the box room, where they kept spare things. She cleared it out, gave it a brief clean. Found linens and a blanket, a pillow, made up the small bed that had been under everything. Then she wrote a short note, left it on the hall table where the mail always waited. *You are in the spare room*, it read.

It was past 8 p.m. by the time she was finished. She wasn't hungry, but felt she should eat. Opened a can of soup, ate half of it. *Sleep*, she thought, and got ready for bed.

Her body felt as exhausted as her mind. Still, she couldn't sleep—her brain racing, running between rage and despair. Wondering how Richard could ever have betrayed her. Wondering if she could ever do the same.

A ragged sleep came and went. At one point she woke up and thought she was back in her bedroom in Westmount. Before the wedding. Was joyful for the moment she thought so. "It was all a dream," she murmured. Until she realized. Then the tears came again and, somehow, strangely, took her back to the oblivion of sleep.

TWELVE

November 21, 1939

EVE SAT IN THE entrance hall of the Nationalmuseum, shivering. She thought the half-hour walk from the apartment might still her mind, which had been whirling more or less continuously since Richard's revelation eight days before—his suggestion of “an arrangement.” But a dry, crisp day had suddenly turned wet and vicious; halfway along Slussbron a slanting rain had hit her. She hadn't brought an umbrella and her raincoat had offered only a brief resistance to the onslaught. Her hair, quite carefully styled for this meeting, hung now in damp corkscrews past her neck. There'd been nothing much she could do about that, though she had repaired the worst of the damage to her makeup.

This meeting. Carefully she pulled the envelope from her clutch. Somehow water had already reached it, and her name and address had blurred. The note within was still clear, though—the strong cursive unblemished. Though she'd read it perhaps a dozen times, seeking alternate meanings where perhaps none were to be found, she read it again now.

My esteemed lady,

At last I am back from my working in the northern mines.

They have given me a few days off, and of course I remembered my promise aboard the ship to look after you in my city.

May I begin by showing you our Nationalmuseum? Are you free next Tuesday, the 21st, at 10:30? Perhaps we can take coffee and waffles afterwards? A call to the office to confirm or reschedule would be appreciated.

*Yours, with deepest respect,
Henrik*

She looked up at the entrance hall's clock. Ten twenty-three. She'd arrived closer to ten, running the last few hundred metres to escape the rain. She tucked the note away in its damp envelope, then back into her bag.

The previous Friday, she'd gone down to collect the mail as she always did. Hadn't recognized the writing—she only ever received letters from her mother and a couple of Brillantmont friends. She'd opened it standing there, leapt straight to the name. When Richard, late as usual, came clattering down the stairs, she'd slipped it swiftly into her dressing gown pocket. Thinking, even as she did, as he grabbed the letters she held out, pecked her cheek and ran past her, that this hiding was how adultery begins.

Adultery. It was absurd on so many levels. So her plans had veered wildly from living out the rest of her life as a kind of nun...to heading down to a rough bar on the Gamla Stan docks and seducing the first sailor she met! Yet once she'd managed to largely get past the sin element—driven into her by priests, teachers and her mother from an early age—what remained was a strong sense of unfairness. Why could Richard have passion in his life and she couldn't? She knew she was capable of it. Knew how she'd mirrored the yearning in Gianni's eyes within her own. Remembered how the way he'd touched her in that forest had made her feel. So at last, and after many back and forths in her mind, she'd settled on what her husband had suggested.

Surely I can manage an affair, she'd thought, *if Richard can?* She'd read *Madame Bovary* at fourteen, after all, under her covers in bed with a flashlight. Then she'd remembered that the novel hadn't ended so well for the adulteress.

Looking at the clock moving so slowly around the dial, she thought about Henrik's letter. Nothing about it indicated his having anything but the "deepest respect" for her. She was the boss's daughter, and he was merely offering to show her around town. He'd been nothing but correct aboard the

Empress of Britain. Perhaps he'd flirted, a little. It was what people did. And yes, they'd shared that wild dance. She'd felt...something. Had he?

She really knew so little about him. Perhaps he was married? In which case, this half-hope was ended. One thing she had decided was that she would not betray another woman. Not now she knew the pain of it.

The revolving door spun. It had disgorged people before, wet and cursing. Now, it disgorged Henrik. "I am so sorry! Am I late? This weather! Terrible. Terrible!" He placed his umbrella in an ornate Chinese lacquered urn by the entrance and came to her. He was wearing a trench coat streaked with water. Eve held out her hand and he bent over it, landing a kiss an inch above it, clicking his heels. "So good to see you, Miss Sinclair. I am sorry—Mrs. Spence."

"Wrong again," she replied. "Eve. Remember?"

"Eve." He smiled. "Shall we drop our wet coats in the cloakroom...oh, I see you have? Excuse me." He went, returned. "Shall we?" He grinned. "I want to introduce you immediately to my girlfriend."

And there it is, she thought, as she followed him up the marble staircase and into a gallery. He doesn't have a wife but he does have a girlfriend. Same difference.

He stopped before a painting—gestured between it and Eve. "Betje, meet Eve. Eve, Betje. My girlfriend."

Eve recognized immediately that the painting was a Rembrandt. She'd seen enough of them on her European tours, especially in Holland. This one was called *The Kitchen Maid*. Painted in 1651. A rather pudgy young lady stared somewhat glumly out.

"I fell in love with her when I was fourteen." Henrik sighed. "But now I have aged and she has not, I am not sure the relationship is, ah, 'appropriate'? Is this the word?"

He'd been speaking in English. Eve switched to Swedish to ask, "How old are you, Henrik?"

"Twenty-four." He gazed at the painting again. "Too old for you, young lady."

She laughed at the melancholy in his voice, the tragic expression on his face. He laughed too, and they moved on through the impressive displays. She mostly looked at him while he looked at the art, which he knew quite a lot about. Recalled how, aboard the liner, she had been struck by the greeny-blue eyes, the short, white-blond hair oiled and parted by a razored line. That scar that cut across his forehead and bisected his left eyebrow. An attractive man, she'd thought then, and did again now, feeling something stir. Yet what stirred next was her stomach. She'd been too nervous to eat any breakfast and she hadn't slept much the night before. Her knees suddenly felt weak. *I can't do this*, she thought.

A little later, before a Gauguin landscape, he noticed her hiding a yawn, and was immediately concerned. "Dear lady, I am going on. It is a fault of mine with art. Shall we rest a little? Perhaps take that coffee and waffles? There is a café just around the corner. We can always come back."

Coats retrieved, she took his arm under the shelter of his umbrella and they ran between the raindrops the hundred metres to the café. It was warm inside—humid almost, the windows steamed up. Busy. But a couple were just leaving a table in the corner and Henrik swooped.

Coffee and waffles arrived. Henrik talked on, about things other than art. About how clever Bootstraps, her father, was, a genius engineer with a sixth sense for hidden seams of ore. About his own recent trip to the north of the country—and how strange the people up there could be. He was quite good at impressions, made her laugh at a few of his countrymen. Managed to do all this while still making his food rapidly, politely, disappear. Even though she found she was relaxing a little—*truly*, she thought, *he is quite charming*—she still couldn't do more than pick at her food. In the end, when he'd finished his meal, she put her knife and fork together and pushed her plate forward.

"Not good?"

"Very good. Just not hungry, I'm afraid."

"Cigarette?"

"Please."

He reached into his pocket, produced a pack of Klubi—Finnish-made but popular in Sweden.

“Do you mind if I...?” She drew Lucky Strikes from her clutch. “Would you...?”

“Thanks.” He took one, then he patted his various pockets, before glancing across the room. “My lighter is in my coat over there. I’ll just...”

He started to rise. “No need,” she said, and drew the lighter he’d given her aboard the liner from her clutch.

He smiled. “You kept it?”

“I never use anything else.” Was it her imagination, or did his gaze sharpen as he looked at her?

They put the cigarettes between their lips. She raised the lighter but her hand was shaking and she couldn’t make it strike. He took it—and worked it on the first try. But the café door opened, a gust of wind blew in, challenging the flame. She put her hand on his as he lit them both.

Come on, girl, she urged herself. *Do it. Now. Now!*

He placed the lighter on the table before her. But when he went to take his hand back, she laid hers on top of it, trapping it. “Henrik,” she breathed, “I...I want you. I...need you.”

It was as absurd as the word *adultery*. Dialogue she’d heard in a film. Slowly he withdrew his hand from hers. “But Mrs. Spence”—he glanced about before focusing again on her—“you are a married woman.”

She was up then, moving fast. Banging into tables and chairs as she went, voices rising in surprise behind her. Snatching her coat from the hook, she didn’t put it on, just flung open the door, and ran—she didn’t know where.

He caught her on the next corner. “Eve!” he cried, taking her arm.

“Let me go! Let me...”

She tried to step off the curb. A car swept past, horn blaring, tires splashing water up and onto her dress. Henrik pulled her back. “Please! Please wait.”

“I’m sorry. I am so sorry.” She couldn’t meet his eyes, squirmed in his grip. She was crying too. “I had one friend in Stockholm and I’ve...I’ve

ruined it. I—”

“No. No! I just don’t understand...your husband.”

“He...he doesn’t want me!” She blurted it. Couldn’t believe she was saying this at last, the secret she hadn’t told a soul. Now that the dam had burst, she couldn’t stop herself. “He doesn’t desire me!”

She looked at him now, fearing the pity she’d see. Instead, she saw... Was that incredulity on his face?

“You? He doesn’t desire...*you*?” he gasped. “Is he...*blind*?”

She saw the change come into his eyes. Saw them coming closer as he leaned in...and kissed her.

She returned the kiss. It was sloppy, watery, lasted but a moment. She tasted the salt of her tears on both of their lips before he pulled back, stepped away.

“Taxi!” he called, raising his arm.

One pulled over immediately. He opened the door for her.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

“Out of the rain.”

His apartment was in Vasastan. It was cold inside, and they were wet. But soon they were drier, warmer, under the bedclothes. One thing led to another. Then another. Then, for Eve, some very surprising others.

THIRTEEN

November 30, 1939

“WELL,” EVE SAID, “there’s looking after someone...and then there is *looking after someone!*” She spoke while stubbing her cigarette out in the ashtray which rested on his naked chest. It wasn’t the first time she’d said it. That had been when they’d made love the second time, after the gallery, nine days before. This morning’s encounter, though, had been an advance on something she’d already thought was pretty good. Something extra had just...clicked.

He may have heard it before, but Henrik still laughed. “We are known for our hospitable ways, we Swedes.”

She laughed too and lay back, an arm behind her head on the pillow. Immediately he pushed his face into her armpit. She felt his tongue. “Stop that!” she yelped, wriggling away. “And, ugh. How can you like that? I’m all sweaty.”

“Even tastier.”

“You are an animal!” She planted her hand on his face and shoved.

“For you I am.” He lifted his head, and gave the cry of a wolf. “Only for you.”

“Oh, sure. Me and half the ladies on Drottninggatan.”

He grinned. “Not quite half. Besides they are all...cod’s roe. You are beluga caviar!”

She snorted. “Is that what passes for a compliment in Sweden? Likening your lover to fish eggs?”

He put on the voice of a farmer from the east of the country, all singsongy. “We are simple folk, with simple appetites.”

“There’s nothing simple about your appetite, pal.”

“Oh, you think so?” He rolled toward her, growled. “And here I am, hungry again.”

“You can’t be.”

“But I am. See?”

He pressed against her, something hard at her hip. She slid out of the bed. “Hold that thought, baby. I need the bathroom.”

“Take your time. I’ll be here.”

She crossed to the bathroom, her legs wobbly. Closing the door behind her, she used the toilet. Done, she stood, looked in the mirror, feeling both a little rawness and a delicious tingle.

My God, she thought, who is this woman?

It wasn’t just the ravaged makeup. It was the look in the eye. Someone sated—and yet still famished. How had the innocent bride from Montreal transformed into this...tramp? What had happened?

Henrik Ridelsson had happened.

Beyond the closed door she heard a strange voice. Started, until she realized it was from the radio. A news broadcast, she guessed, from the serious tone of the speaker.

She turned back to the mirror, leaned in. “Who are you, Eve Sinclair?” she asked her reflection.

That was part of the arrangement—with herself. In Henrik’s apartment she couldn’t think of herself as Mrs. Spence, because Mrs. Spence was an adulteress. A Sinner, with a capital *S*. And even if she’d managed to slip free of many of the commandments she’d been raised with, she was still a Catholic. Guilt was handed out along with the communion wafers. Not here in this apartment, though. Here, she was always too distracted by the pleasures of the Sin. But at night, in her own bed? When she’d hear Richard come in late—from work probably, though perhaps not? Then the guilt would come.

So it was Eve Sinclair who looked back at her now. Eve Sinclair, who had discovered what she suspected had always lain deep within her. Something she’d glimpsed in a forest in Switzerland, when an Italian

nobleman had touched her. Finally and fully recognized in this small apartment in Stockholm.

Hearing the radio again through the door, the sombre tones of the newsreader reminded her of another reason to feel guilty, and it took the smile from her face. Her country was at war with Germany. It had been declared ten weeks before, a week after Britain's declaration. Most Canadians had rallied enthusiastically to the Empire's defence. The visit of the King and Queen had been timely, after all. Yet there she was, in a neutral country, experiencing passion for the first time, while others died. Though the only major dying so far had taken place in Poland, a country she knew very little about. Still, it didn't seem fair that she could be so happy while others were suffering.

Oh, well, she thought, leaning closer to the mirror, I'll add that to my guilt-full nights. This is Thursday morning...and I have other priorities.

There wasn't much point in fixing her face entirely, but she did remove the streaks of mascara on her cheeks, run a comb through her hair, freshen up her lipstick. She was about to turn away when she picked up her bottle of Tabu and daubed some behind each ear, on her neck. She kept her only bottle in his apartment now. It was not needed at home—and it drove her Swedish lover absolutely crazy.

My lover, she thought, catching her eyes in the mirror again. I have a lover. When a month ago I thought they only existed in French novels.

"Lover," though? The term didn't quite convey what she felt about Henrik. It implied passion, of course, yet also a sort of...disconnection. Someone you made love to. With. Not necessarily someone you loved.

She sought her eyes in the mirror again. Stared deep. "You do love him, don't you?" she whispered. *Yes* was the answer that came back. She knew she'd found at last what her mother had alluded to back in Montreal, two days before the wedding. Marlene had talked about the best love leading to physical passion. And vice versa. For her parents that had happened *within* marriage. Lucky them. But even if Eve had found love *and* passion outside marriage, she still felt lucky too. Grateful, even if the gratitude was tinged with a touch of guilt.

She hadn't told him, of course—said the words. She was scared to. She'd discovered that Henrik, like a lot of Swedes, hid a playful nature behind a formal facade. He was a joker, a bit of a teaser, but she found she could give as good as she got there. So if she declared herself, he might think she was just teasing him again. Should she risk it? Go back in and just say it? Would he respond in the same way? Or would he just laugh?

Maybe he would. Maybe she'd try later anyway. After.

After. Her smile was back. She was ready for Round Two. Round One was always frantic because they hadn't seen each other for a few days. As soon as she'd arrive, they'd tear at each other. The second time was always more protracted, even leisurely. Without the blur she'd learn things. Wonderful things. About how to give, and how to receive.

"Tits up!" She laughed as she quoted Pearl, the former dancer she'd met on the *Empress of Britain*. Though truly, she thought, contemplating them, hers didn't need much help. With a smile, she opened the door.

Henrik was no longer lying on the bed. He was standing and he was half-dressed—shirt and trousers on, a sock in one hand, not moving. He was staring down at the radio, she realized, which was still on. "What's the matter?" she asked. "What's happening?"

He turned to her. His face was flushed red. The jagged scar on his face, that ran across his left eyebrow, that he'd told her he'd gotten in a sword-duelling club while studying in Munich, was a vivid, contrasting white, a lightning bolt in the night.

She crossed to him, put a hand on his arm. "Henrik? Has someone died?"

"Yes." His voice was sharp. "And many more are about to. Listen."

He jerked his head back to the radio and she focused on what she'd been ignoring. A man's voice, speaking low and fast: "...judging by the latest reports, fighting has erupted along the entire border—"

"Which border? Not Sweden? The Germans haven't—"

"Tch!" He jerked his hand up. "Listen!"

She reached for her gown, wrapped it around herself, sat on the bed, did as she was told. The newsflash didn't last much longer. It appeared that no

one knew much anyway. Only that the USSR had invaded Sweden's neighbour, Finland.

The broadcast moved onto other news—domestic. Henrik twisted the dial till it clicked. He pulled on the sock he held, stooped for the other on the floor.

“Fucking Bolsheviks!” he said in Swedish, though he usually spoke only English with her. “Waiting till the world is busy so they can try to grab back what they think they still own.”

“They owned Finland?”

“Of course! Do you not know anything?” She shrank at the tone of his voice—something she'd never heard before. “We owned it for a long time, then the Russians took it over. But after the Revolution, the Finns seized their independence.”

“The Russian Revolution?”

“Of course the fucking Russian revolution,” he snapped. Threading the belt he'd found, he threw his shoes close to the bed, sat, then began tugging them on. “Those commie fuckers! Slavs? Our traditional enemy, you know—for centuries!”

She didn't know. Yet saying it would only provoke him again. She did know he was terribly upset, so she put her arms around his waist. He stiffened at first, then relaxed slightly.

“Baby, how can I help?” she asked.

He shook his head. “You can't. There's nothing you can do.” He slipped on the second shoe, swiftly tied the laces, stood up. “But there is something I can.”

“You're not...you're not going to war, are you?”

He stared down at her for a long moment, though she wasn't sure he was looking at *her*. “Maybe. And I know I will not be alone. There are many patriots, like me.” He looked above her. “Because if we do not fight them there, we will be fighting them here before long.”

Then he was up and halfway to the door before her voice halted him. “Henrik!”

He turned. His face changed. It was as if he was only now seeing her clearly again. He came back, took her hands. "I am so sorry, my sweet one. Sorry for my rudeness too. I have to go. I need to see some people."

"Will you be back?"

"Before your lunch with your husband? No. But stay here till then. Unless you wish to go to the modern art gallery. It was our cover for today anyway, yes?" He bent, kissed her hard on the mouth, then went back to the door, swiftly put on his shoes, grabbed his jacket, scarf and coat from hooks. "I will telephone you later tonight. Make yourself at home. You have your key now to lock up."

He'd given her one only that morning. *A key to a love nest*, she'd thought, thrilled. "I do. And yes, please call tonight. Richard is out so—"

"Good. I'll ring you."

"Oh, Henrik," she called, "I love you!"

But he didn't hear her. The door had closed. She'd left it too late. He was gone.

Eve shivered, and not only because it was always cold in Henrik's apartment. Usually it didn't matter. Usually they made their own heat. Not today, though. And it wasn't just the cold. She decided she didn't want to stay there without him. But first she needed to warm up, clean up. She rose and went to run a bath.

By the time she was dry and dressed, it was still only eleven thirty. One more hour till she was due to meet Richard. Should she go to the gallery, as Henrik had suggested? No. She'd wait for her husband at Café Riche, their rendezvous anyway. She could use a cup of coffee. Maybe with some aquavit in it.

The snow was falling fast when she stepped out of the front door of the apartment block, a crosswind blowing it slantwise. Holding her fox fur hat tight to her head, she put the wind to her back and set out for the tram.



Eve stubbed her cigarette out in the ashtray etched with the words *Café Riche*, lifted her coffee cup—and saw him. Richard was in the entrance hall, shaking snow from his coat. He hung that on a stand under his fedora, placed his umbrella in a tall bucket there. Stepped into the café proper and looked about. She raised a hand, waved, and he spotted her, started to make his way across, though it took a little time as he kept stopping at tables. Café Riche was the diplomatic corps' external office, so he was forced to pause, shake hands, bow to the ladies, lay a hand on a colleague's shoulder.

Charming everyone. He was still the handsome charmer she'd married.

They hadn't spoken about "the arrangement" since it had been agreed upon three weeks before. Strangely, though, the silence wasn't uncomfortable. If anything, they were more relaxed with each other, those pressures off somehow. She still hurt sometimes, was furious sometimes, usually when, alone in her bed, she'd wake near dawn and hear him moving around. But daylight brought hope, and she'd realized that they could be friends again. Maybe even soon.

"Sorry, darling." Richard flung himself down. "Bit of a storm brewing."

She knew he was not speaking about the snow. "Finland?"

An eyebrow lifted. "You've heard?"

"I'm not a complete dilettante, Richard. I do keep up."

"Course you do. It's just that it's only just broken on the air waves. And you were at the gallery with Henrik, weren't you?"

There was only innocence in his look—which meant nothing, of course. She wondered if he suspected Henrik was her lover. "I was," she replied, "but some guy came rushing in, shouting about it. There was a radio at the ticket desk and people crowded around to listen." She was still somewhat amazed at how easily she lied. The skills an adulteress acquired, she supposed. "What's going to happen?"

"Well, the first thing that's going to happen is that I'm only going to be able to have a coffee with you. No lunch, sadly." He gestured a waiter over, gave his order for a coffee with a tot of aquavit, in his accented but increasingly confident Swedish. As the man walked away, Richard continued, "It's all hands to the pump at the legation. There are many

Canadians in Finland we'd like to have out of there. Many working for your father's companies, actually."

"So another war. Who will win this one?"

"Oh, the Soviets, undoubtedly. Just too massive an army. I suspect the Finns may give them a few bloody noses first, though. Tough buggers. Depending how big the bleed, it may help them secure a better peace deal perhaps. Should be all wrapped up by Christmas."

"Isn't that what they always say? And are they ever?"

"True. And, no, you're right."

The waiter returned with Richard's drink. He slurped, then put the cup down. "Caused quite a stir in the diplomatic, of course." He glanced back into the café. "Soviets and Finns conspicuous by their absence. Germans too."

"Aren't they Russia's allies?"

"No, no. Oh, you're referring to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact?"

"Maybe. What was that again?"

"The Germans and Soviets wanted to carve up Poland between them."

"Which they did."

"Indeed. Invaded from both sides. But they really hate each other. Fascists and Communists couldn't get much more opposed. It goes back centuries of course—Teutons versus Slavs."

Eve remembered Henrik earlier that morning, raving against Slavs, the ancient enemy. "Once they've beaten the Finns, will the Russians come here?"

"Hmm. Possible. But unlikely. The Nazis don't really care about the plucky Finns. But they very much care about the minerals that power their war machines, iron ore and the like—and Sweden supplies them with a huge proportion of those. Adolf wouldn't like Joe Stalin controlling his resources. Sorry." He downed the rest of his coffee in one. "I'm afraid I must be heading back. Will you get the bill?" On her nod, he continued, "See you at home. I may be late, alas."

He turned, walked off, this time halting at no tables. She watched him don his coat and hat, snatch up his umbrella. Armed, he set off into the

storm.

A waiter came to take her food order, but she found she'd lost her appetite. War will do that, she supposed.

“Just the bill, please.”

FOURTEEN

Three months later—March 11, 1940

EVE SAT ON THE BED in Henrik's apartment. On her lap, in its envelope, lay his letter.

She'd collected it on a mid-December morning from her father's Stockholm office, after a clerk had called to say it was there—discreet Henrik, not sending it to her home. She had come straight to his apartment, for the first time since he'd left, to read it. It had seemed right, and she still only ever read it there. Never at home.

She shivered. The room was as chilly as ever. But she always wrapped up well in anticipation, wearing mostly what she'd wear when skiing, topped with her wool coat, scarf, hat. Skiing is what she'd tell Richard she'd be doing if he asked, though he rarely did.

Eve looked around at the little there was to see. A bachelor's apartment, for sure. Plain second-hand furniture, with the only decoration being a few photographic prints on the wall. Henrik's own work; he was a keen photographer. She'd tidied the place up that first time she'd come because he had gone to war in a rush and it had been a bit of a mess. On her second visit, a few weeks later, she'd even brought a duster. She wanted it to be clean for him, welcoming. For whenever he got back.

And what happens then, she wondered, and shivered again. Do we just...start over? She knew how she felt about him. Especially here—it was one of the reasons she came. For the memories. Yearned to be touched by him again on this bed, to touch in return.

But did he feel the same for her? They'd been lovers for, what, all of ten days?

She sighed, then carefully opened the envelope. She'd ripped it open that first time, and the paper was not of the sturdiest, all he could get in a war zone, she assumed. Even though she almost knew the note by heart, she read it again now. Mined it again for meaning.

Hjärtegull,

I am so sorry I did not call you. I met with some comrades who I served with in the army reserves. They were leaving in a truck that evening for a forest camp near the Finnish border. A week of further training and then they were to cross over to join the fight against the Russians. I had to make a fast decision, and I decided to go.

I hope we will make it such a hell for those commies that they will run back to Mother Russia and leave our brothers alone. Maybe this will happen fast, maybe this will take some time. However long it takes, know that I will be thinking of you. I will have the photograph I took of you always with me and will be in touch as soon as I am returned.

With deepest affection,

Henrik

p.s. You have the key. Use my apartment if you need a refuge.

Slipping the letter gently back into its envelope, she pressed it into her thigh.

“Hjärtegull,” she murmured. It meant “gold heart.” She’d asked some Swedish friends if it was reserved only for those you loved—apparently not, most relatives could be addressed as such, or dear friends. Whilst “with deepest affection” could be written to a maiden aunt! “Thinking of you” and the mention of the photograph were better, if undramatic.

She’d looked for love in his words...and hadn’t found them. She was so inexperienced in love’s ways. She’d had feelings only for three men—Gianni, Richard and now Henrik. So she’d wondered if such extraordinary

passions—expended on the very bed where she sat now—might indicate love between them. Not according to Hilda, a friend she'd made volunteering at the Red Cross. Australian, in her mid-thirties, Hilda had teenage children, an ex-husband and, apparently, a collection of discarded lovers. "It's just sex, luv," she'd said, blowing smoke rings toward the ceiling. "It can be confusing."

It sure can, Eve thought. Yet she was certain it wasn't "just sex" with Henrik. If that was true, she might have been tempted to seek another liaison to test the theory. But she hadn't been. Because she knew in her heart she'd never find anything, anyone, so fulfilling.

Sighing again, she put the letter away in her handbag. Stood, thinking that now the letter was reread, and the room dusted, she may as well go. Maybe even go skiing. There was a bus that left in half an hour for Ågesta, where she and Richard had rented a hut for the season. She loved to ski. Perhaps she could lose these feelings of longing for a time on those trails.

She snorted. Feelings of longing for a man she scarcely knew! She felt like a character in the play she'd seen in the grounds of Richard's college at Oxford the summer they'd met, in '38. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Some imp must have dropped fairy juice in her eyes!

She looked around again. A man she scarcely knew, sure—but this was where he lived, had lived for a while. There would be clues to him here.

Suddenly, she felt she needed to learn more about Herr Henrik Ridelsson.

After all, she thought, *he did tell me to make myself at home*.

His desk was in a nook, made smaller by the shelves that lined it. Henrik was an engineer—what kind she didn't know. Something to do with mining, since he worked for the Swedish arm of her father's company. She sat down in his chair. Noted the textbooks, in Swedish, German, English. There were folders stuffed with papers which, when she opened a couple at random, showed pages of calculations and analysis reports.

So far so dull. Surely there must be something juicier? Photos? Love letters? You didn't get as skilled as Henrik at lovemaking unless you'd had plenty of practice. Either that, or he'd read some bloody good books!

“And if that’s true, I want to find *them*.” She’d spoken aloud. Now she began rooting.

His desk had two drawers. The first was for pads, blank paper, pens and ink. The second held one of his cameras, a Leica. Eve glanced again at one of the prints that hung on his wall. It was close to a metre across, showed a train emerging from a tunnel, huffing steam. She was no expert, but it looked pretty good to her.

She sat back, frustrated, then glanced at the bed again. It was made up, because she’d taken away the dirty sheets and washed them. Now she noticed something she’d seen before when she’d been dusting and hadn’t really considered.

Beneath the bed, at the very top where it met the wall, was a suitcase.

She got onto her knees, grabbed at its handle. It may have been small but it was also heavy, so she had to scooch it over with both hands. When she had it clear she lifted it onto the bed, then sat and studied her prize. It had two clasps, each with a small keyhole. Probably locked. Where would Henrik keep the key? She pressed both clasps—to her delight, they sprang up. “Alright, Astrid and Greta, let’s see what you have to say.” However when she lifted the lid, the first name she saw was not a woman’s. It was also not Swedish, but German.

The name was Adolf Hitler. It was on the cover of a black book, embossed above its title, *Mein Kampf*.

She looked up at the snow falling faster outside. Like everyone, she’d seen newsreels of the German leader. These usually depicted him strutting, ranting. People—her friends in Montreal—mocked him as a pocket dictator, a madman. Yet from what she’d read, this madman had always gotten what he wanted. Austria. Czechoslovakia. Now Poland. Also, when the cameras cut away to the crowd, the faces she saw weren’t amused, apprehensive, intimidated. They were ecstatic.

She lifted the book out. It had tags at many points; someone had annotated it. When she opened the book to one of them, prepared to tax her German, the weakest of her languages, she found she didn’t have to. Henrik

had translated passages into Swedish—written them beneath the black lines in blue.

“A racially pure people which is conscious of its blood can never be enslaved by the Jew. In this world he will forever be master over bastards and bastards alone,” she read. She frowned. Like everyone, she’d heard the stories from Germany, of persecution and drastic laws—of how the Nazis had driven many Jews from the country. She’d also heard people, both at her finishing school and at dinner parties in Quebec, speak with approval of those policies. That man on the ship, Charpentier, had. She never had. She’d had Jewish friends at The Study in Montreal. Though, admittedly, she hadn’t reconnected with many since her return from Brillantmont. They mixed in different circles. In hers, she knew many people who were often casually anti-Semitic. Odd remarks made. Not terribly funny jokes cracked. Now she recalled that even her father had said to her once, just a few years before, “I don’t mind who you marry, lassie—so long as it’s not a Negro or a Jew.”

“The most frightful example of this kind is offered by Russia,” she read, “where he killed or starved about thirty million people with positively fanatical savagery, in part amid inhuman tortures, in order to give a gang of Jewish journalists and stock exchange bandits domination over a great people.”

“Positively fanatical savagery”? “Inhuman tortures”? It all seemed far-fetched. Extreme. More to the point, though: Why was Henrik reading it? Translating it? To improve his German?

She laid the book down on the bedcover, glanced again into the case—and there was Henrik looking up at her. A much younger Henrik in a black-and-white photograph. He was wearing a dark shirt, brown perhaps, black trousers and a peaked cap. She couldn’t make out the symbol on the latter, but the one at the centre of his armband was instantly recognizable.

It was a swastika.

She picked up the card, for that’s what it was. A membership card to an organization called the “Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet”—the Swedish National Socialist Party.

So Henrik was a Nazi. Or at least had been in 1933, the year stamped on the card. Was he still? Did it matter? She felt it must, somehow. She'd always considered herself apolitical. She had no interest in the subject, really. In Canada, all politicians of whatever party were equally bland. Everyone seemed as bad as everyone else. But the poison that Hitler wrote in this *Mein Kampf*? The hatred? That couldn't be right, surely?

She looked at the date again. Seven years before. He'd been, what, sixteen, seventeen then? A boy. Perhaps Henrik would laugh when she brought it up. At himself, at who he'd once been. She'd have to raise the subject carefully though, she thought. Snooping was one thing; being caught at it quite another.

She glanced down. The photo had hidden another. A snapshot this, of two men smiling at the camera. One was Henrik and the other was... *Farmor*! Her mother's father, Baron Gustav af Tumba. She gasped, snatched the shot up. Recalled now what Henrik had told her on the rear deck of the *Empress of Britain*—how he'd met her grandfather once. Here was the proof. Both men were in uniform: Young Henrik's the same as in the other snap, her grandfather in something black, better-cut. He had riding boots on, held a riding crop. The one thing they shared was the Nazi emblem on their right arms.

Farmor. She sat back and stared at the ceiling. She hadn't known him, not really. A few childhood visits to Sweden—staying at the family hunting lodge in the forests near Uppsala. A cold man, she'd felt, always demanding quiet. Her mother rarely talked of him. Hadn't cried when she'd received the news of his death three years before.

So her grandfather had been a Nazi too.

She shuddered, replaced the photo into the case, the card on top of it, and finally the book. She didn't seek through any of the other papers. She suspected she wouldn't turn up any love letters anyway. Snapping the clasps shut, she put the case onto the floor then slid it back under the bed.

Eve sat there for a while, staring at nothing. Eventually she checked the bedside clock. She'd missed the bus to Ågesta. Besides, she didn't want to ski now. She wanted to talk to a friend.

She wanted to talk to Richard.

FIFTEEN

“MORE?”

“Darling, I don’t think I could manage another bite!” Richard put down his knife and fork, picked up his napkin and wiped his mouth. “That was superb!”

Eve couldn’t help being pleased. Reindeer was tricky, it could be tough if you didn’t cook it really slowly. Fortunately, she’d had all day before Richard came home from work, and tonight he hadn’t gotten back till 8 p.m. So the meat had stewed on a low heat in red wine, stock, onions and juniper berries for the whole six hours since she’d returned from Henrik’s place. She’d only added the mushrooms and cream when her husband came through the door, and boiled the potatoes while he soaked in his bath with an Old-Fashioned.

He sighed, snagged his wine glass, then sat back, his chair at their tiny dining table in the kitchen creaking as he did. She’d insisted that he did not have to put on a suit again, or even shirt and trousers, so he’d dined in his silk dressing gown. “I don’t know how you do it, on the salary of a junior diplomat,” he said.

“That good Bordeaux you get via the legation makes all the difference,” she replied, then began collecting the plates and cutlery. “No, no, you stay there,” she continued over his murmured protests, “or decamp to the living room, if you’d rather. That looks like a toy chair with you on it and it’s about to snap.”

“You know, I think I will. But only if you join me.” He drained his wine glass, rose. “So please, no washing up just yet, Mrs. Spence.”

She agreed, he left, and she stacked the dishes in the sink, ran some water over them. There was a small mirror just above the sink and she caught her eyes in it. Yes, she thought, ask him now. I need to understand.

As she came into the living room, Richard rose from the grate where he'd been stirring the fire. He flopped into the captain's chair, picked up a snifter of cognac from the table. There was another glass opposite, close to the sofa. Eve lifted that as she sat.

"Santé." They pledged each other, sipped. Eve stared into the flames, not really seeing them. Seeing that other grate where she'd been that morning. That one had been empty, and the room cold. She swallowed, spoke. "Richard, may I ask you something?"

"Of course, m'dear. Anything."

"Nazis. Are they really so terrible?"

His eyelids, which had sunk quite low, now rose. "Hmm. Why that question now?"

"Oh, I don't know," she lied. "I've just been talking with some friends. Swedish friends. They seem to think it is the Russians who are the truly evil ones."

"Well, they would. They've hated them for centuries." He swirled the cognac in its glass, pressed his nose into it, took a deep sniff. "With good reason, too. They've brutalized their own people, caused a famine in the Ukraine a few years back that killed millions. And now in Finland, some of the things they've done there, well..." He broke off, drained his glass, rose and went to the drinks trolley, raised the decanter and held it up to her, one eyebrow lifted.

She shook her head. Had only taken that one toasting sip. "So the Nazis are...are not as bad?"

He poured, then replaced the stopper on the decanter before he spoke, his voice soft. "Darling," he said, "the Nazis are Evil Incarnate."

Eve's whole body flushed cold from her toes to the top of her head. Richard came back, sat again, leaned forward, his voice shaking slightly as he continued. "The secret reports I am seeing of what they are doing to any who oppose their policies, their so-called philosophies? Anyone they

consider inferior because of their race, or nationality? In their own country—and in every country they’ve taken over. Czech professors, writers, politicians killed. Whole villages in Poland razed, their inhabitants machine-gunned, just because they are Jewish. And it will only get worse. Until they are stopped. Until we help stop them.” He took a sip at last. “Joe Stalin may be a murderous bandit. But Hitler? Hitler is”—he looked to the ceiling—“the devil returned to Earth.”

It was exactly what she feared he would say—ever since she’d seen Henrik with a swastika on his arm that morning. But there’d been something else in that photo too—a very young man staring out, a child still in so many ways. Playing in a uniform, perhaps. “Would”—her voice rasped, she had to sip some cognac to clear her throat—“would everyone have known that in, say, 1933?”

If he found the question odd, he didn’t show it. “Thirty-three? Hitler was elected chancellor that year. Had only caused the death of...a few people by then, mainly killed by his thugs in street fights. Politicians in every country were soon courting him. The world came to Germany for the Berlin Olympics in ’36, remember?”

Another flush came. Warmer, this time. Henrik had been sixteen in 1933. An age to seek out a cause. To get caught up in the excitement of a new world. It didn’t excuse him entirely. But maybe...maybe it did explain him a little.

He stared at her, as if awaiting more questions. When none came, he spoke again. “I meant to tell you something. Thought I’d wait till after dinner.” He smiled. “The war’s over.”

Eve gasped. “The Allies have made peace with Germany?”

“Good Lord, no! Sorry, no, not that war, alas. The war between Finland and Russia. It came on the diplomatic tickertape tonight. Tomorrow the two sides are signing a peace treaty in Moscow. Finland gives up a lot of territory. But they retain their sovereignty. I told you before, they are tough buggers. It was costing Stalin too many troops.”

The war was over! That meant that Henrik was coming home. For the third time in as many minutes, Eve flushed again. Suddenly, after all the

worries of the day, she felt almost happy again.

Richard had turned to stare into the fire and she studied his profile. It was true what she'd told that magazine back in November. He was movie-star handsome. But she also noticed that his eyes, reflecting the flames, were filled with sadness. "Richard," she asked, "are you alright?"

He'd been lost in something. Jerked when she spoke, looked back at her. Whatever or whoever had been in his eyes was gone. "Fine, old girl. A little tired, I suppose. So much work on."

"You looked so sad."

"Did I?" He shrugged, looked again into the fire, spoke softly. "Well, maybe I am a little sad."

"Would you like to tell me the reason?"

He shifted. "Oh. No." He swigged some brandy. "It's not, uh, not something that we discuss."

She knew then. The one subject they did not discuss was their affairs. She'd never wanted to know anything and assumed he felt the same. But that sadness, when she'd just been filled with such joy? "Tell me, Richard. Is it"—she hesitated because she'd only ever said the name once before—"is it Ingrid?"

He started slightly, didn't turn to her. "Yes. Ingrid."

"Is it over?"

"I...I don't know. Perhaps. She...has gone away. Her husband has taken her away. Been a while now."

He rubbed the glass across his brow. He looked so...forlorn, all of a sudden. And she realized that within the skilled diplomat was also a boy. Right now, a lost boy.

"Darling," Eve whispered, "you seem quite far away over there. Why don't you come over here?"

He did look at her then, surprise on his face. Putting down his glass, he rose and came to sit beside her. "Darling," she murmured, and placed a hand on his thigh.

In their very first discussion about "the arrangement," back in November, she had asked him if he wanted to keep being a married couple,

in the full sense of the term. He had left that to her, and for a while she'd been too angry, too hurt, to even consider it. But at Christmas, during the round of diplomatic parties, they had really started to enjoy each other's company again, remembered how much each could make the other laugh, mocking and imitating some of Stockholm's stranger diplomats—the strutting Italian ambassador, all four foot eight of him. The American ambassador's statuesque wife who had a laugh like a whooping crane that could halt an assembly in its tracks and which, of course, they both took as a challenge to try and provoke. They'd succeeded at the Canadian legation's own reception, fell through the door of their apartment that night, helpless with laughter. Fell into bed soon after.

It had been...alright, swift. They'd been drunk—and perhaps they both were missing their lovers. And Eve remembered thinking quite clearly at the time: He is my husband, after all. It wasn't duty. But perhaps it was... custom.

It hadn't happened since. But it was going to happen now. Especially after the movie star leaned in and kissed her.

It was not as swift as it had been. It was still not fulfilling, in the way she'd learned lovemaking could be. But it was...comfortable. And as she held her husband while he drifted to sleep, she thought that comfortable would do.

However, the last image in her mind before she joined him in sleep was not of the man she held, but of the one who would even now be returning from war. Previously when she'd thought of Henrik her feelings had been simple. She simply wanted him. Now, after what she'd found at his apartment, and after her talk with Richard that night, Eve realized that her thoughts were no longer simple at all.

SIXTEEN

Stockholm. April 12, 1940

ONCE AGAIN EVE SAT on Henrik's bed. Once again she read something he'd written. Shorter, a note that had come to the apartment the previous night. "Please, dear lady, join me at the gallery, Kungstensgatan 53, 2 p.m. tomorrow. There is a new exhibit of drawings by up-and-coming artists."

Kungstensgatan 53 was Henrik's address. The note was in his handwriting.

She looked around the room. She hadn't been there since that day a month before, but had let herself in when he didn't answer the door. She could see he'd been back. There was a green canvas duffle bag in one corner—army-issue, she assumed. His toothbrush was in the bathroom, a towel damp on the rail. Other than feeling the towel, she didn't "snoop" this time. She was slightly afraid of what she might find.

There was one other clear sign of his presence—the photo of her, which lay on his bedside table. Tucking the note into her handbag, she picked up that photo now.

Crease folds quartered it and the edges showed that it had been much handled. It was almost certainly the one he'd referred to in his letter, the one he'd taken to war. Being the keen photographer that he was, he'd snapped several of her. Annoyingly he had never shown her any, except for this one: she was sitting in his desk chair, legs crossed, wearing the silk kimono gown she kept at his apartment, half-smiling up at the camera.

She stared at her face. Couldn't figure out what kind of expression she had...until she found the word for it.

Wanton.

She sighed, put the photo back in its place. She didn't feel wanton now. Just very, very nervous.

Since the discovery she'd made here that last time, her thinking about Henrik had fluctuated wildly. On one hand, she believed that the swastika on his arm proved he was a Nazi, and thus partly responsible for all the evil Richard had detailed. Evil being further practised now, since the Nazis had conquered Denmark and invaded Norway four days before.

On the other...he'd been a boy when he'd worn that symbol, in a world that appeared far less certain than it did now. Besides, "evil" did not tally with the sexy, caring, funny, sometimes even goofy man she had unearthed behind that formal Swedish facade. That man had selflessly gone to war for a cause, to help an underdog, to fight against another form of evil, its symbol a hammer and sickle.

In the end, after driving herself half crazy, she'd realized that thinking was not going to help her. Only Henrik could do that.

She jumped when she heard the outer door to the building, three floors down, open and close. Stood up, then sat down again. First on the bed, then on the chair. *Calm down*, she commanded herself, but that did nothing for her racing heart. Part of its speed was her desire to see this man again. Part was that she had something she needed to tell him.

The key entered the lock. She stood again without meaning to.

He came in. "Hello, Eve." He bowed formally, giving that little heel click he so often did.

"Hello, Henrik."

He didn't move. They looked at each other. She'd wondered if war would have changed him. She'd assumed so—and she did get an immediate impression of him being different somehow, even if she couldn't tell in what way.

Maybe because he didn't give her much of a chance. Slamming the door behind him, he was across the room in two strides. His arms went round her and he pulled her tight to him. Then his lips were on hers. His kiss was exactly as she remembered it and instantly took all her worries and her nerves away. Without another word they fell onto the bed.



Round One over, she thought, gazing at him through the smoke cloud their cigarettes had formed. As wonderful, no change, fast and furious as ever. *Will there be a Round Two?*

She'd come back from the bathroom expecting it. Henrik had previously initiated something fairly quickly. But instead he'd lit her a cigarette from his, lit another one from hers, and they'd chain-smoked for a while, saying little. She rested on one elbow to study him. He'd lost weight—a body that was not hefty beforehand now reduced to wiriness. There was also a scar on his left shoulder to go with the one above his eyes. This one was longer, though, fresher, still purpling; there were parallel stitch holes along its length.

It was somewhere to begin. Stubbing out her cigarette in the ashtray beside her, she bent and kissed the wound. “Would you like to tell me about it, Henrik?” she asked, her voice gentle.

“That?” He tipped his head to the side. “I was a little careless. I'd forgotten that a Russian is never dead until he is dead.”

The casual way he said it! It made her shiver. The room was still unheated of course, and it was only mid-April. So she pulled up the bedcover and said, “You can tell me about that if you like. But I meant the war.”

“The war?” His echo had a kind of wonder in it.

She heard it then, the strangest sound. It was part groan, part cry, part laugh and it came from somewhere in his chest. Her eyes went there, as if to find its source. But then she heard another sound, and she saw his face, the tears spilling down it. “Oh God, Eve, oh God!” he whimpered, and folded himself into her. “I saw...I did...”

She held him while he wept. Words came, some of which she could make out, most she couldn't. Many weren't even in any language she spoke, Finnish perhaps. Mostly, he just sobbed. So she rocked him, whispered soft words, the kind her mother would whisper to her when she

was a child and she woke with a nightmare: *gulleplutt, lilla flicka, min älskade*.

Gradually, he calmed. The words subsided; the tears ebbed. Finally, he rolled onto his back and put a forearm over his eyes. “I am so sorry,” he said.

“No, no—”

“Hardly the big, strong hero you were expecting, am I?”

“I wasn’t expecting any hero. I was expecting you. Here, let me fetch you some—”

His hand, strong on her forearm, prevented her from rising. “Don’t go!” he said. His words had panic in them.

“Just for water. I’m not going anywhere.”

He sat up. He was still gripping her with one hand. With the back of the other he wiped his eyes, his streaming nose. Then he fixed her with his blue-green gaze. “You must help me, Eve. I beg you.” His voice was hoarse.

“Of course I will, darling. Any way I can. How—”

“You must speak to your father.”

It wasn’t what she was expecting at all. Bootstraps had arrived in Stockholm from Canada three nights before. They’d had dinner twice. “My father? A-about what?”

“I’ll try to explain.” He sat up, placed his face into his hands, fingers wiping the moisture from his eyes. “I saw...*things* in Finland. Things I will never be able to unsee.” He shook his head. “The Russians are...they are”—his voice dropped to a whisper—“monsters!”

“I know. I’ve read some rep—”

“No!” He took her by the wrists, gripping hard. “There is nothing you can read, nothing you can see in a newsreel that comes close...*close!*” His voice lowered and he changed his grip to her hands, squeezed them. “There was a village. They captured it, held it for a few days. We launched a night attack, drove them out. They left behind—” He stared past her then, and she didn’t think she’d ever seen such horror in anyone’s eyes, that same horror in his voice as he went on. “Girls, boys too, as young as five, six...raped,

then murdered. Men with eyes gouged out with pokers, balls cut off. Women—” He broke off, took his hands back, buried his face in them, spoke next through his fingers. “Not just one place. Many. All over the front. Every town we took back, the same.” He dropped his hands, looked straight at her. “They are barbarians, Eve. They are Slavs and throughout history they have been the worst, the most bestial of conquerors.” He swallowed. “And they will be coming here next. Coming for our women. Our boys and girls.”

She frowned. “But they signed a peace treaty. A month ago. Isn’t the war over?”

“That war. With Finland giving them a quarter of their land, most of their mines. So now the monstrous Slav will look elsewhere. Here.” He swallowed. “And we must stop him.”

“How?”

“We must do what we should have done before. Your country, the Brits, the French, everyone. We must join together with the one country capable of stopping the Bolsheviks.” He swallowed. “Germany.”

“Germany?” This was it, the moment she’d dreaded, the moment she needed to deal with. “Henrik, isn’t Germany—isn’t it as bad? Poland? The Czechs? The Jews?”

“Eve, of course all that is awful.” He took a deep breath. “I used to have some, ah, some sympathy for the Nazis, but no more. But the Nazis aren’t Germany, not forever. And there is something much worse loose in the world.”

Her heart sped up. This was what she’d wanted, been desperate to hear. She thought she might confess then, what she’d found, her relief at what he’d just said. But before she could, he sat up, shook her hands again, pulled her closer, spoke softly.

“You have to understand, Eve. Sometimes one is forced to choose the lesser of two evils. For a time at least.” He sighed, though it was closer to a sob. “And after what I have seen, nothing matters except stopping these monsters. Later everything else will be resolved peacefully, the way it should be. But only when the Russians have been defeated.”

It was so much to take in. She'd come with her own issues, her own desires. And these had all been swept aside. Henrik wanted something from her. What was it? Oh. "My father," she said, "how is he...am I—"

"He needs to make the right choice. To get on the right side of history." He licked his lips. "You know why he is here?"

Her father had written a little of it in the letter announcing his arrival. He'd told her a little more last night—just as much as he felt a young woman's mind could handle. "The Canadian government has ordered him to close his Swedish mining operation," she said. "Because the Swedes are selling most of their iron ore to the Germans."

"Exactly!"

"Well, he has to do that. He can't disobey his government." She shrugged. "Canada is also at war with Germany, Henrik."

"Yes. He must be *seen* to be doing it, for sure. But if he is *seen* doing it, then hides his continual involvement—"

"I don't understand," she interrupted. "Swedish companies will buy my father's assets. They'll keep mining. The Germans will still get their ore—"

He interrupted back. "No, you *don't* understand! I told you once before—your father is a genius. A genius businessman. A genius miner. No one can find and then extract ore like him. Ten, maybe twenty percent more than any other man! Twenty percent more could make the difference between victory and...and Slavs walking down Drottninggatan, raping, murdering children—"

He broke off. Eve shook her head. "I...I don't see what you think I can do. I have no influence on his business. I never have."

"Now you underestimate yourself! Eve, he loves you beyond price. He relies on you. I am not saying you alone can help change his mind. But Richard as well—"

"Richard?" She frowned. "How would he be able to help?"

"Eve." He squeezed the hands he still held. "There are many people in your own government who already know that Germany is going to win this war. Look what they have done so far. Look at the map of Europe. The swastika flies in so many places it didn't a year ago. Add Denmark as of

last week, Norway soon. Even if they fight on for a bit, they are doomed. Perhaps France next. Perhaps Britain.” He squeezed her fingers to the point of pain. “Then imagine how Hitler will treat those who did not oppose him but helped him. Your father knows this. I heard him say as much in the office this morning.”

“Wait. You’re back in the office?”

“I’ve been back a week.”

“But”—she looked around the apartment—“why did you only get in touch now?”

He reached out and caressed her cheek. “I wanted to see you straightaway, of course. I hungered for you. But I also needed first to hear some of your father’s thoughts, then consider what to say to you. How I was going to ask you to help.”

So many feelings were battling each other now, she couldn’t focus on one. The whirling made her feel slightly sick. “I...I need to think about all this. May I?”

“Of course. Of course!” He kissed each of her hands. “And you are accompanying your father as he visits some mines in the next few days, are you not?”

“How...how did you know that?”

“Your father said it in the office. ‘My daughter...my *beloved* daughter...is going to come with me.’” He smiled. “You’ll be able to hear what he actually believes. You’ll see the truth of what I have told you. And then...you can help him pick the right side.”

Who had said that to her? About picking a side? It was a while back. Oh, yes, that woman aboard the ship. Pearl. The Jewish lady from the Bronx. Though she suspected Pearl’s was not the same side Henrik was asking her to pick now.

“Let me think about it,” she repeated. “And I will certainly be talking with my father when we travel.”

“Good. Good! That’s all I ask.” He stretched out his arms. “Thank you, my darling. You have made me so happy.” His voice changed, dropped lower. “Now, how can I make you happy?”

There was no mistaking the intent behind his words, nor his leaning in. But that fire had cooled in her. There was just too much to think about now. “Henrik, I can’t. I must go. There are things...”

“You break my heart! Feel!” He lifted her hands, placed them against his chest. “I was so long away. I think I dreamed of you every night. Of us, here. Of what we made here.” He sat up, so he could look more closely into her eyes. “I wonder if you understand, Eve, what this means to me...what you and I—” He broke off. “I will let you go. But only if you promise to return tomorrow.”

“I am leaving with my father. Remember?”

“Oh, of course. When do you come back?”

“Friday.”

“A whole week?” He clutched his heart as if it was giving out on him. It was so theatrical a gesture she couldn’t help her laugh. The playful Henrik she hadn’t seen yet was back too. “Then you promise to come straight here?”

“I promise.” She stood, reached for her stockings. “And I’ll tell you then what...what my father’s thoughts are.”

“Yes, yes, good.” He was still holding her hands. Now he let them go and reached for his cigarettes, tapped one from the pack. “Now I will watch you dress. It will make me sad. I always prefer to watch you undress.”

As he spoke, he was searching around the bedside table. Eve knew what for. So she reached into her clutch, took out the lighter, struck flame. He kept her hand as she went to withdraw it. “The lighter I gave you. I’m so glad you still use it.”

“I love it,” she replied, then pulled free. She dressed; he smoked and watched her. When she came out of the bathroom having fixed her makeup, he had his dressing gown on, had moved to his desk, where he was sorting through papers.

She put on her coat. “I’ll see you Friday.”

“Hmm?” He glanced up. “Yes, Friday, my *hjärtegull*. I can hardly wait.”

He stood, leaned in to kiss her. She offered her cheek. He looked hurt, so she reminded him: “This lipstick is getting hard to get with a war on. I’m

not having you kiss it off now!”

“I’ll do so in six days,” he said. Then he kissed her cheek, tucking his hand inside her open coat, running his fingers down her side.

She shivered, then left. Outside his door she stopped. She felt faint. She leaned against the wall for a few moments before taking the three flights down. The front door opened on a sharp wind, which whipped some fresh-fallen snow along Kungstensgatan. She stood there, gazing at it, not really seeing it, thinking about what he’d said. Then about what she hadn’t.

She’d meant to tell him she was pregnant. Like so many other things now, that would also have to wait for Friday.

SEVENTEEN

*Southern Sweden. The following Thursday—
April 18, 1940*

EVE PULLED OPEN THE DOOR and stepped back inside the carriage. It was the third time she'd had to go to the toilet during the two-hour journey from Norrköpping. The first visit had got rid of the little supper she'd attempted. The other two were empty retching.

She'd been able to ignore her pregnancy for so long because there'd been so little sign of it. Until this sickness came. She had always had irregular cycles. And her belly was still almost as flat as ever. She was muscled there, all the cross-country skiing she'd been doing since they'd rented the hut in Ågesta. What had been an interest in Quebec had become an obsession in Sweden. Was that why she was not showing? There was no one she could ask. No one could know—not until she'd told two men, either of whom could be the father.

The other woman in the carriage glanced up at her when she came back. To Eve, she looked knowing, as if she'd guessed the reason for the frequent visits. She returned to reading her book. Her daughter, however, leapt up to greet Eve. "We play again?"

"Of course, Annika. It's such fun," replied Eve, settling opposite the five-year-old, who immediately whipped out a long loop of string.

"It is. It is." The girl placed each end between the middle fingers of her hands and held them out.

They'd already played for most of an hour, once Annika had discovered that Eve was an easy mark. Eve welcomed the distraction from her churning mind. Thoughts, however, still intruded. Sometimes they were prompted by

her stomach's shiftings. Sometimes by snatches of memory from recent conversations. She couldn't help looking at this sweet child—five years old, she'd been proudly informed—and remembering what Henrik had said happened to Finnish girls that same age in the village he'd helped liberate. Was it possible that men could be such savages? Slavs were, according to her lover. Bolsheviks. A word that had provoked a similar disgust in her father, when she'd tried to feel him out on the subject as they toured his mining operation in Norrköping-Oxelösund.

"Look at these workers!" he'd said, in the works' canteen, packed with miners and staff. "I take care of them, pay them well, make sure their conditions are safe. They are happy, ye ken. And those Bolshie bastards want to unionize them, turn them into aggrieved agitators. Or drones in the hive of International Communism!"

They'd talked, she'd probed. Her father was not at all happy at having to sell his Swedish operation. It was not that he supported Germany in the war—though his anger was more often directed at Stalin than Hitler. He was simply furious at losing profits. But she hadn't been able to learn if that fury made him open to the sort of thing Henrik had suggested. Which was at heart, she'd realized, about asking her father to be a traitor. Something she certainly did not wish to see.

"You! You!"

Eve shook herself and peered down again at the eager young face before her. Annika shot her eyes wide and gestured with her head to the tangle of string between them. Eve was surprised to realize they'd progressed several moves ahead of where they'd gotten stuck in previous attempts. She wasn't sure she knew what was next. It had been a long while since she'd played this game at school in Montreal.

"Annika, sweetheart, we are arriving," her mother said.

Eve felt the train slowing. Stockholm, Thursday, 7 p.m. Home a day earlier than she'd planned. But the mining works that her father needed to see were full of smoke and chemicals, and this had made his daughter's nausea worse. So she'd decided to return. She'd tried calling Richard to get him to pick her up at the station, but there'd been no reply at home or at his

office. No surprise. With all that was going on in the world, her husband was working flat out seven days a week.

As the train juddered to a stop, as the girl's mother pulled her cases down from the rack and commanded her daughter more sharply to come, Eve saw it. With twists of her fingers, she wove the strings tight, then dropped them onto Annika's thumbs. The little girl looked startled—until Eve took her wrists and pulled them gently apart into a perfect cat's cradle.

The little girl gave an ecstatic cry. "Look, Mother, look!"

"Yes, very good. Now come along."

"Come along," echoed the little girl, dropping the string into the pocket of her skirt. But she said it to Eve, seizing her hand, tugging. Eve only just had time to snatch down her own small suitcase before she was pulled out the door.

Annika was reluctant to part from her new friend—until her father appeared and lifted her up into the sky. She giggled in his arms as the family moved off—waving at Eve who waved back until a corner took them from her sight. She picked up her suitcase, exited the station. The girl's farewell had delayed her; all the taxis were gone. More would be along soon, but it was a sunny early evening for once, the first real sign of spring, and her apartment was only a half-hour walk away.

She went to the back of the station, turned onto Vasagatan. The Vasabron bridge took her into Gamla Stan, the oldest part of Stockholm. She often lingered in its quaint alleys and browsed among the antique stores and book shops. Not today. She was concerned about her stomach.

The small shop on the corner of her street, Roddargatan, was selling daffodils for the first time that year, so she bought some. They would look lovely on the windowsill in the emerald-green Chinese vase she'd paid "far too much money" for, according to Richard, who was only teasing. She hoped he wouldn't work late tonight. It would be lovely if he came home early for once and saw the flowers in this sunlight.

The first thing she heard as she opened the door of the apartment was the cry. It was unmistakable, the pleasure in it, the heat. It was coming from

the bigger bedroom. Hers. *Dammit, Richard*, she thought, flushing with fury, *we agreed—no lovers here!*

She hesitated, the door still open. Though she was furious, she didn't want a scene. The last thing she needed today, with her mind a-whirl, was to meet the blonde floozy—Ingrid!—her husband had taken up with! She'd obviously returned to Stockholm. Bully for him!

She moved from foot to foot, torn. This was her apartment too—and she badly needed the bathroom again. She could creep in, use it, wait in the darkened living room, or the second tiny bedroom.

No, she thought, *best to go, best to go*. Especially with the sounds that were coming, building. *I'll wait in a café. I'll—*

There was a sudden male shout from the main bedroom. Ecstatic, triumphant even. It didn't even sound like Richard. *He's certainly never made that sound with me*, she thought.

Then, just as she stooped to pick up her suitcase, the bedroom door banged open, and she froze. Couldn't move. Couldn't take her eyes from Richard's lover standing, blond and naked, in the doorway.

"Oh, hello, Eve," said Henrik Ridelsson.

EIGHTEEN

SHE DROPPED THE SUITCASE and turned. Her legs were not working properly but she still made the top of the stairs before he grabbed her arm. “Come back,” Henrik commanded, tugging.

“No. Let me go. Leave me alone.” She tried to pull her arm away, but his grip was too strong, iron claws in her flesh. She tried to resist his pull, but her legs were weak. Besides, somewhere on an upper landing a door opened, closed, voices came down the stairwell. A naked man held her outside her apartment—and she was still a diplomat’s wife.

So she let him drag her back inside—the door closing just as the first feet appeared on the flight above. Richard was standing in the hallway, shock etched in lines all over his face. “Eve,” he said, tying the cord of his silk dressing gown around him. “You were meant to come back tomorrow. I...I’m—”

When Henrik let her go, her legs gave and she slumped, only the door holding her up. “Take her in there,” ordered Henrik, walking past Richard. “I’ll put some clothes on. Make her a drink. Make us all one.”

He disappeared into the bedroom. “Eve...” Richard was beside her now, taking her arm. Another man, manhandling her. She shrugged out of his grasp and walked down the short corridor to the living room. Made the sofa and fell into it.

He’d followed. “Darling, can I...can I get you a drink?”

“Water,” she managed. She was eyeing the wastebasket, six feet away, wondering if she could make it. She didn’t want to throw up, though. She didn’t want these men to think that it was because of them. Because of what they’d done.

There was a pitcher on the drinks trolley; Richard went to it, poured her a glass. While there he got himself a Scotch, brought both back to the sofa. He sat too close to her, but she didn't want to speak to him or push him away. Not yet.

"Eve, I...I don't know what to say. I'm so sorry."

"Oh, you're...*sorry*?" She breathed deep, scared she was going to fly into pieces. She gulped, then put the glass down, managed to keep her voice almost level. "Sorry about breaking the rule about lovers in the house? Or about your lover being a man?"

He recoiled from the acid in her tone. "I—"

Henrik came in. He'd put on his white shirt, black trousers. His feet were bare. "Well, I suppose this had to happen eventually." He seemed unconcerned. Amused, even.

"You bastard," Eve said.

An eyebrow went up. "Me? Why? We never said we couldn't have other lovers, did we, Eve? I chose mine." He looked at their glasses. "Didn't fix me one, Richard? You know what I like. Never mind, I'll help myself."

He went to the trolley. Richard's face was creased, frown lines at brow and eyes. He was looking first at Henrik, then at Eve, his gaze moving between them. "I don't...I don't understand...what you mean." Then he did, though he didn't want to. "No. You're not...you're not, not saying—"

Henrik turned back. "That Eve and I are lovers? That's exactly what we're saying. Have been since last year."

Richard shook his head back and forth. His eyes were dazed. "But you told me...you told me that you didn't like women."

Henrik smiled. "I told you many things, Dickie. Some of them were even true." He raised his glass. "Shall we toast a situation with some, ah, tantalizing possibilities?"

Then he laughed. It wasn't a laugh she'd ever heard from him before. It lacked any humour. Who was he, this man? She didn't know him. Had never known him.

Richard jumped up. "You fucker!" he snarled, and threw his glass. It missed Henrik's head by a finger, whisky darkening the white cotton of the

Swede's shirt as it passed. Richard took a step to follow it, fists bunched.

"Don't be a fool!" Henrik shouted, picking up a bottle. "I've killed five men, maybe more. How many have you killed?"

Eve felt it, her husband vibrating, as if he was about to launch himself, despite the warning. She grabbed a hand, pulled. "Don't. Please don't, Richard." The thought of these two men fighting, the only lovers she'd ever had, was suddenly even more appalling than visions of them making love with each other.

After a moment, he sagged, yielding to her tug, and sat.

"Better." Henrik came forward, sat in the captain's chair. "Now we can discuss this like civilized people—not play out some scene from a French farce."

"I want you gone, now." Richard's voice was tight with restrained emotion. "I want you never to come back."

"I'm hurt, Dickie." Henrik put his hand over his heart. "After all the fun we've had?" He looked at Eve. "Do you want me gone too, *hjärtegull*? Will you never visit my tiny apartment again?"

"Never. And I think you should leave too. Now!"

"Aw, such a pity. When I so enjoyed your...awakening."

Richard growled then. Eve gripped the arm she held even harder.

"Still, as you both wish it, I will leave. Soon. First, though, there is something we need to talk about." He looked straight at Eve. "How did your conversations with your father go?"

"What?" It seemed such an odd question under these circumstances. "What conversations?"

"About him staying in Swedish mining. Under cover, of course. Helping the war effort."

"War effort? Sweden's not at war." Richard frowned. He turned to her. "What is he talking about?"

All those doubts she'd had, that she'd chosen to ignore, were suddenly clear. "Henrik is a Nazi, Richard. He wants my father to keep helping Sweden supply the iron ore the Germans need to defeat their enemies." She was surprised how steady her voice sounded.

Henrik's eyes had widened. "How do you know I am a—? Oh!" He banged his forehead with the heel of his hand in mock surprise. "Of course. The suitcase under the bed!" He barked a laugh. "Never leave a woman alone with things you don't wish her to see, eh? Ach"—he shrugged—"it doesn't matter. Yes, I am a Nazi. Proud to be. Proud to be on the right side of destiny. Proud that I will be standing beside those who will soon rule the world."

"You won't be standing beside my father, though. He's not interested."

"Is he not?"

"He's not a traitor."

"No? Even when you told him what I told you about those"—he let out a little sob—"child-raping Bolsheviks?"

A tear ran down his left cheek. She stared at it, at him. "You...you swine."

He laughed. "It's a trick I have. Ever since childhood, I can cry whenever I want. Very useful, when you grew up in the household I did. I can cry from either eye, actually. 'On cue'—is that not what they say in films? I would make a very great movie actor, don't you think? And, yes, I may have embellished some of the facts of war. For effect, you know?"

He wiped the tear away, and his face changed. His next words, when they came, were cold. "Also, I think you are wrong about your father. His being uninterested. Because if he is not now, I think he will be. Very interested. Once he has a little extra...motivation."

He reached beside his chair and lifted up a stout leather briefcase she hadn't noticed before. He pressed the buttons, pulled a manila envelope from it and threw it onto the table before them. "Have a look. Some of my finest work, I think. Go on." When neither of them moved, he sighed, leaned forward, then tipped the contents of the envelope onto the table, spreading them as if they were cards and he was about to do a trick.

Bodies. Naked bodies. Two in each photograph. Entwined or slightly separated, though still linked by acts, limbs, flesh. Man with woman. Man with man. She knew them, of course. Knew the setting too. Henrik's apartment, for both pairings. There was only one angle to the shots, taken

from above somewhere. She saw her scarf, draped over the chair. She'd only bought it a week ago. Some of these photos had been taken at their reunion six days before.

She swallowed hard, kept down the acid that surged up into her throat. Managed a faint, "How?"

Henrik shrugged. "You know the photo of mine you so admire, on the wall facing the bed? The lens of the camera is hidden in one of the carriages of the train. Covered until I needed it. I ran a wire to the bed frame. A button there." He pulled at his ear. "I damp the shutter, but it still makes a little click. I was surprised when neither of you noticed. But then those water pipes, the noises they make? And you were, uh, distracted, yes?" He gestured to the table, the images there. "I am good at distracting, aren't I?"

Eve closed her eyes. Heard the scrabbling of paper—photos picked up and slammed down. When she opened her eyes, she saw Richard had inverted the photographs. On the back of each one a date was written in red ink.

"Yes, well. Not to everyone's taste perhaps. But you see the point." Henrik leaned forward. "You must surely both see the point."

"You'll show them to Eve's father."

"Oh, Dickie—I'll show them to the world!" He spread his arms wide, laughed. "But if you both do as I ask, then Bootstraps will be the only one to see, hmm, perhaps just a tiny sample of them, eh? Only enough for him to, well, you know." He reached again into the briefcase, pulled out a sheaf of papers. A thicker document was on top—the word "*Avdal*" in bold on its first page. "Then, if he signs this contract and these other papers my friends and I have prepared—papers that conceal his new activities entirely from his own government—I will return all the prints I made to you, together with all negatives." He smiled. "Then we can be friends again, yes?"

No one spoke for a long moment. Until Richard did. "There is one alternative I can see." He swallowed. "I could kill you now."

"Hmm, you could try. Perhaps your fury might even defeat my, uh, skills, eh?" He shook his head. "But then, dear Dick, *all* the photos will be revealed. Because the duplicates I set aside somewhere safe will be mailed

to *Dagens Nyheter* in the event of my death. On newsstands the next day. I saw this in a Humphrey Bogart movie. Good, eh?” He chortled. “Of course, the world will then know you as a murderer as well as an adulterer, a cuckold. A sodomite.”

Eve felt Richard flinch on each word, as if they were blows to his body. He slumped back. He was beaten, and all three in the room knew it. But she wasn’t, not yet. Though there was nothing she could do except stall. “My father does not return to Stockholm till Tuesday. Can you wait until then?”

“Of course, my dear.” Henrik drained his glass. “Since my fellow National Socialists are winning everywhere right now, a few more days will not make much difference.” He looked at the table. “You may keep those. I’ve plenty more. And one very discreet one, to await Bootstraps in his office.” He stood, raised a hand. “No, please, don’t disturb yourselves. I know the way out. Enjoy the photographs.”

Eve and Richard listened in silence to the sounds that came—of Henrik finishing dressing, collecting his things. Then, without another word spoken, the front door opened and closed.

NINETEEN

FOR A LONG TIME, neither of them spoke. Words would lead to actions. Actions would bring consequences. In silence there was safety somehow, before the storm broke.

But it could not last. “Oh God, Evie,” Richard said. “Oh my God, I am so sorry.”

Witty responses, cruel insults, leapt to her mind and mouth. But she couldn’t speak them. She was suddenly so tired—while at the same time her mind was racing. What were they going to do? What the hell were they going to do? She couldn’t speak of that, not yet. So she said something that had been on her mind since the bedroom door had opened and let out all those consequences, like Pandora’s box.

“I didn’t know you were a homosexual.”

“Oh. Oh, neither did I, really.” He looked up at the ceiling. “I’d thought it was just an Oxford thing. Half the men seemed to be and so—” He shrugged. “Then after I graduated that summer, when I came to Sweden to start to learn about what my role would be here, I met Henrik. One last fling, I thought. Especially as I’d already met you and knew you were the one for me.” Without looking at her he reached and took her hand. “I thought it would all go away. But then after our wedding it was all so...so terrible in *that* way, you know”—he sniffed—“and I felt so guilty at what I’d done to you, and thought maybe I was, uh, queer after all. But I knew we couldn’t get divorced. Which is why I suggested the arrangement.” He turned to her then, lifting her hands so she’d look in his eyes. “Henrik made me believe that he didn’t like women at all *that* way. I never thought...” He

choked. "Liar. That damned liar!" His voice had risen, his eyes closed. He tried to let go of her, but she kept his hands, shook them.

"My darling, he played us both for idiots. Used us because of this plan of his, this terrible plan. I feel a complete fool too, if that helps." He opened his eyes. "But if we are fools, we're neither of us stupid. There must be something we can do. We just have to figure out what."

"You're right. You're right, of course. How can we fight back? Hmm." He hummed for a second, then sniffed, sat up. "What are our options? To agree and work on your father? Would he do this, do you think, to stop you being shamed?"

"I don't know. We're very close. Besides, it's not only you and me who would be ruined by this. My family would be too. My mother? She'd lose her place in Montreal society. Father would be finished as a businessman. After the struggle he's had to get where he is?" She shivered. "But is that enough to make him betray his country? Because that's what he'd be doing." She sighed. "I truly don't know. He might." She reached for her water, gulped some down. "But is that what we'd want? To save ourselves? To let that bastard win?"

"We could refuse." Richard sat straighter. "Dare him to do his worst. Exposure would ruin him too. Swedish society is quite strict, conservative. Damn us and he damns himself."

"Would that stop him, though? He's out of step with this society anyway. The proportion of Nazis here must be tiny. I think his loyalties are beyond his nation now."

"Yes, I see..." He took a deep, shuddery breath. "I don't know, Evie. Part of me thinks I deserve ruin anyway for my stupidities...my sins."

"Sins?"

He coloured, looked away. "Loving men."

"I see. Well, if it helps, I feel I should be stoned for being an adulteress." She shook her head. "It's quite the burden of guilt we Catholics carry, eh?"

She laughed, and after a moment he did too, then put his arms around her neck. "Oh, Scarlett! What can we do?"

“Nothing. Not now, this minute, today. We’re both in shock. And we do have a little time to come up with a plan.” She grasped his wrists at her neck. “I know! Let’s go to the cabin. Ski for a few days. Exercise our way to an answer?”

“Yes! What a wonderful idea! I—” The smile left his face. “I can’t, Evie.”

“You can!”

“No. Ottawa is sending a senior administrator to brief us on all current war scenarios, and to learn the latest developments in Sweden. He arrives Monday, and everyone at the legation is either in committee or madly writing reports.”

“Oh. Oh, well. Then I’ll stay too. We can plan—”

“No! No, no. You must go. I won’t be around anyway. Your father’s not back till Tuesday. Come back Monday afternoon. We’ll have time to figure out what to tell that bastard.”

“Alright. If you’re sure.”

“I am. I know it’ll help clear your head.” He shook her hands again, started to rise. “I’ll fetch you a proper drink.”

“No.” She held him, kept him seated. “Wait, Richard. There’s something else I must tell you. I—”

“What is it, old girl?” He leaned back to study her. “You look very serious.”

She burst into tears. “I’m pregnant.”

“What?”

“I’m going to have a baby.”

“But that’s...that’s...”

“Terrible, I know,” she sobbed.

“Nonsense. I was going to say it’s marvellous!”

“How? How can it be marvellous?” Her voice quavered. “Richard, you must know. It...it could be his.”

“Nonsense,” he repeated, even more firmly. “You are my wife. That baby is ours.”

“But—”

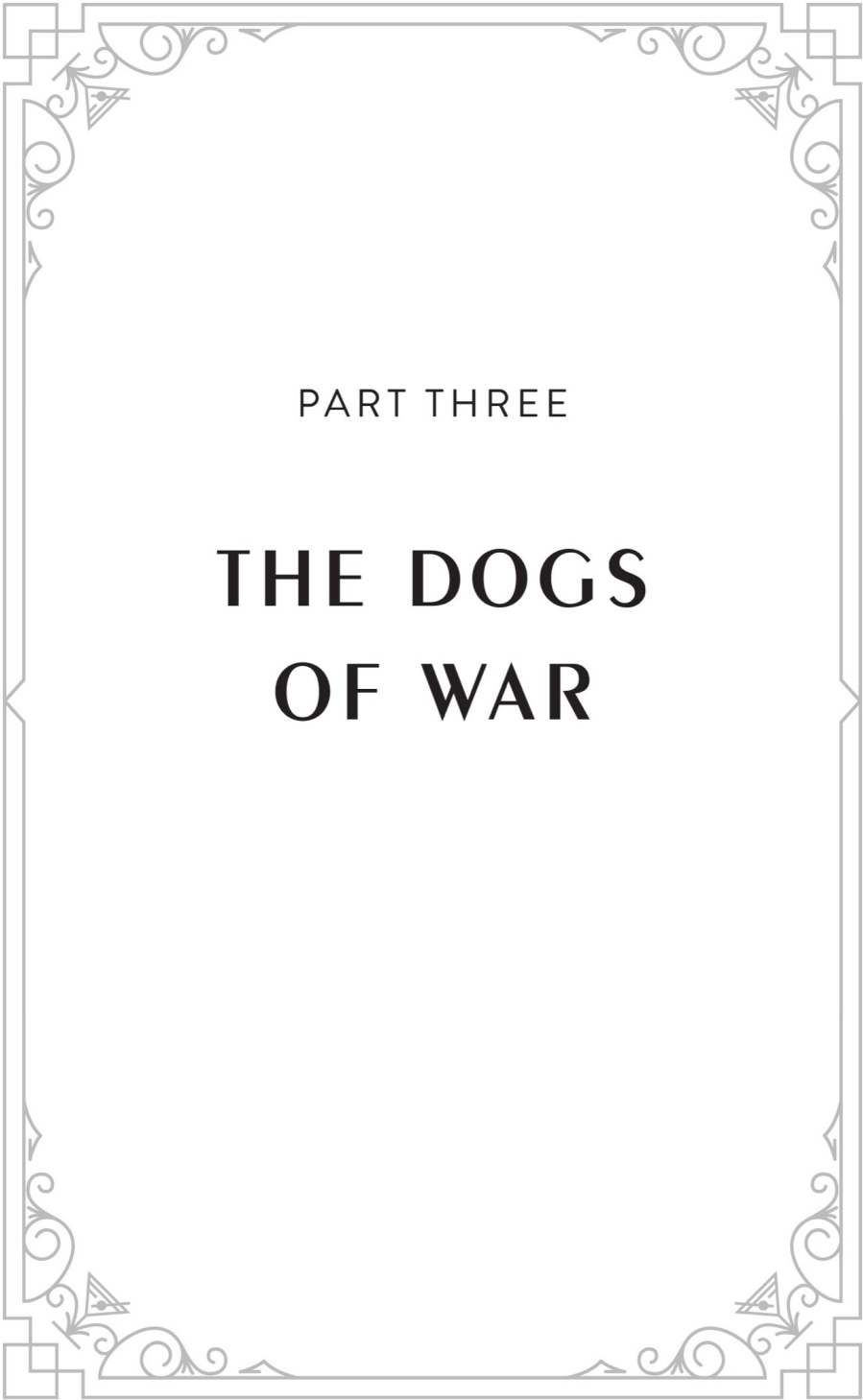
He put a finger on her lips. “No *buts*, Mrs. Spence. That baby is ours. And we will love him. Her. It!”

She gave a laugh, watery with tears. “Oh, Richard! I do love you.”

“And I you.” He stood and drew her up. “Come on, old girl. No nightcap for us. Let’s go to bed.”

They did. He held her in his arms, stroked her forehead. Remarkably, Eve fell asleep almost immediately.

He did not.



PART THREE

**THE DOGS
OF WAR**

TWENTY

*Haugsbygd, Norway. The same day—April
18, 1940*

THE BIG MAN SLID into the shallow trench beside him.

“Everyone in position, Corporal Helmstad?”

“That’s Troop Sergeant Helmstad now,” the big man replied, grinning. “And what are you now, sir? It’s hard to keep up.”

It took Erik a moment to remember. He hadn’t slept much, just three hours the night before. Six a.m. looked pretty grim without any coffee. Two weeks before he’d been a simple *fenrik*, the junior lieutenant in charge of a platoon. Then war had come, and in the chaos of the sudden invasion his immediate superior hadn’t shown up at the muster point before they’d moved out. So he’d been made *kompaniadjutant*, which had terrified him because he hadn’t been trained to be the second-in-command and handle one hundred and twenty men. Then Körland had been killed in the first air raid on their camp. So when Major-General Hvindem Haug had dispatched him here to Haugsbygd, he’d raised him to...

“Captain. That’s it.” He yawned.

The other man studied him. “Feel up to it, Captain?”

Erik closed his mouth, looked around to make sure no one was in hearing distance. He kept his voice low. “Not really. Would you like to take over? You’re the one with the military experience, after all.”

“Fuck, no.” The man lifted his head and spat out of the trench. “In Finland, my military experience consisted of shooting as many Rooskies as I could when ordered to. I couldn’t manage”—he nodded at the open ground before the trench—“this.”

This was the battlefield. At least it would be if the enemy obliged and entered it. *But am I managing it?* Erik wondered, not voicing this thought. Saying instead, “And the answer to my question?”

“Which was?”

“Is everyone in position?”

“It is what I came to tell you, sir. They are.”

“Good. Then back to your post.”

“Captain!”

Helmstad began to rise, but Erik’s voice stopped him. “Still didn’t manage to find a uniform, I see.”

The man looked down and shrugged. “Nothing fitted.” He rolled his big shoulders. He was wearing what he would wear on his farm, which was two valleys over: baggy wool trousers that had seen better days, a thick green fisherman’s sweater, an overcoat that had once been blue judging by the cuff ends, but had since been dyed mostly black. He smiled. “Still and all, I’m not too bothered. I mean, if the Krauts break through, who are they more likely to shoot? The man in the uniform”—he waved at Erik—“or the farmer?”

“Thanks for that, Corporal.”

“Troop Sergeant,” Helmstad corrected, gave as approximate a salute as one could manage from a crouch, and lumbered off.

Erik watched him pick his way along the rough path, made by the feet of the company, that crossed the snowy field. On the far edge, before the village proper began, there was a tumbledown shepherd’s hut and Helmstad slid into it. That was where the company’s sole Madsen M29 heavy machine gun was. Helmstad was the only one who had real experience firing it. He’d had the young recruits wide-eyed over several campfires with tales of how many “Rooskies” he’d slaughtered with one in Finland—where he, a Norwegian, had been a volunteer in their Winter War. He’d been back only two weeks before the Germans invaded his country.

One war straight to another. It was good to have him—his experience of combat. Aside from the stumbling night retreat they’d made three nights before under bombing and shelling, no one else in Erik’s company had any.

Including myself. Erik shivered, but not from the chilly pre-dawn air. Then he remembered that wasn't true. He did have some experience. Seven months before he'd been in a forest camp in Poland when the Germans attacked it.

He closed his eyes. "Aleksandra," he murmured. When he opened them again, he was no longer shivering. He looked again at the valley before him. The village of Haugsbygd was two hundred and fifty metres away on the rise opposite the forested ridge where he sat, with his troops spread along the treeline, positioned for the ambush he'd created—and he thought, *Oh yes, please. Let them come.*

His position was just under the canopy, up the slope where field turned to forest. What he sat in was a trench only in name. A depression—a couple of sandbags on its edge, with a gap between them. He'd put one of his two light machine guns in it. Olav and Kjaersten Solberg had carried it there and set it up. Twin brothers, farm boys from Gudbrandsdalen, they worked well as a team, which is what a machine gun required—one to fire and one to make sure the ammo belt went through easily, and to reload when it was empty. Madsen M22s tended to jam; they had been dubbed "the young virgins." Army humour—it tended to stop when it was meant to keep going.

He'd placed the gun there to protect the purpose of this position and he turned and looked at that purpose now. Twenty yards back was his Granatkastare M/09 mortar. Its three-man crew was experienced—on a firing range, at least. He'd followed the instructions of its corporal—Moen was the man's name—and had the trees cut away all around it, leaving only the ones that hid it in front, with a gap opened above for the mortar to launch through. With the gunner's aim and some fortune, its shells would drop precisely where Erik needed them to: the one-hundred-and-fifty-metre stretch of roadway before the southern road entered the village proper.

He rose, moved back. The mortar team had got a small fire going; they were brewing coffee. He'd ordered that there were to be no fires, so as not to give away their position. But these men had erected a barrier that concealed the flames, and the little smoke that rose was dissipated fast by a stiff wind. He decided not to make a point of it.

Besides... He squatted beside them. “Is there one for me?”

“Of course, Captain.” The corporal handed him a steaming mug. It had more chicory and roasted dandelion roots in it than actual coffee, but it was welcome all the same.

He didn’t get to enjoy it for long. He heard the feet on the forest floor before he saw his scout. “Captain!” Knausgaard skidded to a halt, heaving breaths. “They are coming.”

“How soon?”

“Soon. I ran from Klekkenveien. But Anders had run to me from Borger.” He gulped air. “And they are in trucks.”

“How many?”

“Eight.”

Eight. Thirty men in each. Two companies, then. Two hundred and forty men. Twice what he had. But defence always had at least a two-to-one advantage. So the textbooks said, anyway.

Resting in the treeline twenty paces away was a huddle of soldiers. He called to them. “Strand! Haugen!” The two men ran over. “You,” he said, pointing at Strand. “North trench. Tell Corporal Solveig ten minutes. Remind him: he is not to fire until my first flare. It’s vital. Go! You”—as the soldier took off, he pointed at the other man—“go to the shepherd’s hut and tell Troop Sergeant Helmstad that the enemy are close. Remind him to wait till the enemy are halfway up the field before firing. Go!”

Erik stood, handing his mug to the scout, who sat and gulped from it gratefully. *So. It begins*, Erik thought.

He’d learned ambush techniques at the Military College...for one whole week. But who was it who said “No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy?” Some Prussian, no doubt. They’d read a lot of Prussian war manuals. Studied a few of Napoleon’s campaigns. But how would Frederick the Great’s tactics at Rossbach, or the emperor’s at Marengo, apply to the village of Haugsbygd, in Buskerud County, Norway?

There was one big difference, of course. Those generals were mainly fighting for their own glory. He and his men were fighting for their home.

He crossed the short space to join some of those men. All had heard the runner's return, the harsh whispers. All were on their haunches. Some looked eager, some terrified. All looked so young. At twenty-two, he was probably the eldest by three or four years. Once, as he'd walked past back at the camp, he'd even heard some kid whisper, "There goes Grandad."

He took a breath, exhaled, spoke low and calm. "Soldiers of Norway, to your positions. And remember—fingers off triggers until you see the second flare. Then...give them hell!"

He walked back the way he'd come. Behind him, the soldiers let out a soft cheer, then scattered to the edge of the forest. In the five hours they'd been there, they'd scraped two- or three-man shallow ditches in the treeline, piled rocks and fallen branches on the rims through which to shoot. The trees edged the field all the way up to its end, where thicker forest began. Just before those woods was a half-ruined stone wall surrounding the remnants of what had been a cottage. His second light machine gun, another Madsen M22, was behind the wall.

Erik returned to his first position and slid into the depression, clapping one of the Solberg boys on the shoulder. Though they were not identical, he still found it hard to tell one from the other. "Feeling good?"

"Feeling fine, sir!" The young man beamed, then turned aside and vomited. "Sorry, sir," he said, wiping his mouth.

"Better now than later, lad."

Erik squeezed the shoulder again, then reached into his small pack, drawing out two objects. The first, the flare gun, he placed on the ground beside him. The second, his night vision binoculars, he put to his eyes and trained on the point where the road from the south, up which the enemy would be coming, met Klekkenveien, the road that ran west to east below the village. When he saw them there, he would know if he'd guessed right or wrong. If the Germans were just reconnoitring in force, checking for suitable routes north, they would probably halt at the T-junction. If the Germans were trying to outflank the main Norwegian force at Hønefoss, which was what General Hvinden Haug suspected, they would push on to

Haugsbygd, seize the village, reinforce it, then march west. That was what Erik was there to halt—or delay at the very least.

He stared until the glasses began to wobble. Wiped his eyes, rested his elbows on a sandbag, looked again. Five minutes passed. Ten. Despite the chill of early morning, he felt a trickle of sweat start at his neck and run down his back. If the Germans were coming—in trucks—they should have been there by now. He saw no movement until...a deer, a buck with a fine set of antlers, suddenly loped through his vision, then paused to nibble on a bush. Were Erik hunting now, he'd put a bullet just behind the left shoulder blade. Shot in the heart, the beast would only run for a few hundred metres before dying. But he was after different prey this morning.

The stag jerked its head up, then took off. A moment later, Erik heard what had spooked the animal.

An engine coming up the southern road.

TWENTY-ONE

ERIK SWUNG THE BINOCULARS BACK. He didn't really need the night vision; dawn was coming earlier and earlier with every April morning. So he was able to see quite clearly when the motorcycle swept into view, halting at the junction with a crunch of spraying gravel. He focused on the uniforms; a corporal in a sidecar manned a machine gun while a private drove. They had SS insignia at their collar tabs. Like those the officer in Poland had worn—Erich von Küchler, a name he would never forget. He hadn't known what SS meant then. He did now. They were elite troops, well trained, especially fanatical in their devotion to Adolf Hitler.

Know your enemy. The phrase had been drilled into them at the military college. He'd learned that the SS had different rank names than the regular German Wehrmacht. So the corporal ahead was actually an *Obergefeiter*. The private beside him a *Schütze*. Instead of lieutenant, von Küchler had been an *Obersturmführer*.

The sound of another engine. A staff car swept into view and halted beside the motorcycle. An officer with SS tabs opened the door, stepped out.

Erik ran his tongue over his dry lips. *Oh please, let it be him*, he thought.

The officer—disappointingly not von Küchler—had a brief discussion with the man in the sidecar.

Come on, come on, move! Erik needed the motorcycle to keep going. He needed the officer and his trucks, which must be close behind, to follow. If they didn't, if they went back, the ambush was aborted. If they stayed where they were...Erik would have to attack them. Attack a superior force, a

moment's surprise his only advantage. "No battle plan survives—" he began to mutter, then cut himself off as he felt the boy next to him stare.

German words carried easily on the chill dawn air. "*Jawohl, Herr Sturmbannführer!*" The *Obergefreiter* rose, saluted, sat back down in the sidecar, and the motorcycle took off...toward the village! Its inhabitants had fled, and Erik had put no men in its buildings. He wanted the enemy to feel safe to pass through it.

He followed the motorbike through his lenses and saw it pull up in the little square before the village school. The passenger stood in the sidecar, looked slowly all around...then turned back to the officer and waved.

He was acknowledged. Erik put the glasses back in his satchel, picked up the flare gun in his right hand, raised his left arm, the one that the mortar crew were watching—and waited. The staff car pulled over to the side and the eight trucks came, each one tight to the bumper of the one ahead of it. He saw the officer wave them on past the ruined cottage, the outlier of the village; there was another hundred and fifty metres till the next building. When the first truck was about twenty-five metres from it, and all eight in the gap between the cottage and the village proper, Erik dropped his arm.

There was a sucking sound as the mortar shell dropped in the tube, a whoosh as it left it. But the loudest noise, startling in that dawn quiet, was the explosion when the projectile struck.

It wasn't bad, considering they'd only ever fired at a range, and they'd had so little time to set up or calculate trajectory. The shell landed on the road but about ten metres ahead of the first truck. It did no damage; the driver did that, swerving hard right, straight into a ditch where the truck pitched sideways. Screams carried clearly on the morning air. Terror. Pain. The other trucks jammed to a halt, men jumping off them, some taking shelter behind them, some sprinting off the open road. A second and then a third mortar shell landed: one in the field, one slap on the roadway between trucks.

Erik was not a praying man. But he prayed now as he raised the flare gun. *Please God, let only those I told to fire, fire now. Only them.* He squeezed the trigger. The flare sailed high, bursting into reds and yellows

three hundred feet up. On its parachute, it began to descend, casting a strange glow over the field. Immediately, the Madsen M22 at the end of the field, the one behind the tumbled cottage wall, began to fire at the soldiers on the road. Between the staccato bursts came the *crack-crack-crack* of a dozen Krag-Jørgensen rifles.

None of the other men in Erik's company fired. The battle plan had survived first contact.

Some Germans had scattered into the fields. Some were still sheltering behind the trucks as bullets clattered off the fenders, sides and engine casing. But he could see sergeants and officers moving amongst them, talking, organizing. They had already conquered Poland. Many of these men must have been there and knew what they were doing.

At the ruined cottage, the Madsen gave a cough and died. "The virgin has crossed her legs," muttered one of the twins. The few rifles kept firing, but the Germans had begun to fire back, especially from behind the first truck. Behind the other two, Erik saw men forming by squads into loose columns. Here it comes, he thought.

The last day at the military college, they'd had a special visitor—a Polish soldier with only one arm, one eye. He'd fought the Germans, fought the Russians too, and managed to escape to Romania with a sizable portion of the Polish army, and most of Poland's gold reserve. For three hours he'd briefed the cadets on how the Wehrmacht and SS squad systems worked. Erik could only hope they hadn't changed their tactics for Norway—and that they would take the bait. They would have counted a dozen rifles and a faulty machine gun behind a wall in a field. In the ten days since the invasion this was about all the undertrained and overwhelmed Norwegian army had managed.

It was the cheese in the mousetrap.

He held his breath—and watched as six German machine gunners set up and began firing. The old collapsed wall behind which his men sheltered started exploding granite chips. Only a few shots were returned. He'd told them to keep their heads down.

After two minutes of firing, two German platoons set out—thirty men in each, divided into three squads of ten, much like their Norwegian enemies. They ran in loose columns in the gaps between their own machine-gun fire, at each column's head officers or sergeants with sub-machine guns. One column headed straight for the ruined cottage, one straight toward the ridge where Erik lay. They'd spotted where the mortar, which had not ceased launching its shells, was firing from.

There was no reason for pure silence now. "Come on, Helmstad," Erik muttered, as he chambered another flare into his gun, "let's see if it's only Rooskies you can kill."

The Germans advanced, barely troubled by the occasional shot that came from behind the wall at the top of the field. The head of the column passed the broken-down shepherd's hut. *Now, Helmstad, surely?* Erik thought. He raised his flare gun in hope. But the columns loped on, men pausing to kneel and shoot before running again. Had his troop sergeant's Madsen M29, his heavy machine gun, acted like its younger sister and jammed? "No battle plan survives..." he began to whisper—unable to finish the sentence because of the low roar that came.

Helmstad fired—and the column nearest him, perhaps fifty metres away, vanished as if snatched up by an unseen hand. Screams came, bodies were hurled. Raising his arm, Erik shot his second flare into the air. It exploded green and bright in the dawn sky above the ridge, and one hundred Norwegians, in the bliss of release, put their fingers on their triggers and pulled. Erik, casting aside the flare gun, snatched up his rifle and shot too.

Germans fell—terrified, wounded, dead. He could hear shouts above the terrible clamour of gunfire. Some must have been commands to retreat, though he thought most were not waiting for orders. Men were leaping up, weaving, running back to the paltry shelter of their trucks—where Erik saw, in a swift glance, their officer, hatless now, waving his arms, shouting, pointing.

His own men kept shooting from all sides of the field—the ridge, the low wall at its top, the cottage nearest to the tumbled shepherd's hut where

Helmstad's Madsen was still coughing out lead. The Germans fled, those who were able, and the Norwegians shot any they could. Some of the enemy stopped to lift or drag a fallen comrade, and his men shot them too. There could be no pity in war.

Perhaps half of the two platoons that had set out made it back. But the trucks were not the shelter they'd been because of the storm of shots from all his men, and the mortar rounds that kept falling. Even as Erik chambered five more bullets, aimed and shot again, he saw above his barrel one of the middle trucks take a direct hit, disappearing in a dazzling explosion of flame. The ones before it were now trapped on the road. The ones behind were trying to turn around. But the drivers were exposed. When two died where they sat, the others leapt from their cabs to join those who were running back the way they'd come. Their officer was still standing in the middle of the road, screaming, but whatever his commands were, they had no effect. When the last man ran past him, he slapped on his hat and followed.

The shooting went on for a while. But when Erik waved down the mortar and Helmstad's Madsen also ceased, gradually the rifles did too. There was a flurry, then a couple of shots, a pause, a single last *crack*. Silence came then, for half a dozen heartbeats. Until the shouting began.

"Norway!" cried the men of the Sixth Infantry Regiment, Second Division. "Norway!"

TWENTY-TWO

ERIK WAS CHEERING AS loud as the best of them. Oh, the feeling! His whole body surged with it, the power of combat, the joy of victory. The relief of survival! He was grinning fit to split his mouth, saw that the others around him were too. But in seeing them he remembered, started taking deeper breaths. He had to master himself. There were things to do next and he had to be the one to order them.

He came onto his feet, and for a moment his legs felt like they wouldn't hold him. The ambush may have been successful—still, he was sure that once their leader had stopped the rout, and perhaps summoned reinforcements, the Germans would be back. They always came back. Now he had to hold the village—until he was ordered to retreat.

“Beck! Here!”

The summoned man ran over. Erik raised a hand, then carried on scribbling. “Run this to HQ in Hønefoss. This tells them what happened here, but add any information you can—that we've driven two companies of Waffen-SS back, for now. But they'll be coming again. I await orders. Go!”

Beck, picked for his speed—he'd run middle-distance for Norway in the Berlin Olympics—took off up the slope and over the crest of the hill, heading west. It would take him half an hour to reach headquarters, and at least an hour for any plan to be communicated and returned. Meantime, Erik had his original orders.

Hold Haugsbygd.

He became aware of other sounds now—the buzz of chatter from excited men; German voices crying in agony in the field. Then, suddenly,

the *crack* of a revolver. He snatched up his rifle, peered. Saw the figure below, recognizing that hefty shape immediately. Helmstad was walking the battlefield. He had a pistol in his hand and he was executing German wounded. "Troop Sergeant!" Erik shouted, stepping from the treeline, moving fast down the slope. "Stop!"

The man paused over a writhing body. "Captain?" He watched his officer descend from the hill. "Just tidying up. Like we did in Finland."

He lifted his pistol again, and the young man, no older than any of Erik's soldiers, the front of his uniform a mass of red, held out a blocking hand, whimpering, "*Nein! Bitte! Nein!*"

"Stop," Erik commanded. "This is not Finland."

Helmstad stared down at the German, his pistol levelled. "Just putting him out of his misery."

"Stop! That's an order, Troop Sergeant."

Helmstad studied Erik a moment, then shrugged and holstered his pistol.

The men of Erik's command were now streaming down from their positions. He frowned. He had not ordered any of them to move. Then he spotted the man he needed. "Berglund! Any casualties?"

The medical orderly shook his head. "A couple of splinter grazes from the stone." He pointed back at the low wall at the valley's head. "That's all I know of."

Erik felt another rush of adrenalin. *Not one man killed.* "Good. Then organize a detail. Get any wounded Germans into that house there. Field dressings."

"Sir." He moved off, grabbing men to help as he went.

"Why are you being kind to this scum?" asked Helmstad.

"Oh, I don't know, Troop Sergeant. Rules of war?"

"Rules of war?" Helmstad gave a low chuckle. "What are they again?"

There was no time for debate. There were more pressing matters. Until he heard differently, his orders were to hold Haugsbygd. So far, he'd only had time to plan an ambush.

“Men to gather the enemy weapons. Non-commissioned officers, with me,” he called. Then he walked toward the burning truck. Behind him, excited chatter exploded again as young men began to share their combat stories.

They gathered beside the flames, enjoying the warmth. There was one wounded German there, crawling along the road as if to follow his comrades. Erik ordered the junior corporal, Nygaard, to grab a soldier to help cart the man to the temporary field hospital, then looked down the road that led south. About two hundred metres away it bent to the right. There was a crossroads just beyond it.

“Solbergs? You two! Yes, you!” The twins ran up to him. One of them carried the Madsen, the other its ammo belts. “Set up the gun at the bend there. See any Germans, fire three bursts then get the hell back here. Go!” He turned back to the half-circle of non-commissioneds. “Our orders are to hold Haugsbygd. From here, I think. Helmstad, you decide where to place your gun. And you”—he pointed at the mortar corporal—“get your weapon down here and set it up in shelter but ranging onto the road bend where I just sent those boys.”

“Sir!”

The discussion didn’t take long. It couldn’t when they didn’t know how long they had before the inevitable German counterattack. Erik listened to opinions, especially Helmstad’s, then issued orders. The defence would centre on Helmstad’s heavy machine gun in the lee of that same ruined house where the Germans had first halted, before the stretch of road that had become the killing zone. It had the widest shooting arc, covering the whole area before them. Erik dispatched a platoon to occupy the treeline on his right flank—the only place the enemy could find cover. Everyone else was in a rough skirmish line spread along a four-hundred-metre front. He ordered them all to find what shelter they could—dig shallow ditches if they needed to. He didn’t want anyone in houses, in case the enemy called in their Stuka dive bombers. More men would be killed by collapsed walls than actual bombs.

Though that may be my third plan, if they attack in force, he mused. *Retreat to the village. Fight them house-to-house.* For the second time that day he prayed—this time, that it wouldn't come to that. He hadn't taken that course at the academy.

As he walked back to where Helmstad was setting up, he glanced up the slope he'd just descended, hoping to see his runner coming back from HQ with orders to withdraw. A vain hope, he knew. It would be another half-hour at the earliest. Perhaps the Germans would not manage to rally before then. He'd pray for that too when he had time.

He stopped at the house but kept looking ahead down the road. He couldn't see the twins, which was good—they'd be tucked into the trees there. Then he glanced at the sky, full of light now, hoping it wouldn't be darkened anytime soon by Stukas. He'd experienced those gull-winged monsters further south. Their bomb load was bad enough, but the sirens mounted on their legs were truly awful, like the protracted screams of dragons falling on their prey.

"Captain?" He looked at Helmstad, who was holding out a steaming mug to him. Behind his troop sergeant, beside the machine gun, a small stove flamed. Old soldiers had their priorities, Erik supposed. He took the ersatz coffee and the hunk of bread that followed it, finding that he was suddenly starving. He squatted, chewed, and despite his mother's voice in his head, spoke with his mouth full. "Good enough, you think?" He indicated with his head the defensive line he'd ordered.

"Good enough, I'm sure." Helmstad pulled out a flask, tipped something clear into his coffee. Raised it to Erik who hesitated, then shook his head. "You gave 'em such a licking," Helmstad continued, "I'd give you five-to-one odds they won't be back before noon. By then, the general will either have pulled us back or reinforced us—and sent a colonel over to run the show." He sipped, nodded in appreciation. "He should leave it to you. Your first battle and you drove 'em off and lost no men." He raised his mug. "Bravo!"

"The colonel can have it. I've just been lucky. I—"

The bursts came—three but so tight together they almost blended into one. Dropping his coffee and bread, Erik stepped out of the front door. Saw...

...the twins running, stumbling because they were trying to bring back their Madsen. Screaming words he couldn't make out...but then he didn't need to when the first Panzer tank rounded the corner.

It was faster, so much faster than the fastest running man. "No!" Erik screamed, as the monster caught up. One of the twins, the one with the ammo belts, flung himself out of the way just in time. The other couldn't because he was encumbered with the machine gun. The tank's front track guard hit him, knocked him forward, then the tracks rolled over him, sucked him in. Behind the first tank, Erik glimpsed at least two more.

Helmstad had begun firing—his bullets striking sparks on the armour. They didn't slow it a bit and bullets now came the other way, tearing wood and plaster from the wall. "We have to go!" the troop sergeant yelled above the blast. "We can't stop tanks!"

"There aren't meant to be tanks here!" Erik screamed back, as if screaming would change anything. Intelligence had said that all tanks were being used further south and in the west. As usual they'd got it wrong. And Helmstad was right. They had no gun, not even an antitank rifle, to fight back with. Moen's mortar had fired a couple of shells, but he'd targeted the bend and the Panzers were already well past that.

As soon as the first tank reached the field's edge, it peeled right into the field, the second one went left, the one behind came straight on. Machine-gun fire now raked the entire length of Erik's skirmish line—which did not hold anyway. All along it he saw his men leap up and begin running like hares in a field to whatever shelter they thought they could find. Some fell immediately; some kept going. Beside him Helmstad had ceased firing. He and his assistant were now trying to fold the gun up, preparing to run with it. Only Erik was still looking ahead...to see that the middle tank, the one directly ahead of him, had paused—to shoot more accurately with its machine gun perhaps. Now it came on again, but more slowly. It was only one hundred metres from the house.

Erik saw the tank...then saw another. Though this one wasn't there. Not in that field. Not even in Norway. This one was in a forest in Poland and it was coming to kill his lover.

He realized Helmstad was not going to get the gun out before the tank bulldozed the house. Not unless Erik bought him some time. Because the veteran from Finland was wrong. They did have one way to stop a tank. He'd read about it in a manual.

Reaching to his belt, he unclipped one of his two Mills bombs.

Helmstad glanced up at the approaching tank, then flung himself back as bullets lashed the house's front wall, destroying its window. Then he noticed what Erik now was holding—and his face went white. "Don't be a fool!" he yelled. He jumped up, grabbed Erik's arm, jerked him toward the rear of the house.

Erik stumbled a pace, then wrenched his arm free. "Leave me!" he cried, "I can stop him. I—" He ran to the front door, put his teeth on the pin, yanked it out, and still holding the grenade, flung open the front door. Bullets sprayed into the door, its frame, into the wall at the back of the room. Only one entered his arm. Not his throwing arm because, for no reason anyone had ever been able to explain, he was right-handed but threw better with his left. So he still threw. He had an idea that the grenade hit the tank where he'd aimed, at its front left track. But he couldn't confirm that because the tank was so close, which meant that the blast was, too—and that launched him backwards, far, far backwards. He entered some sort of cloud there, made of red and black smoke. His arm was numb, but it didn't pain him much. Besides, he had other things to think about now. Such as Aleksandra parting the smoke, beckoning him forward.

"Come, Erik. Come," she said, smiling that smile he'd loved. "I've been expecting you."

TWENTY-THREE

ALEKSANDRA, TO HIS SORROW, vanished as quickly as she'd arrived. The cloud stayed around for a while. When the red-grey mists briefly parted, Erik glimpsed canvas above him. He realized then that he must be in a truck because he was lying on something hard—something that lurched.

German or Norwegian, he couldn't tell. But once he could see, he could feel and that was when the pain came, from zero to one hundred in a moment. Then he was screaming, and Helmstad—he thought it was him—was leaning over him, trying to calm him. He couldn't, didn't.

After a forever of agony, the truck stopped. Erik was taken off it, and someone jabbed something in his arm. This sent him into another cloud. A much nicer one, with smoke in pastel shades that he felt he could touch, if only he could lift a hand.

He woke. It had to be much later because it was dark. Now he was lying under a tree beside a path. The cloud had reduced to tendrils at the edges of his vision, but the pain had grown again. Sharp, but somehow bearable, for the moment at least. Speaking was hard, yet he finally managed a word. "Water."

Someone came, lifted his head, held a canteen to his mouth. Helmstad.

Erik choked, coughed, drank more. "Where are we?" he croaked.

"Ah, Captain. You're back."

"Where?"

"Not sure, exactly." The troop sergeant scratched at his stubble. "Maybe an hour from the Swedish border."

"Swedish—?" That made no sense. Haugsbygd was nowhere near Sweden.

The other man must have noticed the confusion in his eyes. “We were lucky to get out,” he said. “Your grenade actually stopped the tank, you mad fucker!” He chuckled. “It was you or the Madsen, so I chose you—flung you over my shoulder. We made the woods.” He sucked air between his teeth. “The tanks couldn’t follow us—and they’d left their infantry too far behind. By the time they arrived we were on the move again.”

Erik looked around, though the movement pained him. He could see other figures under the trees—a score or more in sight. “Are these our lads?”

“These? A few. Dozen or so. Most are from the units we met coming up from the south. About three hundred all told. They had doctors with them, so—” He nodded at Erik’s right arm, which Erik now noticed was wrapped tight in bandages. “We are going to cross into Sweden tomorrow, try to work our way up the border, cross back to join the rest of the army. There is no chance of fighting our way through from here. Germans have overrun us.”

Erik frowned. His thoughts were still coming fuzzily, but one thing was clear. “The Swedes won’t allow that. They are interning any Norwegians that escape across the border. They won’t let us just go back.”

“They might. It depends on who we meet, I’ve been told. Some are more sympathetic than others.”

“That’s crazy! I’m not going. There are Germans to fight.”

He tried to hoist himself up on an elbow, but the pain of the movement made him gasp. “I don’t think you’ll be fighting anyone for a while, my brave one,” said Helmstad. “Besides, the colonel in charge here isn’t giving anyone a choice. It’s orders. We cross, we cross back, or we get interned.” He stuck out his lower lip. “Maybe that’s not so bad. It won’t be forever. Alive to fight another day, eh?” His eyes darkened and he looked away. “And you’ve seen them, the Krauts. Better than the Rooskies. I don’t think we can win this round. Maybe the next.”

Erik slumped back down. “No,” he groaned. “No.”

Helmstad stood. “I’ll go find that doctor. Get him to give you some more of what makes the pain go away.”

He left, and Erik lay there thinking. Sweden, to keep its neutrality—and keep in with the Germans—had to intern any foreign combatants. Brits, Poles. Norwegians now. Internment was house arrest, really. He would be fed and looked after, but he would not be able to do anything about the enemy despoiling his country. “No,” he muttered, differently than he’d groaned it. “I won’t do it.” He’d slip away soon. Not yet though. He felt too weak to attempt that now. It also sounded like this colonel would brook no disobedience. Try it and fail, and they’d watch him too closely thereafter.

He saw Helmstad coming back with a middle-aged man in a suit and small round glasses. He was holding a large leather doctor’s bag. The man squatted down. “There’s good news and bad news, my young man. I am all out of liquid morphine. But these pills”—he held up a vial—“are strong too, and will have the same effect, though a little slower. Knock you out while the pain passes.”

He tapped two into his hand and held them out. Erik took them, palmed them, pretended to swallow them with the water Helmstad gave him. He lay back down and closed his eyes, as the other two men walked away. Then he dug the pills into the earth beside him.

During the night he wished he hadn’t. Woke and wept as the pain surged like fire through his arm. Almost sent Helmstad, who slept near him, to fetch the doctor to give him more. But by morning the pain was less—just about bearable. Erik hid the next pills he was given in his jacket pocket. Dug in the earth beside him and found one of the ones he’d buried. When he reached somewhere safe, he knew he’d need it.



There was no crossing and re-crossing at the border. The Swedes were polite but firm. All those who crossed were interned, no exceptions. Erik, Helmstad and the rest were disarmed, fed, then loaded onto other trucks. A guard on Erik’s tried to cheer them up. “The camp where we are taking you is in a Stockholm suburb.” He grinned. “They give you passes to go into town. You can visit the girls!”

Erik wasn't going to wait for the camp. There was only one girl for him, she was dead, and her murderers were ravaging his country.

About an hour short of the camp, the truck pulled off the road into a forest clearing so the men could piss, smoke and stretch. When the guards were elsewhere, Erik took Helmstad's arm and led him to squat in the lee of a small hut, the type foresters used. "Cover for me," he said.

"Don't be a fool," Helmstad hissed. "You're wounded. You need help."

"I'm going back. Cover for me."

"I should report you. Save your life."

"Don't. That's an order, Troop Sergeant."

The other man muttered "Fool!" again, then reached under his jacket into the small of his back. "Take this," he said. "You'll need it more than me."

"This" was a Browning 9mm pistol. All their weapons had been taken at the border. Helmstad had obviously hidden this one.

Erik grasped it, tucked it into the empty holster he still wore. "Thanks," he said.

"Good luck, Captain," Helmstad replied. "You're a brave one for all that you are crazy. Go kill some Rooskies with that."

"Krauts."

The troop sergeant grinned. "Them too."

He stood, walked away, and Erik sat and put his back to the hut's wall. He heard Helmstad mutter something he didn't catch. Heard him clearly again at the truck when the guard asked him where his wounded friend was. "Already inside. You must have missed him," Helmstad answered, then called into the crowded truck, "Erik, lad? You in there?" In a truck of thirty there were at least two other Eriks. One called, "Ja, up here," and Helmstad nodded at the guard and climbed aboard.

Erik stayed behind the hut until all five trucks had passed. Then he waited a while longer, summoning strength. Now he'd escaped he had no plan beyond finding somewhere to rest up for a few days. Heal, get his strength back. Then he'd make for the border...and the war.

The forester's hut was holed in most of its planks. With snow still on the ground, he'd freeze. Besides, he had no water, and nothing to eat.

He looked away from the road—and now noticed a trail leading further into the forest. So he took it. At first, deep snow made it slow going. But, as the light started to fail, he stumbled onto a path that was levelled—and bore the marks of many skis. He followed that for a while and soon came to a side path that he saw led to some cabins. Of the seven there, only one had any lights flickering within it. He avoided it and went on to the cabin at the very end of the row. Its back door was locked but he felt along the lintel and...yes, there was the key. He used it and let himself in.

There were some tins of meat soup in a cupboard. He couldn't risk lighting a fire for warmth or cooking, but he found a can opener, managed awkwardly to open two of the tins one-handed, then drank the soup cold, washing down two of the pills he'd pocketed. He went on into the cabin's main room, fell onto the sofa there and pulled a wool blanket over himself. Too tired to even take off his boots, Erik was asleep in moments.

TWENTY-FOUR

Ågesta, Sweden. April 19, 1940

THE MORNING BUS PULLED out of the stop, heading toward the village one kilometre away. Only one other person got off where Eve did, a young man who, after a cheery “*bra skidåkning*,” skied off down the opposite trail to the one Eve was to take. There were cabins dotted all over the forest here; it was a popular escape so close to Stockholm. And as she clipped herself into her bindings, shouldered her rucksack and poled off between the trees, Eve immediately knew that, as the young man had wished her, she would indeed have “good skiing.” The snow was older here, icier, and the temperature had dropped to a couple of degrees below zero. Perfect. Despite yesterday’s promise, spring had not quite arrived, winter still clung on to the land. *Good for skiers*, she thought. *Bad for daffodils*.

She had a sudden pang as she thought about them, the ones she’d bought for her Chinese vase. After the revelations at the apartment, she couldn’t remember what she’d done with them—hadn’t noticed them that morning as she hurried to pack and catch the bus. Perhaps Richard would find them and set them out nicely. She laughed at the thought. Her husband was many things, but flower arranger was not one of them.

Richard! She saw him then as she had that morning, all solicitude since her announcement of the pregnancy, concerned that she should be resting, not skiing at all. He appeared keener on the idea of the baby than she was. When she was in love with Henrik, the paternity of the baby had not concerned her as much as she might have expected. But now that the possible father was a monster? Truly, though, she probably wouldn’t know who the father was until the birth, from the timing. Henrik had made love to

her—though that was not a phrase she would ever associate with him again—the day before he took off for Finland. November 30th. Richard and she had made love on Christmas Eve. Either way, how could she not be showing more than she was, which was hardly at all? Questions for the doctor Richard had insisted on her seeing early next week.

Questions I don't want to think about now. All I want to do now ...is ski! So she did, swooping between the trees, enjoying the speed of the downhill, then the effort needed to herringbone up the reverse slope. It took her thoughts away—and strangely her nausea. She'd spent much of the winter on these trails while Richard worked. She felt free out there, away from the city and her "role," such as it was, of the diplomat's wife. She hadn't skied at all during the brief affair with Henrik. Then for six weeks after he'd gone, the weather was too foul, or Richard had functions. This was her first time skiing since Henrik's return.

Henrik! There he was, back again. A glimpse of him, naked and triumphant, at her bedroom door.

The hill crested, the trail levelled, and she started to sprint, hoping to lose visions of him in speed. Now, though, it was no good. All the glorious ones had gone, those times of passion in his apartment. Destroyed by seeing some of them on her apartment's table, printed in black and white.

Maybe coming here was not such a great idea, she thought, slowing as the little group of cabins came in sight. Alone she'd have nothing and no one to distract her from such memories, especially if even her beloved skiing had failed to do so for more than a few moments.

Only one other cabin of the seven was occupied. It was quite late in the season for some people, their efforts already turning to opening up their summer places. Eve and Richard's cabin was at the end of the row, furthest from the lit one.

She halted near the back entrance, shed her skis, leaned them against the wall next to her poles. After taking off her gloves, she reached up and felt along the lintel for the key. Went its length, then back again, sure she must have missed it. It wasn't there. Nor had it fallen on the mat, which she scoured on her knees. Damn! There was a spare in the neighbour's hut—the

lit one, fortunately. Mr. and Mrs. Halverssen were a retired couple and spent a lot of time out there. She'd have to walk down to them. That meant coffee, conversation, which she didn't feel up to, not at all. But she didn't really have a choice. Frustrated, she put her hand on the doorknob, twisted and pushed anyway. To her immense surprise, the door opened.

Not questioning the luck, she stepped inside. The back door gave straight into the small kitchen, and she unpacked the supplies she'd brought for the four days they'd agreed on with their blackmailer. Put the cheese, milk, eggs, bacon and butter in the cold store, the dark rye bread in the crock, the *knäckebröd* and the few tins of soup and stew in the cupboard whose door she'd obviously left open the last time she was here. She'd also somehow forgotten to wash out the last two tins of soup she'd eaten. They sat on the counter, next to the opener. "Must have been distracted or something," she muttered, pumping some water from the small tank at the sink and rinsing the containers. Then she picked up her rucksack, which now only contained a change of clothes, and walked into the living room.

She'd almost reached the door of the bedroom before she noticed the man lying on the sofa. He must have seen her at the same time because he sat up fast, and said, "Don't be frightened." Which was easy for him to say, she thought, considering he was the one holding a gun.

She dropped the rucksack and reeled backwards toward the fireplace. The backs of her knees hit a chair she kept there, so she sat down.

"I mean you no harm," the man said. "I just need a little help."

Swallowing a surge of sick that came into her mouth, she took some deeper breaths—and noticed some other things about him now. He was wearing some kind of grey-green army uniform. A sling held his right arm. His face was a fiery red and his eyes contrastingly dull, as if filmed over. "Where"—she coughed—"where have you come from?"

"Norway."

Norway? It was quite far away. "You're Norwegian?"

"Yes."

It explained his Swedish, which was accented in a way she hadn't recognized. Explained the sling too, and the uniform. The Germans had

invaded Norway eleven days before. “You are wounded?”

He glanced at his arm. “Yes. I thought it wasn’t so bad but now—” He swallowed. “It is really hurting again.”

Her heart appeared to have slowed a little. Enough. “May I?” She gestured at the arm.

“You are a doctor?”

“No, but I...I have a little training.”

He nodded, and she rose. She was a little surprised that her legs were steady now—at how calm she felt after the shock. Perhaps she was *in* shock, which might explain it. But she didn’t think so. Aside from the gun, she didn’t feel threatened by this man whose green eyes, despite their filminess, were gentle.

She crossed to him and dipped her head at the gun. He started, as if he’d forgotten he was holding it, then laid it on the table. She knelt, helped him shrug out of his jacket, reached for his right arm and slipped it out of the sling. When she took its weight, he groaned. Someone had already cut his shirt sleeve away; his arm was bare up to the bandage at his bicep, which was darkened by a wide red stain. She pulled a cushion from the corner of the sofa, set his arm to rest on it, then untied the bandage.

The “little training” she’d mentioned was little indeed. At Brillantmont, along with learning to foxtrot, to balance books on her head while she walked, to conjugate German verbs and to climb mountains while wearing skirts, all the girls had done two months of basic nursing. Even if she hadn’t, she suspected she’d recognize this wound was infected. It was swollen, almost pulsing crimson, and warm to her touch—while on the inside of the bandage she’d removed, along with the red of blood there was the yellow of something else.

“Bullet?” she asked.

He nodded.

“Still in there?”

He shook his head.

“Very well.” She laid his arm down again and sat back on her haunches. “We need to get you to a hospital immediately. You must see a doctor.”

“No doctors. No hospitals.”

“But—”

“No.” The word was firmly spoken, came with a shake of the head. “I am in the Norwegian army. If I go to a hospital, they may fix me but they will definitely intern me afterwards. I have to return to my country to fight the Nazis.”

“You won’t be able to fight them if you are dead from sepsis.”

Perhaps she said it more harshly than she intended because he started. “That bad, you think?”

“That bad.”

He nodded, then turned to look out the window. A light snow had begun to fall. Without turning back, he asked, “What’s your name?”

“Eve. Eve, ah, Spence.”

“Eve Spence.” He faced her and bowed his head slightly. “My name is Erik Strom.” He smiled then, and she thought he looked ten years younger. “Your name. Your accent. Not Swedish. Where are you from?”

“Canada.”

“Canada?” He made it sound like she’d said Xanadu. “You’ve come far.”

He licked dry lips, and she immediately got up, went to the kitchen, and pumped water into a glass. As she did, she looked at the outside door. He wouldn’t be able to stop her if she made a run for it. Skied into the village. There was a phone there—police in close driving distance. But when the glass overflowed, she just stopped pumping into it, put it down, grabbed a small saucepan, filled that with water, struck a match, lit the small propane burner and put the saucepan onto it. Then she picked up the glass and went back into the living room.

He drank fast. “Thank you.” He lifted what she saw was a small pill. “My last one.” He swallowed it, drank, and put down the empty glass.

She knelt. “Look, you should really go to a hospital. But—”

“I can’t!”

“*But* if you insist that you won’t, there may be something I can do.”

Light came into the dullness of his eyes. “Yes?”

The vision had come to her in a flash while she'd been pumping water. The small cardboard box on a shelf in her bathroom cabinet. A month before, Richard had cut one hand quite badly carving a roast duck. Needed five stitches. He'd been prescribed an antibiotic—sulfonamide, it was called. But like all men, once the wound was healed and the stitches taken out, he hadn't bothered to finish the course. In her memory, she saw a box still half full in her bathroom cabinet. "Look, I am going to clean your wound up, re-bandage it, then I am going to catch the next bus back to Stockholm." She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "There's one in an hour and twenty. I'll return on the evening one back here. I have some, ah, medicine at my apartment that may stop the infection. No guarantees, but—"

She stood up, turned for the kitchen. His voice stopped her. "I have to warn you, Miss Spence—"

"Mrs."

"Oh, Mrs. I have to warn you, Mrs. Spence. What you are offering to do is almost certainly illegal. Are you sure?"

"I am."

"So certain? Why?"

She saw Henrik then, not naked in lurid snapshots. In another photograph. He was wearing a brown-black uniform. He had a swastika on his arm. He'd said he was no longer involved with that cause. Another lie. "I have discovered that I want to fight the Nazis too, Mr. Strom."

In the kitchen, the water was boiling. She turned it off, found some clean tea towels. They kept a medical kit in the hut, so she brought that back into the living room too. It only contained the very basics. However, there was a small, red oval tin of Golden Dragon salve that she'd purchased from a Chinese apothecary in Vieux-Montréal before she left. It was said to contain extract of opium. It certainly worked wonders on skiing blisters. Perhaps it would do the same for gunshot wounds.

Eve flushed out the wound with soap and water, then dried it before applying the salve on and all around it. There was a crepe bandage in the kit—she always had one around, as her left ankle was weak from tearing the

ligaments while playing field hockey at school. She wrapped that tightly around his bicep.

She still had over an hour before her bus, so she returned to the kitchen, fried up some eggs and bacon, made some toast and a pot of coffee. His eyes gleamed as he smelled it all, and he happily joined her at the cabin's small table. He'd obviously not eaten properly for a while, and she smiled watching him trying to be polite whilst wolfing down the meal. When they'd finished, she topped up his coffee, then took all the plates back to the kitchen and put them in the sink. She'd wash them later. It was a ten-minute ski to the bus stop, and the bus left in fifteen.

"You'll be OK? I'll be back by 7 p.m." She shivered. "Are you able to make a fire?"

"Even one-handed, a Norwegian can always manage that."

"Good. There's wood and kindling in the basket there. Matches. More wood at the back door. I'll be off."

"One thing, Mrs. Spence?" She turned back. "Have you anything to read?"

"Do you read in English?"

"I do."

"Then try this for size." She went to the mantel above the fireplace, pulled down the thickest volume there, and dropped it onto the table.

"*Gone with the Wind*." He lifted the battered copy. "Isn't this a movie?"

"Just came out. Haven't seen it. But I am sure the book's better—they usually are."

She put on her coat, scarf and hat. When she glanced into the living room, he was back on the sofa, the novel on his knees. Absorbed. He looked younger again. What was he, twenty?

She didn't say goodbye. She slipped into her ski boots, and locked them into her bindings. Put on her gloves, grabbed her poles, then launched herself onto the snow. She felt lighter, since the rucksack on her back was now empty. Lighter in spirit too. Once again, she remembered Pearl from the liner. For such a short acquaintance, she had left an impression, that tough dame from the Bronx. "You'll have to pick a side," she'd said.

It seemed to Eve now that, in a very small way, she had.

TWENTY-FIVE

SHE WAS AT HER front door on Roddargatan on the stroke of four. She'd left her skis at the bus station in Ågesta. All she had with her was her empty rucksack, which she planned on filling with more food. Maybe a bottle of brandy. Her small training in nursing didn't allow her to guess how long Erik would take to recover if the sulfonamide did work. But she'd bring him supplies for at least a week.

She unlocked then pushed open the front door. "Hello?" she called. Richard would be at the legation writing those reports for the visiting minister. But after the last time she'd come through this door, she needed to be certain.

Silence. She dropped the rucksack, took off her outerwear, hung it all on the rack and shut the door. Shivered. It had dropped to minus three outside, and the flat was unheated. Still, she wasn't going to be there long.

She went toward the living room. Unusually, the door was closed. She grabbed the knob, pushed. It was locked.

Impossible, she thought. She didn't think they even had a key for it. She pushed again, then bent at the knees and put some power into it. The door gave—a little. Something blocking it? What?

Then she realized what it had to be—that heavy wooden armchair that Richard had dropped into too hard one night. He'd broken one of its legs in half. He'd actually tried to hide it from her, had stuck the two halves together, but she'd spotted it anyway. What a child he could still be sometimes, she thought, and grinned. Once the crime had been uncovered, he'd left it beside the door, promising to take it for repair, but of course he kept forgetting. Somehow it must have fallen over.

She bent even deeper, put her shoulder against the door, her hand on the knob, and shoved. It didn't give much at first. *Surely it's not that heavy*, she thought, and shoved even harder. Then it gave so suddenly she fell through, landing hard on her knees. "Ouch," she yelped, then looked to her right, behind the door, where the broken chair would be.

It wasn't. Richard was. On his knees like her. But he was leaning forward at a forty-five-degree angle—held up by a rope tied both to the doorknob and his neck.

It's not him, she thought instantly. *It's someone else*.

She was looking up from the floor now, where she'd fallen full-length, with no memory of doing so—and knew. Knew it *was* him. Even with his face so distorted—his tongue mauve and monstrous, sticking out on one side of his mouth, his skin a splotch of purples and reds. His eyes were crossed—which gave her sudden hope! Richard could cross his eyes at will; did it often to tease her.

"That's right!" She spoke loudly, firmly, certain now, taking a huge breath, scrambling back up. This had only just happened, the same moment she came through the front door. He was still alive, because breath had only just this second left him. She knew what to do. Her little nursing at Brillantmont had taught her this much, as well.

She leaned into him to try to take the pressure off the rope. So heavy! She heaved again, and he moved but only to flop onto his other side, falling off his knees onto his thighs, the rope tightening, his tongue bulging even more. "Richard, help me," she cried, trying to lift him again. But he didn't move. His eyes stayed crossed, no twinkle in them at all.

She fell back, taking huge breaths, ready to try again. Only then did she become aware of the smell—the stench of feces.

"Oh no, Richard. Please, no," she whispered. Still, she couldn't give up, not quite yet. She reached under the sleeve of his jacket—he was wearing his best black suit—and felt for his pulse. On his cold wrist, it wasn't there.

Whimpering, she scrabbled away fast on her backside; only stopped when she collided with the captain's chair. Tears and snot ran down her face, but she made no effort to wipe them away. Only when she thought she

might choke did she turn aside to the low table beside her, where they kept a box of tissues.

It was not the first thing she saw, though. That was her Chinese vase. It was filled with daffodils, and leaning against it was an envelope, “Eve” written on it in Richard’s handwriting.

The envelope wasn’t sealed and she pulled out the single page within. There it was, her husband’s strong cursive, flowing in Parker Royal Blue across the paper.

My Darling,

I am so sorry that you will be dragged back from the hut to face this problem. I had to do it this way. I didn’t want you to see me, in whatever way this death has left me. I am sorry, though, for Luc from the legation, who will have come to collect you and let you know. I feel bad for him, as he is also the one who will have found my body and had to deal with it. I gave him a key to the apartment, told him to come on Sunday early evening to pick up some papers I’d leave for him. That I was joining you for the day at the hut. At least you’ll get a couple of days there, doing what you love.

Eve looked up then, rubbing the back of her hand across her eyes, trying to stop another rush of tears. Richard had planned everything.

She whimpered, wiped, resumed.

I hope that they do not force an open coffin on you. I want you to remember me as I was. Perhaps like the first time we met, in the Magdalen gardens at Oxford. Perhaps at the altar of Notre-Dame when I married you. My God, how beautiful you were!

I know you’ll need to know why. There’s a simple answer: I couldn’t stand the disgrace. My family’s horror; my colleagues’, my country’s. Yours. Because no matter what we said that last night, darling, if everything comes out as I truly fear it will, you

will be shunned by all whom we knew in Montreal. Blamed, when you are blameless.

I couldn't bear that. I also couldn't bear the thought of our child growing up with that disgrace. Learning those things about her father. There would have been lots of people willing to tell him. Her. It.

It was the end of the page. A laugh rose in her throat. She heard him say those words the exact way he'd said them the last time she saw him. But the laugh choked her, she sobbed again, one sob triggering more. Suddenly she was bawling, making sounds she hadn't ever made before, that didn't sound like her at all. On and on they went until she couldn't take in air, thought she was going to pass out.

Somehow, she got some breaths. Somehow, she plucked out another tissue, wiped her face, blew her nose.

She turned the page. There were only a few paragraphs left.

I also believe that with me gone, that bastard blackmailer has a lot less leverage. As we discussed, he will also be disgraced in any revelations. So perhaps he may just give you back all photos and the negatives. I hope so.

However, even if he doesn't, we couldn't make that choice, could we? We cannot help Evil triumph. For as I told you before, that is what the Nazis are. And it would not only be your father who was betraying our country. We would be as well.

I am many things in this world that some would call shameful. But one title I will never own is traitor.

I know this will upset you. I am truly sorry for that. But after you'd gone this morning, I realized something else—that you will never lead the life you deserve, with us always needing to have “an arrangement.” For I would not have changed. It is my nature, and though I have spent so much of my life in

shame, praying that it were not so, here at the end I must own it. I would never have lived any other way.

Still and all, Scarlett, we were good friends, were we not? I hope when the shock and the pain passes, you will have a happy life—and raise a beautiful child. I know you will.

Much love, ever,

Richard

She put the letter back in the envelope, then tucked that into her ski-pant pocket. His words had dried the worst of her tears. She blew her nose again, wiped her eyes—then noticed again the vibrant yellow beside her. Realized why it was there. Before he killed himself that morning, Richard had arranged the daffodils in her beautiful Chinese vase.

That did it. The tears she thought she'd mastered returned: a tap turned on, flowing, flowing. Sounds came, through a jammed throat. She lay on the floor, arms wrapped tightly around herself, trying to hold it in, failing, failing.



She wasn't aware of anything—not for a while. Until she was, when she finally looked at him again, his distorted body, the awful way his suicide had left him. Knew what she must do then.

She forced herself to stand. She'd get a knife from the kitchen, cut him down, clean him up, lay him out for the police and the ambulance she'd call. She took one step—and stopped. Because she'd suddenly remembered why she was there. She'd returned to Stockholm with a purpose. If she failed to pursue it, if she got caught up with all the rigmarole of death, another man might die.

For another long moment she stood there, staring down at nothing. Then, breathing deeply, she walked past the body without looking at it again.

In the hall, she picked up her rucksack, went into her bedroom. Packed clothes—socks, smalls, nylons, a sweater, an extra pair of slacks—since she was pretty certain she'd never come back to this apartment. Continued to the bathroom and collected the box of antibiotics. In a drawer in her vanity table was her passport and a bundle of cash. They'd been planning on buying some new furniture for the apartment. She took that too.

On the hallway table was a framed photograph of her and Richard on their wedding day. She hesitated, then flipped the frame, removed the velvet backing, pulled the photo out, carefully folded it in the middle so neither of their smiling faces were creased, then slipped it carefully into the outer pocket of the rucksack. Placing her hand on the doorknob, she turned and called, "Goodbye, Richard," just like she had that morning before setting out. Though this time, of course, there was no reply.



Erik jerked awake, knocking the book off his chest. He'd fallen asleep reading it, and had stayed asleep a few hours, judging by the twilight outside the window, through which large snowflakes were tumbling. His arm was aching a little less. The fire had sunk to a glow, so he went to it and revived it with some breath and bits of kindling. It caught fast. He added some logs, then went back to the sofa, where he turned on the table lamp, picked up the novel and found his place again.

He was a fast reader, even in English, so he was already a third of the way through it—and it was not a small book. He almost never read novels, thirsty as he always was for practical knowledge of the world. But he found he was enjoying the place where it took him in his mind. Away from his present. Away from his recent past.

He resumed, smiled at something Scarlett O'Hara said. He liked her, vain and selfish though she was. She had pluck. Determination. She reminded him of Aleksandra, of course. But any strong woman he encountered did. Eve Spence had, a little. She was almost as pretty, if not so

tough. Though she did have determination too. She'd gone back to Stockholm and was returning to help save his life.

He read for a while longer, an hour perhaps, judging by the changing light outside. Began to wonder when Mrs. Spence would be back. Had something gone wrong? He yawned, laid the book down again, closed his eyes—then opened them almost immediately. Someone was coming in the back door.

He reached for the gun, then didn't pick it up. It had occurred to him that Mrs. Spence might have reconsidered turning him in. Out of kindness even, certain that if she didn't, he would die. But if she had, what was he going to do? Shoot the Swedish policeman who came through the door?

But no man came. She did. She hadn't taken off her coat. Wordlessly, she crossed to him, and shook two pills out of a box into his hand. He threw them back with a sip of water from his glass on the table. Looked up at her. She was staring at him—a hard, appraising stare. She looked...different somehow. Perhaps it was the fading light but for some reason he thought she looked older.

“What is it?”

“I need to ask you a favour.”

“Of course. What?”

She glanced at the fire. Flames reflected in her eyes as she stared into them.

“You said before that you needed to heal so that you could return to Norway and fight Nazis.”

“I did.”

“Have you killed any already?”

Erik thought back to the firefight at Haugsbygd. Had he? He'd shot at many, so it was likely. Besides, by his actions he had caused many to die, that was certain. “I have,” he replied.

“That's good.” She turned finally and he saw that the fire had not left her eyes. “Because I need you to teach me how to kill a Nazi.”

TWENTY-SIX

Hagaparken, Stockholm. April 23, 1940

SPRING REALLY CAN'T make up its mind, Eve thought, tucking her neck deeper into her scarf. For all the good that did. About two hundred metres away was Brunnsviken Lake, with a biting easterly wind coming off it to probe the gaps in her clothing. The sky loomed—the grey in the thick clouds indicating more snow.

They'd arrived an hour before the time Henrik had told her. She'd been to Hagaparken before, but Erik hadn't, and he wanted to scout the ground. "The battlefield," he'd called it, attempting a joke—though it had fallen flat, and the humour had never reached his eyes anyway. "It is a very different thing," he'd said quietly a little later, "planning to kill one man rather than many."

Though she could not stop her shivering, Eve thought the cold and impending snow were good for their purposes. It would keep people away from this popular spot, the former royal park. Over the weekend, when April had played its tricks and bathed the city in sunlight, this place especially, the Temple of Echo, would have been crowded—locals and a few tourists with their box Brownies clicking away amidst the oval temple's columns. Now, on a bleak Tuesday, there was almost no one about. One skier, with accompanying dog, had made his way past them through the ragged snow. A couple had walked, arms linked, along the lake path. No one came near the Temple. It was built on a slight hill, and its slopes were slick with icy snow.

"Better this way." She spoke aloud, just to hear a voice—and heard its faintest repetition. "Ha!" she called more loudly. "Ha ha," her call bounced

back. It was what gave the mock-Grecian temple its name, of course. She didn't try again, though. Because she was remembering how she and Richard had come there two days after they'd arrived in Stockholm. A glorious autumn day—one of the last, as it turned out, before the rains came. This place was packed then, so many people calling out, that she'd said that it sounded "like a chattering of starlings."

Richard had laughed. "It's actually 'a vulgarity of starlings.' One of my favourite terms. Vulgarity!" He'd yelled it loud enough to overpower all the other echoes, causing people to stop and stare.

There were no birds of any kind there now save for one mournful crow that cawed nearby then flew off. But Eve almost heard Richard's voice in the bird's cry, his laugh. "Richard," she murmured, too low to hear its echo.

She sniffed hard, took a deep breath, then pulled the newspaper from her coat pocket. It was today's *Dagens Nyheter*, left on the bus they'd taken from town. The front page talked mainly about the battle for Norway—how the Germans were advancing mostly everywhere. Though the Norwegians, now aided by British and French troops, were resisting in some places like Narvik and the Hegra Fortress. Erik had muttered at that, looking out at the passing trees, wishing to be elsewhere. If his wound was not entirely healed, it was much better: the swelling down, the pain subsiding, his fever gone. She knew that once this "favour" to her was done, he would be returning to the fight.

It was a small column on page three that talked of "the tragic death of Canadian diplomat Richard Spence." The details were few, and they weren't even calling it a suicide yet; too soon for a coroner to rule that. There was a mention of her: that "Mrs. Spence" was still to be contacted.

She'd woken Sunday morning, after a second night of ragged sleep, in a panic; she'd remembered something from the letter that the shock, and the numbness that had held her all Saturday, had driven out: Richard had planned for Luc to find his body early Sunday evening. She was sure he wouldn't come that night; he'd be too busy arranging for the body he'd found. But early the next morning she'd hustled Erik out of the cabin. Richard's spare boots and skis just about fitted him, and they caught the

first bus to Stockholm at 7 a.m. They'd spent the previous night in a cheap hotel on Sankt Eriksgatan, her on the bed, Erik rolled in blankets on the floor.

She put the paper away. She felt less cold. She'd focused on her dead husband again, and it burned in her.

She looked at her watch. Ten fifty-four. If Henrik was prompt, and he always had been, he would arrive at the rendezvous he'd chosen in six minutes.

She glanced back at the building nearby, King Gustav's summer palace. The park's main driveway ended at it, and it was the principal route in from the city. They'd taken it, as would Henrik. As he would the path that continued for one hundred and fifty metres to the Temple. Eve couldn't see Erik, which was reassuring. She'd assumed a soldier would know how to conceal himself.

She and Erik hadn't talked that much in the three days they'd spent together. He was still in some pain, and slept a lot, while she was in mourning and in shock. But a few details had come out. How he was training to be a lawyer when war came. How he'd been part of an international students' group striving for world peace. How he'd also lost someone—the mention of whom made him stop talking for the rest of the afternoon. When he did start again, it was to ask her what she knew of Germany, of Hitler, of what had been happening and was happening in Europe. When she confessed that she didn't know nearly enough, he started to tell her things; gently, no lecturing. And like with any good teacher she'd ever had, he made her want to learn more, much more. Which she would, she determined. Once Henrik Ridelsson was dead.

Then there he was. A man in a black overcoat and hat, hunched against the wind, walking fast toward her, in that magpie walk one uses when paths are icy. She took one step away from the lake-end Temple entrance. She kept her hands in her pockets, as they'd planned.

There were no steps, just that icy slope. He climbed it like he was on skis, herringboning up, feet jammed into the crust, then stepped straight onto the concrete floor. As soon as he reached it, he saw her at the Temple's

far end and stopped. “Eve!” he called. He had a big smile on his face. “How wonderful to see you.”

She didn’t reply.

He frowned. “I am so sorry, Eve,” he continued, in a quieter voice, “about Richard.” He took a step forward. His arms were opening slightly as if he was about to give her a hug.

“Stay where you are, please. I don’t want you anywhere near me.” Her tone was sharp, cold.

He sighed. “Oh, Eve! After all we’ve meant to each other?”

“Which eye are you going to cry from first, Henrik?”

He shrugged. “Ah yes. I suppose that might make you doubt my, ah, sincerity.” His eyes narrowed. “You said on the phone that your father had agreed to everything. So have you brought all the papers?”

“He did and I have. Do you have all the photos and negatives?”

“I do.” He held up the briefcase he carried—the same one he’d had in the apartment.

She pulled the large manila envelope from her left coat pocket—keeping her other hand wrapped around the object in her right. “There it is,” she said, and then threw the envelope. It skidded across the floor, halfway between them. He came forward, picked it up and drew out the contract. Riffled to the signature page. Smiled. “What did he say, old Bootstraps? I bet he was relieved, eh? A good excuse for helping a cause he believes in?”

“He didn’t speak to me. Wouldn’t, after he saw the two photos you sent.”

“Oh? And they were such, uh, modest ones, really, of both you and Richard. Unlike the ones in here, eh?” He opened the briefcase; shoved the envelope in. Withdrew the one that was already in there, but only halfway. “You know,” he continued, “I was going to give you this. But I think I’ll hang on to it just a little longer. At least until I get a chance to talk with your father. Make sure this signature is genuine.”

She was amazed at how calm she felt. She thought she’d be shaking. Perhaps it was memories of Richard that strengthened her. Perhaps it was because she heard the word “vulgarity” echoing around the Temple. Perfect

for the vulgar man before her. “You know, Henrik, there is such a thing as overplaying your hand.” She shoved her right hand up and forward within her pocket. “Which is why I brought a gun. So drop the briefcase.”

He looked at her face, then down at the bulging pocket, then up to her face again. Then he burst out laughing. “Oh, Eve! You have seen too many gangster movies. You don’t really expect me to believe that you have a gun?”

She studied him for a moment, then nodded. “You are right, Henrik. I don’t.” She pulled out her hairbrush, then nodded over his shoulder. “But he does.”

Erik was standing to Henrik’s right side, about six paces back. He was holding the Browning thrust out in both hands. It was a heavy pistol—one of the lawyer’s arguments he’d used to persuade her that he should be the one doing the shooting. Another was that she’d never shot a pistol before and since he only had the six bullets, there were none spare for practice. She still was determined to try, until she’d conceded that it wouldn’t be his first time killing someone, though it would be hers. “It’s different than you might imagine, when you actually pull the trigger,” he’d told her.

In the end, she’d agreed. The only important thing was that Henrik Ridelsson died.

It silenced Henrik, this man who’d always had an answer for everything. His jaw dropped; his eyes bulged. Erik flicked the pistol. “Put down the briefcase,” he commanded. Still wordless, Henrik did. “Kick it away, to Eve. Good. Now, kneel down, and put your hands behind your neck.”

Henrik obeyed, then spoke at last. “Eve, you can’t—”

“I can.” Eve bent, snatched up the briefcase. The other envelope had the words “Only to be opened in the event of my death” scrawled on it. She ripped it open. Inside were photos, double what he’d brought to the apartment, and negatives too.

“You see!” Henrik leaned toward her. “I kept my word. I brought them all. And I...I...I was only teasing, Eve. Of course, I was going to give them to you now. All of them.”

“Of course you were.” She tucked the envelope back in the briefcase. “And I was only teasing too, Henrik.” She tapped the second envelope. “My father was delayed up north. It’s snowing more there, apparently. He never came back to the office. Never signed the contract. Never saw the photos, which I will now intercept, of course.”

“Eve.” Erik took a step in. “It’s time.”

“Yes.” She looked back at the kneeling man, straight into his eyes. She’d stared into them before, lost in lust. She’d stared into others only recently. Crossed. Dead. Because of this man. She breathed deep. “Off to hell with you now, Henrik.”

“Please! Please, no!” He was weeping now, nothing fake about it. “I beg you!”

Erik moved around until he was standing behind the Swede. Eve thought that she’d watch all of it. But in the end, it was too much, even for her revenge. So as Erik said, “For Norway,” and pulled back the hammer, she turned away—and looked straight into the eyes of an old man.

“Are you making a film?” he asked, his voice a deep boom, the last word echoing around the Temple. At his heels, a large dog, an elkhound, added a bark.

She heard noise behind her, swung back around—to see Henrik grappling with Erik for the gun. “No!” she cried, and ran, swinging the briefcase, catching Henrik hard with a brass corner at the top of his back. He grunted, wrenched—and the gun fell, clattering across the floor. All looked at it, even the old man, who began shouting. Then, instead of lunging for it, Henrik ran.

Erik grabbed the gun, raised, aimed, shot. But just as he did, Henrik slipped on the icy slope, the slip saving him. He lurched up, reached the path, was running again. Erik shot again. Concrete exploded from a giant ornamental vase. A third shot...and this time Henrik fell onto the snow. Yet he was up again immediately, running as fast, cutting right when he reached the avenue of trees. A fourth shot burst bark from an elm, but Henrik kept going, disappearing around the wall of the palace.

“Wha...what the devil!” shouted the old man, waving a walking stick. He was tall, vigorous-looking. His dog was barking furiously now, its echoes loud, snarling as it jerked to the length of its lead.

“Come, Eve!” Erik holstered the pistol.

“No, Erik, we must—”

“What is happening here?” The old man was backing away. His next cry was strangled, but the ones after that came louder, clearer. “Help!” he shouted, running out of the Temple toward the palace. “Police! Help! Help!”

TWENTY-SEVEN

“HELP!”

Snatching up the briefcase, cramming the envelope into it, Eve ran after Erik—the opposite way to Henrik, toward the lake. Shouts and barks faded behind them. It took them less than a minute to reach the water. There was a small jetty there, with rental rowboats tied up near it on the bank. Beached until the summer season got underway.

They stood there, breathing hard, hands on knees. “What...” Eve gasped, “are we going to do?”

“Damn! We...we should have gone the other way, beaten the old man to the road. Too late.” Erik straightened and looked at the rowboats. “What is this?”

“They row here in the summer. I did it with...I did it once.”

“So what’s over there?” He pointed to the opposite shore, which was about two hundred metres away.

“Uh, buildings, um...no, wait! The Riksmuseet is there. Uh, natural history?”

He nodded. “So, people, buses. Get there, we can get into town.” He lifted his right arm. He’d taken off the sling to hold the gun, but she could see it pained him to do so. “Can you row?”

“I can row.”

They flipped a boat over, managed to slide it down the bank, shove its end into the water. While she fetched oars from a rack, he got in; she followed, pushing the boat, sticking one foot in the water to help herself over the gunwale. She began to row. It was a different style of boat from the

one she'd once used in Switzerland, on Lake Lausanne, but she quickly found her rhythm.

They were halfway across the lake when the sirens began.

Erik looked back. "The police must have been nearby. Bad luck for us. He shook his head. "I don't know Stockholm. Where can we go?"

"The hotel on Sankt Eriksgatan?"

"But for how long? They'll be hunting us. That old man? He'd give a description. And he heard our names."

"Did he?"

"We used them to each other."

"Did we? I don't remember."

"We did." He shook his head. "Maybe I should have shot the old man."

She could see he was joking. "You'd probably have missed. You missed Henrik." And she began to laugh. "You'd have missed his dog too."

"You're probably right. I would have missed them both!" He started laughing as well, and they both continued to do so. *It's so absurd*, she thought, *all of it. So completely absurd*. They both stopped simultaneously. "And I didn't miss Henrik. I winged him, for sure."

"Maybe he'll die." She shivered. "But even if he does, the bastard will blab first. Tell his lies. He's good at that."

"He doesn't need to lie much." Erik threw himself back on the seat. "We shot him, a Swedish citizen. The old man is a witness. A diplomat's wife and a Norwegian soldier." He sucked air between his teeth. "We have to get out of the country."

"Norway?"

For a moment, some hope came into his eyes. Then it left fast. "No. It's too far. Besides, the whole country is at war. It would be hard for me, but you? No."

"Maybe you should try. Leave me here. You're right, I am a diplomat's wife. Widow." She swallowed. "The legation here would protect me."

"From attempted murder? I doubt that. And I don't want to leave you to face...whatever is going to happen, alone."

"You don't?"

He looked at her for a long moment, then shook his head.

They were pulling into the shore. She'd spotted a small jetty and aimed for that. Behind them, the one siren had been joined by another. There were also more dogs barking now.

Erik grabbed the dock one handed, she climbed out, secured the boat. They walked up onto a lakeside path. "I think there's only one thing to do," he said. "Make for the docks. Try to find a ship. Stow away or...do you have any money?"

"I do. Quite a bit." She pointed at her rucksack. "But is that safe? Aren't ships being sunk by both sides?"

"Yes, but not usually Swedish ones. Sweden is neutral in this war. They trade with everyone. Make money from everyone."

She heard the bitterness in his voice.

They'd climbed a slope. At its crest she looked ahead, saw the familiar dome of the museum. There were buses outside it. Schoolchildren milled. "Where would we go?" she asked.

"Anywhere a ship will take us. Probably another neutral country first. You have your papers as well as money?"

She nodded.

"I know where I want to go."

"Where?"

"England."

"Why there?"

"To carry on the fight. I think maybe I'll be more use there than"—he waved to the west behind him—"back in Norway now. I could shoot a gun, eventually." He raised his arm and winced. "But if we are to lose this part of the war—as my friend Helmstad believes—then the fightback will start from England."

It was a sudden decision for her, but not a rash one. In all the madness, she was now only certain of one thing. "I'm coming there with you." She laid a hand on his hurt arm. "Because I now know that I must join the fight too. I don't know how. I just know I must." She felt a sharp jab in her

stomach, as if someone was reminding her. “A few things to do first,” she added softly, “but then I must.”

He laid his hand over hers. “Good then,” he murmured. “We are a team.”

He squeezed her fingers, then released her. “Now, let’s go find a bus to take us to the docks. Then a ship to take us...away. I don’t think we have much time.” He jerked his head across the lake, where sirens and dogs had gotten louder. “It will not be easy. We’ll need your money—and a lot of luck.”



A last long blast on the horn and the vessel began to move away from the dock. At last Eve was able to lie back on the bunk and clutch her midriff. She’d had to try to ignore it while they were negotiating. Now it felt like someone was jabbing her abdomen with scissors while her stomach was all compressed, as if knots in cloths were being twisted tighter and tighter, akin to the worst menstrual pains she used to have.

She took deep breaths, tried to distract herself with thought. *Well, we had the luck alright.* Luck to find a ship leaving that night, and a captain—a one-eyed Brazilian named Silveira—happy to ask no questions and only take half her money in exchange for the third mate’s squalid cabin. The money also bought them basic food for the journey as well as his “discretion”—as he reminded them, three times, in broken English, working the word like a terrier.

The foul excuse for food they’d been given appeared to have ravaged her guts. She thought she was going to throw up—and they hadn’t even put to sea yet! She suspected this tramp steamer would not have the stabilizers that the *Empress of Britain* did.

There was no position that she could get into that stopped the roiling. She cried out twice as the pain built, twisting the sheets into ropes on each side. Finally, unable to bear it, she ran for the head at the end of the corridor. Lowered her slacks, hurled herself down. Her bowels emptied but

that didn't truly help because the pain came again immediately, differently, doubled, an undulating throb that had her pressing her hands against the walls of the cubicle, trying to hold back the shriek she knew was about to burst from her. Then, suddenly, it was as if someone had jabbed a bayonet into her lower belly...from the inside. She did scream then, long and loud, whimpers following, fading as there came, eventually, blessedly, a kind of dull relief.

Which lasted until the moment she realized what relief might mean.

She forced herself up—stared down into the bowl. It had already been filthy, stained brown and yellow. But there was red in it too now, a lot of it, clumped. Crying out, her knees gave, she fell forward and, without meaning to, grabbed the chain to halt her fall. There was an immediate flush, the bowl returning to its customary foulness...

And her baby was gone.

She staggered back to the cabin and collapsed onto the bunk. Her belly settled into a throb with the occasional sharp stab thrown in. Then, when the tears finally came, it was as if the dam that had held them back burst and she wept and wept. For Richard. For the child, hers and his, for he had claimed it as his own and it might well have been. She recalled the tenderness in his eye as he talked about “Him. Her. It!” Heard his voice saying it...and the sobs grew louder then as she realized she'd never had the chance to experience any joy that she was going to have a baby. Because at almost the same time she'd found that she was pregnant, her life had gone to hell.

Her cries were almost animal now so she buried them in the filthy pillowcase where only God might hear them.



Erik came back an hour later. He was carrying a hammock, which he slung between hooks at each end of the small space. “Eve?” he whispered.

She didn't want to answer. But maybe it was important. “Yes?”

“I rented this hammock from the money you gave me. Outrageous price, but it’s more comfortable than the deck. Cleaner than that bunk too.” He laid a hand on her arm. “You want it?”

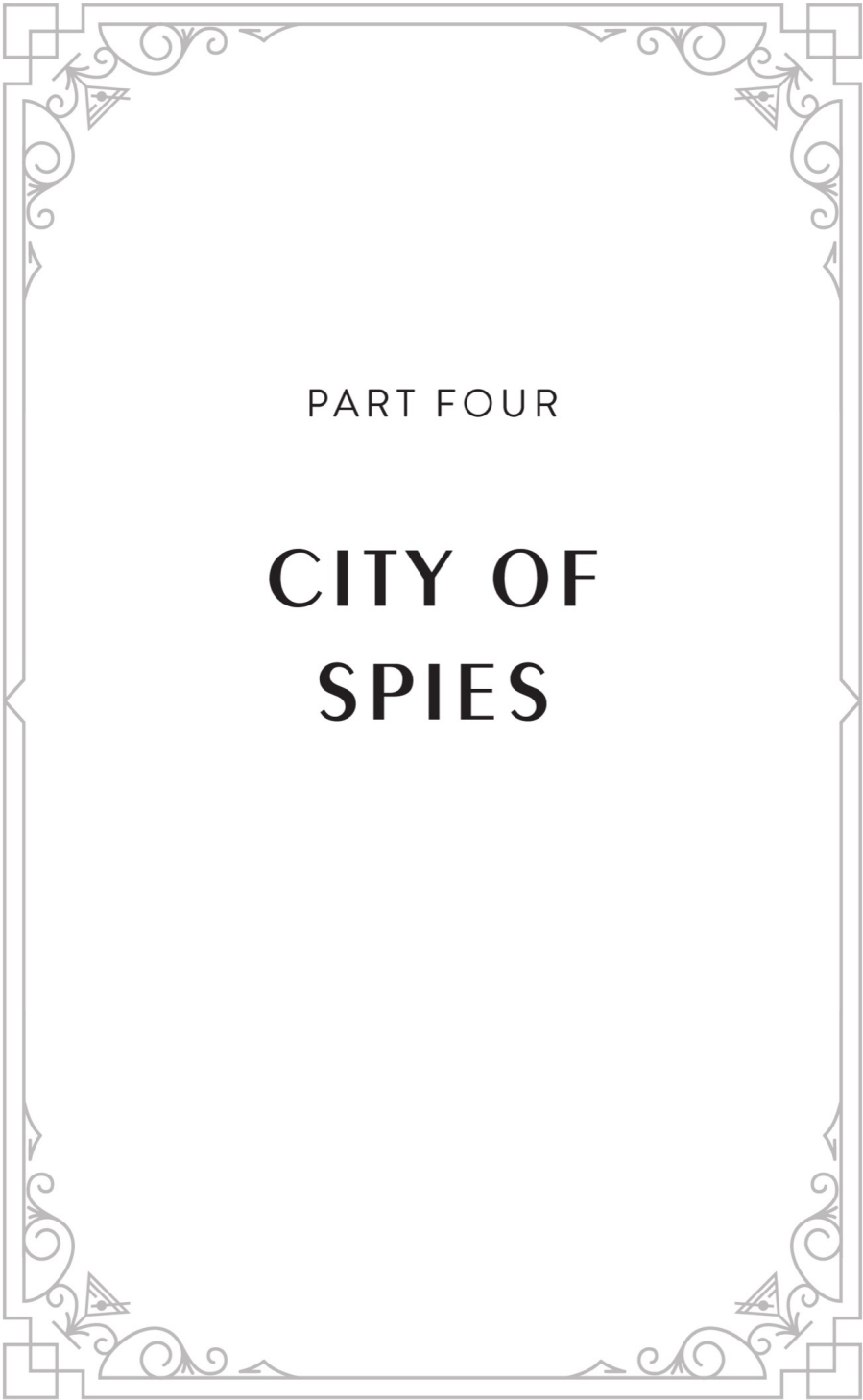
“No.”

“OK.”

She heard him hoist himself in. Grunt as he settled and pulled his coat on top of himself. She hoped he wasn’t going to talk about the voyage—it was the last thing she needed. Besides, he’d hear her tears in her voice, and she didn’t want to talk about the cause of them either. But then she remembered a question she did need to ask, something they’d both failed to ask in the necessities of escape. “Where are we going?”

She thought he couldn’t have heard or had fallen asleep fast. Until his voice came, with one word.

“Lisbon.”



PART FOUR

**CITY OF
SPIES**

TWENTY-EIGHT

Lisbon, Portugal. June 12, 1940

Eve Sinclair stood at the far end of the Palácio Estoril Hotel's long onyx bar, watching the party get wilder and wilder.

In other times, other places, she thought, *it would have been me out there in the bias-cut dress and stiletto heels.* Knocking back the martinis, smoking ciggies from a long holder, laughing uproariously at conversations that would be forgotten by midnight. In Paris, she'd have been at the Georges Cinq; in London, the Savoy. Going on to some nightclub to dance, or to throw money down on the green baize in a casino, like the one at the end of this hotel's garden. Flirting with the handsome young men in their dinner jackets, or their industrialist fathers who were footing the bills. Later to fall between sheer satin sheets at 3 a.m., waking to nurse the hangover with fresh-squeezed orange juice, black coffee and the first cigarette of the day.

Other times, other places...another Eve. That young woman was unrecognizable to her now. In her basic black dress and comfortable shoes. In her practical, pinned-back hair, and makeup that was nothing more than a neutral base. She was not there to be noticed, after all. She was there to serve.

"Martine. Table Seven."

It took her a moment to realize that João, the bar manager, was addressing her. Martine was a name she'd adopted when she'd applied for this job only three days before. She didn't have the papers to prove it. In 1940, Lisbon was crammed with refugees from Europe's wars. Papers were not required for the post of lowly waitress. Only a decent memory, and the

ability to blend into the background. The bar of the Estoril was the domain of high-end prostitutes who had made it clear: no competition from semi-professionals. If the manager and his bosses wanted their share of the proceeds, they had better be careful in their hiring. So Eve, who had shared a table at a café in Rossio Square with Josefina, a waitress already working at the Estoril, had taken her advice and dressed down for the interview: a plain, knee-length dress she'd borrowed, no makeup, hair held in a bun, eyes lowered. Still, João had hesitated. Eve's beauty was hard to conceal entirely. Yet he was short-staffed in a busy week, and the work experience she'd fictionalized swayed him.

"*Senhor,*" she responded, and made her way to Table Seven. She'd visited it once before that evening, was fairly certain she'd know what these people wanted.

She stood silently, waiting to be noticed by the host of the party. He was deep in conversation with a woman wearing Chanel, his eyes fixed on her plunging, well-filled décolletage. If he hadn't already had three of the bar's famous Manhattans, he might have seen what Eve saw: breasts that had been made up to look far younger than they were. That, when they escaped the upthrust bra, would be closer to belly button than neckline. She heard her father's Scottish burr—"Mutton dressed as lamb."

Don't be catty, Eve, she told herself. *The woman's only trying to get by. Much like you.*

Finally, the man noticed her. Rearing back, he began to give his order in his native German, which Eve understood quite well—a year of intense classes at Brillantmont had seen to that. Here, though, she had to pretend she didn't. Proficiency in languages was frowned upon at the Estoril, Josefina had told her. The bar was the main meeting place for the city's legions of foreign spies—and they wished to converse freely in their own tongue. She'd realized the absurdity of this immediately—if a waitress was going to spy on the spies, she would obviously play dumb and pretend she only spoke her native tongue. French was what Eve had claimed to be, and poor in any other tongue apart from having a smattering of English and enough Portuguese to take orders.

So, once again, she shook her head at Herr Berndt Schneider and bobbed an apologetic curtsy. Remembering, he switched to French—slowly, as if speaking to a simpleton. “Three bottles of Laurent Perrier 1928, child.” He bent to lift a long, narrow and empty plate. “And more of these...whatever they are called.”

“Devils on horseback,” the young Portuguese man opposite informed him, his dark hair glistening with oil in the bar’s bright light.

“Exactly. More...devils! Two...no, three devils! They are delicious!” The German let the plate fall and the three women and two men at his table cheered.

“*Monsieur.*” Eve bent her knees again and hurried to the bar. When she stated the order, João, at the bar’s end, gave her a discreet thumbs-up. Cocktails were expensive enough at the Estoril, but Laurent Perrier was outrageous. The manager signalled two waiters to take ice buckets over to the table.

As she waited for the food order, Eve again looked back into the room. Twenty tables packed with well-dressed foreigners, most of whom were making little attempt to keep their voices down. A babel of languages arose. João had pointed out three groups when explaining the clientele, and even after her few days there, she’d become adept at spotting them. There were the businessmen, mainly from Germany or Austria like Schneider, there to make deals with their Portuguese equivalents in one of Europe’s only remaining neutral countries. Furthermore, one rich in natural commodities. She’d heard Schneider talk about something called wolfram. It seemed to be some type of mineral—which, Schneider had said, the Portuguese “had better come through with if they don’t want their shitty little country to become part of the Greater Reich.”

This statement had especially seemed to interest members of the second group João had mentioned. These occupied several of the tables: spies. One of whom, a Brit by his accent, was sitting in immaculate evening dress at the next table to Schneider’s, and, Eve noticed now, pretending not to listen.

It appeared that the Palácio Estoril was Lisbon’s centre of espionage. Neutral Portugal hosted all the spy rivals at this bar’s elegant tables.

Still, the majority of people at them were well-heeled refugees, mostly Jewish. These people had a different look in their eyes from the hawk-like spies. Behind the facade of enjoying themselves lay a core of fear. They had escaped from the countries where the Nazis had seized power—Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria, Germany itself—one step ahead of their persecutors. Now, they needed to move on again—to America, most hoped. The fear was that, despite their wealth, they would not be able to buy the necessary papers, or have their passports stamped with exit visas...before the Nazis arrived there, in Lisbon, as the rumours said they might. They had conquered most of Europe already. Holland and Belgium were beaten, Denmark done, Norway too, France reputed to be falling within days. Having crushed all opposition, why would Hitler stop until the whole continent was flying the swastika?

Every day, hundreds more refugees flooded in, gumming the visa works, delaying the escape of everyone...*including me*, Eve thought, as the champagne was placed on the counter. João came out from behind the bar to carry the bottles himself, to make a fuss of these high-spending customers, leaving her only the six glasses on a tray. She brought them over, dispensed the crystal, curtsied, backed away—leaving the effusive manager to it. Took up her position again at the end of the bar nearest the kitchen's swing doors.

Josefina was already there. "Would it be so bad," her friend whispered—in English, a language they both spoke but had agreed to conceal—"to drink champagne, eat good food, sleep in a beautiful bed and earn twenty times what we earn a night...just for a few minutes lying on one's back?" She nodded at the escorts at the champagne table. All three were not-so-discreetly fondling the men they'd been paired with. The one Eve had focused on before was whispering in Schneider's ear, causing him to bray a laugh then slap the table. Perhaps the woman felt the scrutiny because she looked up—straight at Eve. There was a moment of connection. Eve almost heard her say, *Pretty girl like you? You should listen to your friend*, before she put her smile back in place and laughed as a German hand moved up her thigh.

Eve looked down. *Would it be so bad?* It was not the first time she'd thought it. The money she'd brought from Sweden, after half had gone to their passage, had disappeared fast; while the pittance she was earning, and what Erik was scraping together, bought them only a tiny room in a slum, with barely enough food to get by. She was always hungry—the scraps she filched from customers' plates scarcely making a difference. Her pitiful earnings certainly weren't enough to put any aside for the bribes she'd need to make if she was to get a visa any time before Christmas.

There was another reason she'd considered it. Sex. Between Richard and Henrik, sex hadn't been the wonder she'd always dreamed it would be. When love was present, passion wasn't. When delight was there, betrayal shared the same bed. After all that, reducing it to a business transaction made a kind of sense. She'd have to take precautions, of course, which she assumed prostitutes did. She couldn't get pregnant again. It would end all her plans—to get to England, to take up the fight against Fascism. But it would destroy her, too, if she lost another baby.

So, Eve, she thought, a new career then? What would Mamma think of that?

Her mother's face came to her. Reeling from this, her daughter's latest choice. It made Eve smile—and then suddenly miss her mother, and her old, safe life, very, very much.

She realized that Josefina was still prattling on, something about how she could see herself as a rich man's mistress. Eve rolled her eyes. The plain, dumpy girl had no hope of achieving that dream. *My God, Eve, she thought, how bitchy you've become. I suppose desperation will do that.*

The party swung on. But by 10 p.m. the bar had begun to clear. People were heading off for late suppers, or to hit club and casino. Schneider and his party went...wherever they went—though judging by the leering and fondling, Eve had a pretty good idea.

There was another little surge around eleven—the nightcappers. By midnight, it was over. Eve tidied, taking special care of the ashtrays, dumping the cigarette remainders in a paper bag. As a newcomer, she didn't take much of a share in tips—but at least the butts were hers. She also went

into the kitchen where, in return for a swift fondle of her backside, the fat cook let her slide some scraps into another paper bag.

There was a train heading downtown on the hour through the night. She and Josefina took it to Rossio station where they'd catch their separate trams. Though tonight, Eve decided to save the paltry tram fair and walk to the tenement in Alfama.

The streets were largely empty with the only break to the silence the occasional shriek of a cat in heat or battle, or the equally piercing squeal of taxi wheels spinning over tram tracks. Despite the hot summer night, mist still rose up from the river, giving everything an eerie tinge and shrouding scattered street lamps in grey hoods. If she hadn't been so exhausted, she might have been frightened. Alfama was a rough neighbourhood, day or night. She trudged, clutching her meagre wages in her pocket, wondering if that escort whose eyes she'd gazed into was already asleep between silk sheets, luxuriously fed and liquored up—her short burst of well-paid work done for the night.

Despite her exhaustion, she slowed the nearer she got to her bed. It might be nearly two a.m. but Eve knew Erik would still be awake when she arrived. And he would want to talk—to share the schemes he'd devised during a day that was mainly idle. In a city filled with the unemployed, he was just one more man on the streets, lining up with fifty others whenever a "*Homem Escurado*" sign appeared—but at an immediate disadvantage because he did not speak the language. Still, he tried...anything. And she carried in her purse the means to help fulfill his latest plan.

Her pace slowed even further. "Erik," she murmured. Even though they'd been almost as close as two people could ever be, crammed into a tiny cabin and then tiny rooms these past seven weeks, she wasn't sure she knew him any better than when she'd first tended to his wound in the ski hut. Her Swedish mother had once told her: "Norwegians are like icebergs—most of them are beneath the surface." It wasn't that he didn't talk. Lordy, how he could talk! He was smart, well-educated, opinionated. She'd learned more about world politics in seven weeks than she had in all her years of formal education. He never talked down to her, and she was a

quick study. What she'd begun to feel about the world and its evils, Erik had confirmed for her. As had Henrik Ridelsson, of course.

That was all the tip of the iceberg, though. Beneath? There'd been glimpses, she recalled. When he really laughed, he laughed with his whole being. The ship had had a pet monkey, a macaque named Rodolpho, who had adopted Erik as *his* pet. Groomed him, brazenly stole from him, used him as a tree. Erik had laughed at him, *a lot*, his whole face transforming—looking not the twenty-two-year-old he was, but all of seven. Then something else would happen—a country mentioned, a time, a woman's name—and he would age before her. Twenty-two became fifty in a blink. And the further they got from his Scandinavian home—the closer to his exile—the less the laughter came, the older he looked.

They slept in the same bed. Inevitably they touched. Yet there was zero heat in it. Like brother and sister, she thought, descending the last precipitous flight of stairs that led to their street.

Most of the time she was fine with that. Her lovers, all two of them, still haunted her. Sometimes she believed that she'd never let herself fall in love again—it came at too great a price. Though on occasion, she'd be dreaming...of sunlight coming through pine trees, dappling the grass where she lay, the firm touch of a hand on her thigh. Then she'd wake up...and there was Erik lying next to her, pressed against her at various points and...and more than once she'd nearly put her hand on *his* thigh. Yearned to lose herself in that dream.

She never had yielded to that yearning...*and I never will*, she thought, stopping to look up at the apartment block where she lived. On each of the five floors, chunks of plaster had fallen away from the facade, exposing the dull grey concrete beneath. The main entrance was columned in *azulejos*, the blue tiles that adorned and brightened so many of the city's buildings. Most here were cracked, some were missing entirely—all were begrimed, their designs mostly no longer distinguishable. Almost every window had at least one cracked pane, with broken shutters smeared with the sandy dirt that coated so much of Lisbon. From the entrance hall wafted the scent of long-established damp, of blossoming mould. Something else tonight too—

the acrid tang of urine. No doubt the ground floor's single toilet was blocked again.

"Home Sweet Home," Eve muttered. She couldn't face the interior stairwell, climbing five floors up through darkness and that perfumed miasma. There was a rickety wooden stair that ran up the outside; it was missing steps, others were rotten; but at least she'd be able to see by the light of a moon half full and breathe air that carried salt in it from the ocean.

Wearily, she began to climb.

TWENTY-NINE

ERIK SAT BACK, and the room's only chair protested in creaks and snaps.

He'd have to be careful; he'd broken it once already. Now it was held together more by twine than tongue-and-groove. Break it fully and he'd have to do his work on the bed, which would be awful; his back and neck hurt enough already from his leaning for hours over his "table," the windowsill.

He looked down at the "fruit of his labours," as he liked to think of it. Where was the phrase from? A psalm? His mother could have told him. He would have known once; but he'd largely forgotten the old religion once he'd adopted the new one of political action. Weren't you meant to "eat" the fruit of your labour? He examined the one hundred cigarettes he'd rolled. He definitely didn't want to do that—despite his stomach's almost unceasing growl of hunger. *I'll smoke one, though*, he thought. He placed one in his mouth, struck a match, inhaled deeply. The scent that rose wasn't too harsh. It was even slightly sweet. But that was just luck—or more likely the fact that Eve was bringing back butts from a higher class of establishment than the cafés where he'd rooted for "fag-ends," as his British friends in the Student Federation had called them. His first stock of fag-ends had emerged entirely from the garbage cans of Alfama—along with a stench he feared he'd never entirely get out of his clothes.

He rolled one more to make up for the one he was smoking. While he did, he calculated. One hundred cigarettes to fill the five packets he had from those same garbage cans—two blue packets, two red, one yellow—all the favourite local brand, Português Suave, all featuring the famous Belém Tower on the Tagus River.

Five packets. Once he'd prettied them up, made them look like new, he could sell each one for six *escudos*—five if he wanted to undercut the stores. So twenty-five *escudos* for three hours of work. What was that in US dollars, the only currency the Lisbon black market really cared about? Nearly one. Nearly one whole dollar. One quarter of what he and Eve paid per month for this shitty room.

He picked up the newspaper he'd salvaged earlier, ignoring the oily stain that was beginning to whiff of sardine. On their ten-day voyage down from Stockholm, he'd made sure he learned some Portuguese from Captain Silveira. As long as he matched him rum for rum, the deranged one-eyed skipper was happy to talk and teach. But in this case Erik didn't need to understand too many words—the graphics here were clear enough. Huge black arrows across the map of Europe displayed the successes of the Nazi juggernaut: the British driven back across the channel from a place called Dunkirk. Most of France fallen. And Norway...

Erik looked up at the grimy windowpanes, not seeing them—seeing instead the large, black symbol emblazoned on the map of his homeland. His country had finally given up the heroic fight and formally surrendered two days before. Their flag had been taken down. The swastika flew everywhere. *At least we lasted longer than the French*, he thought, wiping his eyes clear of the tears that had suddenly appeared. Part of him still yearned to be back home, even though the war was over. *One war*, he reminded himself. Another had begun to rid his land of the evil that had overtaken it. How could he join that?

He looked at the map. There was only one place in northern Europe where the swastika did not fly. England. That was where he had to go. That was where he could sign up for the fight. And all he needed for that was a shit-ton of money. He laughed—because what else could he do? When he'd asked a Portuguese clerk who worked for the Brits what bribe would be needed to put his application somewhere near the top of the visa queue, to maybe get it back in a week, the answer was fifty US dollars. Or...

"Half a month of rolling fucking cigarettes," he muttered. "If I can keep getting the tobacco. If I don't eat, drink, sleep..."

He slumped back. It was double that, of course. Two bribes were needed—two visas. Because he wasn't going anywhere without Eve, whose own paltry earnings might keep the roof over their head, some stale bread on their...windowsill!

Eve. Where was she? He looked at his watch. Just past two a.m. His stomach grumbled again, as if on cue. Eve had brought back scraps from the hotel's kitchen the last two nights, as well as fag-ends. He just prayed she would again. The fruits of *her* labour.

Eve. When she returned, they'd talk a little, scheme some more. Then lie down on the single bed, feet to each other's head. Inevitably they'd touch at different points. Then he'd lie there, listening to her breathe. Yearning.

For what, you damn fool?

He shook his head. He'd tried again and again to use his law student's mind to break it down into components.

There was sex, of course—plain and simple. Eve was attractive. Yet her charm wasn't only in her physique, her face. It was also in her manner. She was a bold woman, determined. The way she'd decided to kill that Nazi bastard! The way she'd hit him with that briefcase in the Temple of Echo!

Yet she could also act her age—nineteen, still almost a girl. There was that time aboard the ship, a week into the voyage, when Rodolpho had snatched the cigarette from his mouth and Erik had chased the monkey all over the aft deck, the beast always just teasingly out of reach. How she'd laughed! How he'd played up the outraged pursuer because he'd never heard her laugh before and he suddenly liked the sound of it so very much.

The only time he'd touched her, other than by accident, was when she woke up crying from a nightmare. Then she'd let him hold her for a while as she wept—for her dead husband, her ruined life. There was so much about her he didn't know. She hadn't told him why she'd wanted to kill the Nazi bastard; only that he held photographs she needed back. Hadn't told him how her husband had died. But he could see that she'd suffered. Then, in the moments of her grief, he remembered his. Remembered Aleksandra. So beautiful. So fiery, by day and by night. And when he remembered her,

he wept as well. Silently though, and with his face turned away, so Eve wouldn't hear.

And that is the final thing that keeps Eve and me apart, he thought. Because there are never just two people in those tiny beds. There are four. Two of them may be ghosts, but it doesn't make it any less crowded.

He heard her then, the object of his musings, in the creak of the external stairwell. Sweeping up the cigarettes, he dropped them into the old fedora he'd found on the street one night. She'd need to step on the windowsill to enter.

"Hello." She peered in, and he reached a hand to her to help her through. When she stepped onto the floor, he let go of her and took the purse she proffered. "Cigarettes?"

"And something else." She sat on the edge of the bed, peeled off her shoes, groaned as she rubbed her feet through her nylons which, he saw, had new holes across several of the toes.

He reached into the purse and pulled out two paper bags. One, from its weight, contained what he needed for his "factory." The other was heavier and had... "Ah," he grunted. "Thank you." Pulling out half a bread roll, and the gristly, fatty rind of a steak, he ate, making little noises in his throat.

She smiled. "Like that, do you?"

He grinned, then replied with his mouth still full. "Don't think I've ever tasted anything better."

Though they could converse in "Scandinavian"—she spoke Swedish, he Norwegian, the languages so close they could understand each other perfectly—they mostly spoke English. His was good but he wanted it to be even better to prepare for their hoped-for destination.

"Well then you've led a very impoverished life, Erik." She tapped the newspaper on the bed beside her. "What's the news?"

It was almost the first question everyone asked anyone these days. Eve had also gotten into the habit when she returned; Erik gave her a summation, and often an opinion, before sleep took her. So now he leaned in and fingered the map. "Not much different. Nazis everywhere. The

French are beaten—will surrender any day. Especially now Italy has invaded France too—”

“Italy declared war?”

“Yes. Late in the game. Mussolini was so jealous of Hitler’s successes, he wanted some Fascist glory too.”

“I see.” She studied the map. “So the Germans have also reached the Pyrenees. Will they cross them?”

“Perhaps. But why? Franco in Spain is already Hitler’s little poodle. He might goad the Generalissimo to invade here, though. From what I’ve heard on the street, it’s what the Portuguese fear.”

“So where is his attention now, Der Führer?”

Erik put his forefinger on the map again. “England.”

“Mightn’t they also make peace?”

“Maybe. But I doubt it. Have you heard that Churchill fellow speak? There’s part of a speech here. They printed it in English and Portuguese.” He picked up the paper, flicked through to an inner page, cleared his throat. ““We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.””

“But weren’t leaders saying that in Poland? In France?” She yawned. “Oh, excuse me. So England’s on the edge. Yet you still think that’s where we should go?”

“Where else?”

“America. Most of the refugees here are heading there or trying to.”

He shook his head. “Too far from the fight for me. Besides, I don’t believe England will fall. So they’ll need people to help drive Hitler and his thugs out of Europe.” He leaned closer, nearly took her hand—but didn’t. “But I said before, Eve, and I say again: you should go to America. From there, home to Canada. To safety. To your family. Contact them.” He looked around at the room. “You could be clear of this palace with a phone call.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because”—she reached into his fedora, pulled out two cigarettes, put them between her lips, lit them, then passed one to him—“we don’t know what they believe about me there. Perhaps I am known as an attempted murderer. I am certainly a widow. A tragic one, at that. I worry about my parents. I know they’ll be desperate but—” She inhaled deeply. “Nope. Back home, they’d either stick me in jail or wrap me in cotton wool. Besides”—she smiled at him—“it’s too far from the fight.”

They smoked in silence for a little then. When she stubbed out her cigarette, he thought she was going to say what she usually did at this point: *Good night*. Instead, she said, “So, I’ve been considering a way we can earn the money we need much quicker.” Then she told him what she’d considered in the bar of the Palácio Estoril Hotel.

“You’d...you’d do that?”

“I don’t think it’s that big a deal. As my friend Josefina said—”

“It *is* that big a deal! Of course it is! Apart from the danger—”

“Not so much. These guys are usually drunk and—”

“Violent. Drunk and violent. Besides—”

“Erik, we need the m—”

“*Besides*, if you are considering a life of crime, there are better paying crimes than...than that one.”

“Such as?”

“Such as robbery. You don’t need to sleep with these men, Eve. Not when you can steal from them.”

“Hmm.”

She looked above him then, reaching absent-mindedly into the fedora. *Damn*, he thought, *that’s three more I need to roll tonight. No, four*, he corrected himself as he delved in too.

He lit them both and she looked at him again. “What’s wolfram?” she asked.

“What?”

“Wolfram. What is it?” She took in smoke, letting some escape her mouth, then sucking it up her nose. “There was a German at the bar tonight, throwing money around. I overheard him talking about wolfram. I think it’s

a mineral? He was boasting about how the Third Reich would corner the market.”

“Yes, wolfram is a, ah, a mineral, of a kind. I think you may call it tungsten.”

“Oh, I’ve heard of that. My father mines that in Canada. Never asked him what it was for.”

“I believe it is used to harden metals.” He ran his hand through his hair. “All armies need it. To strengthen the armour on their tanks. To tip their bullets and bombs.”

“So it’s vital?”

“I am not an engineer but, yes, I would think it’s vital in war.”

“Is there a lot here? In Portugal?”

“I don’t know. I suspect, though, that if that man is here to ‘corner the market,’ then yes.”

“And like every other deal in Portugal, that will require a lot of bribery funds, yes?”

“Yes.” He suddenly smiled. “Eve, are you thinking what I am thinking?”

“Probably. After all, you did suggest that if we were to embark on a life of crime, we should start big.”

“I did. This is not really crime, though. Stealing from the enemy is our duty. It is also a way to get back into the fight!” He threw back his head and laughed. “My God, Eve, you are brilliant!”

“It has been said.” She grinned. “All we need to do now is find a suitable mark, eh? Can’t be hard in Lisbon, surely?” She took a last drag then stubbed out her cigarette, looked at him through her smoky exhalation, before reaching into the fedora again to draw out a solo cigarette. “You’re the soldier, Erik. You must make a plan while I smoke this last one—but out there!” She gestured to the stairs beyond the window, waved her hand, disturbing the clouds that had taken over the tiny space. “I won’t be able to get to sleep in this fog, otherwise.”

She stepped over the windowsill, out onto the small platform that was part of the exterior stairs. He took her hint and resisted, didn’t light up

himself. Looked down at the map instead. Suddenly, he saw more than swastikas there. Saw...possibilities.

He was so absorbed in those that it took him a while to realize what the sounds were—heavy footsteps, running up the inner stairs. He just managed to hiss, “Hide, Eve,” before the door was kicked in.

THIRTY

EVE HEARD THE HISS, obeyed, didn't move—wasn't sure she'd be able to even if she wished it. Because the first voice she heard was harsh, deep. Speaking German, but with a Portuguese accent. "Sit down, you little fucker!"

"Why? Who are you? What—"

Erik's reply was cut off by the sound of a blow—a gasp of air forced out. "I said, sit down! Oh, you have, good!" The man switched to Portuguese, saying something fast she didn't catch. But it was clear what the order was because whoever had received it began breaking things.

She risked a look, a quick lean in then back. The glance had told her enough. The two strangers were both in black coats and wide-brimmed hats. The man searching was small, scrawny. The man standing in front of the chair on which a doubled-over Erik sat was huge—tall and wide with it. He was holding something black, about six inches long. A cudgel.

Shit.

She leaned back against the loose plaster of the wall. She knew who they had to be: members of the Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado. PVDE. The secret police. She'd heard whispers about them. People only spoke of them in whispers. Josefina had told Eve of a brother, a Communist like all in her family, who'd tried to organize a strike at the docks against the terrible working conditions. He'd been taken in the night and returned two months later having lost almost half his weight and sustained a fractured skull. The PVDE were a tyranny's enforcers. Other whispers told that they were modelled on the Nazis' Gestapo. Many had been trained by them too, in Germany.

Perhaps this one had been. His German was flawed but good. Eve didn't move but suddenly saw movement. In the cracked mirror that leaned against the wall inside the room, she caught a glimpse of the man bending forward. The huge officer jammed the cudgel under Erik's chin, began lifting his face. Eve caught a gasp in her throat.

The officer spoke again, his voice dropped to a whisper, but like something in a theatre. Dramatic, meant to be heard. "Oh, by the way... Henrik Ridelsson says hello."

Eve put a hand to her mouth, covering the gasp that this time she couldn't help.

The man didn't hear, too focused on the pain he was inflicting as he forced Erik's head back. "Where's the girl, shithead? I was told there was a girl." In the mirror, Eve saw him grin. "I was looking forward to meeting her. I was told she was pretty. How did the Swede say it? 'A real spitfire, yes?'"

"Please, sir." It was Erik who spoke now, but his voice was high-pitched, quavering. "Please don't hurt me."

"Ha! I was also told you were a lion. 'Please don't hurt me!'" he mimicked, then turned to his comrade who had searched the little that was there and was now standing, hands on hips. "A cowardly lion, eh? Like in that movie."

The other officer laughed—but he stopped when Erik came out of the chair, seized the hand that held the cudgel, bent the wrist sharp and sudden against its inclination. The big man yelped, dropping down to save his wrist snapping. The other man grunted and reached to his armpit inside his black coat. But Erik had the cudgel now and he threw it hard, striking the man in the face. He shrieked, falling backwards.

But Erik had had to let go of the big man...who now came off the floor and drove his fist in an uppercut into Erik's stomach. When he collapsed at the waist, the man stood fast and swept his knee up into the Norwegian's face. Erik went over backwards, landing on the chair, snapping it—man and shattered wood falling to the ground.

“Little fucker!” The big man was breathing heavily, holding his right wrist in his left hand. “I think the little fucker’s broken my hand. Gomes, you OK?”

The other man got onto his knees. His hand obscured his face. From behind it he said something, his voice liquid. From the amount of blood, Eve thought his nose was broken. But she was now too busy to confirm that, since she was delving into a cavity in the crumbling plaster beside the window.

Perhaps his German wasn’t so extensive. “Little fucker,” he said for the fourth time. “Oh, you are in for a time now.” He tried to rotate his wrist, winced. “But not here. I’m going to take you down to HQ. Ouch, fucker! Gomes, give me the handcuffs. Gomes!” He must have forgotten that his subordinate hardly spoke German, repeated it in Portuguese. Turned away when he did.

Which is when Eve came through the window, preceded by the Browning pistol. “*Hände hoch*,” she said.

Both agents turned to her. The looks on their faces were almost comical. Neither moved to obey her. But neither used their hands to reach for their weapons either. “The girl,” the bigger man whispered. “Not so pretty.”

Without taking her eyes from them, she bent and put a hand on Erik. “You OK?”

He rolled onto his back. “Ah. Just, yes. OK.” He came up to sitting. His eyes were teary. “Ah,” he gasped, rubbing his stomach.

“Little girl.” The bigger agent had started to lower his hands. “Give me that gun. You are in enough trouble already.”

“I don’t think so.” She put her second hand over her first, which had begun to shake with the Browning’s weight. “Erik, get their guns.”

He rolled onto his knees, spat, then rose unsteadily, picking up the cudgel on the way.

“You fools,” the big agent growled at them. “We are PVDE. The police!” Erik reached into the man’s armpit, drew out his Luger, threw it on the bed. “Give up before you make this even worse for yourselves.”

Erik didn't reply; just went to the smaller man who had sunk onto his knees, blood flowing copiously from his nose onto his chest. He had a gun—and something else, which Erik raised up to Eve. Two sets of handcuffs. He looked down. "Keys," he demanded. The man groaned as he fished in a pocket, extracting a steel ring with half a dozen keys on it.

Despite using both hands, her gun was visibly shaking now. She knew the big agent had noticed—saw his small eyes narrowing in calculation. But they widened again when a small click came from beside him.

Erik now had a gun in his hand as well, its safety off—and the Luger wasn't shaking at all. "Sit over there," he ordered, jerking the barrel to the wall by the door. "Against the radiator." The agent shrugged, sank down. When his comrade didn't follow him, didn't seem to understand, Erik nudged him with his foot. The man crawled then to slump beside his colleague, leaning against him as if for protection.

"Eve, come closer. If they move, shoot them."

She came nearer, turning the smashed chair onto its side and resting her hands on it. Erik grabbed the handcuffs, found the right keys, snapped one tight over the bigger man's wrist—his pained wrist; he moaned as it clasped him. Then Erik passed the free cuff through the radiator's grill before snapping it over the man's other wrist, tugging the whole hard for strength, eliciting another groan. Then he did the same for the smaller man. Done, he stepped back and regarded them.

"Are you mad?" The bigger agent stared up, his eyes furious. "We'll get free, and we'll track you down. We'll have you in our cells. We'll—"

His words were cut off by Erik stepping in and putting the Luger's barrel in the centre of the man's forehead. "You're right. I should kill you. For what you wanted to do here. For my country." His voice was calm. "One less Nazi in the world."

At last, the man's bravura broke. "Please!" he whispered. "Please do not."

Eve watched Erik. Watched the knuckle of his trigger finger whiten. "Erik?" Her voice was soft. He turned to her. "Do you think it's a good idea?"

The knuckle coloured again. He drew back the gun. “No,” he sighed. “But we do need a head start.” He laid the gun down on the bed. “Help me?”

He bent to the big man, undid the laces of his shoes and pulled them both off. Eve, seeing what he was up to, went to the smaller man, did the same. Socks followed shoes—then belts, trousers. “Heh—” The main agent started to speak...stopped when Erik shoved one long sock into his mouth, then wrapped the other one round and tied it tight to secure the gag. Eve did the same on the smaller agent. Bubbles appeared at his bloodied nostrils but she could see he was still getting enough air not to choke.

Done, Erik reached into the man’s jacket pocket and pulled out a wallet. He flicked it open. “Well, Agent Félix.” He extracted bank notes. “Thank you for the donation.” Gomes’s wallet yielded less. He stuffed the wallets into the trousers’ pockets, threw them over the railing of the outer stair, then turned to Eve, speaking a single word: “Pack.”

It didn’t take long. They didn’t have much. They put on most of their clothes, leaving the most tattered behind. At the last, Erik lifted the fedora and tipped the fruits of his labour onto the bed, bending to snatch up a dozen and drop them into his coat pocket. He caught Eve’s querying look. “Agent Félix paid for them,” he said in Norwegian. “Besides, after this we’ll need to speed up our earning. We won’t have a lot of time now.”

He picked up his canvas bag, now heavy with the agents’ guns. Eve raised her small suitcase—as well as the briefcase she’d brought from Sweden, which she’d taken from another man. She looked at it, then down at the two men. Spoke in Swedish. “Shouldn’t we ask them about Henrik Ridelsson? Their connection?”

“I think it’s clear. Nazis the world over helping each other. Though how he learned we were in Lisbon is another matter. Silveira was returning to Stockholm on his ship. Maybe they questioned him?” He glanced at the gagged men. “Doesn’t matter really. We have other priorities now.”

The men stared at them, fury in their eyes. Erik and Eve closed the door on them, descending the five flights to the street. Three a.m., and deserted

at last, save for a cat that was eating something in a gutter and hissed as they approached.

They stopped. “Now where?” Erik asked.

“You mean you haven’t worked that out?”

Erik grinned. “I’ve been busy. And I think I may have used up all my invention up there.” He put down his bag, winced as he straightened, touched the bruise on his jaw, then his chest. “Also I think that big fucker may have busted one of my ribs. Do you know of somewhere? Someone we can trust. For a couple of nights at least?”

She considered. She didn’t really know many people. They’d decided that in Lisbon, this city of spies, contacts meant peril, betrayal. Then she remembered. “Josefina,” she said. “She’s in the Bairro Alto. She might. For a little money, anyway, she might.”

“Well, we have that now.” He picked up his case and began walking. As Eve fell into step beside him, he said, “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For back there. For being so...bold.”

“Bold?” She laughed. “I think I pooped my pants.”

He laughed too. “That makes two of us, then. Still...” He stopped, found her eyes. “We make a good team, Eve Spence, you and I.”

She looked back. “We do, Erik Strom. We do.” They stared at each other for a moment. Then both looked away and she started walking again. “But will we make good thieves?”

“That,” he said, catching up, falling into stride, “is what we need to learn. And pretty damn fast, I’d say.”

They fell silent then, each lost to their own thoughts—their heels clicking on the mist-damp cobbles of Lisbon.

THIRTY-ONE

Lisbon. June 13, 1940

AT ELEVEN A.M., the Chave d'Ouro café was its usual buzzing self. As at every café around Rossio Square, every table was taken, from those under the awnings at the front windows to those right down to the curb. White-shirted, black-aproned waiters—the drones of the hive—moved fast through the crowd, servicing the queens.

And the kings, thought Eve, though now she knew she was muddling up her entomology, which she was prone to do. Her high school biology teacher, Mrs. Fremantle, had consistently threatened to fail her because of it. There were no kings in a hive. Yet there were so many on this patio—almost one per table, each holding court. The few queens around were all staring at the passing play with the glazed eyes of the bored.

Eve was not bored—not at all. Ever since Berndt Schneider, the man she'd overheard talking about wolfram the previous night at the Estoril, had arrived at the café, joined at his table by three prosperous-looking Lisboetas, she knew she'd found what she sought: a mark. She'd felt heat immediately—every sense heightened. Including her sense of absurdity. *What are you playing at, Eve Spence née Sinclair?* she asked herself. *Acting the spy?* When she realized that what she was doing was “eavesdropping” she had to walk away to stifle her giggles. *“Eve’s dropping?” Really?*

She contrived to pass near Schneider's table as often as possible, and hover, without appearing to do so. Each time she came with a cover purpose. The men chain-smoked as they talked and their ashtrays filled fast. She had grabbed a small bucket from just inside the café's main door which she emptied their butts into—even though this time she knew she was not

going to save any for Erik. She was dressed in her shabby waitress dress anyway—and none of the real staff paid her any mind. She took her time, moving slowly, but the men at Schneider’s table did not notice her, too intent on their conversation, which was conducted in German. Words, many familiar now, were often repeated: “wolfram,” “tungsten,” “bullets” and “bombs.”

On her first visit, the men were friendly with each other. On her second, Schneider was lecturing, and she caught the bombast of the conqueror, together with the threat of the bully: *accede or suffer*. The Portuguese looked glum. On her third visit, though, they had cheered up. Money was being discussed, and whatever sums had been mentioned for the purchase of minerals had brightened all their days. As she emptied their ashtrays, she heard Schneider use a word she thought she knew but couldn’t quite remember the meaning of: “*Bestechungsgelder*.” But she figured out what it meant quite quickly when he corrected himself. “I mean commission, of course. A healthy commission,” the German said, beaming. “You must all come and dine with me at the Palácio Estoril tonight. The, ah, commission will be waiting.”

She walked away then, aware of one waiter’s stare; she’d lingered a little too long. Putting the bucket down on the curb, she dodged between a couple of taxis and crossed the square, passing Dom Pedro the Fourth atop his column without a glance. Soon she was in the first of the twisting stairways and alleys of the Bairro Alto, heading to Josefina’s. Still excited.

“*Bestechungsgelder*,” she whispered, drawing out each German syllable. It meant bribes, of course. Those Portuguese businessmen were going to collect theirs tonight at the Palácio Estoril. By the avarice on their faces, they weren’t expecting anything small.

I’ve done my part, Erik Strom, she thought, turning into the tenement’s entrance. *Over to you.*



Lisbon Docks—12:00 p.m.

One of the few times he'd actually been hired as an "*Homem Escurado*," Erik had spent two days unloading sugar sacks on these wharves. Twelve hours, few breaks, every sinew strained, the scarcely healed wound in his arm reminding him of its rawness with fire. He'd taken his shirt off and the supervisor who'd hired him, a man named Sampaio, had noticed the wound, then laughingly compared it with his own: a jagged line that ran through the side of his ample belly. He'd been a merchant seaman, spoke some German, English and French, which he mixed freely. Both men claimed they'd been shot in hunting accidents. Both knew the other lied.

Erik spotted that same man sitting on a stack of pallets, spitting sunflower husks and chewing the seeds. He was supervising a crane bringing boxes off a rusted bucket of a steamer flying the Liberian flag. "Oh look, the Viking's back!" he said as Erik approached. "Sorry, I got no work for you today, *parceiro*. Even if I did, fucking Communists keep making me hire a comrade."

"Not looking for work." Erik took off his fedora, wiped sweat from his forehead on a sleeve. "Got something to sell."

"Try a pawnshop." The man sent a sunflower husk sailing past Erik's ear. "Though from the look of you, you got nothing left to sell but your ass. And that ain't going to fetch two *escudos*!" No one around Sampaio spoke the strange polyglot of languages he did, so he laughed at his own joke.

"Can't go to a pawnshop with this." Erik lifted his shirttail. Stuck in his waistband was a Luger.

"*Mãe de Deus!*" exclaimed the man, rising from the pallet, looking all around before stepping down. "What the fuck you have there?"

"Luger. Latest model, fresh from Germany." He dropped his shirttail back. "Want it?"

"What you asking?"

"Five hundred *escudos*."

"Fuck a goat! You think I have that kind of money?"

"No. But you know people who do." He leaned in and whispered, "Your fucking Communist friends, perhaps?"

“Ha!” The Portuguese stood back, studying Erik. “They might.” He put another seed in his mouth, spat out the husk, chewed. “Why them? You like them? You want this world revolution too?”

Erik disliked Communists only a little less than Fascists. Disliked anyone trying to impose their views on him. But he knew he needn’t say that. “The two days I worked here, they took ten percent of my wages in their ‘dues.’ I’d like some of it back.”

“That’s fair.” Above his head, the crane was lowering another pallet of sacks. “Take a break!” he shouted, and the crane man put his load on the ground then got out of his cab. Sampaio took Erik by the arm, began to lead him away. “You got the balls to deal with them?”

“We’ll see.”

“Tell you what, Viking.” He slipped his arm around Erik’s shoulders. “How about you cut me in? I’ll get you the best price.”

Erik considered. He didn’t really speak much Portuguese. Besides, Sampaio was a wily old fox. “Tell *you* what, *companheiro*. Anything you can get over one thousand escudos, you can keep.”

“Ay! You said five hundred before!”

“Five hundred for this one,” Erik replied, patting the lump at his belly, “and another five hundred for this one.” He swivelled slightly, lifting his untucked shirttail again, this time at the back, before dropping it over the second Luger once the man had seen it.

“*Mãe de Deus!*” exclaimed Sampaio. “I think you are a real Viking, Viking.”

He steered Erik toward a warehouse. “Their leader is in there. Emilio Santos. Fought in Russia with the Bolsheviks, they say. Stupendously big balls. He likes guns.” He stopped at the door. “So everything over nine hundred I keep, yes?”

“Everything over one thousand. I’ve asked around and if I could wait, I’d probably get a thousand for each. He’ll know that. But I am in a hurry.” He reached up and took Sampaio’s arm as he was about to go in. “One thing more. I need a gun back.”

“What gun?”

“Something small. Like a Liliput. Or a derringer.”

“What, you cowboy as well as Viking?” He scratched his thick stubble, the noise like sandpaper in a woodshop. “I know some guys carry them. Easy to hide, no?” He shrugged. “We’ll see. Come on.”

He led Erik in. A group of men were standing around a crate, a newspaper spread out upon it. On its masthead was a red hammer and sickle. “Comrade Santos,” Sampaio said, throwing his arms wide, “have I got a deal for you!”

THIRTY-TWO

Estoril Beach—4:00 p.m.

FOR ONE LAST, LONG MOMENT, Eve stretched out on the surface of the ocean, letting her mind go blank. Simply enjoying the rise and fall of the waves, the salt on her lips, the heat of the sun on her exposed skin, the coolness beneath. There were those who could float and those who could not. Eve was a floater—could have medalled if it were an Olympic sport.

When was the last time, she wondered, then remembered. She and Richard had arrived in Stockholm in September and had caught the very last fling of summer. Friends at the legation had suggested a boat trip to Vaxholm, one of the hundreds of islands that surrounded the city like a scattering of jewels. She'd swum then, floated of course, though truly the temperature of that water had not allowed this much lingering.

Richard, she thought, a sudden jab in her stomach. She dropped her legs, gazed back at the shore. She'd swum out quite far, something else she loved to do. Away from the world, its pressing needs. Cleansed by salt and sun, in a way she hadn't been for some time. Cheap cold-water apartments did not allow for more than a nightly sponge bath.

Cleansed in mind too. Ready.

She started in, employing the powerful Australian crawl she'd learned at nine years old. Closer to the beach the waves were breaking—not Biarritz-strong, not Saint-Jean-de-Luz, both of which she'd bodysurfed, though she'd heard that, on their day, Portuguese waves could rival the world's best. But she was still able to catch one, stroking fast just ahead of it, riding it until her belly slid along the sand.

She stood. As the same wave sucked at her ankles, willing her back, she studied the crowded beach of the Palácio Estoril Hotel. She could just see the hotel's gabled roof at the top of the slope, surrounded by trees: cedars of Lebanon, holm oaks, some kind of pine. The band of sand ran about four hundred metres, ending in a round martello tower to her right; at the other end, to her left, an elegant beach café sat atop a rise of rock.

There were a lot of people before her. But like at most resorts in Europe, they were marshalled, organized. Two rows of sideless canvas pavilions ran the length of the beach. Before them on the sand children played—watched by buttoned-up, black-swathed grandmothers or nannies in the shade. Nearby men and women sunbathed, or hit shuttlecocks at each other with badminton racquets, or small hard balls with wooden bats. White-coated waiters from the open-air cafés at the back plied the sand with trays of lime and lemon long drinks in glasses that ran with condensation, and French-bread sandwiches thick with cheese and meats.

Despite the crowd, it was still easy to spot both the bodyguards—and the spies.

The former were heavily muscled, all with large, oiled pectorals and bulging biceps. They appeared to have a uniform: tiny briefs and sunglasses. All had the same watchful gaze, studying the frolicking kids and adults for threat. The spies, conversely, were clothed, and sitting apart at tables on the periphery, where they nursed small cups of coffee. Eve assumed their government allowances didn't allow for a better table or the purchase of one of those long, cool drinks. They watched and sweated and gossiped with each other, as she had observed them doing on the nights she worked at the hotel bar.

There was another, smaller group also doing business on the beach. The Ladies. The professional ones. The hotel charged anyone not a guest quite a large sum to swim and sun on its sand. This kept the street whores away—leaving the same high-end escorts who worked the bar at night.

Of whose number I am now one, Eve thought, pulling the top of her bathing suit up. It was one of the items she'd purchased earlier that afternoon, when Erik returned flush from the docks and they'd both gone to

the elite persons' pawnshops near Rossio Square. Formerly affluent, now desperate, refugees fleeing war had filled the racks of such places. She was quite sure that this bathing suit had last been seen in the summer of '39 somewhere on the Côte d'Azur. It was a maillot, a one-piece, made by Neyret in silk jersey. So it mostly clung very nice and tight where it was meant to. Only around its top was it a little loose—which, for her purposes, Eve had decided was not such a bad thing.

She'd caught the attention of a few men and teenage boys playing in the surf's edge. Now, as she walked toward where she knew Berndt Schneider was sitting, she drew more looks. She moved slowly, easily, despite the accelerated beating of her heart. All those classes in deportment at Brillantmont had not been wasted on her.

There were a few fellow professionals circling the German's beach tent. Their swimsuits were skimpier, cheaper, far less well made. Two were trying to flirt with Schneider's two bronzed bodyguards, who were wearing the standard issue of brief briefs and sunglasses and largely ignoring them. As was their boss, who was bent over a folding table crowded with papers. But maybe something, some energy, some wave of attention, preceded Eve as she approached; other men staring before their wives pulled them away. Because as she reached his tent, he looked up.

Eve stopped and hitched her swimsuit up, needing to bend from the waist, pulling it a little out and forward first, giving the barest glimpse of what the silk jersey contained. This had even the bodyguards glancing. Ignoring them, ignoring everyone, Eve settled herself, then started forward again, her eyes fixed on the bar ahead. *Come on*, she thought. *Please. I don't want to have to do all that again.*

"Young lady! Young lady!"

"*Fraülein*" was the word he'd used, of course. She'd listened to that voice the night before in the hotel bar as well as that morning at the Chave d'Ouro café. It was a coarse accent—not refined like the ones she'd heard in Switzerland or at the spas of Baden-Baden. But Schneider was a businessman, of course, not a nobleman. Part of the New Germany that had risen with that "man of the people," Adolf Hitler.

She ignored his call, kept moving—until stopped by a hand on her forearm.

“Miss?”

She looked up, saw her own face reflected in the bodyguard’s sunglasses. “Yes?”

The man jerked his head back. She turned. Berndt Schneider had half-standing from his chair, was waving. “Come!” He was indicating a chair before him. “Come, please.”

She smiled, and glided over.

“Please,” Schneider said, waving at the chair again. She sat and he did too, with an audible crack of his knee joints. His distended, hairy belly spilled over his waistband from his loose linen shirt. Quite the contrast to Erik’s taut tummy, she suddenly thought. She’d seen that the day before when, despite all the pressures they were under, or perhaps because of them, they’d decided to take an afternoon on a beach for themselves. The Norwegian was, she’d had to admit, in pretty good shape.

She was slightly startled by her distraction. *Focus, Eve*, she thought. Schneider had just asked her something.

“I beg your pardon,” she asked, in French.

“Do you speak German?” he repeated, in that tongue.

“Certainly,” she replied, crossing her legs before leaning slightly forward.

Schneider’s eyes fell, then rose again. “May I get you a drink, young lady?”

“I was just going to get one myself.”

“I’ll have one brought here. What would you like?”

“Thank you. I’ll have a Tom Collins.”

The German snapped his fingers. A bodyguard came, and the order was given—for two. He went, and his boss turned back. “My name is Herr Schneider. But you may call me Berndt.”

“Mine is Doucet. But you may call me Chantal.”

“French?”

“Yes, from Paris.”

“And why are you here, Chantal?”

“My father...” She hesitated before continuing. “My father felt that the coming regime might not, ah, appreciate him so much.”

“Why? Are you Jewish?” The words were harshly said.

Eve laughed. “Ha! Certainly not! But my father was the editor of *Esprit* and—”

“What is that?”

“*Esprit*? Oh, it’s a literary magazine—”

“Literary?” He pronounced it as if it were excrement on his shoe. “Your father is an intellectual?” He gave that word the same disdain.

“Perhaps,” she replied.

He grunted. “So you came here?”

“Yes. My father feels his talents will be more appreciated in America. But he did not realize how much it would cost to get there.” She laughed again. “Being an editor does not pay very well. And we left fast, with almost nothing. The clothes we stood up in.”

“As well as this very lovely bathing suit.”

“Oh, yes. I brought that.”

“It must be hard.”

“It is.” She wriggled slightly, making the top of the suit rise and fall. Schneider studied her with the kind of look she thought a shark must have as it circled its prey. She’d been fairly certain he would not recognize her. Waitresses and fag-end collectors in cheap black dresses rarely warranted a second glance.

The drinks arrived. The waiter placed the tall glasses on the small table. They both picked one up. “*Prost*,” he said.

“*Bonne santé*.” She looked at the plate of nuts that the waiter had also brought. “May I?”

“Of course.”

She took a handful and wolfed them down, giving out a little groan of pleasure. The German’s shark smile widened. “*Fraülein Doucet*,” he said, “may I buy you dinner?”



Palácio Estoril Hotel, Room 72—7:00 p.m.

Erik considered himself in the mantelpiece mirror. It was an older one, mottled with age, and thus befitted this room on a lower floor which was slightly shabby around its edges. However, with the recent flood of refugees into Lisbon, they were lucky to get even *this*, with the privilege of paying the outrageous price of four dollars a night—the room they'd fled had cost that for a month. The desk clerk, eyeing Erik's tattered fedora and the coat he'd worn since the Norwegian campaign, had at first said that there were no free rooms available. The six dollars Erik put down—four for the night, two for the clerk—had secured it.

It was vital to their plan that they stayed there. But between the rate, the bribe and the money they'd had to spend on clothes, the thirty-six dollars that the one thousand *escudos* he'd gotten for the guns had turned into was down to less than twenty. Erik would spend at least another five in the bar tonight. His cover meant that he couldn't look cheap. If all went well, they'd have a lot more than they currently did by night's end. If all went wrong...they probably wouldn't need fifteen dollars anyway.

Because they'd either be in prison, or they'd be dead.

Well, he thought, gazing into the mirror, *at least I'll die a gentleman. Or looking like one, anyway.*

He'd never owned a tuxedo in Norway. His father managed a small paper factory, and Erik's clothes allowance stretched to practical—not fancy. He'd been bought a lounge suit when he turned eighteen and it had been let out—twice—as he put on weight and muscle. He'd only been to one student ball that required black tie, so he'd rented like almost everyone else. And that attire was not close in quality to this one.

The midnight-blue double-breasted jacket had jetted pockets, three cuff buttons and satin lapels that caught the light, matching the stripes down the trousers' sides. The soft, front-pleated evening shirt was a pleasure to wear,

unlike the rented starched monstrosity that had given him a neck rash. All fitted him beautifully.

He had wondered who his sartorial doppelgänger might be. What story did the man have that had led him to pawn this finery? Erik wasn't sure if the shiny black patent leather shoes had belonged to the same person. When he slipped them on and found they also fit perfectly he had a momentary qualm that their previous owner might be dead. Wasn't it unlucky to wear a dead man's shoes?

The noise of something dropping came from the bathroom, followed by a faint and quite obscene curse. He smiled. Eve's language was much ruder than his. Perhaps it was her country. Perhaps it was her class. Sometimes, in conversation with her he felt...provincial. She'd travelled all over the world, been educated in Switzerland...he'd been to Prague with the Student Federation, Sweden and Portugal. He swallowed. And Poland, of course. With Aleksandra.

Aleksandra, who was the daughter of a duke.

Is that your pattern, then, young fellow? he wondered. *Only fall for women of a class above your own?* He looked into his eyes in the mirror. *Though of course you haven't fallen for the lady still cursing in the bathroom, have you? It's just all that...proximity, right?*

"Well? What do you think?"

He hadn't heard the bathroom door open. He turned now—and let out what he hoped was an inaudible gasp.

It was partly that Eve was backlit by the bathroom light and her hourglass figure shone through her sheer dress. It was partly her hair, which had been teased with tongs to fall in a waterfall of golden curls to her shoulders. It was also her makeup, which he noticed now as she stepped closer. Her beautiful eyes enhanced with mascara and liner, the faintest tinge of blush on her cheeks, a red on her lips that was as crimson as a Caribbean sunset. And of course, her black floral lace gown accentuated her form so perfectly. The neckline at the front was round, modest, but when she swayed slightly, he saw the V that revealed a swath of her back and the silky skin there. To him, this was more arousing than any flash of cleavage.

When she'd first appeared in the bathroom doorway, he'd thought she must be naked beneath the dress. Now he saw that she wore an ivory slip, one shoulder strap just edging in at her neck.

She studied his face. Mistook the expression. "That bad, huh? It needed more taking in than I thought when I bought it. Maybe I botched it."

"Eve. It's beautiful. You...look beautiful."

"It was sex appeal I was going for more than beauty."

"That too." He coughed. "Oh, yes, that too, of course."

"Thanks." She focused on him. "And speaking of sex appeal. Wow! Mr. Strom, you clean up pretty well yourself."

"You think so?" He couldn't help the pleasure that flushed through him at her words. He felt he had to be blushing, so he looked down to hide it... and saw what had defeated him. "I can't do this, though," he said, pulling the bow tie from his breast pocket. He held one end and let it spool down. "Never could."

"Let me. My father could never tie one either, so I have been doing it since I was seven." She threw the silk around his neck. "Butterfly or Windsor, sir?"

"I don't know what either of those is. I—"

"Oh, let's go for the Windsor. More fun."

She began to whirl the tie—a tip of tongue showing pink against her crimson lips as she concentrated. She was also leaning very close to him.

"Eve?"

"Uh-huh?"

"I wish...I wish we were just getting ready to go out. A normal night."

"Me too." She tapped him on his Adam's apple, then stepped back. "Take a look."

He did. The tie was perfect. She, smiling up at him, was also perfect. He took her hand, led her over to the small sofa. "Eve, I am not sure we should do this."

"What? Why?"

"Because...because there are so many ways it could go wrong. We're not thieves, you and me. We're not killers. And it could come down to that."

We get it wrong, and we are in jail perhaps for the rest of our lives. Or worse.”

She stared at him for a long moment. When she spoke, her voice was soft, with a little quaver. “I know what you are saying. I...I have felt the same. Every few minutes I think: Is this a game? Or a school play? In the bathroom there I felt like I was getting ready for a role. I—” She broke off, gazed above him, eyes unfocused. Then something else came into them, and she looked into his again, and shook the hand she still held. “But I’ve also had a glimpse of that other life, a life of...of freedom. Where I can make my own choices. Where the people around me can as well. Where someone isn’t holding a gun to their heads. Or firing it.” She nodded. “And I can’t go back to any of the lives I led unless I try to make a difference first. I don’t want to find another cold-water flat in Lisbon and use my youth just getting by, while the world burns. I want to help in the fight. Take on people like those policemen. Like Schneider. Like Henrik Ridelsson.” She faltered a little on the name. “Like...like all those other bastards in the world with their swastikas and their billy clubs. I must. I know now that I must.”

Erik smiled. His fears, if they did not vanish, at least receded. She’d put into words what he’d felt for so long. Actually, from the moment he’d seen a tank crash through a forest in Poland. There’d been fear then too. Terror, truly. Yet also the instant and complete certainty that this evil must be opposed. “You are right. Of course you are right. We can do this. We have a plan, a definite plan and, God willing, it will work.”

“Yes. We have a definite plan.” She stood up. “What was it again?”

They laughed, then he squeezed her hands before letting her go. There were a few final things to do to prepare. For her it was to apply a touch of powder to her face before getting into the stilettos she’d bought. For him? Well, they had started frisking people entering the bar of the Palácio Estoril Hotel ever since an incident between a young Jewish refugee and a German official. So his task was to find the best way to tuck the Liliput pistol into his crotch so as not to give himself a hernia when he walked.

THIRTY-THREE

Bar Estoril—8:30 p.m.

ANOTHER SHOUT OF LAUGHTER went up from the table he wasn't looking at. Again, Erik forced himself to concentrate on what exactly the elderly woman from Seville was saying to him. It had something to do with her youngest daughter and the ingratitude of children these days, but between his lack of concentration and the fact that both of them were poor in the only language they shared even a little—French—much passed over his head. Her husband, who was about half her size, with comb-over hair and a pencil moustache, had given up trying to contribute. He had his eyes closed as if meditating, though Erik was pretty sure he was asleep.

Erik had got to the bar at seven thirty. Eve had entered closer to eight—"fashionably late," she'd told him. Even then, she hadn't gone straight to Schneider's table, but over to the bar manager instead. Erik watched him look at her, then look again with surprise. He said something and she leaned in, whispered in his ear while at the same time tucking a folded bill into his top pocket. He'd glanced down and smiled. Then she'd joined an impatient Schneider, who'd spotted her, and his three Portuguese guests. Whatever she said soon had her forgiven and them all laughing. One of the escorts had a particular laugh, as if she were a singer running up and down the scales. Erik was sure he was not the only one in the bar who found it irritating. Worse for those closer to her. At least he was at a table at the furthest wall, which he'd been forced to share.

He turned back to the elderly woman in time to hear a French sentence he fully understood. "*Je suis désolée, monsieur. On doit partir.*" He rose as they did, reassuring them that he was equally sorry at their leaving. When

he sat again, he was looking forward to a respite from chatter—he had enough on his mind.

But it was not to be.

“Mind if I join you, old chap?”

The tall, dark-haired man standing at Erik’s table had one eyebrow raised in query and a tortoise-shell cigarette holder—cigarette-less—in his mouth. Without waiting for an answer he pulled out a chair, sat down, leaned back, extended his long legs out before him and smiled. “Been watching you from the bar, old son.”

“Oh, yes?”

“What’s your name? Where are you from?” He shook himself. “I’m sorry, that’s terribly rude of me. Shocking manners, what?” He reached a hand across, though no name came with it.

“Jens Solberg. From Stockholm,” Erik said, the name he’d been practising, which is why he offered it so easily, he supposed. He took the proffered hand, shook it once.

“Jens Solberg. From Stockholm, eh?”

The man delved into his dinner jacket—which Erik immediately saw was so utterly, beautifully cut it could only have been made for the man wearing it, not taken from a hanger like his own. He pulled out a gold cigarette case. “So you’re Swedish?”

Erik smiled. “People from Stockholm usually are.”

“Funny that. You sound more like a Norwegian to me.”

Erik tensed. “I’m not. How could you tell the difference, anyway?”

“Ah well, you see, that’s one of my very few talents. One that my employers really rely on me for. Have you seen the play *Pygmalion*? Shaw? *I’m a regular ‘enry ‘iggins, oi am oi am!*” The man opened his cigarette case, held it out. When Erik took a cigarette, the man placed another in his holder, then magicked a gold lighter from somewhere and lit them both.

“Your employers?” Erik, dragging on the cigarette, was startled by how good he instantly recognized the tobacco to be. The appreciation must have shown on his face.

“Balkan Sobranie,” the man said, waving his holder like a conductor would a baton. “Get them in a little shop on the Haymarket. See the double eagle?” He held the cigarette out, and Erik indeed saw the double-headed eagle. “This is the White Russian brand, my favourite. Long live the Czar, what? Except, and alas, of course, he doesn’t.”

Erik wondered if this man was one of those upper-class Brits who simply couldn’t stop talking, suffering from what his mother would call “verbal diarrhea”—or if he was using it as a tactic. In which case the question was why. He exhaled. “You were talking about your employers. And you still haven’t told me your name?”

“Good Lord, have I not? How rude of me!” He extended his hand again and once more Erik found himself taking it. “Fleming. Ian Fleming.” He squeezed and let go. “And my employers are the British Secret Services.” Again, surprise must have shown on Erik’s face, because the man laughed and continued, “Don’t worry, old chap. Everyone in here knows each other and what we do.” He pointed at a thick-set man three tables over. “That’s Vladimir Gorochenko. GUGB head here in Portugal. That’s the Soviets’ secret service. Bit of a bore, actually. No small talk. Pig farmer before he became a spy.” He pointed again. “Over there is Wolfgang von Buchholz. Head of the Abwehr here. That’s German military intelligence.”

“I know what it is.”

“Of course you do, ah, Jens. Oh look, he’s seen me. Coo ee!” Fleming waved. “Now Wolfie is quite a cultured fellow. Plays a mean hand at contract bridge, though he’s even better at poker.” He looked back at Erik. “I could show you the Italians, the French—poor chaps won’t be here much longer. Lots of PVDE—the Portuguese boys, of course.” He smiled. “We know why we are all here, naturally. What I want to know is which team you are playing for, my fine young Norwegian friend.”

“Swedish. We don’t have a team.”

“Freelancer then? Fair enough. Ah, marvellous,” he exclaimed, seeing the waiter who had appeared at their table. “What can I get you?”

“I—”

“Tell you what, have what I am having. It’s to die for.” He turned back to the waiter. “Two vodka martinis. The merest whisper of vermouth. And”—he raised his voice as the waiter had partly turned away—“shaken not stirred, you understand. Two silverskin onions.”

“Thank you,” said Erik.

“*De nada*. Or consider it payment for you telling me what you are doing here. You—”

“I’m not doing—”

“You and that simply gorgeous young woman who’s doing such a fine job enamouring our German industrialist friend over there. The same young woman who only two days ago was here wearing a shabby black dress and working as a waitress.”

Erik stiffened. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I am here alone to have a drink, that’s all.”

“Oh, come on, old chap. She’s the most beautiful thing in the bar. Everyone in here has ogled her at least five times, including me. You’re the only man who hasn’t. Which either means you are queer, which I somehow doubt, or that the two of you are in cahoots.”

“Cahoots?”

“You know, accomplices. With a plan.”

“Again, you have lost me, sir.”

“Have I though? You see, here’s the thing.” Fleming ran fingers through his dark, slick brown hair, then leaned in, his voice lowering. “In my two weeks in Lisbon, one of the main threats I have discovered to His Majesty’s interests in Portugal is yon Nazi *scheisskopf* over there, Berndt Schneider. Now I believe he’s very close to securing a deal that would guarantee Herr Hitler’s armies the lion’s share of Portugal’s wolfram. Do you know what that is?” When Erik didn’t reply, Fleming continued, “It’s for weapons. Vital stuff anyway. I would very much like that not to happen.” He took a last deep drag and stubbed out his cigarette. “And I believe you. You are far too awful a liar to be on any ‘team.’ So you must be, ah, playing for yourselves, what? Perhaps you and your fair lady have some sort of plan to, uh, disrupt Herr Schneider’s plans?” He leaned in. “Do tell.”

“You are mad.”

“It’s been said before. In this case, though, I am not so sure.”

“I don’t know why you would make up such an absurd story.”

“Ha.” He leaned back. “I do like to make up stories actually. And a Norwegian pretending he is a Swede while also pretending he doesn’t know a beautiful girl he most obviously does, said girl trying to seduce a Nazi businessman...” He grinned. “Well, that all has the makings of a first-class story, don’t you agree? Ah, lookee here.”

The waiter had returned. He placed two martini glasses before them, bowed, then moved off. Fleming lifted one and raised it, didn’t drink. After a moment, Erik raised his.

“So, all I wished to say was this: If you need any help, in any way at all, I’d be delighted to oblige. Myself and His Majesty, of course. Cheer ho!” They both sipped, and Fleming smiled. “Not bad. Nearly as good as Raymond’s at Claridge’s.” His gaze moved over Erik’s shoulder. “Don’t look now, but it seems your friend’s party is moving on. Some of them anyway.”

Erik put his glass down, stretched his back, twisting each way. His quick glance confirmed what the Englishman had said. Two of the party were leaving.

Schneider and Eve.

His breath came short, his heart beat faster. Fleming spoke again, his voice low. “Now listen to me. Whatever you’re thinking, both his bodyguards are Gestapo. Thugs, and thus probably quite useful in a dust-up. Might need more than your Liliput to deal with them. It’s not got much stopping power, has it?” On Erik’s sharp look, Fleming shrugged. “It’s a nice jacket. Little tight perhaps? The bulge is barely noticeable. Clever of you to get it past the frisking. Had it near your balls, I assume? Alas, I had to leave my Browning in my room. Ah, Wolfgang is waving me over. And you are, uh, busy, yes?” He stood. “I mean it—do let me know if I can be of any assistance, won’t you?” He gestured to the table in front of Erik. Two of the gold-banded cigarettes had appeared, lying next to a card. It was cream with gold cursive lettering—listing his name and...

“Imports and Exports?”

“Well, you know.” Fleming put a hand on Erik’s shoulder. “Good hunting, my young friend. Take care, eh?” He moved away. “Wolfie!” he called loudly, drawing many eyes. “Shall we hie us to the casino for some baccarat?”

Erik sat there for another minute before signalling the waiter over. When he did, he discovered his tab had been paid. Draining the martini, then slipping the card and cigarettes into his breast pocket, he stood and left the bar.

THIRTY-FOUR

WHEN EVE ROSE FROM the table, she thought that she might have to immediately sit down again. Her legs! They were as wobbly as if she'd actually drunk the four martinis Schneider had plied her with, instead of tipping the bulk of them discreetly into the carpet below. She swayed, and the German made some remark about it in Portuguese to the men who remained. Something coarse, she assumed, by the quality of their laughter. The two women dutifully smiled, but the look in their eyes was vaguely sympathetic. They knew that Eve was off to do the work that they'd be doing later.

Eve stole a glance back and caught Erik twisting in his chair—knew he'd noticed that she was leaving. It was some comfort. He was sitting with a tall, dark-haired, beautifully dressed man, which was strange. Perhaps he thought that company would help him blend in.

Schneider took her arm near the door, his fingers digging in. As he turned to her, his smile a wide leer, she smelled both the whisky on his breath and something fouler—the chicken livers in brandy that he'd guzzled by the plateful. If she'd tried one, she knew the German would have been wearing it on his gaudy tie almost immediately, which would not have helped her plan of seduction.

Which had worked well so far. Too well?

She and Erik had figured that their attempt would happen later, after dinner, when everyone was drunker, and the bodyguards tired from standing around all night. They knew they'd need all the edge they could find. But her flirting, the way she'd moved her body in that tight dress, even while in her chair, the occasional whisper in the German's hairy ear? It had roused

him. So instead of having her as dessert as he'd planned, he would have her as a... "*Gaumenreiniger*." He'd used this word, and though the Portuguese hadn't understood it, they'd laughed anyway. It took her a while to remember what it meant; she'd only heard it once before, in Geneva, at a dinner party.

Palate cleanser. Eve was to cleanse his palate before he returned for the main course.

The bigger of the two bodyguards joined them at the bar's door. Preceded them across the hotel lobby, pressed the button for the elevator. All the while Schneider's fingers dug into her upper arm. She'd have bruises there, she knew. He was not paying attention to her, though, but issuing orders to the bodyguard in fast, clipped German. He knew she spoke it, didn't care. One of the Portuguese businessmen needed to leave early to meet a minister in the government. The minister needed his share of the bribe money tonight. Apparently he had gambling debts to pay.

So Schneider's visit to his suite was about both sex and money. *That old combination*, Eve thought.

The elevator doors parted. They all stepped inside, and the bodyguard growled the floor number. Seven, at the top, where the suites were. The boy in the smart grey uniform placed his hand on the wheel. He hesitated when he saw an elderly man approaching—another growl made him turn the wheel and close the doors in the man's face. As they closed, Eve looked across the lobby to the bar. But Erik did not come out.

Shit, she thought, then breathed deeper. He would not be far behind. Pray God he would not be far behind.

The hotel had been recently renovated to cater to the increased numbers, the wealthier clientele that had flooded Lisbon. The elevator had not—it rattled its way slowly up, pinging the floors. Schneider was again focusing on her. Having given his orders to his bodyguard about money, he was now giving her hers about sex. What he was going to do to her. What he required her to do to him. It was going to be rough, painful—for her. Eve kept nodding—even kept a little smile on her face. She realized now that when she'd considered a career in prostitution, it had been abstract, ten minutes of

well-paid yet basic labour. The realities were different, and she knew she was not cut out for them—not at all.

Except for this one night, perhaps. If all did not go according to the plan.

They reached the seventh floor. The doors opened. A richly carpeted hall ran before them. They walked to the end of the hall and turned into another corridor. The second bodyguard stood at its end before the last door. Suite Four.

As Schneider pulled her roughly along it—already acting on his whispered desires—she stumbled. He laughed and commended her on her performance. She got her feet under her, walked more strongly and prayed. Not to God this time.

To Erik.



The elevator doors were just closing as he stepped from the bar into the lobby. Erik thought he caught a glimpse of black lace, slight and soft between two huge, dark shapes.

He crossed the lobby, took the stairs beside the elevator shaft. By the end of the third flight he was already winded, and he forced himself to take deeper breaths as he stopped beside that floor's service closet. Opening it, he bent and rummaged among the buckets and the dirty, wet cloths on its floor. For a moment, his breath stopped, his heart sped up. Calming when his hand closed around hard rubber and he pulled out the secret policeman's cudgel. He'd thought of leaving his Liliput in there too but hadn't known if he'd need to adapt more quickly to circumstance in the bar. They'd discussed stashing his Browning there too but had decided against it. The noise the revolver would have made if he'd been forced to fire it would have brought half of Portugal down on their necks.

He started up the stairs. When they'd checked in and while Eve distracted the desk clerk, Erik had managed to steal a glimpse of the register. Four more flights to Schneider's suite. This time he took them at a

steadier pace. He'd need his wind for whatever awaited him on the seventh floor.



You could fit four of our room into this suite, Eve thought, as the bodyguard opened the door and Schneider pushed her through. Two tall, wide windows opened onto the night—their sheer white curtains blown back into the room by a warm breeze that did little to reduce the day's heat. Still, as she looked around, Eve shivered. This was it, then—the stage for this unfolding play.

The living room was decked out in deco: from the mahogany cabinets with lines and triangles etched into them in darker wood to the emerald-green sofa with scalloped edges. At each end of the sofa there was a small stand, a dark Bakelite lamp upon both, each with the same woman reaching up to the bulb as if she were holding a flaming torch. The coffee table before the sofa was burl and walnut, with a woven lower shelf. The door to the bedroom was open and she saw a huge canopied bed within. She was pretty sure they were not going to make it that far.

For a palate cleanser this room would do just fine.

Schneider had just finished giving his two bodyguards some instructions which she didn't catch. By the time he closed the door on them and turned to her she had got herself together, was sprawled on the sofa, arms spread out along the scalloped back. "My, but you are beautiful," the German growled, hunger in his eyes. His hands were at his belt which he undid, then slid the whole of it through the loops. His belly sagged over his waistband.

"Champagne?"

"Eh?" He stopped the other side of the table, looked down at her, his forehead creased. "What did you say?"

"I'd love some champagne. Wouldn't you?"

"I don't drink champagne."

Eve leaned forward and ran one finger along the neckline of her dress, tugging it out just a little. She wasn't wearing a brassiere. "Who said anything about drinking it?" she purred.

He gave a bark of a laugh. "How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"Ha! Just like my daughter." A different look flitted through his eyes then. Lust displaced by...guilt perhaps? Whatever it was, it made him pause, look at his watch. "Alright," he grunted. He went back to the door. Opening it, he gave rapid orders to the smaller of the bodyguards, who grumbled.

"You could call for room service."

"Idiot! It would take much too long. Fetch one for me."

"Which one?"

"Any one!" He glanced back. "A cheaper one," he said. "I am spending a fortune tonight as it is. Those penny-pinchers in Berlin are starting to query too many receipts."

"Jawohl."

The man ran off, and Schneider closed the door. "Now, where were we?"

One bodyguard leaving was a bonus, she thought. But she needed to delay longer, as long as possible, truly. She sat up and crossed her legs. "Money," she said.

"Money?" He frowned again. "Yes, of course—afterwards."

"Ah, Berndt, sweetie!" She giggled. "You know I am not very experienced. I think you like that, no? From what you said to me before?" She smiled up at him. "But even I know that I must ask for the money first, yes?"

His piggy eyes narrowed. He snapped the belt which he'd double-looped and still held in his hands. For a moment she thought he was going to refuse, and she'd have to think of something else, she had no idea what. But then he shrugged, dropped the belt on the table and crossed to one of the tall cabinets. He pressed on the side of a door, and it sprang open. On the floor of the cupboard, she saw a small iron safe. He knelt, began flicking the tumbler each way, stopping at numbers left and right. He was fast, the numbers were small—she didn't catch them. Then he put his hand

on the large brass handle and turned it up. The door clicked and he pulled it open.

She couldn't help the slight gasp she gave. The interior was filled with stacks of American dollars. He reached in and peeled a single note from the top. Five dollars—and he'd even grumbled at that. He pushed the door to. Pushed down the handle.

“Berndt, baby!” She made her voice loud, demanding.

His hand was on the tumbler, but he didn't twist it—held first by her voice, then by the sight when he turned.

“I've changed my mind. What say you we save the champagne for later?” Then she ran her hands over her naked breasts.

THIRTY-FIVE

ERIK CAME UP THE last flight onto the seventh floor and stopped. One of Schneider's bodyguards was standing at the elevator doors, repeatedly pushing the call button. He kept looking up at the arrow which did not leave the *T* for *Térreo*. Judging by the curses he was muttering in German, it had probably been stuck on the ground floor for a while.

The man turned. Erik gave him a sympathetic shrug, then walked past him. He heard a final "*Scheisse!*" and then the sound of footfalls on the stairs.

Erik stopped at the junction of the corridors. Took a deep breath, leaned out to look, then leaned back once he'd seen. The bigger of the bodyguards was standing before Suite Four. *Gestapo*, the Englishman had said. A fanatic, then. But also just a man. Because even in his snatched glance, Erik had seen the bodyguard leaning into the door, an ear planted on the wood, a grin on his face.

Reaching up, Erik undid his tie, looped it around his neck, letting the ends fall either side of his lapels. Then he tucked his hands into his pockets and sauntered around the corner, humming a Strauss waltz. The bodyguard didn't hear him until he was halfway down the corridor; then he came away from the door, the smile leaving his face. "Fuck off," he said in German.

Erik kept coming, weaving a little, his sloppy grin in place. Muttered a phrase he'd used often in Portuguese. "*Eu não entendo.*"

The bodyguard clearly didn't understand any of the language. "Fuck off," he repeated louder, placing his hand on Erik's chest.

"*Meu quarto,*" Erik said, nodding at the door.

The German must have understood at least that much. “Not your room, you drunken idiot. Try another floor.” He shoved him then, and Erik stumbled back.

At that moment there came a cry from the suite—a woman’s voice raised in fear, in pain. When the German turned to it, Erik pulled out the cudgel and hit him on his temple.

He didn’t fall. He looked at Erik as if he’d insulted him, then reached up to touch his head, brought his fingers down. Their tips glistened in the corridor light. “Bastard,” he said, and lurched forward, his arms stretched for Erik’s throat. But he stumbled a little, so Erik moved to the side and hit him again. This time he went down, his crash shaking the floor—and didn’t move. Erik stepped over him and flung open the door—to a tableau of horror.

Schneider had Eve pulled half over a coffee table, holding both her hands behind her in one of his meaty paws. Her naked top half was pressed to the wood, her knees were on the floor before the sofa. He was sitting on that, half-crouched—his other hand at his fly.

“What?” he yelled, his angry expression changing when he saw that it wasn’t his bodyguard there but a stranger. “Who—” he began, but then his gaze went behind Erik, lower, to where two feet lay in the corridor.

Erik saw it in those small eyes within the jowly face. The change. Not fear. Fury. Schneider pushed Eve hard down on the table, leaped over it, rushing fast for a fat man, too fast for Erik to do more than half-swing the cudgel before the man barrelled into him—taking him down to the carpet, landing on top of him, knocking the wind from him. Erik raised his hands, deflected some of the blows that started to fall, but not all. The man was sitting on his chest and he could get no air into his lungs. He thought he was going to pass out, the room tingeing red—when suddenly he heard a sound as if from a distance, a *thock* that was immediately followed by the weight shifting from him and Schneider joining him on the ground, eyelids fluttering.

“Are you OK?”

Erik whooped air. Eve was standing above him, naked from the waist up. In her right hand, she was holding an art deco woman upside down, a cord dangling from what had to be a lamp. “OK?” she asked again, and he rolled onto his knees.

“Yes.” He spat, tasting blood. “I think so.”

“Good.” She set down the lamp before pulling up her dress. “We better move.”

“Right.” He stood, shook his head. It cleared a little. Enough to see Eve crouching before a tall cabinet. He went and joined her, looked down at a safe. “Damn! Is that where his money is?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t suppose you know the combination.”

“Nope. Don’t need to.” Then she jerked the handle to vertical and opened the door.

“My God! How much is in there?”

“Don’t know. Can you see a bag anywhere?”

On a side table with papers on it that must have served Schneider as a desk, there was a large soft leather briefcase, the German eagle embossed in gold on its front flap. Tipping out what was in there, Erik brought it back to Eve. Together they shovelled all the money in.

Groans came from more than one man. Schneider was stirring on the floor, and in the hall Erik saw the bodyguard’s heels scraping back and forth on the carpet. “Should have hit the bastard harder,” he said. “Let’s go.” He offered Eve his hand. She took it, used it to stand, and they started for the door.

She paused at the prone businessman. “Do you think we should kill him?”

“I...” He shook his head. “I know we’re thieves. But are we killers?”

She stared at him for a long moment, then shrugged. “Probably not yet,” she murmured, and led him past both men.

They’d reached the top of the stairwell when they heard footsteps coming up, a muttered, breathy “*Scheisse!*” Erik took Eve’s arm, retreated a

few steps. Then he realized that he must have dropped the cudgel in the fight with Schneider—all he had now was the Liliput.

The bodyguard made the landing. He had a bottle of champagne in one hand. He stopped when he saw them. For a moment, he didn't seem to know what he was seeing. Then recognition came—first of Eve, then of the briefcase with the gold eagle she held before her like a shield.

He dropped the bottle. It rolled toward them. He reached inside his jacket.

Erik flicked the safety off, raised the gun and shot him in the head. *That Englishman was right*, he thought. *Not much stopping power*. But from seven paces away, it was enough to stop a Nazi. Erik could still see the man's eyes, the puzzlement in them. The red dot that appeared between them. The bodyguard staggered backwards. There was not much landing, his foot found air, and then he was gone, falling down the flight of stairs.

Eve and Erik stared, disbelieving, unable to move. Until a *ping* came from behind them, followed by the sound of elevator doors opening. They turned. It was the same operator she'd had before. "*Sinto muito, a senhorita. Senhor,*" the young man said, then remembered and continued in German. "Sorry, miss. Mister. Big party, take up. Three time." He beckoned them in, and they obeyed. "Floor?" he asked as he closed the doors.

"Lobby," they chorused, and he nodded, pulled his handle. He stared straight ahead, as he always did. If he noticed their dishevelment, any blood, he didn't comment. In a hotel like the Palácio Estoril, discretion was prized in its staff. And required.

In the lobby, after the elevator doors had closed behind them, they took the stairs down to the basement and turned left, away from the room they'd paid for. The hotel's renovations were not quite complete. There were a dozen rooms in the basement in various states of refurbishment. Earlier, they'd chosen one that had a bed in it at least, with dust sheets over a chair and table. Like all these rooms, the door hadn't been locked.

They went in. The room smelled of fresh paint, was dark—little illumination coming from the small window that opened onto a ventilation shaft outside. But when he flicked a switch, the room flooded with yellow

light from a naked bulb. It was harsh so he turned it off again. Gradually their eyes adjusted.

They stood in silence for a moment—until Eve sat down suddenly on the bed. “How’s your head?” she asked.

“Oh.” He reached up. Schneider had caught him a few times. His jaw was swelling and there was a small cut above his right eye. “Not too bad.”

“I’ll get water.”

“I will. You stay.”

There were rags on the floor, some with less dried paint on them than others. He found one, went to the bathroom, ran the tap, came back, and she drew him down onto the bed. She held his chin and wiped the blood away over his eye, before pressing the cold cloth to his jaw.

This close he could see her eyes. “Always nursing me, eh?”

“Well, I can’t guarantee always.”

“Are you OK?” He reached up, took her hand. “I mean, did he—”

“No.” She shuddered. “No, you arrived, I would say, in the nick of time.” She put on a voice that would have suited Scarlett O’Hara. “You saved my honour, suh.”

He laughed and she disengaged her hand—carried on with her pressing and wiping. Finally, she sat back and looked at him. “We did it.”

“Yes. Yes, we did.” He tipped his head. “I mean, we still need to get away and—”

She leaned forward and put a finger on his lips. “Let’s celebrate this part now and worry about the next part later.”

“Alright.” He sighed. “I just wish we could celebrate with more than water from the tap.”

“We can.” She rose, went to the briefcase, from which she pulled out a bottle of champagne.

“What? Where the hell did you—?”

“The bodyguard dropped it. I picked it up.” She sat again, raising the bottle into the scant light. “Huh, definitely on the lower end. Cheapskate Nazi bastard.”

He took it from her, peeled back the foil, and popped the cork. It went with a loud bang that had them both giggling and shushing each other. The bottle had suffered in its fall and lots of liquid sprayed out. But he caught what he could down its neck, then offered the bottle to her. She tipped it, drank. When he reached for it again, she held it back. A whisper came. “It didn’t take you long, did it?”

“What didn’t?”

“To move on. From thief to killer.”

“Oh.” He remembered now, what she’d said in the room. Remembered too the surprise in the Gestapo man’s eyes just before he fell back down the stairs. He swallowed. “It’s true.” He looked at her. “Should I feel bad?”

“Do you?”

He thought about it for a moment. A memory flashed of a forest in Poland, a field in Norway. He shook his head.

“It wasn’t a criticism, trust me. I think you should only feel bad if”—she put the bottle down on the floor—“you fail to kiss me in the next ten seconds.”

He didn’t need three. He slipped one hand behind her neck and pulled her close. Their lips met with a jolt, as if they’d both walked across thick carpet. It startled him, the electric shock of it. He had only experienced that power once before in his life. Recognized it as a sign of what was to come.

However there was something he had to ask first. A vision from a little before, from when he’d burst into a hotel room. So he pulled back and whispered, “Eve, are you sure? After—”



Eve knew what he meant: Berndt Schneider, and what he’d started to do. But she’d paid him for that, had cracked the Nazi bastard’s skull open. Besides, she was damned if she was going to let such a man manipulate who she loved and how and when she loved them. While here and now and right before her was Erik with things in his eyes she’d glimpsed in other

eyes before. Desire, of course, and that had always excited her, to be desired. Something else too. Love, perhaps?

Love and desire, she thought, could a girl ask for anything more?

He was waiting for an answer. She needn't give it to him in words. Just had to lean in and kiss him back.

Then they were touching in more places—his fingertips running down the V her dress made on her back, both her hands slipping around him, pulling him urgently to her. When he stood up, unbuttoned his jacket and threw it onto the chair, she reached her hands over her shoulders, questing for the zipper that bound her in her sheath of black lace. But he took her left hand, turned the palm up, placed his lips upon it and said, in a voice that didn't really sound like him anymore, "Leave the dress."

She laughed, kicked off her shoes, shoved him until he fell back onto the bed. He tore the shirt from himself, studs flying everywhere. Pushing him down, she wriggled her dress up so she could straddle his hips then took his wrists and stretched both his arms high above him. She gazed down at him for a moment before lowering herself to lick him from navel to neck.

He groaned. She could feel that he was about to surrender to her and that thrilled her. But instead he splayed his fingers through hers and nudged her up to sitting again. "There's something I need to do," he said, his voice still thick, "because if I don't, I'll regret it forever." Then, wrapping his arms around her, pressing himself full against her, he held her there for ten heartbeats with the length of her chest on his, separated only by that skim of black silk.

After that, in the blur, there was no more thinking. Only responding...to fingertips, heel of hand, tongue, lips; on hardness, on sweetness. At some point the dress came off. But Erik was over it by then because he'd discovered that there was silk...and then there was silk. Much later, and in the end their only concern was preventing their cries rising up the well shaft. Though they found there was still unvisited skin to lose those in.

So they did.

THIRTY-SIX

“WHAT WAS *THAT*?”

“O-oh, you’re one of those?”

“One of who?”

“One of those who want to talk about it straight afterwards. I’ve heard about people like you.”

“Oh we, uh, we don’t have to—”

Eve laughed and extracted herself from the nook she’d found between his shoulder and neck in order to look at him. “No, we can. I don’t mind.”

“Then I—” Erik looked up at the ceiling. “I didn’t think you liked me. That way.”

“Nor you me.” She brushed fingernails across his chest. “Seems we were both wrong.”

“Yes.”

She watched all sort of things flit through his moonlit eyes. “Regret it?”

“No!” He spoke loudly, pulled himself up, so he could put his back against the headboard. Took her hands. “No,” he repeated, softer this time. “Not for a moment. I...I dreamed of it. Thought it could only be a, ah, a fantasy.”

“You kept it pretty hidden.”

“I thought that anything else would be...offensive. You were in mourning.”

“I was. I still am. But aren’t you as well?” She swallowed. “Aleksandra.”

He stiffened. “How did you know about her?”

“You mentioned her once. You were talking about your time with the Student Confederation. Her name slipped out. When it did you...looked like someone had kicked you in the stomach. Turned away, didn’t talk about it further.” She flicked her hair away from her face. “Then once, on the ship, you had a nightmare. You yelled her name.”

“Did I?”

She climbed a little higher on his chest. “Would you like to tell me about her now?”

He stared at her. “Not really, no. I still mourn too. Yes...she is...dead. Was killed before my eyes.” He swallowed. “I truly thought I could never love again.” He smiled. “Clearly, I was wrong.”

“Wait.” She drew herself up to sit. “So you do love me?”

“Yes. Of course. Did we not—” He flicked his head to the bed.

“Well, this could have been...I mean, there’s...” She blushed. “This could have been, you know, the excitement before, the relief—”

“Love,” he said. “I love you.” He leaned in, took her face in his hands. “You are as bold as you are beautiful. When I saw you come through the window to surprise those agents? When you hit that Nazi up there...”

“I see. You love me for my actions.”

He shook his head. “Oh no, Eve. I love you for you.”

She turned away then, to hide the tear that ran from her right eye. *Three men have told me that they loved me*, she thought. *But I was a schoolgirl with Gianni. Henrik...well, he never actually said the words and, if he had, would have been lying. While Richard?* Another tear came. *Yes, Richard did love me—but only to the limits of which he was capable.* She rubbed the back of her hand up her cheek. “Now look,” she sniffed, “if we are going to have *that* conversation, I am going to need a cigarette.”

She went to rise but he stopped her. “Wait.” He got up, dug into the breast pocket of his tuxedo, grabbed his lighter and a crushed can lid the painters must have been using for the same purpose, and came back to the bed. She was sitting up now, the dust sheet pulled to her neck. He lay back beside her, placed the two cigarettes in his mouth, lit both, and put one between her lips.

She inhaled, and her eyes narrowed. “What the hell?” She removed the cigarette, stared at it.

“I know. It’s called a Balkan Sobranie.”

“Is it now? Where did you get it?”

“The man at my table in the bar? He was English. He gave it to me.”

“I noticed him. What was his name?”

“It was...ha, I don’t remember.”

“You remember the brand name but not—”

He reached down, and pulled something else from his tuxedo jacket—a card, she saw.

“Ian Fleming,” he read, then looked at her. “He is a spy.”

“He told you that?”

“Quite openly. Said most people in that bar were spies.”

“I see.” She took a deep drag. “The man has good taste.”

They smoked for a while in silence, flicking the ash onto the can lid. Then she took a last deep inhale and stubbed hers out. “Erik...” she said.

“Ah. Is this when you tell me you don’t love me in return?”

“Well, that’s the thing,” she replied, “because...I do.” She laughed, flung her arms wide. “It’s crazy, but I do. When did you know?”

She took his cigarette from his mouth, ground it into the can, let the dust sheet fall. “Um, you may need to cover yourself up if you want words,” he said.

She thumped him on the chest. “Concentrate,” she commanded. “When?”

He looked up to the ceiling. “I don’t think there was one moment. I didn’t want to, and I knew you didn’t either, so we just...carried on.” He grinned. “I mean, you are beautiful—”

“Oh that!”

“But there were those times when, for a little while, I suppose we forgot...forgot our dead.” He looked at her again. “Like when I brought that watermelon back, and your face was covered in juice, you ate it so fast. You looked about seven.”

“It was yummy. Reminded me of summers by the lake in Quebec.”

“Then that time when I beat you at rummy five games in a row and you threw the deck at me—”

“I see! So you loved me because I was a brat?”

“I loved you because I saw...you. Your playfulness. Your strength.” He reached one hand up her cheek, into her hair, and she laid her face into his palm. “You are so strong, my darling.”

“No one has ever told me that before.”

“Then everyone you’ve known up to now has been a fool.”

“OK, then!” She laughed, took his hand, kissed it. “Shall I tell you when I knew I loved you?”

“Sure. Though you can speak about my handsomeness first if you like.”

“Aw, you’re alright. I mean, you’re no Clark Gable but...ouch!” He’d squeezed her hand hard, and she laughed. “It was when you came through the door. Up there. When Schneider had me—”

He squeezed her hand again, gently this time. “But I did so little. He was on top of me. You hit him.”

“You...*came* for me. In this mad plan that we worked out *together*. You trusted me like...like no man has ever done before. No one, really. Everyone has always wrapped me in cotton wool. But you? You let me take risks too. When I saw you in the doorway, I knew. I knew I couldn’t...deny what I was feeling any longer. Knew in that moment that this”—she looked around the room and then into his eyes—“that this would happen.”

“You did? Hmm. And you are glad?”

“So glad.” She leaned down, kissed him on his neck. Her breasts brushed his belly, that taut belly she had tried so hard not to admire.

“Eve,” he murmured. “Eve—”

There was a faint ping of the elevator bell, the sound of doors opening—then shouting loud, immediate. Erik came off the bed, snatched the Browning from his bag, went to the door and peered through the door’s small glass viewer. “Seven men,” he whispered. “Hotel security, police. Oh, one of them is Schneider. He’s doing most of the yelling. His head is wrapped in a bandage.”

“Should have hit the bastard harder.” Eve began to hastily dress, pulling her shabby black skirt and blouse from the suitcase she’d stowed in the room when they’d first arrived. “Coming this way?”

“Uh...no!” The voices were clear but fading. “They’ve headed for the room we paid for. As we hoped.”

“I’ll take over. You get dressed.” Eve came to the door, took the Browning from Erik and placed her eye on the glass. He began to dress. “Three more police have come down the stairs...meeting up with the ones coming back from the room. Now, will they—?”

Behind her, Erik froze—socks in his hand. *This is the moment*, he thought. *When the whole plan could go wrong. Because if they decide to search all the rooms on this floor...*

“They’re all heading back up the stairs.” Eve turned. “They bought it. Believe we must have taken off into town straight after the heist.”

“Let’s hope they keep thinking that. For a few hours at least.”

“And then what?” She came back into the room, laid the gun on the table. “Midnight flit to Josefina’s still?”

“I suppose. Anywhere is going to be dangerous now. I must meet the clerk round the corner from the British Embassy at 10 a.m.”

“How long then?”

“For him to put the visa applications near the top of the pile? Depends how much we give him, I suppose.”

“How much can we give him?” Her eyes gleamed. “Heh, we haven’t even counted the money.”

They did. In silence, aside from the odd grunt neither could help as the piles, separated into hundreds, grew. Finally they sat back. “Oh,” was all Erik could say.

“That’s an understatement.”

He whistled. “I suppose if you are starting a life of crime, you may as well start big.”

“Five thousand dollars is, uh, pretty big, isn’t it?”

“I’d say so.” He rifled the stack of greenbacks. “The clerk said he could get us two visas in a week for one hundred dollars.” He pulled ten twenties

off the nearest stack. “Could he get us them by the end of the day for two hundred?”

“What’s that? A year’s salary in these parts?”

“Probably.”

“And then? A ship, yes? But going...where?”

“To begin with, anywhere. We need to be gone fast. Portugal as a neutral country is still selling goods to everyone. So their ships go everywhere. Sweden, as we know—”

“No, thanks.” She pointed at herself. “Wanted woman.” Then at him. “Wanted man.”

“Germany. Obviously not. America?”

“I said before. No. Anyway, you told me that it’s England where the fight will continue. So that’s where we should go.”

“Ideally, of course. But...I suspect berths on Portuguese freighters heading there will be rare. Many will want them. It could take weeks. I just don’t think we can hide out for that long. This amount of money, lots of people will be looking for it. So we get the first ship out to anywhere, then we try to—” He looked over at the bed, and his forehead creased. “Wait. Unless—” He bent and delved into the rumpled dust sheet. Pulled out the card that had come with the Balkan Sobranie.

He held it out to her. “‘Ian Fleming,’” she read aloud. “‘Imports and Exports.’” She looked back up at him. He was smiling.

“We’re exports, aren’t we?” He tapped the card. “And the Brits have three flights a week to London with their BOAC—‘British Overseas Airline Corporation.’”

“I heard. I also heard that seats are harder to get than visas.”

“But Mr. Fleming guessed that we were up to something. Something to do with Schneider. I don’t know how he guessed. But he wasn’t, uh, displeased. It’s why he offered his assistance.” Erik tapped the card on his upper teeth. “When the coast is clear, I’ll slip out to that other hotel, make a call.”

“Clearing the coast could take some time. When will you go?”

“Perhaps 2 a.m.? When the casino closes? Mingle with the crowds?”

“Two? In four hours?” Eve stood up. “Whatever will we do in the meantime?”

He heard it in her voice, saw it in the gleam of moonlight in her eyes. “Cards? I owe you that rematch at rummy.”

“Oh, shucks.” She pushed him back onto the bed. “I know a better game than that.”

THIRTY-SEVEN

Portela Airport, Lisbon. June 16, 1940

IT WAS AN AIRPORT only in name. The runway a single strip of grass. Half a dozen hangars in various stages of construction. One decrepit hut with a corrugated iron roof next to a building site where a tower and what would eventually be a larger terminal were being built.

Eve stared through the rain-spattered windshield of the Daimler. Her stomach was twisting in coils. The rain had been heavy most of the day and though it had eased up, the skies threatened. Moisture had combined with heat to create even more of Lisbon's customary mist. It shrouded each light pole by the main hangar in a monk's cowl, and tendrils rose from the blades of the four propellers on the plane their guide and driver had named an Armstrong Whitworth Atalanta.

Their flight was meant to have left an hour earlier, at 9 p.m., but the rain had been ceaseless then. It had since let up some, but the mist had only thickened. She didn't see how anyone could take off. On that thought her stomach contracted again. They couldn't stay there all night, waiting for the weather to clear. Their guide had informed them how the city was buzzing with police, uniformed and secret, hunting for them. Soon after they'd arrived, two sedans had pulled up and trench-coated agents had poured out, questioning the passengers huddled in the hut, then walking about outside despite the rain. They'd searched the hangar—twice. Now they stood in groups of twos and threes, smoke from their cigarettes curling up to the lights. Three of them had swastika armbands.

Their own car was parked to the right of the runway's far end, diagonally across from the hangar and the hut, tucked into bushes that

fringed the runway. They had bumped down a farm track to reach that point. Mist and night hid them—for now. Daylight would expose them. They'd have to leave long before dawn. But where would they go? Another cheap hotel like the one they'd just come from? They hadn't gone back to Josefina's but they'd heard that it had been raided anyway—the lady herself taken away for questioning. Eve felt terrible when she heard that. But her new friend knew nothing, and Eve could only hope that she'd be believed.

Behind the wheel, Fleming chain-smoked his Balkan Sobranies, sharing them liberally, their combined smoke rising from their windows to contribute to the mist. Eve had had to cease a while before and crack her window wider despite the rain that spattered in. It was making her nauseous. But everything she'd ingested that day had.

“Do you know what the RAF boys call the pilots of BOAC?” Fleming suddenly said, apropos of nothing. He was given to such outbursts, speaking as thoughts occurred. “They have transformed ‘British Overseas Airline Corporation’ into ‘Bastards Overseas Avoiding Conscription.’” He chortled. “Bit unfair, really. These chaps risk a lot. Jerry knows about these flights and near France sends up night fighters to shoot 'em out of the sky.” He became aware of what he'd said. “Highly unlikely you'll meet one, of course. Needle-in-haystack time for Jerry. And our boys fly all sorts of devious routes and altitudes to avoid them.”

“But do you think they'll be able to fly at all? In this?”

Eve heard the strain in Erik's voice under the forced calm. Wondered how *his* stomach was.

“Not a fly boy myself but it is easing a jot. I suspect they'll try if at all possible. Got a number of important people on the flight, not just yourselves.”

“Thank you again for—”

“Not at all, old chap.” Fleming wafted smoke through the air. “Bit of quid pro quo. Love to see that Nazi bastard's plans upset. Not to mention the bandage on his head.” He gave them both a look. “Want to hear a fuller account of the heist sometime, by the way. I told you I like to dabble in stories. I think yours would make a cracker. The police have put out that

you got away with three grand—and they are offering twenty percent as a reward for your capture. Hence the brouhaha. A king's ransom in these here parts."

"It was, ah, a little more than that."

"Was it indeed?" He looked in his rear-view mirror at Eve. "Well, I'm afraid that they will probably take it all from you at Whitchurch aerodrome where you'll land in England. So I'd ah, tuck some away if I were you." He looked at Erik sitting beside him. "Look, you are lovers, yes?"

"What? No, we—"

Fleming laughed. "Oh, come on, old chap! Radiates off you both. New love, I suspect too. Nothing like it. But"—he ran his tongue over his gums—"word to the wise. The name on the letter of introduction I gave you? He's a high-up in the Ministry of Economic Warfare. It's that ministry that will spawn lots of the types of units you two say you wish to be involved in."

"To join the fightback?"

"Quite so." Fleming tapped the briefcase on Erik's lap. "Now, this chap at the MEW is splendid in many ways but he is highly religious, no sex before marriage kind of fellow, gawd 'elp us." He shuddered. "And he is also implementing a policy of loners only. People without ties more likely to sacrifice themselves, and all that. No one to torture in front of you if you are both captured, what? So I'd keep your love secret. No, better yet, confess to a fling but state that's all it was. Better to have a grain of truth in there." He glanced in the mirror again. "Unless of course it *is* just a fling."

"It's not." Erik and Eve spoke at the same time. She put a hand on the back of his neck and squeezed.

Fleming chuckled. "Aw, sweet. Then keep it quiet, I'd say. Oh, hello?" He flung his lit cigarette out of the window. "Looks like the game's afoot."

Eve peered across the runway. The aircraft's interior lights had come on and she saw the pilot settle into the cockpit. A few moments later the four propellers feathered into life. Almost immediately the plane taxied forward then swung about, until its far side faced the hut. Light spilled from the

door that opened, and mobile stairs were wheeled into place. Passengers left the hut and walked briskly to the aircraft.

“Ready, chaps?” Though the Englishman was still striving for calm, Eve could hear the tension in his voice. The plan he’d explained was fraught to say the least.

Eve clutched the little she had—a purse, which contained her passport, her compact, her lipstick, her engagement and wedding rings, and the Liliput revolver. Erik gripped Schneider’s briefcase, now containing only the dollars and his Browning, which Fleming had fully loaded again from his stock, saying, “Never know” whilst he did.

“Thank you, sir,” Erik said. “I don’t know what we would have—”

“Tell you what, buy me a martini back in London.” He grinned at them both. “I like you two. This could be the start of a beautiful friendship, don’t you think? Oh,” he added, “here we are.”

The plane had begun to taxi down the runway toward them. “It’s going!” Eve was unable to hold back her cry.

“No, no. Needs to take off into the wind. See that windsock?”

She had noticed it before. The tunnel of red cloth was blowing in their direction. She looked back as the plane went past them. Fifty metres on, it spun where the shorter clipped grass met the long. Now its nose was facing into the wind—the length of the runway stretched before it.

“Tally-ho!” Fleming cried, and turned the key.

A cough and no catch. He tried again. Same result. “Damn it!” he yelled, hitting the wheel as he turned back. “You’re going to have to run.”

Erik bolted from the front, Eve from the back. Outside, she could hear the high-pitched whine of the aircraft’s engines, revs high. It was at least a hundred and fifty metres to the plane, and she wasn’t going to make it in evening shoes. Kicking them off, she began to sprint, Erik a pace behind. They burst through the cover of bushes, hit the runway, her nylons soaking up water from the short grass. Ahead there was light, the cabin door flung open.

Fifty metres to go, and she heard distant shouting, then engines starting up. A moment later, headlights ran across the turf. But she was close

enough to hear an Englishman in the lit doorway shouting, “Come on! Come on!” as he dropped something down from the plane.

The engine shriek was near unbearable as Eve flung herself onto the rope ladder. Erik placed his hands on her backside and pushed her up. A hand grabbed her by the wrist, there was a grunt, a heave, and the man yanked her inside. A car horn sounded, but she lost sound and most other senses when Erik thumped on top of her. “Away!” shouted the man at the door.

The plane leapt forward, reins slipped. The door slammed behind her, cutting off a car horn in mid-blare. Soon after that came the lift as the plane left the ground.

Erik rolled off her. Both lay on their backs, gasping, looking first at row on row of shocked faces stretching to the aft of the plane, then up at a sandy-haired young officer in a smart blue uniform. He spoke in a clipped English accent as he reached a hand down to Eve.

“Welcome aboard, madam.”



PART FIVE

FIGHTBACK

THIRTY-EIGHT

London. February 16, 1941

THE NAZI AGENT LIFTED his pint glass, drained it and set it back on the bar. He looked at his watch, then reached beneath the bar to the brass hook on which he'd hung his hat and a small satchel. Collecting only the hat, he put that on and left the pub.

Eve, from her seat in the corner, watched him through the frosted glass of the Dog and Duck's front door. He paused for a moment on Frith Street, looked both ways, pulled up his collar against the sharp wind, then turned left, heading up to Soho Square. Back at the bar a man wearing the distinctive *ARP* armband of Air Raid Precautions left his pint unfinished and followed. As he swung through the doors, Eve saw him slip the armband off and put a flat cap on before he, too, headed left.

She picked up her "gin and it" and took the smallest of sips. Partly because it was an absurd drink—*gin and water, really?* Mainly because she'd only bought it because anyone sitting alone in a pub would need to order and drink alcohol or be noticed. A woman most especially. Putting the glass down, she watched the satchel on its hook vanish and reappear behind people as they stepped up to the pub's small bar. The man who'd left it there would be followed, though he was only a courier. The man who collected it was more important. His code name was "Setter." The leader of the pack, whose capture was the whole object of this mission, was the man for whom the satchel, or rather the secret papers inside it, were meant. Code name: "Wolfhound."

They hadn't been told much at the briefing. These men were coded with the names of Irish dog breeds because they were members of the Irish

Republican Army, a terrorist group seeking the unification of all Ireland. The southern part, Eire, independent since 1921, was neutral in this war, like Sweden. The northern six counties were still part of Great Britain. But many in the south believed that Germany, when they won the war, would help them get those six counties back and unite the whole island. Hence this helping of the Nazis.

People bought drinks, lingered at the bar, moved away. The satchel stayed. Eve didn't need to know anything about its contents. That was work for a different team. This, her first mission, her first test, was only about surveillance and pursuit. Her superiors had been reluctant to even let her try out for field work. "Leave it to the boys," an obnoxious major from SOE's Scandinavian Section, a man called Cholmondeley-Warren, had said to her, more than once. "Stick to analysis, there's a good girl." But she'd insisted—repeatedly, annoyingly—to the point where she'd worn him down.

"Why did you send me on all those courses, if not?"

"Keep you off the streets." He'd sighed. "Alright, I'll give you one crack, Miss Sinclair. Only one."

"This chair taken, luv?" A man wearing overalls, covered in soot and oil, stood at the other side of the small table before her. He didn't wait for a reply, pulled the chair out, sat. "Sorry about the muck, luv." He tapped his jacket and dust rose. "Jerry made a big mess of the house next door last night. Someone's got to clear it up." He picked up his pint and raised it in a cheers. "Thank God he missed the boozier, eh?"

Eve looked back to the bar. A man stepped away from it, holding pints.

The satchel was gone.

She looked straight at the door. It was swinging in and she glimpsed a trench coat, a hand disappearing, the leather bag within it. Immediately, she was up and moving.

"Something I said, luv?" called the voice from behind her.

On Frith Street, she looked up and down fast. He wasn't there. She took three paces to the corner of Bateman Street. There was the trench coat, moving away from her toward Dean Street. She swivelled. Another of her team was in the doorway of a small guesthouse fifty yards up on the

opposite side of the street. He was meant to always be keeping an eye on the pub door, not doing what he was doing now: peering away up the street to the square, where the courier and his tail had gone. There was a lot of shouting right beside her. Men trying to clear the rubble of the house the man inside had referred to. She couldn't call to her teammate above that noise—and the trench coat was just disappearing around the corner.

She ran, into a wind that had most people holding down their hats. At the next corner, she slowed, looked. The man had sped up too. He was just turning left onto St. Anne's Court, a cut-through to Wardour Street. Moving at just short of a run, she followed. There was a dogleg halfway down the court. Rounding that, Eve glimpsed the man turning right onto the street ahead. When she reached the corner she saw that he had slowed his pace so she matched it, settling fifty paces back.

It was 8 p.m. The street lamps were off, of course, the light had gone, as had most of the people, but there was a half-full moon and starlight to see by. No one who didn't have to lingered in the centre of London if they could help it. The Germans might not have been bombing every night, as they had the previous year for fifty-seven nights straight during the Blitz, but they still came often enough. The residents of the house next to the pub knew that. And the street she was now walking along showed both older and fresher scars of war. Random buildings gone. One here, a terrace there, one hundred yards unblemished, then a giant hole in the ground. Hell's Lottery.

The man stood at Oxford Street, waiting for a bus to pass. Swivelling, glancing back, not seeing Eve, who'd stepped into a doorway. Then she followed, dodged between buses coming the opposite way. "Shit," she kept muttering to herself. She was meant to be part of a team of five, each taking over from the other so none were noticeable for long. But the man in the doorway opposite the Dog and Duck had not been doing his job. She hadn't liked him—Renfrew was his name, and he smelled of cheap whisky. She'd have to be very lucky to follow a skilled Nazi agent to his source. To "Wolfhound." And even if it clearly wasn't her fault, if the team lost, she

lost. It was the English way, she'd found. Her one "crack" might have gone. A life of translation and analysis awaited.

The man was weaving east now, back through side streets in the direction of Tottenham Court Road. Then, on the corner of Mortimer Street, Eve snatched a sudden breath. One of her team—Martin, a Pole—was standing on the other side of the street. He saw her, shrugged, started to cross toward her. She shook her head fast, then jerked it forward. Martin turned, saw the person closest to them on the pavement ahead, a man in a trench coat. He turned back, eyebrows raised. She nodded and he scratched his nose. "My turn," his signal said.

She could have dropped out then. Should have, perhaps. *But I'm damned if I will*, she thought. *They lost him, I found him, he's mine.*

Martin followed on the opposite pavement, while she stuck to hers. He gestured a "What?" at her and scratched his nose again. She shook her head then raised her eyebrows, nodding forward. He saw now what she had. The man had stopped twenty yards short of the junction with Tottenham Court Road. Stopped because he'd joined a queue there. Eve knew where it led—to Goodge Street Underground station. It was one of the deepest Tube stations in Central London and so one of the most popular...as a bomb shelter. Their quarry was going to ground. Or perhaps he thought a crowd the best place for the handover of the satchel.

Eve joined the queue about six people behind the man, Martin five or so further back. The line moved steadily forward. The man entered the station and descended the spiralling stairs. She glimpsed him sometimes as they moved down. She reached the platform. "Ticket, dearie?"

Eve glanced at the woman who'd asked. "Ticket? I thought the trains didn't stop here?"

The woman laughed. "'Course they don't. Have you got a ticket for a bunk?" She waved her hand to her right down the platform. It was filled with bunks, two rows, three beds high.

"Oh, no, I haven't."

"Not one of our regulars then. Might be a bed further down. Or a bit of space on the floor. It will be cozy tonight!" As Eve moved on, the ticketer

looked at the next person in line. “Ticket, dearie?”

While the woman talked, Eve had kept her eyes on the man she was following. He was threading through the crowd about thirty yards ahead of her. Suddenly he stopped, turned around, so she halted too—right beside a small table with a tea urn on it. Wordlessly the woman behind it handed her a cup. Beside her, a circle of people had formed around a man with a ukulele. He began playing a popular song, “Leaning on a Lamp-post.” The people began singing along with him.

Keeping one eye on her quarry, who was looking all around him, Eve sipped her tea. It was weak, mainly water and milk. Watched as the man turned again and hurried on. There was an exit at the end of the platform, which she knew led back up to another stairwell and from there on up to the street. Putting her cup down, Eve pushed through the singers, eliciting a few protests, watching as the man disappeared through the exit ahead.

Eve raced to the exit and ran up the stairs. The Irish Nazi might have had longer legs, but perhaps he wasn’t as fit as Eve, who’d spent a month at a physical training camp at Beaulieu Estate being shouted at by drill sergeants. So he was only fifty paces down Goodge Street when she emerged from the station. He was heading back the way he’d come. Again, he glanced back, so Eve ducked behind a tall man walking ahead. When she looked the agent had slowed again. Getting his wind back. Confident he’d shed any pursuit.

“Lady!” Martin puffed up to her. He was a little overweight, perhaps hadn’t yet attended those same courses. “You should stop, call in. I follow now.”

“No.” She gestured ahead. “He thinks he’s lost us. We can get them both.”

He grumbled something in Polish but crossed to the opposite side of the road anyway. Bending into the sharp wind, they followed. Along Goodge Street, left onto Charlotte Street. It was busier there, with several restaurants still open. Outside one, the man leaned suddenly against a set of iron railings. When he moved on, she saw that the satchel was now hanging from an iron spike.

She caught Martin's eye. Tugged her ear. *Follow him*, she was saying. The Pole shook his head but then did as he was told.

Eve folded herself into a doorway, out of the biting wind. She didn't think the satchel would be left there long for collection.

She was right. Two minutes later, she noticed a man—couldn't help it, as he was the most conspicuous person there. Most people were reasonably well-dressed. Office workers, many from the Forces. Others clearly wealthier. This man had a coat that gaped because it had no buttons, a moth-eaten trilby pulled low, a ragged scarf, and a rope belt on baggy trousers. He was swaying. Mumbling.

She considered him, considered others, then looked back at the tramp. "Hide in plain sight," she muttered. It was a phrase drilled into her at the course she'd taken on enemy-controlled cities. "The most obvious can be the least obvious." She watched as he came level with the satchel. Lurched into the railing. Righted himself.

When he stepped away, the satchel was no longer there.

He'd only taken three paces when the strongest gust of wind yet buffeted him. It lifted his trilby from his head, blew it back. He cursed loudly, chased it down the street. Slapped it back on. Held it firmly as he continued on his way.

After ten seconds, Eve followed. She maintained the thirty-yard gap between them. He was in no hurry now so neither was she.

They both knew where he was going.

THIRTY-NINE

IT WAS ONLY WHEN the tramp began to descend the stairwell that Eve finally closed the gap. When he reached the door, she saw him change. His stoop was gone as he withdrew a key from his coat pocket and inserted it steadily into the keyhole.

“Wolfhound!” she called softly, but loud enough for him to hear. “Gotcha!”

He froze, but didn’t turn. “They didn’t tell me you were part of this exercise,” he said.

“You didn’t tell me you were back.”

She heard his laugh. “I wanted to surprise you.”

“You certainly did that.”

He did turn then. “Hello, Eve,” he said.

“Hello, Erik.”

He pushed open the door and entered the building. She followed him down the stairs. He was waiting for her five paces back in the hall. He opened his arms wide. “Darling.”

She stopped by the door. “Erik, I could smell you from the top of the stairs.”

“They made me sleep on the Embankment for a week. Said it would toughen me up.”

“Well, it certainly got you into character.”

He took a step toward her and she thrust out a hand. “Back off! You’ll take a bath before you come anywhere near me.”

He bowed. “Ma’am.” He hung his coat on a hook and went down the hall. “Are you going to call this in? Your...triumph?”

“Oh, I think that can wait a few hours, don’t you? I can tell them that I followed you up and down, hither and yon. Besides”—she looked around —“we don’t want them to know about this place, do we?”

“That we do not.” Erik was shedding clothes, dropping them on the floor as he made for the bathroom. She heard the squeak of the taps turning, the gas boiler firing up. “Mind bringing me a Scotch?” he called.

Eve hung her own coat from a hallway hook, then gathered up Erik’s discarded clothes—*Honestly, men!*—then went into the kitchen, dropping the malodorous items into a wicker basket there. She went on to a cabinet, took down two glasses and a half-full bottle of Glenmorangie. She ran her finger along the counter. Came up with dust. Neither of them had been there recently. Erik had been gone for three months, she for five weeks, on their courses. The flat they’d bought with cash from the undeclared part of the money they’d stolen from Berndt Schneider could use a little love and attention.

Two good pieces of advice from that Mr. Fleming. To keep some of the money back. And to disavow any relationship between them. So far, neither lie had been uncovered—at least, so she thought.

She poured the whisky, added a splash of water to each. Then went to the gramophone and flicked through some records there. Glenn Miller was her current passion, and she put his latest on. First song up: “Chattanooga Choo Choo.” As his trombone filled the room, she carried the glasses into the bathroom. Paused in the doorway. “Excuse me, Lieutenant, but don’t you know there is a war on?”

Erik was lying with hot water up to his chin—far above the rationed line drawn in the tub by its previous owner. “I haven’t had a bath for a week,” he protested. “This is a week’s worth of baths.”

She laughed and handed him his glass. They clinked, and she sat on the edge of the tub. Looked at him through the steam. “Welcome home,” she said.

“Thanks.” He sipped, sighed. “So, they let you into the field.”

“Grudgingly. This was ‘my one crack,’ Cholmondeley-Warren told me. Perhaps my success will make them think again about putting me into the

real field.”

“I know you want that. Which is why I let you catch me.”

“Liar!”

“Of course. Spotted you immediately.”

“Double liar! Where?”

“Uh, Poland Street.”

“Triple liar. I was never on it. Three strikes, you are out!”

“What?”

“It’s baseball. You’ve missed three times. You’re out.”

“I see. What happens to me now?”

“You’re on the bench.”

“But we don’t have a bench.”

“No. We don’t.” Eve knocked back her whisky, set her glass down, then started unbuttoning her dress. Starting from her neck, moving slowly down toward her belly. She was aware of the stillness, the quality of his attention. When she’d undone the last button, and her dress parted to reveal her garter belt and stockings, she continued, “So we’ll have to make do with this bath.”

“Eve,” he grunted, reaching.

“Uh-uh.” She stepped away from his hand and finished undressing with a little more dispatch. When she was finally naked, she looked down at him. “You know,” she said, “I am deeply concerned about your casual attitude to water rationing, Lieutenant.” She put one foot in the water. “The least we can do for the war effort is share.”



Afterwards, they lay in the bed—her in his arms, the covers pulled over them. The tiny gas fire didn’t do much for the room. She could see their exhales, rising side by side.

They’d spent so much time sharing beds, not touching, before they fell in love. It was different now, of course. The silence between them so comfortable. She’d thought that they might just drift off, as they loved to

do, wrapped in each other. But she sensed he wanted to speak, so she waited, not rushing him. You didn't rush a Norwegian, she'd found. At least not her Norwegian.

"Eve? You awake?"

"Sure."

"I...I need to tell you something."

"OK. Should I sit up?"

"No. Stay right there. I want to feel this. Remember it in my bones."

She swallowed. "They're sending you in."

"Yes."

Damn, she thought. "Where?"

"You know I mustn't tell you. Though I am sure you can guess."

Norway. She knew he'd been in Scotland these last months, in the Highlands, where the Scandinavian branch of the Special Operations Executive maintained a base.

"Do you know how long?"

"No. A while, though. I am to do...certain things. They might take a while."

She knew she shouldn't ask. Had to. "A year?"

"Maybe. Maybe longer."

Fuck, she thought.

He took her hand. "Eve," he murmured.

"Erik."

"I wondered if we...if we should—" He shook his head. "Christ, I have no idea how to say this. I am not sure I even want to say this."

She had a feeling she knew what was troubling him. "Spit it out, soldier."

"OK." He rose up on one elbow and looked into her eyes. The only light in the room came from that ineffectual bar. But their eyes had kind of grown accustomed to the dark. "I said I may be gone a year. I may be gone longer. I could be killed—"

"Don't. Don't say that. Ever."

“I may, my love. Our job—most people do not live so long in it. And if I am, or taken by the Germans...” He squeezed her hand to halt the next protest. “They may not let you know for a while. Why would they if they do not know about us?”

She licked her lips. “So?”

“So...so you are young, Eve. You may get...lonely. And if you do...if you do”—the next words came in a rush—“I want to say that it’s OK.”

“I see.” She jerked her hand away, reached to the bedside table, to her cigarettes and lighter there. Usually she’d light one for him too. This time she didn’t. “So are you talking about some kind of...*arrangement*?”

She spat out the word she hated. Felt it like a charge moving through her body. The word that brought her immediately back to Richard’s first use of it. To Henrik Ridelsson and what he did to them. The arrangement that had led to her husband hanging from a doorknob.

Erik didn’t know what the word meant to her. She had never discussed it. Even with this man she loved and trusted. It was a different Eve who had lived that life. Yet he could see what it had done to her. The set of her jaw. Her furious eyes. “My love, I just don’t want you to waste your youth waiting for a man who might never come back.”

She felt her fury working still. “And I assume *you* won’t waste yours? Back in your homeland?” She was aware that her eyes had filled with tears. *Damn it*, she thought, and shoved a wrist across them.

He sat up fully, pulled the cigarette from her hand, took a drag of it then stubbed it out in the ashtray. Lifted both her hands. “My love?” He shook what he held. “What is it? I thought this might help you. Us.”

“You were wrong.”

“Look at me. Eve, please look at me.”

She did, reluctantly. He drew a deep breath. “Listen, Eve. I don’t want anyone but you. I won’t *love* anyone but you. I know this. Here. *Here!*” He placed her hand against his chest. “But we are both human. And so much time may pass. So perhaps take some...comfort, if you wish. With no guilt. Because it will not be love. Only this is love. This!”

She broke then. Let the tears fall while he held her. Then, when she'd shed enough, she pulled away and looked at him. "I agree—on one condition."

"What is it."

"The same for you as me." She leaned close until her eyes were a handspan from his. "Don't fall in love with anyone else, soldier."

He smiled. "Believe me, I won't. How could I? Look at you."

"There are prettier girls than me in Norway. Much prettier."

"Oh, sure, much prettier!" She hit him then, fist to chest. He laughed. "But that's not what I am talking about. That's not what I am seeing. I am seeing you. Only you."

"Alright." She knew what she was seeing too. Only him. "But there's one other condition."

"Shoot."

"I don't have to, right? I don't have to."

"Neither of us has to do anything, darling."

"Good." She knew something else too, quite suddenly. The room was freezing! She drew him down and held him again under the covers. Just held him; cherishing, like he had before, that contact, that heat. It didn't become anything else. She knew they might make love again in the morning. They often did. But if they didn't, that was OK too.

What she would do in the morning was "arrest" him. She'd been the one to trap the Wolfhound. That was her final thought as sleep took her. That perhaps she'd done enough with her "one crack" to impress even Cholmondeley-Warren. That, like her one love lying beside her, someday she would be out in the field too.

Someday, she thought, as her eyes slowly closed.

FORTY

Three years later—April 10, 1944

THOUGH THERE WAS NOW the faintest of dawn light behind her, Eve didn't need the rising sun to see. The night sky was almost cloudless—a waxing three-quarter moon etching every object below her in silver. The fences around the gardens of the village's houses. The chaotic stack of nets and floats the fishermen used. The roadway. And especially, her target: the twin metal rails of the train tracks. They gleamed, beckoning her.

Got to move before sun-up, Eve thought, and shivered. Fear? Certainly. But shivering had been her constant state since her raiding party had set out four days before in an early spring downpour that had largely cleared the snow but had also pursued them for the first three days across the soggy land, finding every gap in their inadequate rain gear. On the barren moorlands there was no true shelter—the odd lean of stone or scoop of ground doing little to protect them. The forests were no better, the trees this far north only just coming into leaf. Though at least the team had been able to cut and weave together boughs and withies for the second night's shelter.

It had been a mistake, though, to light a fire on the third night. She'd said so, but had been overruled by the team leader, a Norwegian from Stavanger with the code name "Ash." Despite the allure of being a little drier, a little warmer for a little while, Eve—code name "Birch"—had taken herself up the hill to sleep, followed by "Oak," who'd agreed with her assessment. Or so she'd thought, until the kid from Bergen started talking about "sharing body warmth" in the shallow trench they'd dug—one of the more original chat-up lines she'd heard recently. She'd declined.

At least Oak had been nearby, and thus also hidden, when the enemy arrived. The enemy was why Ash and the other three were now in an interrogation cell. They had all been told to say if captured only that they were acting alone. But whoever had taken them must have known they were lying, because the pursuit of the surviving two—Birch and Oak—continued, and every trick Eve had been taught to lose them had failed. Oak had tripped near midnight, sprained an ankle, so she'd had to abandon him, taking what basic food he had, leaving him only with his Sten gun and a cyanide capsule. Not ten minutes later there'd been a short exchange of gunfire. She hoped he'd taken a few of the enemy out before killing himself. Hoped he'd spared himself the torture that would come before he was killed anyway—because Hitler himself had ordered that for any commando taken in a raid, whether in uniform or not.

She knew they were faster than her, so she'd hidden in the crook of a copper beech. Half an hour later, she'd watched her pursuers pass along the path a hundred and fifty yards below her. A dozen of them. She'd focused on their officer, her real opponent here, swathed in a heavy coat, a scarf wrapped round his face, keeping out the cutting wind. He was smart, she'd give him that. Had figured out her route and then each of the places from which she was likely to attack the train. But she'd turned the tables now. Quarry had become hunter. She'd followed him and his team as they went to the bridge over the river, left guards there, went on to the culvert over a canyon, left others there.

There was a third spot, the next most likely, but she'd left her stalking to head for the fourth instead. The train was coming through at 8 a.m., which, once she'd arrived, had given her less than an hour.

She looked down at the spot now and shook her head. This fourth was the poorest sabotage choice for a reason. Too close to a village that already had a detachment of soldiers—two of whom were walking opposite ways along the tracks below, each disappearing around a corner. She'd timed the gap between their passing and reappearance. Two minutes, give or take a few seconds.

Long enough, she wondered, for someone who had only trained at setting explosives twice before, a Glaswegian trooper shouting filthy insults at her while she worked? “Not going to find out sitting here.” She said it aloud then pursed her lips. Wasn’t that the first sign of madness? Talking to oneself?

She watched as the two guards met, parted, and kept walking their opposite ways—one heading into the town, the other walking away down the track. When the latter had gotten thirty paces past her viewpoint, she stuck a leg over the rock lip, heaved herself over, and slithered down the steep slope.

At the tracks, she stopped and looked both ways at the sentries’ backs moving away. Then she crossed to the far rail and opened her bag. Cursed yet again that she’d not been able to arrive three hours before in the dead of night so she could have dug a hole four inches deep under each rail and hidden ten pounds of explosives. Which, of course, she couldn’t anyway. The men on her team had each been carrying twenty pounds of explosives. The only woman had not been expected to get anywhere close to the train. Only after her strong objections was Eve allowed to carry even two pounds, and the means to set them off.

She’d prepared what she could ahead. Divided then shaped her Nobel 808 explosive into two plastic cones, each about the length of a fat cigar. Her fingers still reeked of the explosive’s almondy smell.

Scraping away enough of the small-piece rocky ballast beneath the bottom of the rail, she slipped her reinforced tape through, then placed the first cigar below the lip of the upper rail. A quick knot and it was held, tighter when she wiggled a small piece of wood under the tape. Then she shoved the detonator’s sharp copper head into the plastic before heading back over the railroad ties, letting the wire play out behind her.

She risked a look at her watch, then up the track each way. She had just under a minute before the sentries reappeared and...there! She felt the rail vibrate with the approaching train. Breathing deep and steadily, she repeated what she’d done before, if a little less elegantly.

With both cigars held in position, she checked the bridging wire between them, then clipped the spool to her belt and started to scramble back up the slope. Made five yards before she was jerked to a halt. Looked back—to the two wires stuck on a rock. She didn't check, didn't have time, but she sensed that one if not both sentries had turned the corners onto the straight of the track, and that the train was about to round the bend. Since there was no time, she took all she needed to slide down, lift the wires over and wide of the rock, then continue her climb to the rock lip.

There was her car battery, the heaviest weight in her pack. Looping the negative red wire around its terminal, she lifted the black then looked down again. The train was fifty yards away, going slowly, which was a pity. Better if it was fast, or on a bridge, to make for a more impressive wreck. But at least she'd derail it—cause some aggravation to the enemy. Succeed in her mission. Unlike the men on her team. She grinned as she lifted the other wire.

“Hände hoch.”

It wasn't the volume of the words telling her to put her hands up, which were softly spoken. It was the suddenness of them, out of nowhere. It almost paralysed her. Almost. But even if she was finished, she wasn't beaten. Not when she could put the wire to the terminal.

So she did.

And nothing happened. So she tried again. And nothing happened again. From behind her came the soft sound of laughter, from more than one voice. She looked down to where she'd set the explosives. There was a man standing on the other side of the tracks now. In one hand he held up the wire bridge that was meant to join the two cigars. She couldn't see if he was smiling because the train came between them immediately.

“Hände hoch,” came the voice again, harsher this time. She obeyed, turned. Three men were standing there. They were dressed for winter with forage caps, goggles, and scarves pulled over their faces. One had a captain's pips on the shoulders of his khaki greatcoat. The leader, obviously. He stepped forward now and spoke again. In English. In a very bad German accent. “For you, Tommy, ze war ist over.” Then he reached up and

removed his scarf. Continuing in his normal accent, he grinned and added, “Oh, and...gotcha.”

It was a shock. Joy chased fury away, but she wasn’t going to give him either of those, not in front of these others. So she lowered her hands.

“Hello, Erik,” she replied. “You bastard.”

FORTY-ONE

Morar, Scotland. April 10, 1944

IT WAS PLEASANT TO be sitting before a glowing hearth in the back room of the Station Hotel, bathed, in clean clothes, with a stew bowl empty and scraped before her, and a fine malt whisky in her hand. Of the several establishments SOE maintained in the Highlands of Scotland, the Station Hotel was one of the nicest. Or so Eve thought now, looking around at the framed prints of stags in glens and photographs of huge salmon held by smiling men above streams. A hotel, not a laird's commandeered mansion. The Scots, she'd discovered, leaned to the austere. Like at Arisaig House, just along the coast, the main training centre in the region, with its draughty timbered halls and cavernous ceilings. Well placed for railway sabotage training, since a track ran past it and up to where they were now, in the small port of Morar.

Though the Norwegian Section's house in Aviemore, where Eve had recently come from, was even more bare-bones. Among the highest peaks in the country, the barren, beautiful land replicated the conditions in the uplands of Norway, making it ideal for the Norwegian commandos training to return to the fight in their country. It was a long trek to where she was now; her party had set out from it four days before.

She assumed the rest of Tree Team were either back there now or returned to their regiments. SOE didn't like failure, and the men on her team had been captured only halfway through the exercise. She shivered. Not from the cold this time—she was toasty warm—but because she knew that even though she'd gotten close, she'd also failed at the very end. The last thing she wanted was to be sent back to London—to the office where

she'd worked at SOE's Scandinavian Section in Chiltern Court, off Baker Street, since arriving from Portugal all those years ago. Stuck there, aside from the occasional training course like this one. She'd had that brief success, capturing the "Irish Nazi" agent, "Wolfhound," played by Erik Strom. But though her superiors had said they'd been impressed and there had been talk of sending her out, though she'd kept training, nothing had progressed. "Too valuable to us here," she'd been told.

She knew that the work she did, translating and analyzing reports and data that came from both Sweden and Norway, was vital. But all she'd ever wanted was to get into the field. Lisbon, the little she and Erik had achieved there, had given her a taste for it.

She looked again at the three men who were sharing the hotel's back room with her. Men who would decide her fate. Captain MacAllister she knew reasonably well, since he'd been her main instructor on the four-week course that had just ended in this mission. A one-legged veteran of the Great War, he had not let his handicap stop him from climbing several of the world's highest mountains, starting in his native Scotland and on through every continent. The second man before her she'd met on a few occasions in London, as he was high up in SOE. Colonel Cholmondeley-Warren was short, bald, with a pencil moustache and a brusque manner. He was known as "the Saint" at HQ, but not because he had the patience of one—far from it. Rather, because his first name was St. John. "St. John" was pronounced "Sinjin"—with the other oddity of his name being that "Cholmondeley" was pronounced "Chumley." It was strange that he was there. He usually only strayed from Baker Street to brief senior commanders at Whitehall, or even Churchill himself sometimes in the War Rooms. *Which could either be good or bad for me*, she thought.

Finally, she turned her attention to the third man there. Erik Strom.

He was the true surprise. And all the complicated feelings that had hit her the moment she'd seen him above the tracks still played in her now. The last she'd heard of him he'd been "out," which in his case meant Norway. The last time she'd seen him had been nearly a year before, and that had also been after a year apart. She'd noted the change in him then. Not just

the man he'd become from the almost-boy she'd met in Sweden. Physically, of course—SOE training methods put on muscle, she'd acquired some herself. But his demeanour as well. A centre to him, a darkness there, perhaps. The aspiring lawyer had always been serious, but he laughed even less now.

Why is he here? she wondered, taking a sip of her whisky. A very small sip, because she'd already found that the one glass of claret she'd had with the stew had reacted with her last tablets of Benzedrine, a double dose of which she'd taken when she'd arrived above the tracks at Morar because she'd been so exhausted and needed the uppers to do her job. Despite the couple of hours they'd allowed her that afternoon, the lingering bath, she still felt it in her system. Booze made her edgier, and she was edgy enough. She'd need her wits here if she was to fight for what she wanted.

The mission debrief had happened over the smoked salmon starter and the stew. Her choices had been picked apart, her errors analyzed. She had defended herself, as was expected. There was no praise for how close she'd gotten. “‘Almost succeeded’ is another term for failure,” the Saint had pronounced at one point. However, she got the sense that they were slightly impressed. It was never said, of course. Praise was not the British way—the highest she'd ever gotten being a “not bad” from her section leader when she'd turned in a particularly astute report. They also mentioned *en passant* that she'd nearly outwitted the best “chaser” they had. Which perhaps partly explained why Erik was there. It pleased her. She knew he'd been a hunter in his native land.

Only partly explains, though, she thought, glancing away from him at last.

“Anything else, MacAllister?”

The captain ran his tongue around his lips. “No, Colonel. I think we've covered it.”

“Good show. Then perhaps give us the room? Oh, and send someone in to clear all this away, will you?”

“Certainly, sir. I'll join the rest of the chaps in the bar.” MacAllister drained the whisky before him, rose, picked up his cap and moved with his

slight limp around the table to the door. At it he paused, swivelled. “In case I dinna get another chance, Corporal Sinclair, may I wish you all the best.” His lined face slipped into the unaccustomed grooves of a smile. “You’re tougher than nine out of ten of the fellas I get at Aviemore, and that’s no messin’.”

Eve flushed, rose and saluted. “Thank you for everything, Captain.”

“’Twas a pleasure. If I had—”

“Yes, indeed, thank you, MacAllister,” Cholmondeley-Warren interrupted, waving his hand. “Door behind you, please.”

The captain nodded and opened the door, which admitted the faint sound of people enjoying themselves in the hotel’s public bar; it immediately cut off when he closed it.

Erik went to the fireplace, added some logs, and used a metal poker to rouse the flames. The colonel meanwhile extracted a piece of paper from one of the folders in front of him on the dining table. She’d glimpsed the name on its cover, in bold black: “Sinclair, Eve. Corporal.” Though “Sinclair” was inked in with a different pen above “Spence,” which had been struck through. When they were first considering her for SOE she’d felt that “Spence” was someone from another life, one she’d lived briefly and hadn’t much cared for. “Eve Sinclair” was who she was, and who she wanted to be in the fight ahead.

The folder was, she felt, alarmingly thick.

Cholmondeley-Warren tipped his head back so he could squint through his pince-nez glasses. Reflected firelight danced in them, and off the hairless dome of his head, as he read. “MacAllister likes you,” he said, eyes moving over the lines. “Been married three times, of course, so he has an eye for pretty ladies.”

“I don’t think, Colonel, that would affect his—”

“No, no. Not saying it would. That chappie gives no one an easy ride. Besides, for this type of work, pretty can sometimes be a useful thing.”

Ha, she thought. *Is this it?* She’d wondered before if they might use her in that way. The “honey trap” was as old a spying technique as history. It was what she’d attempted with Schneider in Lisbon, of course. The memory

of him, of how close she'd come to being badly hurt, still made her jerk awake sometimes. Yet what woke her far more often was the fear of not getting out there again. To never feel she was helping end the war with more than paper-pushing. Occasionally she'd even hinted to her superiors that she'd be willing to go in that direction. For reasons they never stated, they never took her up on it.

She waited, watching as the colonel put down one page, lifted another. Through the thin paper she saw a grid—writing and numbers in boxes. “At Aviemore you scored quite highly in fitness and orienteering, and relatively well in shooting. Pistols, though your Sten gun marks are lower. Your unarmed combat skills are higher than average, you're OK with a Fairbairn knife and you are not bad with explosives, it appears. While at Fawley Court you did well to begin with at the Morse, less so a year later.”

“I was rusty. I've been practicing since.”

“Glad to hear.” He peered closer at one box. “The only fly in your particular ointment, young lady, is your fear of heights. Says here you refused an order to jump from the balloon at Tatton Park. Failed the course.”

Eve had known this would be coming. She swallowed. “Sir, I told them to take me up in an actual airplane, then push me out. I'd manage—”

The colonel grunted. “Maybe. Maybe not. Still—” He held up his hand to stop her further protestations. “There are other methods of inserting an agent into hostile territory. We'll consider those.”

As he replaced the paper into the folder, Eve felt a surge of electricity not unlike a Benzedrine rush. *Insert an agent*, he'd said. Was this her moment?

But instead of addressing that, the Saint closed the folder, took off his glasses, leaned back and appraised her for at least twenty seconds before continuing. “Perhaps you'd be so good, Corporal Sinclair, as to tell me what you know about Swedish ball bearings?”

Eve was careful not to let the change of topic throw her. “I wrote a report on them last year, sir.”

“Indeed you did. Haven’t had a chance to read it, so a summary would help. Help the captain here too, what?” He inclined his head to Erik, who was still at the fireplace, leaning on its mantel. “Besides, the situation has changed somewhat this year, has it not?”

“It has, sir. Shall I begin with that?”

“As the King said to Alice in Wonderland: ‘Begin at the beginning, then go on till you come to the end: then stop.’” He harumphed, as if he’d been caught out in some absurdity, then dug into his breast pocket, pulled out something and set it on the table. “And the beginning begins here, doesn’t it? With this.”

He spun the something across to her. When she caught it, she saw what it was, the subject she was being asked to talk about—a small steel sphere. She lifted it, then wrapped it up between her thumb and forefinger in an O.

“Tell us again why something so innocent-looking is so vital to each country’s military machine.”

“Because it literally makes their machines run.” She held the ball bearing up until it caught some flame light. “They come in all sorts of sizes, used for different purposes in different ways. Covered in grease, sometimes put into steel rings, they reduce friction between metal surfaces, prevent them overheating and shutting down.”

“Can engines—in tanks, armoured cars—work without them?”

“No. And not just vehicles, Colonel. All weapons need them too. Artillery, machine guns.”

“Planes?”

“Yes, of course, planes.” She licked her lips. “In my report, I quoted figures from downed German aircraft that had been studied. They found four thousand ball bearings in a Dornier. Two thousand in a Focke-Wulf 190. A Junkers 88 bomber has one thousand in its controls alone. Then there are—”

“Yes, well, I think we’ve got the point.” He gestured at the ball bearing and Eve rolled it back to him. “My grandson will kill me if I don’t return this. His best shooter at marbles apparently.” He tucked it back into his

breast pocket. “Now, tell me where Herr Hitler procures this vital component for his forces.”

“He has his own factories. The big one at Schweinfurt—”

“Which was severely incapacitated in the raid last August. Forgive me, go on.”

“Yet he still gets most of his ball bearings from Sweden. They have a history of precision steelmaking—and ball bearings require extreme precision in the making.”

“Care to put a figure on the Swedish contribution of ball bearings to the Nazi war effort?”

Again, it was in her report. Again, even if he hadn’t read it, he almost certainly knew the figure. But this was the way with the Brits, she’d discovered, in endless meetings over a range of subjects. State all the facts, clearly, for the record. The fact that no secretary was there writing them down made no difference whatsoever. “Fifty-eight percent,” she stated.

“Over half of all the ball bearings Germany has used in this war have come from Sweden?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Fuckers.” The word was muttered from the fireplace, but it was still clear.

Cholmondeley-Warren swivelled. “You have a comment, Captain Strom?”

“I do.” Erik grunted, turned to them. “I hate the fact that the Swedes are not only sitting out the war but making huge profits from it, as well. While their fellow Scandinavians, my Norwegian countrymen and women, are starved and murdered by the very oppressors they are helping.” He spoke softly but there was no mistaking the anger beneath his words.

“And what would you have them do, Captain?”

“Fight. Get on the right side of history and help defeat this pure evil.”

Eve felt her Swedish half stir. “But, uh, Captain Strom, the Germans have three hundred thousand men across the border in Norway. The Swedish army can muster not even a third of that. They have no experience

in war, and far inferior machines. Even if Hitler didn't invade, his bombers could lay waste to Stockholm, all the cities. They—"

Erik stepped away from the mantel. "By their collusion they are supporting murder on an unimaginable scale. We have only just started to hear of the camps—"

A loud knock came on the door just before it was flung open and a middle-aged woman in a pinny bustled in. She rapidly collected the dishes and empty glasses on a tray, muttering indecipherable Scots the whole while. At the door, she said something that sounded like, "Do you want anything else?" The colonel's only reply was to wave her out.

On the closing door, Eve and Erik took deep breaths to continue the argument. But the Saint spoke first. "You may continue this debate on your own time. What might be does not concern us. The only thing that does is what is." He turned to Eve. "Where do we stand now, vis-à-vis Sweden's ball-bearing exports to Germany?"

"Last year's LTA agreement—"

"LTA?" Erik asked.

"Sorry. 'London Tripartite Agreement.' It reduced the number of exports considerably but—"

"But didn't end it entirely. And last month that's exactly what our American friends demanded: a total cessation of shipments. In the lead-up to...well." Cholmondeley-Warren leaned in, lowering his voice. "Everyone here knows what we have been envisaging, training and preparing for these last years. Opening the second front. The Allied invasion of Europe." He glanced up at Erik. "I know you chaps all hope that Norway will be our target."

"We will rise as one man when you come, sir."

"I am sure you would. Alas, young man, you and your countrymen will have to wait. Our deceptions indicating we might invade Norway first have succeeded in tying down considerable amounts of German manpower and resources. But everyone, from Hitler down, knows where the actual invasion will happen. France." He leaned back again. "Can't tell you where, of course. Almost no one knows, including myself. But France it will most

certainly be.” He rose, went to the fire, held out his hands to warm them. He stared into the flames, and Eve noticed something else come into his eyes. Briskness was gone, replaced by a softness as he spoke again. “Invasions are a terrible risk,” he murmured. “I was at Gallipoli in the first show, and it was”—he swallowed—“unpleasant. So many young lads lost their lives, bogged down on that bloody beach. Piss-poor planning, incompetent leadership, lions led by lambs. I lost—” He broke off, turned back, firmness returning. “Doesn’t matter. As I said before, only the now is important. The Germans will be fighting for their existence. Lose France, they will lose the war. Stop us on the beaches and they have a damn good chance of carrying on. Hundreds of thousands more dead. A world destroyed.”

He came back, sat again, and drained his whisky glass. “Invasion is a highly dangerous game and only won by the very finest of margins. One of those fine margins is my little friend in here”—he tapped his pocket—“the ball bearing. If we stop even some of those reaching German factories, we stop tanks, we stop bombers and fighters, we jam machine guns and reduce their artillery. On a beach, that fine margin could make the difference between victory and defeat.” He grunted. “No wonder the Yanks have pressed the Swedes so hard to end all shipments. Which they cannot do without risking war or the destruction of their cities, as you pointed out, Corporal Sinclair.”

“The legal shipment was already severely reduced according to last year’s LTA terms. Maybe that will be enough?”

He nodded. “It may be. We can only hope so—and pray for those lads on the beaches.” He closed his eyes briefly. “However, the legal shipment might not be the only one that reaches those German factories. Because we know that Hitler has many friends in Sweden determined to aid the Führer’s cause. And we have received intelligence that they have a plan to do so. To smuggle a shipment of ball bearings, larger even than the legitimate one, from the SKF factory in Eskilstuna across the border into Norway and from there fly it to the Fatherland. Speaking of friends,” he continued, delving once again into the folder before him. Pulling out another piece of paper, he

read something then looked up—straight at Eve. “Do you know a man,” he asked, “named Henrik Ridelsson?”

It was Erik who gasped, transforming it into a not-entirely-convincing cough. Eve was too shocked to even breathe, though she wasn’t sure what showed on her face. “Yes, I know him. A little.”

“Didn’t mention him in your debriefing interview when you arrived from Portugal in 1940?”

She took a deep breath, as her training had taught her to do. She remembered exactly what she’d said in that interview four years before. What she and Erik had agreed upon—the minimum, with as much truth woven in as possible. There’d been a scandal, her husband caught in an affair that the Canadians had hushed up but Richard had killed himself anyway. She’d fled to escape the fallout and had met Erik in Lisbon, where they’d had a brief affair, and stolen money from German businessman Berndt Schneider. Both of them knew that no report of Henrik’s blackmail, or of their response, had emerged because they’d scoured imported Swedish papers rigorously in Lisbon, and later in London. The only mention of all that had happened had come in a news report: that a Swedish citizen had been attacked and wounded in Hagaparken, robbery the motive, assailants unknown. For whatever reason, Henrik had kept everything quiet—so they had, too. “I only talked about the executives who worked for my father,” she continued, after a pause she hoped wasn’t too long. “Not every employee.”

“Hmm.” The colonel stared at her for a moment, then glanced down again at his papers. “Would you consider him a friend?”

“More an acquaintance.” She shrugged. “But yes, we got on quite well.”

The Saint looked up again. She held his gaze, didn’t flinch. Finally, he continued. “That may be enough. Because you will need to contact him.” A rare smile came to his lips. “Though ‘contact’ may not be the most appropriate term.”

Now she was startled and couldn’t conceal it. “When will this happen?”

“When we put you back into Sweden. Sometime in the next two weeks.” He shoved the paper back into the folder, wrapped the attached

elastic string around it, then began to shove all the papers before him into a battered leather briefcase. Done, he stood. “You may not have known this about him. But Henrik Ridelsson was and remains one of Sweden’s foremost Nazis. He is also the leader of the group who will attempt to smuggle those ball bearings into Norway. Unless you and Captain Strom can stop him, of course.”

Erik stepped to the table. “I am going in too?”

“Indeed.” The colonel was a short man, and he looked up into Erik’s face. “You, however, will be put separately into Norway. If Corporal Sinclair fails to halt the shipment at source, if they get the ball bearings to Norway, that’s where you’ll come in. Plan B, eh? Oh, and Corporal?”

“Sir?” Eve replied, rising too.

“About the one blemish on your impeccable record?”

For a moment Eve wondered if the colonel meant he’d discovered her lack of candour in her debrief in 1940. “Sir?” she asked again.

“Your fear of heights. We’re not going to have someone shove you out of an airplane. There’s a marvellous aircraft called a Lysander. Marvellous pilots too. They can land on a sixpence, take off from the same—terrain permitting. If it doesn’t”—that rare smile came again—“well, next week you’ll be taught how to roll from one, like some acrobat in a circus. Good?”

“Good, sir.”

A bubble of gas rose from her stomach. Caused by excitement, sure, but by something else too—sudden visions of Henrik Ridelsson. Running away in Hagaparken. Chasing her in the rain. Naked at her bedroom door. She swallowed the gas down. The colonel obviously did not know of their former connection or he would not be sending her in—she’d be too compromised. She was certainly not going to mention it, though. Because this was her chance. Yes, of course she knew this was selfish, personal: a chance to hurt the man who had so nearly ruined her life. Who had killed someone she’d loved. But she knew, as she looked steadily back into the colonel’s eyes, that she would say none of that.

She snapped her heels together and saluted. “And thank you, sir.”

He returned the salute, then extended the same hand forward. She took it and they shook. He retained her hand, and said, "Oh, and by the way, I have been misaddressing you. This is for you." He reached into his briefcase, drew out an envelope. "It is your promotion to sergeant. It was conditional on, well, on how well you did on the course. So, congratulations, Sergeant Sinclair."

Eve took the envelope. Felt a tingle run up her back. "Thank you again, Colonel."

"You deserve it." He shook her hand once more, then released her. "I have great confidence in you, young lady. As do all our instructors. Good hunting." He snapped the briefcase shut and moved to the door. "Get some sleep, you two. The young lady and I will be heading to London at 0800 hours. You, young man, will return to Aviemore for some specialized training."

"Sir," they chorused, as he opened the door, exited and closed it behind him.

They both stared at it wordlessly for a while. Until Erik finally broke the silence. "Who needs sleep?" he asked.

"Not me," she replied, and without looking at him, took his hand.

FORTY-TWO

ERIK STARTED AWAKE, snatching the pistol from under his pillow.

Dawn filtered through the gap in his curtains. It took him a while to remember where he was. There'd been too many rooms in too many places, most of them dangerous. This, he realized, was not one of them.

He shook his head, laid the gun on the bedside table, lay back down. He wondered what it would be like when they won the war. Would he still have to have a pistol beneath his head to get to sleep? Most of the time, it was better than a sleeping pill. Without it? It was no good, he'd lie there with his eyes popping open at every creak of wood, fearful that the Germans would burst in and take him before he could kill them or kill himself. He pictured himself after the war. Back in his student apartment in Oslo, or in the hut his family kept in Gudbrandsdalen. He had a hunting rifle. Could he put that under his pillow? He had a feeling that his Mauser 98 wouldn't be as comfortable as his Browning 9mm. Besides, he'd have to put it widthwise across the bed. Would his companion relish sleeping on a gun?

His companion. There wasn't usually one there, though he'd shared beds with a variety of comrades over the years. Bearded, grunting, blanket-hogging—and none as pretty as Eve Sinclair.

He lay there listening to her breath. Could tell by its evenness that she was still asleep. He wasn't surprised. She'd have slept little on the four-day chase from Aviemore, while he and his hunting party, once they had their quarry in their sights, always managed a few hours each night. He'd thought that after he raided their camp that would be the end of it. But Eve and one other weren't there, and the hunt was on again. She'd done well, pursuing the pursuers; he was proud of her. Almost felt guilty denying her

the victory. But he knew she'd learn more from failure than success. One day that might save her life.

She rolled over, muttering something, pulling most of the covers onto herself. He didn't mind, despite his naked skin. Cold was something else he'd accustomed himself to, and while Scotland in April was hardly hot, it was nothing compared to the mountains of Norway in February. Now that was cold! Especially that first mission in '41, up in the Jotunheim organizing a local Resistance group, teaching the basics he'd learned close to where he was now. Fieldcraft, Morse, arms training, basic sabotage. He'd been pulled out of Norway to train for his second, very different mission: a night one, infiltrating the submarine pens in the Sognefjord to analyze their defences—air, land and water—and bring back samples of their protective netting.

Erik shuddered. It was after that mission that even a revolver under his pillow was no longer a guarantee of sleep. Not if he allowed the memories of that night to come back. One especially.

As it did now.

The sentry had probably been the same age as him. Had a similar look. Could have been a cousin, with his close-cropped fair hair, his green-blue eyes. Eyes Erik had watched turn from shock to terror to a kind of reproach above the hand Erik held to his mouth, as the young man's life drained away in red from his slashed jugular, soaking two uniforms—the German and the Norwegian, melded in blood.

Now he was cold. He wondered if those memories would ever fade. He knew he'd killed others: in his first battle at Haugsbygd. The Gestapo agent at that Lisbon hotel. But the youth above the waters of the fjord? Would Erik ever forget the look in his eyes?

Shivering, Erik decided to pull some of the covers back, gently, so he didn't wake her. Began to...and saw, in the open eyes beside him, that he needn't worry.

"A penny for your thoughts, young man?"

He smiled. "Not worth even that much."

“Oh?” Eve came up onto one elbow. “You were frowning so hard I thought you were working out a plan to assassinate Hitler himself.”

Erik held up his hands in surrender. “You got me.”

“Oh, good.” She placed her forearms on his bare chest. “What’s my role?”

He laughed, pulled her to him, and felt instantly warmer. “Did you sleep well?”

“Wonderfully. Deep. Didn’t even dream.”

“Well, a Benzedrine crash will do that. How many did you take? Your pupils were like saucers.”

“It wasn’t the bennies. Or at least, not only the bennies. As you well know.” She ran a hand along his flank, from shoulder to thigh.

He chuckled. “Oh, I do know.”

She laughed too, then settled herself again onto his chest. “More sleep,” she murmured, her voice lazy.

He did know. How did they manage that? To never tire of each other that way? To always be discovering new delights? Perhaps it was something to do with reunions and farewells. Equally charged with both longing and regret. Since Portugal, the amount of time they’d spent together would add up to less than four months. Four months in four years! A few days here, a few nights there, separated by his training, her training, his missions. He’d have thought it would make a difference, that the strain would tell in the end. End them. Somehow it never had. Even after this long apart—their longest, almost a whole year. Perhaps that *was* the secret. Perhaps when the war ended and they had all the time in the world, they wouldn’t know how to keep loving each other?

He took her hand and kissed her palm, like he loved to do. She gave a little growl. “Really? Is there time?”

He hadn’t intended it. That catch in her voice, though? “There is always time.” He rolled her onto her back, put his full weight onto her. She laughed, her voice choked.

The forceful series of knocks had him across the bed and reaching for his gun. But the same Scottish voice of the woman from the night before

accompanied them, speaking more impenetrable Scots. Somehow amidst the jumble the word “breakfast” was clear.

They heard her disappear down the corridor, banging and shouting. Erik rolled back on top of Eve, looked into her eyes, a hand’s-width away. “Breakfast?” he inquired.

“Overrated.” She pushed up and kissed him hard. “But you must be swift, Captain.”

“Aye, aye, Sergeant.”



Miraculously, when Eve came into the dining room there was still some food left. Perhaps because there were fewer than the full complement of spies staying there right then. SOE also found ways around rationing that few other organizations did. Subterfuge and less-defined scruples helped too. It was an “ends justify the means” kind of outfit. Given that agents’ survival rates on operation were on the low side, the outfit at least liked them to be well fed before they set out.

She loaded her plate with bacon, black pudding, sausage and scrambled eggs, grabbed a mug of tea, then looked for a place to sit in the cavernous hotel restaurant. Cholmondeley-Warren was at its far end, in conversation with the hotel’s proprietor, a retired agent called MacDiarmid. The colonel acknowledged her with a brief wave but didn’t beckon her to join them, which suited her.

She sat, ate, drank. Ten minutes later—a reasonable amount of time to “preserve my honour,” she’d said—Erik came into the room, loaded up his plate and joined her. “Do you think he knows about us?” he asked through a mouthful of toast, nodding to the room’s other end.

“I can’t think he doesn’t.” She forked some bacon. “Not much of a spy agency that doesn’t know about their own spies.”

“Perhaps they think we are just casual. I mean, the number of times we meet.”

“Perhaps. And the Saint’s always banging on about finding ways to completely relax.” She smiled. “He once urged me to take up golf. ‘Marvellous exercise for mind and body,’” she quoted, in a sharp impression of the colonel’s bark which made Erik grin over the rim of his coffee mug.

“I can think of better exercises for both.”

She flushed at the recent memory, then thought about what he’d said. But *were* they casual? That night in London, back in ’41, after she’d caught her “spy,” before that first parting that was to last nearly a year, they’d agreed on two rules: Should they be separated a while, other lovers were allowed. The second rule was that you weren’t to fall in love with them. She’d wondered then if that would be possible for her. She’d only “lain”—she coloured slightly at the word—with three men: Richard, Henrik and Erik—and, at different times, she’d thought she’d loved each of them. Could she “make love” with someone and not love them? Fortunately, perhaps, she’d never been tested or put herself in a situation where she might be.

She’d had offers, of course. She’d heard every line there was, been forced to slap hands away and, once, a face, when a Free French officer got too touchy. But the idea of lying with anyone but Erik? Now she wondered if he had broken either rule.

She couldn’t ask him. Couldn’t bear either the truth or the lie she might see in his eyes if he had and chose not to tell her. Couldn’t ask—but she could tell. “Erik,” she said, laying a hand on his. “I just want you to know this. And believe me, I am not expecting you to confirm or deny in return but”—she squeezed the hand she held—“there’s no one else. Hasn’t been. Won’t be.”

His eyes went wide. So wide that in them she saw the absolute truth of his reply. “And there has been no one for me either, Eve.” He squeezed back. “And will never be.” Their gaze, their grip, both held for a long moment, until his eyes moved above her. “Uh-oh,” he whispered, “the colonel looks like he is wrapping up. So we’ll be going our separate ways. Again. There’s a couple of things I need to say first.”

“We may meet again, sooner rather than later,” Eve replied, adding, on his eyebrows raising, “if we go to Plan B. If I can’t stop the shipment in Sweden.”

“Exactly what I want to talk about. Can you remember a phone number?”

“Of course.”

“971058.”

She closed her eyes. Murmured. Then opened them again. “Got it.”

“It’s the number of a Norwegian hunting lodge. About a kilometre from the Swedish border. I know the guy who runs it. If we need to go to Plan B, call it, ask for Herr Møller. Tell him that your boss would like to come and hunt hare. He’ll reply that they only hunt elk there. Ask him if there is hare hunting in the place you need me to be, the day you’ll be going. He’ll get the message to me. So I know when you’ll be coming and where.”

“What about a radio message?”

Erik shook his head. “Sending and receiving in the field is never easy, as you know. Germans hunting you, terrible weather, parts of messages indecipherable. Sent to Britain, then sent back out to...wherever I’ll be. It can take days sometimes and we may not have them. The phone is simpler. Send a message. If you are able to.”

If I am able to. A sudden vision of Stockholm came then, that city of spies. The peril on the streets. She swallowed. “OK. And the second thing?” She glanced back. Cholmondeley-Warren had stood, was putting on his gloves. “Better make it snappy.”

Erik frowned. “You know better than I how dangerous Henrik Ridelsson can be. Four years of subterfuge will only have made him more so. Be extra careful.”

“Believe me, I will.” She narrowed her eyes. “Actually, I am really looking forward to seeing him again.”

“Which is what worries me. Don’t make this personal. It can screw up your judgement.”

“I know that, Erik.”

“Good. Oh, and the last thing—”

“You said two.”

“The last thing.” His gaze rose above her, then his eyes came back to hers. “I love you,” he whispered. Then he stood and saluted. “Good morning, Colonel.”

“Good morning, good morning!” Cholmondeley-Warren acknowledged both of their salutes with a brisk one of his own. “Time we were away, Corporal...sorry, Sergeant Sinclair.”

“Sir.” She reached a hand out. Erik took it and they shook. “Good hunting, Captain.”

“And to you, Sergeant. I hope you can stop this shipment at source but if not”—he nodded—“I’ll see you in Norway.”

“Norway.”

The Saint was watching them with lidded eyes in which Eve could read nothing. “Come along, then,” he barked, swivelled, and headed to the door.

As she passed Erik, she caught his trailing hand. A quick squeeze and she went—didn’t look back.

FORTY-THREE

RAF Newmarket, England. April 15, 1944

EVE STOOD JUST BEYOND the hangar doors, her eyes closed, her face lifted to the sunshine. *God, it feels good*, she thought. *To feel properly warm for once*. London was far balmier than Scotland, far drier too. She may have grown up in Montreal, its long winter making it truly one of the coldest cities in North America, but she'd pretty much decided that when the war was over, and if she returned to Canada, she'd head west. It was said that British Columbia had four seasons—unlike, as often happened, Quebec's lurch straight from winter into summer.

Mind you, she thought, *I'll miss the turning of the trees*. For a moment, she saw them, that kaleidoscopic shimmer of reds and yellows in the Laurentian hills. For a moment, and for the first time in a while, she missed home. Her parents. She'd seen them both just once since she'd left Sweden, one year after Richard's death, when Jock came to London for a meeting of leading industrialists. Marlene, who almost never travelled with him, did this time, determined to delve deeper into the story of her daughter's husband's suicide, and what had happened afterwards. Eve's letter home on arriving in England had been short on details, and she had supplied few more after reuniting with her parents in London. Partly because it was such a sad thing to remember. Mainly because, on joining SOE, she'd signed the Official Secrets Act. Lying to them had been hard. Especially when she saw the disappointment in her mother's eyes at her being a "mere secretary." Jock was easier to handle. He was simply delighted his child was alive and well after her trauma.

Her reveries were interrupted by a voice. "Sergeant Welles?"

She opened her eyes, needing to squint to see the man who'd spoken. She was not startled by her *nom de guerre* so much as her new rank. Most of the women in SOE held no military rank at all. But she'd enlisted in the WAAS—the Women's Air Auxiliary Service—in 1940 in the months when it was unclear whether SOE would accept her or not. For administrative reasons, they'd kept her in it. Her bosses liked it that she drew two salaries—and that they could “suggest” promotion to the WAAS. It also meant she sometimes got to wear a uniform. Like today, with the new stripe on her jacket.

Once she'd moved out of the direct sun, she saw that the man before her was a Royal Canadian Air Force pilot. He was as tall as Erik. Better-looking, if truth be told—the thought making her feel a moment's guilt. He had almost a *matinée* idol face: straight nose, sharp blue eyes, a full mouth.

“Flight Lieutenant William Coke.” He extended a hand. “But you can call me Billy. I'll be squiring you around today.”

She shook his hand. “Is that your real name?” she asked.

“’fraid so. Any objections?”

“I thought we weren't meant to use real names.”

“Ah, I see. No worries there.” He ran his hand through his thick, dark-brown hair. “That only applies if your pilot is actually dropping you into enemy territory. They won't let me do anything so exciting, more's the pity. I just shuttle top brass around, do the odd weather flight. And this sort of thing today. Speaking of”—he opened his hand to the airfield—“shall we go meet Lizzie?”

“Lizzie?”

“Short for Lysander. The plane you'll be taking to...wherever it is you're going.” He stooped and picked up her pack over her murmured objections.

He led the way across the tarmac. She noticed he had a distinct limp. Had noticed other things, as she was trained to do. “You don't sound Canadian,” she said.

“You'd be amazed how many non-Canucks are in the RCAF. Over half in some squadrons. Poles, South Africans. I'm legit, because I was actually

born there. Came here when I was a nipper.” He glanced at her. “Your accent says Canadian to me, though. You, uh, allowed to tell me where you from?”

“Probably not.” She smiled. “Montreal.”

“Uh-huh. Cracker of a city, I’ve heard. Bloody cold though, eh?” He stopped, raised an arm to halt her. “Hang about. Oh, and you may wish to block your ears.”

She did, he didn’t, as a plane taxied close to them and out onto the runway. A Spitfire, she saw. She’d never seen one this close to, only airborne. It was as beautiful on the ground as aloft. Then, as it passed, she noticed his attention to it. Noticed a kind of longing in his eyes.

The Spit took off, roaring into the sky. As the sound faded, he kept staring until it was a speck against the clear sky.

“Fly them, did you?”

He turned. “How’s that?”

“Spitfires. Was it flying them you earned the DFC and two bars?”

“Eh?” He reached up and laid a finger on his medal ribbons. “Yes, actually.” He grinned. “Observant, aren’t you? Suppose that goes with your job, eh?” He set off again at a good pace and she had to run to catch up.

“Were you wounded flying one?”

“This?” He glanced down at his leg. “’ardly, missus. Got this fallin’ out of a young lady’s winder when ’er ’usband come home. Didn’t ’alf give us a fright, I tell ya!” He said it in a perfect Cockney, laughed as he told the lie, so she did too. He stopped walking, turned to her. Spoke in his normal voice. “Mind you, Sergeant, if she’d been a quarter as pretty as you, I might have stayed and fought for her.” He held her gaze until the moment just before it became uncomfortable then, before she could reply, turned away. “And here we are.”

“Here” was a plane. “Sergeant Welles? Meet Lizzie. Lizzie? Sergeant Welles. Which is not her real name. But thrillingly, Lizzie, she is a spy, so she won’t tell us that. Or even her first name. Sergeant Welles will have to do.”

Eve looked past the plane to three others in a row. “Aren’t they all Lysanders too?”

“Indeed. But for me there can only be one Lizzie.”

He was lost to the plane again, as he had been watching the Spitfire. Reached his hand up to the propeller shaft now, ran his fingers around its metal tip. It was a definite caress, gentle, sensual almost...and Eve felt a shiver go through her. She wondered what might have happened if, during her and Erik’s recent long separation, she had met this very handsome wounded warrior in some London pub. The feeling lasted...right up to the moment she remembered their confessions to each other over that last breakfast in Scotland—that neither had taken advantage of their “rules.” *Still*, she thought, looking the man up and down, *doesn’t mean I can’t, uh, daydream a little.*

He turned. “Shall we?”

She was startled. “What?”

He smiled. “Get you on board.”

She sat with her legs dangling from the tiny rear cabin’s hatchway, while he stood before her and went over what lay ahead. Cholmondeley-Warren had said that the Lysander could “land on a sixpence,” which was not quite true. But it could land far shorter than any other aircraft, apparently, Allied or Axis. Like every other agent in SOE, she’d been briefed on many of its aspects because if she was going to be sent in, the Lysander was often a better option than boat or parachute. It was also used, for those same takeoff and landing capabilities, to bring agents out of occupied Europe’s fields and forest clearings.

“Now.” He used his toes to nudge the bulky bag at his feet. “You may wish to put this on out here while I tend to Lizzie’s needs.” He jerked his thumb behind her. “Little cramped, eh?”

“It is.” She glanced into the tiny rear cockpit. “Do you really take two people back here?”

“Only in a pinch. One is optimum.”

“How would two even fit?”

“They’d spoon.” He winked. “And think pure thoughts.”

She hopped down. He climbed up the short, fixed ladder and on into the front cockpit. Eve knelt and undid the straps of the bundle that contained her landing suit. It unfolded, giving off an unpleasant whiff of dried sweat and mould. She wasn't sure how many people had used it before her, but she was certain it had been stuffed, not quite dry, into a cupboard for quite some time. The only way to get it on was to lie on the tarmac and wriggle her legs in first, then sit up and tuck in her arms. The thick body lined every part of her with quilted padding. When she stood, she felt like an elephant.

From the cockpit came clicks, some whistling and eventually a song. It was one she sometimes heard in pubs, after a few ales had been taken. The BBC often played the original, sanitary version. She preferred the soldiers' earthier adaptation.

Fuck 'em all!

Fuck 'em all!

The long and the short and the tall.

Fuck all the sergeants, and WO1s.

Fuck all the corporals and their bastard sons

'Cos we're saying goodbye to them all,

As back to their billets they crawl

You'll get no promotion, this side of the ocean

So cheer up my lads, fuck 'em all!

Eve smiled as she listened, doing up her buttons and buckles. When the pilot climbed down beside her again, she said, "Thank you for the song."

"Oh, hear that did you? I'm sorry, I get a little lost up there."

"No apology required. I've heard much worse. But I've never heard that song sung so beautifully. You must be a professional."

"In Civvy Street I was. Actor who sings, truly, rather than the other way around."

"You should be on the radio. Do you take requests?"

"It has been known." He smiled. "Something you'd especially like before takeoff?"

She recalled a night with Erik early in the war at the music hall in Hoxton. “‘If You Were the Only Girl in the World’?”

The smile went, as suddenly as if a cloud had passed before the sun. He looked away. “Sorry. Don’t know that one.”

“Oh. Oh, it doesn’t matter. I just thought—”

“It’s alright.” He turned back, studied her and his smile returned. “Anyone ever tell you that you resemble the Michelin Man?”

“Everyone, actually.”

“Good show,” he replied, though his gaze on her padded suit was unfocused now, as if he were somewhere else. Then his eyes cleared, and he stood straighter. “Shall we get to it?”

“Um, sure.”

He must have heard the nerves in her voice. “Have you done this before?”

“Only from a moving truck. An acrobat taught me. He was genuinely from the circus. One half of ‘the Zucchini Brothers.’” She grinned. “‘The Great Federico’ was his stage name, and he spoke in this outrageous Italian accent. Made lots of gestures.” She raised her hand and shoulders in imitation, then shook her head. “I found out later in the mess that his real name was Reggie Jones and he was from Tiger Bay, Cardiff.”

The flight lieutenant laughed, then sighed. “Why does everyone get a *nom de guerre* but me? I’m the bloody actor after all.” He gestured her up into the rear cockpit, then climbed past her into the front one. “Strap yourself in,” he called, and she did. “Wear the flying helmet, it’s got the headset in it. It’s about fifteen to the practice field. I’ll tell you when we are about a minute out. I’ll shout, ‘Approach, Approach.’ That’s when you switch from your flying helmet to your paratrooper’s one. After that, for the final approach I’ll do this.” He sat back down in his seat, and she saw his hand shoot up, two fingers raised, before he leaned back in. “And then, when I am as low to the ground and going as slowly as I can without actually landing, I’ll do this.” He stuck a thumb up. “That’s your cue.”

As he was speaking, she put on the soft flying helmet and he put on his then sat back in his seat. His voice now came through the headset. “Once

you're out, I'll swing back around and pick you up for another go. We'll do it as often as you like. Roger all that?"

"Received."

He gave her another thumbs-up. "Tally-ho," he called, started the aircraft and immediately began to taxi to the grass strip.

She was amazed how quickly, and in how short a distance, he took off. Amazed again how soon his voice came crackling into her ears. "Approach, Approach."

Eve cursed in Norwegian, which she'd been practising—its differences to Swedish—as soon as she'd heard of the mission, the possibility of Plan B. She fumbled the flying helmet off and the harder paratrooper's helmet on. Had only just secured its straps when she saw him raise two fingers. The plane was going much slower for its final approach, and she could see through the cockpit door, which had remained open, the tops of trees lining the field that was their target. They dropped still more, slowed. But to her it still felt fast, and high. She unclipped her harness, swung her legs out to dangle over the sides. Heard Federico's advice again, in that absurd Italian accent. "You musta breathe. Three deepa breaths. You must relaxa your body."

She tried. The breathing. The relaxing. Remembered how scared she'd been the first few times she'd rolled from a moving truck. This was different, a whole new level of crazy. Gas burst from her mouth. She thought it was going to be immediately followed by the plate of reconstituted eggs she'd had for breakfast. She managed to fight it down. Just.

From the edge of her vision she saw the ground getting closer, but her eyes were now fixed on the gap between cockpits. She heard the engine change, felt the speed drop further still.

Billy's thumb went up. So Eve threw herself from the plane.

Unbraced knees, legs bent, she hit the ground, rolling straight away, over and over, padded shoulders and back absorbing the impact of the earth, until finally she just lay flat, grinning up at the robin's-egg-blue sky. *Whee*, she thought. *Again. Again!*

She stood as the plane pulled up twenty yards from her. Billy Coke's eyebrows were raised. She gave him the thumbs-up, then indicated "again" with swift circling of one wrist, as she ran to climb aboard.

They did it three more times. Each one felt better. Strangely, she liked the jump and roll more from a plane than a truck, preferred its greater speed. It was a little like skiing downhill. Go slowly, you had less control. Adapt to the velocity and tiny adjustments kept your form, your direction. It was also something from her skiing days that made her finally signal the cut-off with her palm flat to the ground as the plane stopped near her again. People got injured when they said, after a long day, "Oh, just one last run." And she couldn't afford to get injured. Not when the mission she'd been training for all these years was so close. Not when this was her chance to look Henrik Ridelsson straight in the eyes.

They flew back to the base. When he'd shut down his craft, the pilot joined her on the tarmac before the hangar where they'd met. "Bravo." He gave her a quick round of applause. "You have that down." He gestured to the building beside the hangar. "Buy you a celebratory jar in the mess?"

She looked over—and saw the Austin that had brought her. Its driver was standing at his door, looking at his watch. She turned back. "I so wish I could, Flight Lieutenant—"

"Billy."

"Billy. But I'm afraid they've got me on such a tight schedule, that I must—"

"Of course." He held out his hand. "In the theatre we'd say 'Break a leg,' but that seems inappropriate in the circumstances. So...good luck, Sergeant."

She shook his hand. He didn't let it go immediately. Instead he stepped closer and spoke in a low voice so that the aircrewmembers who were walking past to put his Lizzie to bed couldn't hear: "And give my love to Norway, will you?"

She managed not to gasp. Even made her reply casual. "I'm not going there. Why would you think I was?"

“Just before you took off the headset you, uh, said, ‘*Fee faen.*’ Means ‘the devil,’ doesn’t it?”

“You speak Norwegian?”

“Not really. Know a few phrases. I have a...friend.”

She noted the pause between words, the slight emphasis. He let her hand go, stepped back. “You remind me of her. Same beauty. More than that.” He nodded. “Same strength.” He looked into her eyes a moment longer. “Good hunting, Sergeant Welles,” he said, then turned to walk away.

“Flight Lieutenant? Uh, Billy?” He turned back. “I’d appreciate it if you would, uh, not...”

“Between us.” He bowed his head and limped away.

She watched him until he disappeared into the mess. Gave herself a mental kick for her gaffe. But she knew it didn’t really matter. This Billy Coke clearly had many secrets of his own. She felt confident that he could keep one more.



RAF Tempsford, England. Three weeks later—May 5, 1944

Almost everything about the flight was different. Only the Lysander was the same, though its taciturn pilot never called it Lizzie. Never said much beyond a grunt of welcome, and a few instructions on how to handle the door which, unlike at Newmarket, would be locked for the duration of the flight. They would be going much further, of course, and it was very cold up there even with the door shut. For once Eve was grateful she was wearing the cumbersome quilted landing suit. No names were exchanged, even false ones.

How much longer? she wondered, craning to look out the small porthole again. The first few times she had she’d seen nothing except moonlight on water. When the plane lurched a little, lifted, she realized that the pilot had jettisoned one of the long-distance fuel tanks as they approached the coast

of Norway. Then the moon lit the land, forests and bodies of water broken by the occasional peak that the plane rose to soar above.

She'd glanced into the cockpit a few times. The only light in the darkened plane was the pencil flashlight occasionally flicking on as the pilot checked the map wrapped in plastic on his lap, then swiftly clicked off. She'd been told that they flew by dead reckoning and a keen eye. To her, every stretch of the land below looked identical.

At the pre-op briefing, the squadron leader had been very clear about what she needed to do. "The Swedish border is the very limit of a Lysander's range," he'd said. "If your pilot somehow doesn't immediately find the field we've chosen, he'll turn back. If you balk at the first attempted landing, he'll turn back. Got that, young lady?"

His patronizing manner had annoyed Eve almost as much as his handlebar moustache. "I won't balk, sir. And I'd prefer 'Sergeant,' if it's all the same to you."

The man had harrumphed as he sat down. The pilot had then taken over, going over in a monotone all that Billy Coke had told her before. The only difference being that she'd get a preliminary "Approach, Approach" *five* minutes before, two fingers at *one* minute, which was when she must open the door and wait for the thumbs-up.

"Approach, Approach."

She tensed, then breathed deeply, letting her body go limp. Five more minutes seemed to last an hour, but came at last with two fingers going up in the periphery of her vision. Her breath quickened. Shucking the harness, swapping out the headgear, she jerked at the door—which didn't open. She pulled again, and again it didn't move. She felt the plane dropping lower. One chance to roll, that patronizing squadron leader had said. She leaned to the side, peered through the faint moonspill that hit the latch—and saw that she hadn't quite dropped the catch. She did so now and yanked the door open.

The wind hit her hard; the plane was swaying in a way that the other hadn't. Still, she lowered her feet over the edge—and nearly fell forward at another lurch. They still seemed to be going faster than they needed. But the

ground was close, so close. She threw out her haversack just as, in the periphery of her vision, the thumb shot up.

She dropped. It had to be ten feet, not Billy's eight, and she felt her left ankle twist on impact. She kept rolling, rolling, until she finally crashed to a stop. She lay there, biting the padded arm of her suit, stifling her cry of pain. The Lizzie's engine noise faded fast. She was lying on what appeared to be a ploughed field, but she wasn't going to move, not yet. Not until she could confirm what she hoped: that the agony in her ankle didn't mean it was broken or sprained. That it was simply that old field hockey injury, her torn ligaments, back to torture her again.

Eventually, and to her relief, the pain subsided. It would return later. Doubled, she knew of old—but for the moment, the swelling protected her. She got up, putting as little weight as possible on the ankle, hobbled along the furrows until she found her pack, took that to where forest edged onto the field.

In the treeline, she removed her helmet and squirmed out of her suit. Took off her left boot. Despite the dark, she could see that the ankle was already starting to purple. She found her pack of morphine ampules, drew a half dose into a syringe, then injected herself. Then she dug a roll of bandage out of the haversack, wrapped it snug around her ankle, tied it off and laced the boot back tight. Finally, she unstrapped the small collapsible shovel from the pack, walked a few paces deeper into the trees, and dug a hole. Shallower than she would have liked, but the earth was hard, and she needed to get a move on. Dumping in her padded suit, Eve covered it with earth and leaves. The helmet she threw into a thick bunch of shrubs.

There was a branch beside the hole. She used her Fairbairn-Sykes knife to trim it down to a walking stick, all the while hearing the voice of Macrae, her knife instructor. "It's not a tool nor a toy, Corporal. It's God's sharp vengeance."

Tough, she thought, finishing. She slipped the knife into its sheath. Shouldering her pack, she set out. She had a few hours before the pain became great, or she'd need more morphine.

She didn't need her map. She'd studied it so much in the last week she felt she knew this borderland she'd never been in better than she knew most of Vieux-Montréal. There was a path through this wood, on its northern edge. The moon told her where that was.

She found it, began to walk along it. The Norwegian town of Ørje was about one kilometre away, the Swedish border town of Töcksfors only ten. Resistance reports said that the forest was dense here on both sides of the line, and less patrolled by Germans and Swedes. She'd already plotted a way through.

Eve looked at her watch. Three a.m. With luck she'd be in Töcksfors for an early breakfast. Four hours, if she moved at this pace. Before the pain really arrived.

She began to sing under her breath. “*Fuck 'em all, fuck 'em all, the long and the short and the tall.*”

FORTY-FOUR

Stockholm, Sweden. May 6, 1944

“OF COURSE, THE SITUATION is significantly different than even a year ago,” Frank Carson said, stubbing out his cigarette in an ashtray already overflowing, immediately lighting another. “After the German surrender at Stalingrad, the Swedes saw which way the wind doth blow and started favouring the Allies. Recognizing the Norwegian government-in-exile, and starting to train their refugees to act as police when the war is finally over. Still, can’t go too far with three hundred thousand storm troopers across the border.” He took a deep drag and exhaled a plume of smoke above Eve’s head. “But it does mean that the Nazis here, like their mentors in the Fatherland, have grown more desperate. Bigger risks for the cause, et cetera. Well, why you are here, yes?”

The man was obviously fishing for more information. Eve, however, simply nodded and said nothing. It wasn’t that she suspected him of being the double agent many feared operated at the heart of British Intelligence in the Swedish capital. Whom Cholmondeley-Warren had warned her about. The colonel had said he was certain the mole was at MI6, SOE’s supposed spy ally and often rival agency. He’d briefed Eve to not even go to the British legation at Strandvägen 101.

“Walk in the door there, you may as well take out an advertising billboard on Drottninggatan with your photograph announcing, ‘I’m here! Catch me if you can!’” he’d said with uncharacteristic whimsy.

But within five minutes of arriving at this safe house, it was Frank Carson himself who made Eve decide to keep her operation and plans entirely to herself.

She studied the man again now. Her decision, of course, wasn't because he was so odd-looking—though he was, with a bald, egg-like crown of a head, its skin the colour of souring milk, a very skimpy comb-over failing to conceal it. His addiction to cigarettes showed in a nicotine-stained pencil moustache and yellowed fingertips. At its founding, SOE's first recruitment drive had sought out the bright eccentric—writers, painters, archeologists, actors among them—and Frank exemplified the breed. He wore a tweed jacket, had a yellow polka-dot bow tie, and was shod in sandals and socks. All this, again, wouldn't have made up her mind. She'd worked at Baker Street long enough to get used to the zany. But something else the colonel had once said to her did.

“An agent in the field lives a life of isolation, which is simultaneously dreadfully dull and ultra-stressing on a daily basis, as you never know the enemy haven't caught on to you and are about to throw you into a torture cell, or simply shoot you on the street.” He'd sighed. “We've lost too many brave lads and lasses because of it. The life can affect a chap's mental equilibrium and leads, inevitably, to errors of judgement.”

It had clearly affected the equilibrium of the man before her. Aside from the smoking and the look, he was never completely still, what with the tic on his cheek near his right eye and a left leg that kept shaking. But if she was not going to share anything important—as the man's thin raised eyebrows invited her to do now—there was much she still needed to know. “What about the AS? Are they still chasing us down?”

“Ah, the dear Allmänna säkerhetstjänsten!” Carson gave each umlaut of the nation's security service's name a particular and rather peculiar emphasis, using the oddity to switch to Swedish. “Or as we prefer to call it, ‘the Svestapo.’ And their boss, Herr Hallgren, we titled ‘our blue-eyed Himmler.’” He dragged smoke deep. “The buggers are still watching us closely but now they are indeed focusing more on the increasingly desperate Nazzies.” He said the word like Eve had heard Churchill say it on the BBC. “Not true '40 to '43, though, when the Germans were all-conquering. In '41 the bastards had me in a cell for three days. You know they sent agents to train in Berlin with their mentors, the Gestapo? If they

didn't put the thumbscrews on, it was still"—he closed his eyes—"deeply unpleasant." He opened his eyes again. "Thought they were going to expel me, actually. But for some reason they didn't." The tic on his face jumped as if he were sending Morse. He stubbed out his cigarette, and again immediately lit another.

I can guess the reason, Eve thought. *They own a part of you now. They knew you'd make mistakes.* She was surprised Baker Street hadn't withdrawn him. "Do you, ah, think they might have followed you here?"

"What? To the safe house?" He sat up. "Are you questioning my competence? I learned my fieldcraft when you were still in nappies, young lady!" His small eyes had narrowed in affront.

"By no means, sir. I have total confidence in you. As does HQ, of course."

He sat back, seeming only partly placated by her lies, and Eve made a mental note before continuing. "Do we know anything more about the shipment? And Henrik Ridelsson?"

"The ball bearings? Only what London told you. Officially they are still sitting in the warehouse in Eskilstuna. All the manifests say so. We also know, from a sympathizer in the factory, that a large consignment went missing three nights ago. We just don't know where that has gone. Or what the plans are to shift it. Train, truck."

"And Ridelsson?"

"Ah. Our other 'blue-eyed Himmler,' eh?" He reached into a portfolio on the sofa beside him, pulled out a photograph. "Taken only last night, outside his apartment building. Can't see the local führer letting the shipment travel without him, can you?"

He stared at it a moment before placing it on the table between them, next to the overflowing ashtray. Eve, feeling her heart accelerate, took a deep breath to slow it down. It was the first time she'd seen Henrik's face since the attack at Hagaparken four years before—except for the odd disturbing dream. *You look older,* she thought, even in profile, half-turned away before a door. His hair had receded up his forehead. The eye she could see now had lines beside it.

She had a sudden vision of them in bed together—that youthful face full of mischief and laughter on the pillow beside her. Arriving by country bus into Stockholm, walking the streets to this safe house, she had focused on the work that lay ahead, not on what had happened four years before. Henrik’s face brought it all back in a cascade of images: his apartment, what they did there, a photo of him entwined with Richard...

...her husband hanging from a doorknob.

Her stomach lurched; saliva filled her mouth. With difficulty, she swallowed it down. *Breathe, Eve! Focus*, she thought, and did. “Number 53?” she said, tapping the entrance Henrik stood before in the photo, then holding it up to Frank Carson.

He squinted. “Kungstensgatan 53. It’s in the Vasastan district. Know it?”

“No.” She was lying, of course. She knew it well. Henrik was still living in the same apartment where he’d seduced her four years before.

She swallowed again. Perhaps her roiling stomach showed in her face because Carson stubbed out his cigarette and instead of lighting another, leaned forward and said, “I say, young lady, you are looking a bit peaky. How about we get some grub into you? I know one or two half-decent spots. We—”

“Frank, very kind of you but can I rain check that? I’m very tired. And tomorrow will be a long day.”

“Oh, yes, yes, of course.” He gestured to the small kitchen. “The larder’s stocked with tinned goods, so you should be able to fix yourself up something nutritious. I’ll swing by and collect you at, what, 0900?”

“That would be marvellous, thanks.” She stood as she spoke, held out her hand. “Thank you for everything.”

He stood too, squeezed her hand limply, briefly. “Not at all. Looking forward to a bit of a hunt, actually.” He smiled. “Make a change from pushing papers around. Tally-ho!”

She followed him to the door. He opened it, bowed his head to her, and left.

She closed the door behind him, stood for a moment with her hand on the knob. As his footsteps receded down the stone stairs, she shot the bolts, then went back into the main room, crossed to the front window and pulled the heavy curtain back a crack. There was a street lamp opposite the apartment block. Lit—no blackout restrictions in neutral Sweden, unlike in London. Though no light was needed at 6 p.m. on a Stockholm night in May. So she was able to clearly see Frank leaving the building four floors below, turning left, walking away. See, ten seconds later...a man emerge from the entranceway of the building opposite and follow the Englishman. In the portico he'd left, another human shape appeared for just a moment before blending again into the shadows.

Letting the curtain fall, Eve wondered who the chasers were. "Svestapo," Gestapo, Abwehr...or even the rival Brits of MI6? Lots of people would have reasons to follow the newly arrived SOE operative. Whoever they were, she would have to lose them. *After that, I'll "go blind."* An odd term, she'd always thought, because if she succeeded, it was everyone else who would be blind to her.

In the kitchen, Eve found some tins of beef stew. Opened one, poured it into a saucepan, left it on low, and went to the bedroom. Carson had shown it to her when he'd brought her into the flat. There was a suitcase on the bed, which she opened before going to the tall closet. In that were the clothes they'd sent ahead for her. She stripped off her border-crossing clothes, dropping the plain trousers, simple flower-patterned sweater and stockings to the floor and shucking the low-heeled shoes. She wondered if she should take a bath. She certainly wasn't at her most fragrant. Decided against and put on fresh stockings, followed by a plain tweed skirt and one of two identical plain white shirts. *Identical in all ways*, she thought, as she did up the last lozenge-shaped button at her right wrist. There was a larger slit to allow for the size of it, bulkier because of what it contained—a cyanide pill.

She held it for a moment, shuddered, then went to ingest something more palatable.

Beef stew finished and dishes washed, she grabbed three more tins from the cupboard and dropped them into her suitcase, which already contained, alongside the plastic explosives and detonators, three days' worth of field rations: cubes of vitamins in solidified concentrated milk, tablets of bitter chocolate. There were three packets of cigarettes—Klubi 7s. Also the kind, she now remembered, that Henrik had smoked. Under them was a basic medical kit: bandages, disinfectant and the drugs—vials of morphine for wounds, bennies for wakefulness. The unusual thing for her was the disassembled Sten gun and three magazines. She smiled. Her highest mark in training had been achieved in the rapid assembly of said submachine gun in the dark. Mind you, shooting it she only hovered around the average.

Swiftly packing the other change of clothes, she transferred what she'd brought with her on the plane: her Fairbairn-Sykes knife, her toothbrush, a bar of chocolate, all that was left of her day rations. Then she lowered the lid, snapped the two locks, put on the same shoes and a wool coat from the cupboard, added a beret, picked up the case, and went into the small hallway.

She took one deep breath, then opened the door a crack, listening for anyone on the stairs, above or below. Satisfied, she locked the door behind her, then descended the three flights. She didn't hesitate before going through the block's main door. She knew what—who—was beyond it. There was no point going out the back; there'd be another man there and no other people, plus they'd know she was on to them. To lose her tail, she'd need more crowded places. She exited, turned left and walked toward the brighter street ahead. She didn't look back at her hunter, but sensed him following nonetheless. Caught a glimpse of him when she stopped suddenly before a large shoe store's plate-glass window. A man in a trilby and raincoat was intently studying the window of a store three doors down on the opposite side. She didn't think anyone could find the severe-looking tomes of an academic bookseller so fascinating for so long.

The no-longer-safe house at the back of the railway station was less than a five-minute walk to where she wanted to be: Hötorget, one of Stockholm's more fashionable shopping squares. It was busy at 7 p.m. on a

Saturday night—restaurant terraces crowded because of the warmth of the spring day, shops staying open late to cater to the crowds. She was pretty sure she was not going to lose a fellow professional in the throng. But pausing in the centre of the square, looking around for ideas, she found one—and headed for the doors that had the letters *PUB* emblazoned above them.

“Pub,” here, was not meant in the English sense. These were initials for Paul Urbanus Bergström, and she’d shopped in his halls often when she’d lived in Stockholm. It had the best range of higher-end women’s fashions in the city.

She went through the revolving doors, walked toward the main staircase, paused at its foot as if studying the board that listed each floor’s departments. Really, she was looking in the huge ornate mirror that was fixed to the wall above the staircase. In that she watched her hunter come in and immediately move to the tobacconist’s to the right of the entrance. His hat was in one hand, his coat over an arm, and he wore a plain blue suit. But his raincoat was distinct.

One of the stranger courses she’d taken at SOE was on Third Reich fashion; the idea being that you might have to fit in one day on the streets of the Fatherland. She saw that his was not in fact a mackintosh but a *Kleppermantel* trench coat. This told her two things: the first that her pursuer was almost certainly a Nazi—and the second that her hunters didn’t think much of her because they hadn’t bothered to make themselves more inconspicuous.

Oh goody, she thought, starting up the stairs. *I like to be underestimated.*

Just before she moved past the mirror, she saw the man leave the tobacco stand. She went up to the third floor—the women’s department. It was busy but there were only a few men there—most sat in chairs reading newspapers or staring bored at the ceiling while their wives talked to the assistants or appeared from dressing rooms to parade new clothes. Eve passed through, leaving behind the place of few men to the place of none at all—the lingerie department.

“May I help you, madam?”

The assistant here was younger than elsewhere, prettier too, with short, cropped hair, a tight dress and a keen manner. She wore some scent Eve didn't know. Selling sex, of course. Eve remembered her first visit here, before she'd met Henrik, when she'd felt that Richard's lack of desire for her was somehow her fault, and she'd sought out things to entice him. They hadn't, of course. Henrik had liked them, though, she thought with a slight shudder.

She pointed to a mannequin that was wearing a dance set. The panty and soft bra were crepe de Chine, whereas a silk chemise laced around the neckline had a long silver tie down the front. They were all in peach—not her favourite colour. “Do you have these in orchid purple? Also in black?”

“Both, madam, yes. Your sizes?”

“Seventy-five C for the bra. Panties, ah...”

The girl appraised her. “I'll bring you extra small and small, madam.”

“Right. And oh, I'd also like to try on some slips. Do you have any taffeta ones, with ruffled hems? I don't mind about the colours.”

“We've just received a new shipment from Paris.”

“Occupied Paris is still shipping lingerie?”

“Oh, yes, madam.” The young lady smiled. “Some things are beyond war, don't you think?”

“I certainly do. Which room?”

“Take Number Three, madam. I'll bring everything shortly.”

Eve went to the spacious changing room and sat in a comfortable chair, suddenly deeply tired. She'd crossed the border at dawn and walked to Töcksfors. Hadn't slept before the flight from England or on the flight itself, and only fitfully on the bus to Stockholm. *For God's sake, stay awake, Eve*, she scolded herself. She was tempted to take some Benzedrine. Yet when the chance finally came for sleep, she really wanted to sleep deeply, and a benny would not help her do so.

A soft tap came on the door. Eve opened it to the floorwalker, who had a large bundle of softness in her arms. She swept in, hung the items on the plentiful hooks, smiled and left.

It was time to move. But Eve couldn't help taking a moment first to raise one of the taffeta slips, in yellow satin, and hold it up to herself. A younger Eve looked back from the mirror. She'd never worn lingerie for Erik. *Would he like it?* she wondered. *That soldier, that hunter, that aspiring lawyer of a man?* She swayed slightly, remembered their reunion in Scotland a few weeks before. "Oh, I bet he would," she murmured and, thinking of his appreciative smile, smiled herself. Then wondered where he was, right then. He'd parachuted into eastern Norway two days before she'd set out.

Sending him a swift mental kiss, she put down the slip, took off her coat and reversed it—so that bright forest green gave way to a muted magenta. Folded her strawberry beret, shoved it into one pocket, drew a black tam-o'-shanter from the other and put that on.

She opened the door, glanced back down the corridor where her young lady was talking with a well-dressed older woman. Eve stepped out, quietly closed the door and went the other way, to the staff staircase at the back of the corridor. She knew it was there from her first visit to PUB's lingerie department in 1939, when she'd taken a wrong turn. She very much doubted the man would know of it. But he'd have seen the number of items the assistant had carried to the changing rooms. Even if he thought she was trying lingerie as a ruse, it would take him a while to come up with some story so he could come and check on her.

She descended the stairs fast. There was a staff room on the ground floor, voices coming from it, but she moved swiftly past that to the rear door. It gave onto an alley, and she turned left, away from the buzz of Hötorget. The alley ended on busy Drottninggatan. She saw a couple getting out of a taxi and ran for it, cutting in front of a man trying to get in. She heaved her suitcase into the back and slid in. "Vasastan. The main post office," she said.

The driver grunted, and she saw his eyes in the rear-view mirror. Vasastan was a rougher area and her coat and hat, though simple, were well made. But he pulled up his meter arm, and they set off. As they passed the alley's end, she saw PUB's staff entrance door fly open, and a man carrying

a *Kleppermantel* coat rush out. He looked the other way—didn't see the taxi. She settled back.

Smarter than you look, she thought. *Just not quite smart enough.*

The taxi driver dropped her with another grunt and drove off. It was a five-minute walk to her destination, the Hotel Kolbeck. She took off her coat and hat before going into the lobby—the sweater and skirt underneath cheap and plain. The desk clerk didn't look at her like the taxi driver had, no suspicions—just wearily took the details from one of her false IDs, then gave her the room key.

The room was as shabby as the hotel's exterior. But it was clean enough and the bed didn't have too many loose springs. It was its location that really recommended it to her. She'd walked past it every time she'd rendezvoused with Henrik, for it stood on the corner of Upplandsgatan and Kungstensgatan—one hundred and fifty metres from his apartment.

She dropped her suitcase, went straight to the bathroom and turned on the bath taps. There were some clicks and bangs, but the system finally got going and plenty of hot water came out. Before she got in, she gave her ankle another half ampoule of morphine. All the walking had made it throb. She nearly fell asleep in the tub, but the thought of Henrik, of seeing him tomorrow, of what she still needed to do, woke her again.

She got into bed, set her alarm clock for six, lay down. Her mind may have raced still, but she was asleep before she could consider the run. The morphine probably helped with that too.

FORTY-FIVE

May 7, 1944

THE PHOTO SHE'D SEEN of him had been a side view. Otherwise she'd have been prepared for the fact that Henrik Ridelsson now only had one arm.

That might have accounted for the strain on his face. Partly anyway, though she was sure being a Nazi in Sweden was harder these days than it had been at the start of the war, when the Germans were all-conquering.

What had been attractive in him before had gone. His hair, previously long and lustrous, was shorter, receding, and looked like it needed a wash. He'd lost weight, with the result that his eyes had narrowed together and the lines that she'd seen in the photo around his eyes were not his only ones. His brow was now furrowed with cares. *What is he now*, Eve thought, *twenty-six? Twenty-seven?* He looked ten years older.

Henrik glanced up and down the street and then set out, turning right onto Upplandsgatan, heading north. Eve waited to the count of thirty, then followed.

Or is it only that I want to think of him that way? she wondered as she walked. *Diminish him. Make what happened less...worthy somehow?* She knew what a fool she'd been. How easily she'd fallen for him. But she'd had no experience to speak of. One brief romance with an Italian count and then Richard. She hadn't understood the danger of handsome men. How you could lose yourself in them. *Thank God Erik is not in that mould*, she thought. *Perfectly fine-looking, of course...*

Henrik went into a shop—a bakery, Eve saw, as she tucked into the doorway of a hat shop that was not yet open. He emerged a minute later,

munching on a sweet bun. She envied him. Her breakfast had been one square of chocolate and one cube of dehydrated milk.

At Odenplan, on the bottom edge of the plaza, close to the Gustaf Vasa church, Henrik joined a queue at an eastbound tram stop. When the crowded tram arrived, he got onto the first carriage. As it began to pull away, Eve sprinted forward and caught hold of the rear platform's pole, pulling herself aboard. This second carriage was less crowded, and at the next stop a seat came free. She sat, pulled out the previous day's *Dagens Nyheter*. Peering around its edge, she kept an eye on Henrik's lank hair through a sea of heads.

People got on and off. Not her quarry. Now she remembered where this line ended. At the docks. Her heart beat a little faster. *Is that where they're hiding the ball bearings? In a warehouse?* Had the plan changed and were they now going to ship them to Germany by sea, under Sweden's flag of neutrality? It was less likely. There was more supervision at the docks than at that porous border. The authorities, Frank Carson had told her, had become much more vigilant under the Allies' suspicious gaze. Still, it was a possibility she needed to check out. Find the ball bearings and the operation could be settled fast with a report to those same authorities. Henrik would be arrested, jailed. Job done.

Eve shook her head. It was not what she wanted. His punishment would not be...*proportionate* to his crimes.

The tram approached the built-up area of warehouses and repair shops, businesses that serviced the docks. At the terminus stop, Henrik got off and started walking fast and straight. Giving him eighty paces, she followed. The roadway changed quite suddenly, from pavement to cobbles. She could hear his boots, metal-shod, striking the stones, some weird trick of sound making them echo for a moment in the narrowing street behind her. She even glanced back. But the road was unpeopled.

This longish avenue curved around a corner, and she had a flash of memory. Around that bend were the dock's main gates. Was that in her recent studies of Stockholm's city plan? No. She and Erik had come this

way four years before. As fugitives, seeking a ship that would help them escape the consequences...

...of shooting the man who even now disappeared around that corner.

Eve increased her pace. If she was right and the dock gates were ahead, she wasn't sure what she would do when Henrik went through them. He would have the correct papers, no doubt. Although she had identity papers from three nations—Swiss, Swedish and Portuguese, the neutrals—none would get her into that secure area. She would have to lurk, hope he emerged again. But what if he was planning to supervise the loading of the ball bearings, and even accompany them?

Calm down, Eve, she told herself. He wasn't dressed for a voyage. And she could get into the docks, if she had to. Because tucked into one of her IDs was enough Swedish *kronor* to tempt the most officious of harbour guards.

She turned the corner. She was right—the dock gates were just fifty metres away. She'd also been wrong, because Henrik hadn't gone through them. He was ten paces away, facing her, with a smile on his face.

"Hello, Eve," he said. "How good it is to see you again."

"Henrik," she began, but then arms wrapped around her, and she realized that it hadn't been an echo she'd heard on the cobbles before but the man who was following the follower.

It was pure instinct now. All that training in Scotland—endless repetition for each situation. This one made her do what she did—stamp down with a shoe that may have looked soft but had a steel heel. The man who held her screamed and, if he didn't let her go he at least loosened his hold enough for her to find his left hand with hers, seize his little finger and bend it hard back, eliciting a further cry. The man released her and followed the bend so his finger didn't break. Too late because she snapped it, causing the loudest high-pitched yelp yet. As the man fell away, she turned to the blur coming in from her right, just saw the fist descending. She dodged her head but took the blow on the point of her shoulder, instant electric agony surging through her. But his punch had brought him level with her, his side

was exposed, and she made her fingers into a blade and jammed them hard in, just below the ribs. Another cry, another man falling away.

A moment. Taking it all in. The dock gates up ahead, uniformed men running from them. The way behind open, beckoning. Henrik five paces closer than he'd been, his one arm thrust out, a revolver in his fist. The click of the trigger pulled back. "Stop!" he shouted.

Still she thought she might run. Until her legs were swept out from under her by the man on the ground, swinging his own legs like a club. Then she was down, hitting the cobbles so hard that all her wind left her. Couldn't take a saving breath because the man she'd punched now kicked her stomach.

It was all she could do to find breath then, to stay conscious. She managed both, just. Enough to hear and even make some sense of the discussion in rapid Swedish. The gate guards querying. One of Henrik's men stating that he was police. She heard the word "*centralen*," which was Sweden's military intelligence. ID was obviously shown. Then the words "*kvinnlig*" and "*terrorist*." A woman terrorist.

She was hauled up, gripped hard by a man on each arm. She heard footsteps on the cobbles, then others coming toward her. The barrel of a gun touched her chin and cold steel lifted her face. She looked up. Her eyes were misted. But she knew the face before her well enough anyway.

"My, my." Henrik Ridelsson spoke in English, his voice soft and full of wonder. "Haven't you changed, Eve?" Then Swedish came, harsh. "Take her!"

Something dropped over her head, shutting out light, most sound. Foul, oily hessian pressed into her face. Handcuffs snapped over her wrists at her front. She gagged, fought for breath. Her squirming earned her a blow to the head. It brought a deeper darkness.

FORTY-SIX

THE ROOM COULD HAVE been anywhere in the city within a fifteen-minute drive from the docks. Eve had tried to keep track of the turns, but her brain was not working well in its fog. They'd arrived, dragged her down some stairs, two flights, and flung her onto a stone floor where her knees banged hard, her forehead too. Then the door was slammed shut, she heard a key turn and voices receding. She had no doubt that they'd be back soon enough.

Eve managed to right herself, to sit, knees drawn up. She could feel, in her pockets, under her arm, that they'd taken her gun and everything else she carried—papers, food, money. She tried to pull the sack from her face but it had been cinched too tight for handcuffed hands, so she focused instead on steadying her breathing to slow her wildly accelerated heart. So that she could assess the situation. As she'd been trained to do.

SOE courses were varied and infinite. Because they'd lost so many operatives, several focused on the varied interrogation techniques the Nazis employed. These ranged from friendly conversations through to rape, cigarette burning and various implements imaginatively wielded. She had no doubt that if her captors were from the “Svestapo,” they would have been well trained in all forms of torture by their German mentors.

Her pulse slowed—enough for her to be able to think past her terror. Henrik would already know she was a spy; she'd demonstrated that clearly, in losing her tail the previous day, in her fighting skills. He'd want to know why she was there, and how much whatever agency employed her knew of his plans. Unless—and this was a sudden and, in some ways, much worse thought—he had his own plans finalized and didn't care about hers. If that

was the case, then he and his men had simply dumped her in this room and would leave her there while they executed those plans. Before executing her.

Her heart had accelerated again on the thought. She brought it back to steady with some breaths, then focused on the present. The where. Where was she? In a police cell? Sight wasn't going to help but beyond the oily stench of the sack over her head she could smell...was that onion?

She shuffled back until she hit a wall, used it to help her stand, then slowly moved around the space. It wasn't large. One of her knees struck wood and she bent forward, felt with her manacled hands. Picked up...yes, indeed, an onion. It seemed unlikely that police would keep onions in their cells. So Henrik was using his allies in the security services as he had at the docks. This then was a rogue operation—personal.

Personal, she thought, moving back to an open wall, sliding down it to sit. That's what this was for Henrik Ridelsson, her reappearance in his life. He wasn't going to just dump her in a root cellar and carry on. He was going to come back and see her. For information, sure. But the man she'd eventually gotten to know—not the lover, but the blackmailer, the corrupter, revelling in his duplicity—he'd be back, at least one more time.

It took only five more minutes for her to be proved right. Footsteps, keys jangling, a door opening. Someone crossed to her, untied then yanked off the sack. Eve didn't know how soon it would be put on again, so she took the chance to assess the room. A root cellar indeed—tubs of potatoes, parsnips, apples. Onion braids hung from nails on the walls. A place of stone, windowless. A low ceiling, and a wooden door.

Her appraisal only took a few seconds. Now she looked up at the two men glaring down at her. One was tall, wide too, with a broken nose, a thick monobrow above it and a five o'clock shadow. He was the man she'd kidney-punched. His glower told her he still bore a grudge. The other was, of course, Henrik Ridelsson. Who spoke now. "Leave us, Magnus."

The other grunted, muttered something Eve didn't catch.

"Oh, you'll get your chance. Now go."

Magnus spat on the floor between her feet and left.

The former lovers looked at each other. All that she had noticed before at a distance was even clearer close up. Henrik had thinned, aged. What had not changed was a look in his close-set eyes she recognized from their previous times. Noticed it first the first time they'd made love. She'd put it down then to rapture, and only later realized that it hadn't been—because the same look had also been in his eyes when he'd revealed to her and Richard how tightly he'd enmeshed them, laying out his photos with glee. The look was triumph.

Part of her interrogation training course had involved techniques to delay the inevitable. To “turn the tables, put the torturer off his game,” as the former policeman leading it had explained. “Make them defensive, even angry. They can get sloppy then.”

So she spoke first. “What happened to your arm, Henrik?”

He glanced down at the half-sleeve pinned to the breast of his suit jacket, and the light of triumph faded. “You happened to it, Eve,” he snarled. “You and whoever your hired thug was at Hagaparken. His bullet smashed my elbow. How did you find one?”

Hired thug? Erik, of course. She used to tease him sometimes about his marksmanship, about how he'd missed Henrik that day. Apparently, he hadn't. *He'll be pleased when I tell him*, she thought, then wondered if she ever would get that chance. She inhaled, breathed evenly out. “Oh, they can be found easily enough when you have the money. As you would know, judging by the company you're keeping.” She said it looking down at the gobbet of spit between her feet.

He shook his head. “Magnus is as devoted to the cause as I am. And he doesn't like you.” He leaned down, that glint returning. “I've told him he can play with you later.”

She felt her stomach lurch, forced herself to calm. “What cause is that, then?”

He straightened. “The Final Victory of the Reich, of course.”

“Well, that's not going to happen now, is it? Surely even you know that Hitler is beaten.”

“He is not beaten! The Führer will never be defeated!” His voice had risen, almost like that of his hero in the newsreels she’d seen of him, ranting at a podium. “Every soldier will exert his will. The Russians will be halted in Poland. The Allies will be massacred on whatever French beach they try to land on.”

“Every soldier? How will you exert your will, Henrik?”

He may have been a fanatic—but he was no fool. She realized her mistake. She’d brought him back to the present moment. And the present moment was what she was striving to avoid.

A different type of glint in the eye now. “You know how, Eve. It is why you are here, following me through Stockholm. With all your new, ah, skills.” He bent closer again. “Where did you acquire those? Tell me, who are you working for? The Brits, the Yanks? OSS, SOE, MI6? Hmm? I need to know. Then you must tell me how much they know.”

“You’ve...you’ve got me all wrong, Henrik.” She spoke differently now, letting a little quaver into her voice, which wasn’t much of a reach. “I came back for the photos. Do you still have copies?” Ask the interrogators questions, her trainers had told her. Distract.

It didn’t work. “Do you take me for a fool?” he shot back. “Of course I have the photos. I still enjoy looking at them sometimes. You and Richard were both just so...beautiful!” He sighed. “But that is not why you are here, Eve. I know why you are. Somehow whoever your bosses are, they have found out about my ball bearings. So the only thing that matters now is how much you know.”

The slap came, sudden and shocking. Perhaps because he didn’t signal it, it didn’t have as much force as it might have but still had enough to knock her off her knees. She sprawled on the floor, the slapped ear ringing. Through the buzz she heard his shout.

“Magnus!”

Now the fear came, and there was no amount of breathing that could hold it back.

The brute returned—but he was not alone. Another man came too, whom she hadn’t seen before. He went straight to Henrik, pulling him

away, whispering urgently in his ear. Despite the ringing in her ears, she managed to catch two words because they were repeated. "*Öppen godsvagen.*" Swedish for *trucks*.

She tried to listen, focus. But it was hard with Magnus looming over her, his stare hungry. Whatever else the newcomer was saying, it made Henrik whiten and reach over to rub the stump of his missing arm. "Enough!" He held up the other arm and looked down at Eve. "It appears we must interrupt our charming reunion. There is something I must attend to." He turned to Magnus. "I'll be back in one hour."

He took a step toward the door—but the brute didn't move. "Shall I soften her up for you?" Magnus growled.

Henrik took his lower lip between his teeth, considering. Eve held her breath...but finally he shook his head. "You don't know what I need to ask her."

"Who cares about that? I said softening, didn't I?"

"Like that Norwegian agent you softened last week?"

Magnus shrugged. "Didn't know he had a weak heart."

Henrik stared at Eve. Again his hand crept up to his stump, and he rubbed it. Whatever memory that conjured made his eyes narrow further. "No. I've changed my mind. I need you with me. In case some, uh, persuasion is required. We'll be back in an hour." As Eve released her breath, he added, "But I see no need to leave her too comfortable." He reached his one hand down to his fly and began undoing the buttons. Gave the nastiest laugh she'd ever heard. "Anyone need a piss?"

The man with the message looked uncomfortable, shook his head, left the cell. Magnus laughed too, moved beside his boss, also undoing his fly.

Both men urinated on her. She turned her head aside, but they both giggled like schoolboys, competing to find the areas her handcuffed hands could not protect. Eve tried to dissociate. To find a place of escape within. *Could be worse. Could be worse. Could be...*

It went on a while, then both men stopped more or less at the same time. They were still laughing as they went out, slamming the door behind them. Bolts were shot, high and low.

Piss stung her eyes, leaked from her ears, ran from her nostrils in an acrid stream. “Jesus,” she whispered, the word caught between a curse and a prayer. *Don’t cry*, she told herself. *Don’t...*

Then she did, unable to halt what flowed, aware of salt on her lips now, cutting through the alkaline tang. At least she wept silently, so that if anyone was listening, they wouldn’t know her weakness. Guess her stupidity. She’d made a judgement on Frank Carson—had decided to “go blind” and strike out on her own. Which meant no one was coming for her. Except those men, those pissers, returning in an hour. Who did she think she was? *Stupid, arrogant...*

The tears, the self-pity, lasted for a while. Until Eve realized she was wasting what little time she had.

FORTY-SEVEN

EVE USED THE SLEEVE of her coat to wipe her mouth and nose clear, then got to her knees and, with effort, hauled herself to her feet.

The men had left the single bare bulb lit—forgetfulness, not kindness, she knew. So she was able to confirm what her swift survey had shown her: a root cellar, tubs filled with vegetables, plaits of onions hanging from nails driven into the stone walls. She went to the door, kicked it lightly with the toe of one shoe. It didn't give at all. She placed her ear against the wood, but there was no noise beyond. She shivered—the urine that had poured on her hot had chilled, and the cellar was cold. Then she looked at the handcuffs; they were the ratchet kind, toothed arms held by teeth. They were tight, her fingers already numb. Solid too—the chain links between each cuff unbreakable, even if there'd been some kind of iron in the room to smash them against, which there wasn't.

A word struck her. *Nails*. That's what the braids of onions dangled from. The word rang a bell, and she stared at one of the nails, trying to remember why.

An SOE course, that was it! No, not even a full one. Just three hours one day back in early 1941, when she'd finally been accepted into SOE. Down at their place at Beaulieu, the country house. The man who'd taught the course—she wanted to say his name was Debenhams, but that was a department store. No, Debenham-*Taylor*, that was him. He'd taught lock-picking, copying keys using Plasticine moulds, cutting them out of zinc sheets, that kind of thing. One afternoon, though, he'd also shown them...“How to get out of handcuffs using a nail!” she whispered out loud.

Now she focused on it, the haze of memory partly cleared. She went to the wall again and examined three nails before she found one with a head that looked small enough to slip into the keyhole. She took down its onion rope, reached up—this required her to be slightly on tiptoes—then pressed the left cuff’s keyhole against it with a steady pressure until a single ratchet gave with a click. She pressed again...and nothing happened. Withdrew the cuffs, re-inserted the nail...*click*. It took time, not every push worked—something about the angle. She had to pause often, step back onto the ground, ease her calves. Gradually the ratchet count climbed and the cuffs loosened. Then all of a sudden, she found she could slip her left hand out.

She shook both hands, the handcuffs jangling, then sighed. *Why did I start with the left hand?* she thought. *When I’m bloody right-handed!*

She looked at her watch, which they hadn’t taken off her. Ten thirty-five. Henrik had said they’d be back in an hour. She wasn’t sure how long they’d been gone. About half that perhaps? They could be longer, or they could return sooner. Either way, there was another priority now before trying for the second cuff.

She had to find a weapon.

However, a swift, thorough search of the place revealed no tools, metal or otherwise. There were two small scoops, each bowl and handle shaped from single pieces of hardwood. There were the wicker tubs, and a row of containers constructed from wooden slats. She sat back, studying all that was there. It wasn’t much. The slats were possible—break one off, shape one end into a sharp point. When a man came, stick it into his throat? “Who you trying to kid, kid?” she whispered. Even if she could make a shiv in the time she had, which was far from certain, she had no guarantee that it would work. Even if she struck true, somehow found the man’s neck, mightn’t the weapon just snap, splinter? Her one chance thrown away? Besides, both men might come back.

Keep it simple, miss. Simple knows best. Who’d said that to her? She thought back. It had been on another course. Unarmed combat. Aston House, she thought. A sergeant. Symes? Gr...Grimes. That was it. Simple

knows best. Use what comes to hand. And if nothing comes to hand...“Use yer hands,” she murmured, echoing the sergeant’s cockney accent.

She delved into her memory. There was one blow he’d taught her that used both hands. It was indeed simple. But, if she remembered correctly, it worked even better with a little addition.

She looked back at the tubs. Then she stepped forward and picked up the two wooden scoops.

Less than three minutes later, a door slammed somewhere down the corridor. Squatting down in the place where they’d left her, she hung from her knees, back pressed to wall, feet flat under her. The left cuff was on her wrist again, the open part concealed beneath.

Bolts shot, key turned, door opened. One man—thank God, only one—stepped into the cellar. Magnus. “Hello, pretty little lady,” he rumbled.

She didn’t need to fake her fear too much. Her voice trembled. “Where’s Henrik?”

“Busy playing with truck problems,” he replied. “He sent me ahead. Changed his mind about the softening, since we have to be leaving so soon.” He closed the door then came across to stand above her, grinning down.

“Please, sir,” she whimpered, “please don’t hurt me.”

“Oh, I’m going to hurt you alright.” He laughed. “But how about showing me that pretty face again first?”

He bent down, which was what she needed because he was very tall and she wasn’t. She launched herself off her knees, pushing her arms wide out then bringing them sharply in, slamming both scoops directly onto the man’s ears.

He screamed and fell toward her. She ducked to the side, readied herself for him to come again—not sure what she’d do when he did.

He didn’t. He’d kept falling and lay there now, hands over his ears. He was moaning, eyes filmed over. Sergeant Grimes had told her that with only bare hands and ten pounds of force, you could break eardrums. Judging by his moans, and the blood pouring from his ears, the scoops had done that and more.

Eve shook. Took a huge breath. *No time for nerves, old girl*, she thought.

She crossed to him and, when he didn't react to her coming, reached into his jacket and pulled a gun—a Luger—from a holster. Then she went to the door, opened it, peeked out into a corridor, looking left and right.

Empty. She saw further doors along the wall leading to stairs. She headed toward them, gun held at her side. Climbed and reached another level, another corridor. This had glass-fronted offices along its length. From some came the chatter of typewriters. There were more stairs going up at the corridor's end. *To ground level*, she thought, *out to the world*. She straightened her shoulders and set out briskly.

As she passed the first office there was a cry. She kept going, passing two more that were unoccupied. But she hadn't reached the stairs before the shout came. "You! Stop!"

She did, turned. The man who'd brought the message, who had not joined in her humiliation, was there. "What are you doing? Where's Magnus?"

"Down there." She gestured behind him with her head. "Henrik sent word. He's letting me go."

She thought that perhaps his previous sympathy might make this man happy at this news. He wasn't. "What are you talking about?" His voice was caught between anger and confusion. He marched forward as a woman thrust her head out from the office behind him. "That can't be true."

"It's not." Eve levelled the Luger. "Back into the office! Both of you! Now. Now!" She said it while moving steadily toward them, gun leading.

The man shot his hands up, stumbled as he went back, the woman screamed and disappeared.

He found the entrance, went through it, and Eve followed. "Behind the desk, both of you. Lie down."

They obeyed. Eve checked the door. It had a key. She pulled it out, inserted it into the front side. "I will kill anyone who follows me." She locked the door, took out the key, dropped it, and hurried down the corridor again.

A flight of stairs, and light, finally. She entered some kind of car-repair shop. There was a poster of Hermann Göring on one wall. Legs stuck out from under a Volvo, the man there tunelessly whistling. Eve thrust the gun in one deep trouser pocket, her handcuffed hand in the other, then walked to the front doors.

The spring day was still bright, and she had to squint against the sun. Turned right, kept going, she didn't know where, just away from wherever she was. The repair shop was one of several in what was obviously a light industrial zone. At the junction of the cobbled street was a wider paved one—and a bus stop, with a bus just pulling in. She went to it and climbed aboard. She'd heard the jingle of coins as she walked. They'd stripped her of everything except her small change.

Though the bus was crowded, she found a seat. The woman who shared it gave her a strange look, got up and moved away immediately. It took Eve a moment to remember that she stank of piss. That memory brought others—a stone room, onions on a wall, men undoing their belts, Magnus bleeding on the floor—and she began to shake. *Not yet*, she thought. *Please, not yet. Focus, Eve. Focus.*

She focused on the street. After ten minutes, she recognized a church—Gustaf Vasa. She was back in Odenplan, where she'd boarded a tram a few hours before. Close to her hotel. At the next stop, she got off with the crowd.

The desk clerk sighed when she told him she'd lost her key, then gave her another.

It was when she was lying in the bath, her handcuffed hand on its edge, hot water to her chin, that she allowed it all to hit her, let the tears flow. Eventually she calmed and, when the water began to cool, rose to continue the fight.

FORTY-EIGHT

THE HANDCUFFS DROPPED onto the desk. "Thank you, Marie. You may take those with you."

The Swedish assistant nodded and took both the cuffs and the awl she'd used to undo them from Frank Carson's office.

"More tea?" Carson raised the pot, but Eve shook her head. "Well," he continued, "I am still most unhappy about you missing our appointment. Now you better tell me why, and what you've been up to."

She kept it brief, dispassionate. Yet the story was vivid enough to keep all Carson's facial tics active. He asked a few questions, took a few notes. When she'd finished, he put down his pen.

"Right, now I have news for you. Hot off the press, what? One of our informants has just this morning told us what this Ridelsson chap plans to do. He's had some difficulties with transport apparently. But that's sorted out, and the ball bearings are being moved to Norway by truck. Setting out at the witching hour tonight."

"When's that again?"

"Midnight. Cover of darkness, roads clearer, all that."

"And the Swedish authorities?"

"Representations have been made, of course. All are being stalled. Nazi sympathizers and Ridelsson's allies in the secret police, no doubt." He began stuffing a briar pipe with tobacco. "Eventually the government will investigate, then act. Two, three days at the minimum."

Eve sipped her tea. "By which time the shipment will be in Germany."

"Quite. On its way to help power Hitler's war machines."

"So we are on our own?"

“Indeed, we are.”

Good, she thought but said, “Do we know where these trucks will head?”

Carson lit his pipe, then walked to a wall map of Scandinavia. She followed him. “This here’s Eskilstuna, where the factory is.” He tapped the pipe’s mouthpiece on the paper. “The missing ball bearings will be nearby.” He tapped again. “Logic dictates they will speed the shipment to the nearest useful and easily reached point in Norway. Which almost certainly means here.” He tapped again. “Place called Ørje.” She grunted and his eyebrows rose. “Know it?” he asked.

“It’s close to where I landed. I crossed the border there. Took a bus from Töcksfors.”

“Did you?” He looked back at the map. “Given the few roads in that part of Southern Norway they’ll want to get the trucks as directly as possible to the Østfold train line, which runs along here. It will have to be a terminus station, as only those have loading winches, et cetera.” He traced a line, then tapped again. “They’ll load them here at, ah, Fredrikstad, take them”—another tap—“here. Rygge. Another station, with a German air base nearby. Fly the bearings from there to the Fatherland.”

“I see.” She placed her finger on the line of Swedish road from Eskilstuna to Norway. “Could we attack the trucks?”

“This side of the border? Absolutely not.” He returned to his desk, set another match to the pipe’s bowl, and puffed vigorously. “We haven’t got the manpower, for one. Even if we did, an act of war on Swedish soil would have dire consequences. Sweden may be leaning toward the Allied cause now, but they are still terrified of German military action. An invasion, V2 rockets on their cities.” He blew out a cloud of smoke. “They’d have to act, throw the lot of us out, at minimum. Inconvenient at this stage of the war, to say the least.”

“So it’s Plan B?”

“Sorry?”

“Norway and the train.”

“It does seem that way, yes.”

Eve looked at the clock. Twenty past two. “How long will it take the trucks to reach Fredrikstad do you think?”

“Even if they drive like blazes, both sides of the border, can’t see them getting there before, what, 10 a.m. tomorrow, at the earliest?”

“Why wouldn’t they simply drive the ball bearings to the airfield?”

Frank shook his head. “For a start, it would take twice as long. The roads through here”—he tapped the map on the Norwegian side of the border—“quite dreadful. But that’s not only it. Swedish trucks unloading goods at a railway station is one thing. Within the bounds of their neutrality. Unloading at a German military air base in Norway would be something else entirely. Even Ridelsson’s Swedish Nazis would balk at that. Exposed, and the lot of them would be fired, or worse, in this climate. They wouldn’t take the risk. Especially as they don’t have to.”

“I see.” She looked at the map again. “So, once they get the ball bearings onto the train, when do you reckon that could set out?”

“I wouldn’t think they’d put the goods on a civilian train. The Germans do run lots of purely military ones.” He scratched under his chin. “I suppose it could leave, what, noonish? Famously efficient, aren’t they? Didn’t Hitler pledge to get the trains running on time?”

“That was his fellow Fascist, Mussolini.” She went back to the desk, picked up her tea, sipped. It was cold, so she put it down. “You don’t happen to have aerial shots of that part of Norway?”

“Specifically?”

“The Østfold train line?”

“Course we do. The RAF have bombed it a couple of times.” He went to a file cabinet, opened a drawer, drew out a thick folder, brought it to the desk. Undid its elastic and began rooting through a pile of photographs, slipping three out. “Here you are.”

Pushing aside cups and ashtrays, Eve created a space to lay out the three photos, which joined to show the entire train line from Fredrikstad to Oslo. The main stops were written in. Close to the station at Rygge, she saw the outlines of an airfield. The cameraman had even caught planes on the runway. She traced the line south with her finger, all the way to the starting

point, then back up. She'd noted something on the way down and tapped it now. "Do you happen to know what this body of water is called?"

"By Fredrikstad?" Carson pulled a map labelled *Sør-Norge* off a shelf, spread it out beside the photographs, swiftly found the spot. "It's a river called the, uh, Glomma."

"And see, that's a bridge, over it. Two bridges actually." She peered closer. "One with rails, and one smaller for cars and pedestrians, I would think." Eve drew in her lower lip. "It's not enough to only derail the train. We have to make those ball bearings unsalvageable. So dropping the train from a bridge into a river would be the way to do it."

"It would. Especially as the river will be deeper now after all the snow-melt runoff. Hmm." He sucked at his unlit pipe. "Two problems I can see—one major, one minor."

"Getting me to the bridge in time to set the explosives?"

"Precisely. But I have a solution for that." He smiled. "Ever heard of the 'Svenska Hjälpföreningen'?"

"Don't think so. 'Relief' of what?"

"Norwegians. The Nazis have been looting Norway, and much of the population is effectively starving. Various Swedish groups are allowed to run provisions across the border to relieve them." He went back to the cabinet, rooted again, then came back with another photograph. "Interestingly, about a year back I thought it would be a wheeze to create a truck of our own, in case we ever needed to get people across the border. Never used it. Perfect time to give it a go now."

He put the photo down before her. Eve saw a standard truck with a canvas roof, a red cross painted on that. "It has hidden compartments?"

"Of course. A little cramped."

Eve thought of the Lizzie. "I'm used to that."

"Good show. I'll call our chap, get it loaded and ready to leave by, what, 5 p.m.? It's got a special souped-up engine so you might even make Oslo while there is still light in the sky. Now"—he swept his arms wide—"let's grab a spot of late lunch, shall we?"

He'd moved to the door while speaking. Her question halted him at it. "Oslo?"

He stopped. "It's where the aid distribution centres are. Also where you'll be able to catch an early-morning train to Fredrikstad."

It was all so clear, delivered in that forthright and decisive English manner. It reminded her why they'd once had the biggest empire the world had ever known. She laughed. Then, as he turned to go again, she remembered what else he'd said. "If that was the minor, what's the major problem?"

"Sorry?"

"You said there were two—"

"Oh, yes." He cleared his throat. "Fredrikstad is a major terminus, and the Østfold line one of the busiest. So you'll need to know which train the ball bearings are on, so you blow up the correct one. A white cross painted on the caboose's, uh...I don't suppose you know which side of the bridge you'd be blowing it up from?"

"Very hard to say without—" Eve studied the photo again. "Well, as long as they haven't cut them since this photo was taken, these bushes here are about the only shelter."

"So?"

"So I'd need to see the cross on the left side."

"Super. Then that's where I'll paint it."

"You?"

"Me." He beamed. "Time to get back in the field. So I'll be coming with you to Oslo—and beyond." He crossed back to the door. "Shall we?"

"I just need to make a call."

"See you in the lobby then."

He left. She shook her head. She'd seriously underestimated Mr. Frank Carson. All his little tics, vocal and facial, had disappeared as he talked of action. She had a true ally. Now she needed to make sure of another. So she picked up the phone on the desk before her.

It took a while for the operator to put her through to the hunting lodge—calling from a neutral country to an occupied one. Then there was an

eternity of ringing. She was about to hang up, try later, when the phone was picked up. “*Ja?*” said a man.

“Herr Møller?”

“That’s me.”

“I am calling on behalf of my employer in Stockholm. He wishes to come hare hunting. Short notice, I am afraid. Have you a room for tomorrow?”

There was a long pause before the man replied. “We do not hunt this animal here. Only elk.”

“Oh, that is a pity. Can you tell me if there is a lodge I can go to near Fredrikstad?”

Another pause. “Fredrikstad? I do not know. I do not think so. Good hunting, miss.”

There was a click, immediate static. Eve stared at the receiver for a long moment. Not seeing it. Seeing a face. “Good hunting, Erik,” she murmured, before she hung up.

FORTY-NINE

Sarpsborg, Norway. May 8, 1944

ERIK STARED AT THE RECEIVER. DAMN, he thought. He'd tried three times the previous evening to call Knut Møller at his lodge and had not gotten through. He'd set an alarm and had gotten up at 3 a.m. to try again, with the same result. There had been no point, when he *did* finally get hold of the man just now, at 10 a.m., in asking why Møller hadn't picked up before—and no opportunity to, either. The lodge owner and hunting guide was famously short on conversation. He was also one of those Norwegians who would help the Resistance only if there was absolutely no risk to himself. So the message he'd given Erik had been curt: They didn't hunt hare in the Glåmdal district. He'd had someone in Stockholm ask exactly the same ridiculous question only yesterday afternoon. Like he'd said to them, the caller should try Fredrikstad, maybe even today since the weather was so fine. Then he'd hung up.

Erik replaced the receiver on the wall unit in the corridor then moved into the main room of the *konditori*. Two German officers were now sitting at one of the café's previously empty tables, and the waitress was taking their order. Erik stopped at the counter opposite. "I'll take three of those," he said to the owner, Hans Pedersen, pointing at cones of rolled *lompe* dusted in icing sugar in a cake dish. The man lifted the glass dome, then with tongs the three pancakes, dropping them onto paper, folding it. Erik handed over some coins and looked Pedersen in the eyes as he did. Unlike Møller, the owner was a dedicated *jøssing*, a leader in the fight against the occupier, and a local organizer of SIVORG, the Resistance's civilian arm, mainly responsible for transporting refugees and fighters across the border

to Sweden. His café was a communications hub too, and Erik had slept upstairs the previous night, needing to be near the phone.

Hans's eyebrows were lifted slightly in inquiry. Erik gave the smallest of nods. The café owner knew only that Erik was awaiting an important message, not its content. The nod told him he'd gotten it—and that he was leaving.

Hans dropped the change back into Erik's hand. "All the best for the day, sir."

"And to you."

Erik left the store and headed left down Sarpsborg's main street. His guess as to city had proved nearly correct. Since the ball bearings were coming from Eskilstuna, they were most likely destined for a town on the Østfold line, he'd thought. Transferred from a train back onto trucks at Rygge station, taken to the German military airfield nearby and then flown to Germany. He hadn't known which town they'd be loaded at, though. Now he did.

"Fredrikstad," he stated, sliding into the front passenger door of the Volvo.

The men in it stirred. Boys, truly, none of them over nineteen. Lars, Christian and Mikel were local lads he'd recruited when he'd been dropped in the area early in '43 to organize and train a group. They were big, all over six feet, though rationing had slimmed their frames. They'd gone through nearly all the supplies he'd brought with him from England two weeks before. Now they each swallowed the *lompe* he brought them in two bites apiece. They were dishevelled. Understandable since they'd slept in the car in a forest.

"Is it action?" asked Mikel, the biggest, through a full mouth from the back seat.

"It is. Let's go."

They all whooped. Lars, the driver, turned the key. The engine hiccupped and spat, but finally the *knottgenerator* mounted on the car's rear started. Only Nazis and some Quislings had gasoline for their cars.

Ordinary Norwegians burned bags of charcoal in the *knottgenerator* stove to power theirs.

“Drive fast but not so fast as to draw attention.”

“Sure thing, Sheriff,” Lars drawled, in English. He was obsessed with cowboy comics and gave everyone nicknames from them.

It was a twenty-minute drive to Fredrikstad. Erik spent the time studying the local map. They reached the entrance to the town and stopped at the checkpoint there. It was manned by one bored German corporal and two excitable young members of the Hirden, Norway’s Nazi soldiers. One of the soldiers knew the three youths from their local high school, and Erik had ordered them, as part of their training in subterfuge, to make nice with the young Fascists. Not join them, but not shun them, either, as so many of their countrymen did. Lars had gone so far as to attend some recruitment meetings, and as a result the guard was generally keener on talking up the unit rather than checking their papers. Erik’s was the sole fake anyway, and SOE had done their usual bang-up job for “Torstein Hvaller,” machinist in a Sarpsborg shop. Only the most scrupulous examination by the Gestapo might discover an error.

The talk went on too long. A line had built up behind them. The corporal growled and the young soldier jumped, thrust the papers back in, shouted “*Heil Hitler*” and stepped away.

The car moved off. “Wait till the war is over, you fucking traitor,” Mikel whispered from the rear.

Erik ordered Lars to park on a side street about four hundred metres from the station. Then he dispatched the boys to walk the perimeter of the yard to seek gaps in the fencing, time the guards and also find blind spots where the soldiers manning machine guns in the four corner towers of the rail yard—Erik had studied the station two years before for a possible sabotage operation—might not have a clear view. Then Erik made for the main gates.

There was a *konditori* opposite, not nearly as clean and pleasant as the one his friend ran in Sarpsborg. Aimed at railway workers, as well as Hirden and Germans on a break. All three groups occupied most tables, but

Erik found a stool in a corner by the front window. He purchased a cup of tea and a bowl of thin soup but ate almost none of that—it smelled and tasted off. But if he had food in front of him, no one was going to bother the mechanic in the grease-stained overalls.

He'd only been there ten minutes when a fleet of six trucks arrived. Canvas-roofed, with a pair of German soldiers holding rifles at the back of each one. To disguise his excitement, Erik took a sip of his cold tea—because these were not Opel Blitz trucks, the mainstay of the Wehrmacht. These were Scania-Vabis, and they were only made in Sweden.

A German officer stepped down from the first truck. The gate guard snapped to attention, they *Heil Hitler*-ed each other and the gates swung open almost immediately, then closed fast behind the last truck.

Erik left his uneaten food behind and made his way to the car. The three lads were already there. He told them what he'd seen, how their quarry was inside, and how he needed to get inside too. But their reports spoke of increased perimeter patrols. “The fuckers, German and Norwegian, seem extra vigilant today,” Christian informed him. His Resistance job was to monitor what goods came through Fredrikstad station.

“Then there is no sneaking in.” Erik shrugged. “I’ll just have to march in. Does anyone here know someone who works in the yard? Or for the railways?”

“I do.” It was Mikel, the quietest of them, who answered. “My father is a conductor.”

Erik turned to him. “Is he working today?”

“No. He’s been sick. Off for a week.”

“Does he have a uniform?”

“Of course.”

Erik looked up at the strapping lad. He had six inches on him, at least. “How big is he?”

“Not big. He’s a head shorter than my mother. Her family are huge, it’s where I get my height.”

“Is he a *jøssing*? Will he lend his uniform to the fight?”

Mikel shook his head. “He only ever wants a quiet life, and to keep his job. But he doesn’t need to lend it. He sleeps all day. I’ll steal it.”

“Do they live close?”

“On the edge of town. Ten minutes’ drive?”

“Lars, take him.” The two got into the car. “And bring his ID too.”

“You don’t look much like him.”

“It’s better than nothing. Go.”

With a bang and a puff of black smoke from the *knottgenerator*, the car took off.

Erik took the arm of Christian, who’d stayed. “If it comes to a fight, we’ll need more men. So I need—”

“I hope it does.”

“I need you to go to the camp in the woods. Bring fifteen volunteers to, uh”—he tipped back his head, envisioned the map—“to that abandoned mill at the corner of Enebekkveien and Sarpsborgveien. Try to get them there by three. Armed. Lie low. Await orders.”

“More than fifteen will volunteer, you know.”

“I know. But each one over that number increases the risk of discovery. Pick the best. Oh, and tell them to bring their bicycles. Go!”

Christian went. He had a bicycle parked nearby. Erik got out some gum, chewed it and tried to stay calm as he waited. *This is it*, he thought. But so many questions remained.

The first: *Are you even in position, Eve?*

After consulting the map, he knew there was only one place an SOE agent would choose to derail a train between Fredrikstad and Rygge Airfield to *guarantee* its destruction: the trestle bridge over the Glomma River—about three kilometres from Fredrikstad. He and Eve had done exactly the same training. He knew she would have seen it too. But any number of things could have gone wrong since Eve had left the message with Møller. She could have been arrested by Swedish border guards. She could have been shot by German ones, crossing back. She might have reached the bridge and been caught there. Such an important crossing was bound to be well guarded.

If Eve wasn't successful, and the train *wasn't* derailed at the bridge, it would have to be tackled later. Which is why he'd sent for his men. The barn he'd asked them to wait at was only a half-hour cycle ride from the airfield at Rygge.

He sighed. If stopping the shipment in Sweden was Plan A, and the bridge was Plan B, what was an attack with fifteen green volunteers on a heavily guarded airfield? Plan...Hail Mary? An American OSS guy, on the same course up in Aviemore, had explained the term to him. It came from what they called football. The very last chance in a desperate game. An almost hopeless chance.

If it came to it, Erik had no choice. He'd have to follow the train to the bridge. If that wasn't blown, he'd have to collect his men—his boys!—go to the airfield...and launch his "Hail Mary."

The worst chance of all.

The car returning broke his thoughts. Mikel got out, holding the black uniform of a train guard, as well as a cap, white shirt and tie. They were all a little big for Erik—if Mikel's mother was a head taller than his father, she was close to a troll maiden—but it didn't look too bad. The cap fitted ok. He took the father's identity card, used a knife to slit out the photograph, did the same for his, and replaced one with the other using glue Lars kept in the glove compartment. It wouldn't stand up to much scrutiny, but Mikel assured him there were dozens of train guards and a revolving group of sentries. "You should get away with it," he told him.

As he dressed, Erik reconsidered the questions—then made a decision and issued new orders. Mikel and Lars were to wait at the edge of town on the road bridge that passed over the tracks. They were to watch the rear platform of every train that passed. If they saw that he was on one, that train had "the consignment"—the ball bearings. They were then to follow that train in the car. For most of the journey north, tracks and road ran parallel. Erik might need to get off the train and away quickly, so the boys would need to keep a sharp eye out for him. But if he wasn't on any train, if he'd failed to get on board, he'd join them at the road bridge and they'd follow the train in the car to the bridge...and pray! But if Eve failed to blow the

bridge and wreck the train, then they would have to continue on to the rendezvous with Christian and the others, move on to the airfield—and launch his “Hail Mary.” “But listen, lads.” He swallowed. “If I’m not on the train and then I don’t join you at the bridge by, uh, three o’clock, you must all go to the abandoned mill on Enebekkveien. Christian will be there with more men. From there, you must all return to camp.”

“Without a fight? Come on, Wyatt Earp!” Lars faked the quick draw of a gunslinger. “Got to take down the *bandidos*!”

Erik couldn’t help his laugh. “Let’s hope it comes to that. Now go!”

He didn’t tell them that if he didn’t show up at the road bridge he was probably dead. Nor did he try to explain what a “Hail Mary” was, and how they would all almost certainly die attempting it.

FIFTY

THE GATE SENTRY WAS HARRIED; there was a long line of trucks bringing goods and soldiers. He noted Erik's uniform, barely glanced at his ID, waved him through. Once inside, one more man in a uniform easily fit into all the busyness. Fredrikstad was the largest marshalling yard on the Østfold line before Oslo.

There were runs of carriages being shunted onto sidings, others being brought to the main track. As Erik approached that, moving through a crowd both uniformed and in civilian clothes, a whistle blew and a train set out. He started, then calmed, knowing they wouldn't yet have had time to unload the ball bearings from the trucks. The last carriage passed him, revealing, twenty metres ahead, an engine on a turntable, in the process of spinning around to get the engine facing the right direction. Three men were standing beside it. A driver, a German officer whose back was to Erik...and Henrik Ridelsson.

There was another train in a siding there, awaiting its turn for the main track. Swerving, Erik hoisted himself onto its rear platform. The perfect place for a guard about his duties. The perfect place to hear what was being said, especially as the discussion was heated, and the voices raised. He bent to make what he hoped looked like adjustments to the signage back there, but he probably needn't have bothered, they were all so caught up in the debate. He was able to look under his peaked cap at the Swede, who looked quite different than he had four years before. Thinner, his skin paler. When he turned to gesticulate back toward the town, Erik also saw that he was missing an arm. Erik felt a flush of elation. *Gotcha*, he thought. *I'll be sure to tell Eve.*

“I don’t care,” Ridelsson was saying. “We will have to make do.”

“Please, sir,” replied the driver, his regional Norwegian accent thick. “You are not a driver. These beauties can overheat without—”

“Without water. Yes, yes, you said so before. So put in more.”

“Again, sir, you do not understand.” Erik could hear in his voice that the man was trying to control his temper. “The tank has a limited capacity. Besides, this one is already overheating. Allow me to substitute—”

“And *you* do not understand!” shouted Henrik. “You already told us it will take at least five hours to get another engine ready, whereas, even with extra stops at water towers, this one can reach Rygge in three hours. We need it to arrive by 5 p.m. at the latest. The shipment will take time to load and we must be in Germany tonight. Tonight!”

“I said probably three hours. If it doesn’t break down—”

“Enough.” It was the German officer who interrupted, his voice softer than the Swede’s. But he had an upper-class German accent...much like one that Erik never would forget. That he’d heard five years before in a Polish forest...von K  chler. Aleksandra’s killer. *Could it be?*

Erik’s heart quickened as the man spoke. “Herr Ridelsson is quite right. The shipment is required in Germany immediately. Even sooner.” He gave a dry laugh. “So you will make this engine run”—he paused—“or you and your family will face the consequences.”

The driver blanched, then nodded. “I will do as you ask.”

“How long, then?” asked Ridelsson.

The man sighed. “I can get it onto the tracks in one hour.”

“Which is the exact amount of time you said it would take to load the shipment. Excellent!” The German slapped the gloves he held in one hand on his thigh. “So, you, fellow, attend to your work, and Herr Ridelsson, why don’t you go and supervise the loading? Whilst I...I will go and take a little schnapps with my officers.”

All the men moved to their tasks. As Henrik and the German turned and began walking toward the train, once more Erik held his breath. He even prayed...but it wasn’t von K  chler. *No*, he thought, licking his lips, *that would have been too much to ask of God.*

Erik slipped inside the carriage. It was empty and he was able to stand quietly and hear the officer and Henrik go past. When their footsteps faded, he exited, peered around the carriage, let them get fifty metres ahead, then jumped down and followed. When they split, he followed the Swede.

Henrik rounded a corner onto a side track. There stood a train, made up of five carriages—two for passengers at front and rear, three for goods between them. Each of those had their large side doors open and a Swedish truck drawn up to them, one apiece, three more waiting behind. Their canvas roofs were peeled back. Erik, settling between the carriages of a nearby stationary train, could see the large wooden crates on each truck bed. Men were engaged in wrapping hefty chains around the first crate while a driver sat in the cab of a mobile crane on caterpillar tracks, waiting to swing the goods across.

It was not an easy task. The first crate went across OK, but the second slipped its chains and fell to the ground. Some of its slats snapped, but the whole thing didn't break apart. Despite Ridelsson's screaming, the men—civilians all—methodically set about using the crane to lift each side of the crate, to get the chains under and across again. Eventually that crate was lashed down in the second car, and they began on the third, which went smoothly. The three trucks pulled away, three more replaced them. Within twenty minutes the whole load of ball bearings was aboard.

Job complete, the crane was just swinging back when Erik heard a long whistle. Moments later a train engine appeared along a side curve, came onto the track, then backed up to the first carriage. There was a clang of metal on metal, the whole train shuddered and shifted back, before more men came in and joined the two units together with huge chains.

The driver descended from his cab. At the same moment, Henrik appeared, and the two men had another conversation. Because of the noise from the steam engine, Erik couldn't hear what they said. But soldiers had begun to assemble, about sixty of them—two companies brought into ranks by their *Oberfeldwebel*'s shouted commands. *No*, Erik thought as he walked away down the line of the train, *he's not an ordinary sergeant, because*

these soldiers have the double sigil on their collar tabs. They are Waffen-SS. He is a Hauptscharführer.

So that officer he'd mistaken for von Küchler, who he'd thought was a major, was actually an *Obersturmbannführer*. The rank that von Küchler would certainly have attained by now if he were still alive.

The Waffen-SS were the elite—the most dangerous opponents. They were also the only ones, ever since he'd first seen them in a Polish forest, and later in a Norwegian field, that Erik craved to fight. But if it came to that? With fifteen green Norwegian boys? He shook his head. One step at a time, soldier.

He stopped, stared at the ground. *Eve!* The thought of her, a vision of her lying beneath him in that hotel in Scotland, a memory of how they were joined everywhere, always so...*urgent*, as if it would be their last time. Had it been?

Shouts jolted him from his thoughts. He looked along the length of the train to its front end. There was an oldish man in bespattered brown overalls standing by the locomotive. He had a paintbrush, big, like a decorator might use, in one hand, which must mean the bucket he was holding had paint in it. It was the engine driver who had shouted, was shouting now, and waving the painter away.

But he didn't go. Instead he stepped up to the engine, daubed something on it—at which moment a German soldier appeared, levelling a Schmeisser as he came, shouting too. The man turned, dropped the bucket, raised his arms in surrender...then swivelled and began a stumbling run toward the engine sheds. More shouts didn't stop him. A burst from the Schmeisser did, knocking him forward to roll and roll and finally smash into a pile of pallets, crumpling at their base, his limbs askew.

More soldiers came then, along with that officer and Henrik Ridelsson. It was too far away to hear what they said. The man was clearly dead, his body limp and flopping around as he was searched. Something was pulled from within his overalls, held up. It was a template, and Erik was able to see light through its lines, which formed the distinctive "H7." Shorthand for King Haakon the Seventh of Norway—the very symbol of resistance

against the Nazi occupiers. Sprayed and daubed everywhere by everyone from boys to old ladies. Prohibited, of course. Prosecuted. Men and women had been shot during the act of putting it up. Like this *jøssing* had just been.

The cardboard template was ripped in half, its pieces dropped onto the body. Two Hirden in their blue uniforms were summoned over, obviously commanded to deal with the corpse. Then the others returned to the train. Another even longer whistle came.

A man appeared wearing the same uniform as Erik. He climbed onto the train's rear platform holding two flags on short staffs: one red, one blue. He leaned out, holding the blue flag. A train whistle sounded again, but a toot this time. The guard replaced blue with red and waved it, with a final full stroke down. The train began to slowly pull away.

Erik began walking. *Now?* he thought. All those unanswered questions shot through his mind. If Eve was there at the bridge, and blew it up, the best place to see that would be in the car with the boys who waited for him on the bridge ahead. Mission accomplished. But if she wasn't, and the train didn't plunge into the river, was the "Hail Mary" really the next best plan? An attack on a fortified air base? With almost no chance of success and all those lads to die?

No, he thought, gradually speeding up as the train did. If the bridge wasn't blown, then the next best plan was for him, and him alone, to try to derail the train while aboard it. He had some plastic explosives in a pack wedged into the small of his back. The rest was in the car with the boys.

He'd done a course once: blowing up the train you were travelling on. He thought he might just remember how to do that. Though he seemed to recall it required fuses and a timer and he didn't have a timer.

"Cross that bridge when I come to it," he muttered, then smiled as he thought how he might not.

The guard on the platform folded his flags, tucked them into a small chest, then went in through the rear doors. As soon as he disappeared, Erik began to run. The train was moving faster now but he caught hold of its rear railing, hauled himself on board. Sat down immediately just below the view from the window. Just as the train passed the body.

The two Hirden didn't see him since they were staring down at the dead man. Erik caught a glimpse of an older face, thin hair spread across a bald crown. A patriot who had just given his life to defy his oppressors. Erik put his hand to his heart. "My All for Norway," he whispered to the dead.

He looked at his watch. Twelve thirty-two p.m. The train was going slowly through the outskirts of the city, but it would pick up speed and only slow again when it reached the bridge. Three kilometres. Ten minutes, perhaps? By which time he would have to make his choice. Because if Eve was in position and succeeded in blowing the bridge with him on the train, he would most likely die.

"My All for Norway," he whispered to himself. Then a new thought made him smile. He had thwarted Eve "blowing up a train" on that exercise in Scotland. Perhaps he'd witness her succeeding this time. Before he died, that was.

As they approached the outskirts of Fredrikstad, Erik stood. A minute later, the train passed beneath a road bridge. Lars sat on the parapet smoking. He dipped his head at Erik, flicked his cigarette into the air, and was gone.

The train began to pick up speed. Brushing down his trousers, Erik opened the carriage door.

FIFTY-ONE

Gamle Rolvsøysund

EVE LOWERED HER BINOCULARS and rubbed her eyes. She'd been staring at the same point off and on for close to an hour now—a forested hillock that the track from the south curved around. It would be where she'd get her first glimpse of the train. Her train, she hoped. Her target. Two had appeared, and both times she'd dropped the field glasses, reached to connect the battery that would send a current seventy metres along the wires to the charges she'd laid on the bridge's central pier. But as each of the trains got nearer, she could tell by her naked eye that they were not the right one. Passenger trains, with civilians and a few Hirten or German soldiers at their windows. More importantly, no white cross decorated either caboose.

But would one? Had Frank succeeded? He was all confidence when they'd set out from Oslo that morning, having first stopped to collect more plastic explosives for her from a secret stash, and white paint for him from a local agent's garage. The man with the blown nerves she'd met in Stockholm and who she'd decided to lose by "going blind" had vanished. He'd been all brisk business.

"I learned a few tricks in my time, my dear, have no fear. I'll paint that cross."

"They'll just let you walk up to a train and paint it? I thought all the rail yards were tightly guarded. And what if you're caught?"

"There'll be a way." Frank had run a hand across his scalp, smoothing down his comb-over. "And I've an idea about being caught. I'll carry one of those 'H7' thingies that patriots are always daubing on walls."

““Haakon the Seventh.””

“That’s the one. If they catch me at it, they might give me a thrashing. Throw me in jail for a few days.” He’d grinned. “I have ways of bamboozling Jerry, have no fear.”

Eve had sighed. Bamboozling Jerry had not always gone so well over the years. All at SOE had heard of the recently uncovered disaster in Holland. What their German opponents had called “*Englandspiel*”: the England Game. The Abwehr had cracked all the Allied codes in Holland in 1941. Since then they had fed SOE false intelligence, captured every agent dropped into the country, tortured and killed hundreds. Terrible errors had been made, especially the failure to note captured SOE agents’ deliberate mistakes, which they’d put into every message to warn their coders. Somehow these “fail-safes” had been consistently ignored, and the rival British agency—MI6—who’d always distrusted SOE as mavericks, closed in and tried to take them over. Churchill saved them. Otherwise...*Otherwise I would not be sitting here*, she thought. Waiting to decide which train to blow up.

“Jesus,” she murmured, half prayer, half blasphemy. She was going to blow up a train on a bridge. Kill many people. Not all would be soldiers.

It was drilled into every agent that some innocents would inevitably suffer for the greater good. German civilians were dying in their tens of thousands as the Allied air forces reduced the Fatherland to rubble. Only the year before, SOE’s greatest success to date—the destruction of the Norsk Hydro heavy-water plant at Vemork—had been followed by another: the sinking of a ferry transporting barrels of heavy water across a Norwegian lake. Champagne had been quaffed at Baker Street at the news. But Eve had wondered, even as she sipped, about the many innocent Norwegian passengers who’d drowned alongside the Germans in those frigid waters.

She sighed. *Not up to me*, she thought. All I can do is obey and keep doing what I have been trained to do. As I did before. What I’ve wanted to do, truly, ever since I found my husband dead and recognized the evil that had killed him. Eve shivered. “Back with my bloody thoughts,” she

murmured, then shook her head at the irony. At the stains on her hands that all her rubbing in the cold earth had failed to remove.

She'd had no choice. The damned soldier had sat right under the trestle, fishing, at the very place she would have to climb up. She'd watched him, urging him with prayers to every saint she remembered from school to move on. He kept casting and reeling in, casting and reeling in. Caught nothing, but it did not seem to matter to him. When after an hour he still just sat there, she'd crept up behind him and slit his throat with her Fairbairn-Sykes knife.

The first man she'd killed. A youth with a whole life before him, with a family, perhaps a girlfriend at home. Dead now in a foreign country he'd probably had no wish to even visit. And within the hour she could kill hundreds more.

She shook herself. She'd remember him later. Do penance. Should she return to the Catholic Church she'd been raised in? In this moment it seemed to her the only way to atone for some of the things she'd done—would do. For now, though...

She picked up her glasses. Focused on her charges: ten pounds of Nobel 808 tightly tied around the right-central pier at the bridge's L-shaped junction. She'd moulded the plastic explosive before she climbed up from the riverbank onto the girders that morning, seeing the shape it needed to be fitted around. A train had gone over while she'd worked, and the bridge had vibrated. It was old, she could tell by the wood. Ten pounds should be ample.

Should. "But what do I truly know about blowing up bridges?" she muttered.

A whistle sounded in the distance. She swivelled the binoculars in time to see the train round the bend. Immediately saw the white painted cross on the caboose. She was surprised. Given her recent thoughts, she'd expected a biblical crucifix. This one could be used in tic-tac-toe.

Adrenalin surged through her. She forced herself to take deep breaths and swept the glasses along the carriages, just to be sure. Three for goods in the middle, bookended by two for passengers. She saw soldiers at their

windows. Even saw the SS insignia on some collar tabs. A cargo and troop train. Her train.

She shuffled back to the battery. The negative wire was attached. Now she picked up the positive and looked back at the train slowing down for its approach. The theory was to blow the bridge when the train was fifty metres from it. Too close to stop.

Her heart was beating so loudly she could hear it. But then, above that sound came another.

Singing. Children singing.

She swivelled north. There, approaching the pedestrian and road bridge, was a crocodile of schoolkids. Arm in arm, three by three, they sang.

Voices crowded her head. Cholmondeley-Warren, every trainer she'd ever had...

"It's the necessity of war."

"To win, you must be ruthless."

"Be prepared to kill, Corporal. Innocents as well as the enemy."

"You have your orders. Obey them."

"Do your duty."

The children marched onto their bridge. The train's engine was less than one hundred metres from the trestle.

Do your duty.

Eve's right hand was shaking so much she clamped her left around it. Moved the wire closer. When it touched the nut, electricity would surge, the detonator would set off the explosives, the bridge would fall, the train and its deadly cargo would crash into the river. Her first mission, the one she'd trained for all these years, the one she'd been entrusted with, would succeed. Young men would survive on the beaches of invasion. Because of her. The war would end more quickly. Because of what she did here.

Childish voices came clearer. The song that had been a blur became distinct. It was one she knew, because Swedish children sang it too.

"Pål sine høner..."

She looked at the train again. Fifty metres from the bridge. When the locomotive plummeted into the river, it would take out the smaller bridge

beside it. These children would die. Thousands of other children would live.

Do your duty.

In the reeds, a young man stared up through sightless eyes.

Do your duty.

Even through the sudden tears, Eve could still see the terminal. So she touched the wires to it.

Nothing happened. No explosion. No shriek of girders and tracks rending, no engine plunging. She touched it again. Contact was made. There were sparks—and nothing else.

So now she looked. To her explosives. To the central stanchion, and the German soldier clinging there.

Holding the wires in his hand.

He was shouting, she could see. But she couldn't hear what he said because of the train reaching the bridge. She thought of grabbing her Sten gun, shooting him. But it would do no good. The train was on the trestle now. It would be over it soon.

Now its whistle sounded. The children cheered.

Even as she began sliding back, to begin her run—her limp—away, Eve glimpsed the goods wagons where the ball bearings must be. Saw her enemies at the windows of the passenger coaches—the ones she'd failed to kill. On collar tabs the double sigil of the SS storm trooper gleamed silver. Some of these worshippers of Adolf Hitler had their arms out the windows. They were waving to the schoolchildren, who waved back.

Some of these fearsome young warriors looked like they were singing.

FIFTY-TWO

Three minutes earlier...

ERIK WALKED THE TRAIN, looking for *what* he did not quite know. His uniform took him past the storm troopers in the packed end carriage, who ignored him. Through the three goods wagons; six guards in each sat around the big wooden crates and regarded him more curiously. Finally, he crossed the gap of clinking chains into the first carriage.

This was divided into compartments—all first class, so the officers had obviously commandeered it for themselves. Two younger ones, no older than Lars or Mikel, stood at an open window in the corridor, smoking. Beyond them, Erik saw the conductor leaning into the very first compartment. The senior officers' one, he assumed. Where Henrik Ridelsson would also be.

The train was slowing. Erik looked out of a window. There was the bridge, two hundred metres away.

Time to go.

The impulse that had gotten him onto the train had long passed. Further thought told him: he wasn't going to derail this train, even if he could remember exactly where to place the little explosive he had. And he knew derailing the train simply wasn't enough. Its deadly cargo had to be rendered unusable. Not collected by slave labourers and put onto the next flight out. Somehow, he'd need to blow it sky high.

"Hail Mary," he muttered, as the train slowed a little more. *Get between the carriages*, he told himself. If Eve was there and blew the bridge, maybe—and it was a big maybe—he'd be knocked clear. If she didn't...what had he overheard the driver discussing with Ridelsson back in Fredrikstad? That

if they used this engine they'd need to stop more often for water? Erik assumed a stop would come soon. He'd have to be ready to jump off, even as the train slowed—and hope that his boys in the car were close by.

He turned to head for the rear platform...and heard the voice. It was not a German who spoke the local tongue. It was a Norwegian, the man's words thick with the local dialect. "Hey, you! You!" yelled the conductor. "Why did they send another guard? Stop, you!"

Erik didn't stop—didn't look back. He left the carriage, crossing the gap into the first of the goods wagons. Even through the two doors behind him he could hear shouting, more than one voice now, though the words were muffled by wood. The soldiers looked up at him again.

"Someone's for it." Erik kept moving, talking as he did. "I told them they shouldn't let old Georg drive. He's the slowest in the whole of Norway!"

As he reached the wagon's rear door its front one flew open. "Stop him!" yelled a German.

But Erik was through, slamming the door behind him. He glanced at the ground. The gravel embankment had passed—it was all wood now, the start of the bridge trestle.

He heard more shouts, getting nearer through the carriage he'd just left. He glimpsed water, wondered if he should jump into the river. Then there was a thump on the door behind him, so he ran and burst into the next carriage, a goods one.

Blow it now, Eve. Blow it, he prayed as he ran.

Shouts behind him, and a man ahead. A big man who'd been sitting at a small folding table when Erik had passed through before stood up now. He had a bib tucked into his collar and a sausage in one hand. The other he put onto Erik's chest. "You'll stay there, young man," the *Hauptscharführer* growled. He was the same man Erik had seen and heard marshalling the troops in Fredrikstad. But when the door behind them flew open, admitting all that noise, the man looked to it—and Erik took his hand, bent it hard. As the man yelped and fell away, Erik leaped past him, threw open the carriage

door, then slammed it shut behind him. He held the handle, leaning away and using all his weight, as someone tugged it on the other side.

He had no time. So of course there was all the time in the world. To look back at the bridge, which had not blown. To look straight where any bridge blower would look—at the central stanchion. There was a German soldier there. He was waving something, shouting. Just above his head at the bridge's core was a bulky something else that had nothing to do with keeping it up. Quite the opposite. *Eve*, Erik thought, as the door began to slip from his grasp.

Past the unblown bridge, the train was speeding up. Now he had no choice. Stepping onto the chains between the carriages, to shouts so close behind him, Erik hurled himself off the train.

He'd jumped from planes. From trucks moving fast. Not as fast as this train. He kept his knees bent, so at least his legs didn't break, but they also couldn't hold him on the gravel slope. His face slammed into the ground, he slid, rolled, smashed down again, rolled again. He'd tried to take the force on his back, to tuck his arms. But one was out and he heard it snap.

At last he lay on his stomach, trying to get air in, trying to make sense of the sounds that came beyond the ringing in his ears. Train brakes shrieking, shouted commands. Weirdly, he thought he could hear, in the distance, a children's choir. He raised his head and gravel exploded before him, kicking stones into his eyes. The train was slowing...and someone was shooting at him from it.

Somehow, he found the air he needed to slide into the track-side bushes. They formed a narrow divide between the rail tracks and a roadway. As he emerged on the other side, the sound of train brakes grew louder, then stopped. The shouted German commands came clearer. He heard boots dropping hard onto gravel.

Run, he thought, though he had no idea how he could do that. Getting to his feet would be a start. Yet that was also harder than he thought it would be. He'd made it to his knees when a car drew up beside him. A door was flung open.

"Here!" someone yelled in Norwegian.

“Faster!” called someone in German.

Hands were under his arms. As he was lifted, Erik screamed in agony, in protest, but it didn’t stop the lifter. He was flung into a back seat; a body landed on top of him. The pain of that drove him to the edge of consciousness. Now he heard the screech of tires on tarmac, some shots fired—their sound soon fading into the distance along with the cries.

He was turned over. An awed whisper came.

“*Fee faen*, Wyatt.”

“Back!” He coughed, and pain surged through his chest. Somehow, he mastered it enough to say, “We must go back to the bridge.”

Mikel, at the wheel, was still driving fast. “Why?” he called over his shoulder. “It didn’t blow.”

“Eve Sinclair,” Erik said.

FIFTY-THREE

Rygge Airfield

IT HAD TAKEN EVE and Erik nearly an hour to find a suitable vantage point—a low, wooded hill fifty metres from the barbed wire. German sentries had passed periodically through the forest that surrounded Rygge Airfield, and Erik, in the briefing he'd given to his men at the abandoned mill, had ordered that none be killed. It wasn't sudden kindness to the enemy. "If a sentry doesn't return from patrol, they'll raise an alarm," he'd told them. "They are wary enough without going to full alert. And we'll need all the time we can get."

Now Eve and Erik lay side by side in the thin treeline of the knoll. Each pressed binoculars to their eyes. "What the hell *is* that?" Eve whispered.

She could only be referring to one thing. "It is the Messerschmitt 323D. Also known as the Gigant."

"I'm not surprised. I've never seen a bigger plane."

"I don't think there is one."

She swept the binoculars along its length and breadth. The wingspan had to be fifty metres at least. It had three large engines on each wing and was as long as her father's ocean-going yacht—close to thirty metres, she reckoned. "How does that even get airborne?" she asked.

"Look under each engine. See the brackets?"

"Yes."

"Rockets. They fire them at takeoff."

"Jesus. Crew?"

"Five. Two pilots and a radio operator at the front of the plane. Two flight engineers—they sit in tiny cockpits under those raised canopies

between the engines on the wings. See them?"

"Yes." She turned to him. "How come you know so much?"

"I was obsessed with planes when I was a kid. Still a bit of a swot." He laughed and immediately winced.

"You OK?"

"I think one of my ribs is broken. Maybe more than one. The arm, of course."

"Want another slug of morphine?"

He hesitated, then shook his head. "It would make me dopey."

"That's the point." She studied him. "You need to let me handle the next bit alone, Erik."

"Yes, Eve. As if that's going to happen."

"Come on. It's only the one plane to blow up, right? I thought there'd be three."

"Nope. The Gigant can carry twelve tons. A tank. Artillery pieces. One hundred and thirty men—"

"Or six crates of ball bearings."

"Easily." Erik turned back to the plane, levelled his glasses. "Which are already on board."

"How do you know?"

"See the side door?"

"The huge one with the ramp leading up into it? Hard to miss."

"Look inside. Can you see the edge of a crate?"

She focused. Saw the wooden slats. Even saw the letters *SKF* branded in black into the wood. "Svenska Kullagerfabriken," she breathed. "The Wallenbergs' ball-bearing company."

"Indeed."

"So how come if they're loaded, it hasn't taken off yet?"

"That," he replied, tipping his head to the sky without taking his eyes from the eyepieces.

"That" was rain. It had started an hour before and had been pouring continually since. They were both soaked, despite their rain ponchos.

"Planes take off in the rain. Even muck like this. Ours did in Lisbon."

“It did. They do. But it’s a risk. Bird that heavy, if it starts aquaplaning on the runway, it will crash, no question. Not to mention what the weather’s like at the destination. Landing in rain is worse than takeoff.” He grunted. “Too important a cargo to chance it.”

“So we have time?”

“Not much. The rain is easing. Plus”—he looked at his wrist—“rain or shine, kickoff is in ten minutes.”

Kickoff. *How the boys love their sports terminology*, Eve thought. “The game’s afoot,” is what Cholmondeley-Warren always said. Shakespeare, apparently. A game where a lot of people died. “Will they do it, your boys?”

“They will. They’ve been waiting four years to have a crack at their oppressor. Training and training, always held back, like hunting dogs on a leash.” He ran his tongue over his broken lips. “They’ll do it alright.”

Let slip the dogs of war, she thought. Shakespeare again. She’d remembered *something* from Brillantmont, at least.

Erik began to cough, burying the sound in his sleeve. When he raised his head again, she saw blood on the khaki. “Listen to me. You are not well. You have to let me do the next bit alone.”

“No, I told you. I won’t—”

“You will. You must.” She gripped his arm. “What was the name of that British agent in Lisbon? The one who helped us escape?”

“What? Oh, uh...Fleming. Ian Fleming.”

“Him. Remember he told us that if we both wanted to work for the secret services, we’d either need to stop being lovers or conceal the fact that we were? That they only wanted loners for this work?”

“So?”

“So we couldn’t stop loving, could we? We chose to hide our love. Do you want to prove them right, now? That we can’t operate like we should, make the correct choices, because we love each other?”

“Eve—”

“No, Erik! You are thinking with your heart, not your head.” Her low voice was fierce now. “You are wounded. Quite badly, I fear. When I saw you in the back of the car, when you pulled up to give me a ride...” She

shook her head. “So you will not be able to react like you may need to. Down there, you are a liability.”

“Now, wait a—”

“It’s true! Forget your heart. Use your head. In that you’ll find that alone I have a better chance of succeeding. You know that’s true!”

He stared at her for a long moment. She held her breath. He was not only her lover, he was also her commander here in the field too. If he ordered her to accompany him, she would have no choice but to obey.

At last he spoke. “When did you become so tough, Sergeant Sinclair?”

She exhaled. “When I discovered that I needed to be, Captain Strom.”

He studied her again...then looked at his watch. “The attack begins in, uh, six and a half minutes. As soon as the firing starts, we slip down to the wire. You cut it, and you”—he hesitated—“you will go through, and head to the plane.” He raised his hand as she went to speak. “While I stay there and cover your retreat. Meanwhile, organize your plastic. You should stay the absolute minimum of time in there.”

“Sir.” She felt a surge of adrenalin, relief, fear and thrill mixed. She sat back and pulled out the almond-smelling clay and the timer from Erik’s pack. Hers, of course, were all back at the bridge. Or, more likely, in Gestapo headquarters in Fredrikstad. She laid the equipment down. “Besides,” she added, “these days I am much more experienced with explosives than you are.”

“Don’t push your luck, Sergeant,” he growled.



It was surprising both how long and how short six and a half minutes could be. She’d had her plastic ready for an age, it felt. She’d checked and rechecked her Sten gun, its spare magazines, her grenades. Even had time to chew the nails on three fingers to nubs. There was silence, and then there was noise.

So much noise.

The Norwegians' two Bren guns began it. The sewing machine *rat-a-tat* of bullets stitched into a tower on the southern perimeter, the opposite end of the airfield to them. Almost immediately came the muffled *crump-crump* of grenades thrown into a guard hut. Under it all, a half-dozen Lee-Enfield rifles added to the cacophony with a sporadic *crack, crack-crack*.

"Go! Fast!" Erik hissed, and Eve preceded him in a slide down the slight slope. The wire was thirty metres before them. As they ran to it, a klaxon, followed swiftly by a bell, struck up the German alarm.

They reached the wire. Just as they did, the sentry, who had passed every three minutes back and forth, ran in from the right. He was twenty metres away, had his rifle raised, but he was facing toward the firefight. It was clear he was under orders not to join it—that it might be a diversion. Thrusting the silenced muzzle of his Browning through the chain links, resting its silencer on metal, Erik aimed, and fired twice. The guard went down.

Eve had already begun cutting the wire. Soon, she had created a cone-shaped gap big enough for her to slip through. She was about to, when Erik grabbed her arm and pulled her into a hard kiss. "Come back to me," he whispered.

"That's a promise," she replied, and began to run. As she did, she tasted her lover's blood on her lips.

The Gigant was about two hundred metres away. She covered them fast, as fast as the men she could see, beneath the belly of the plane, running from the buildings on the opposite side. Their destination was the same as hers. The pilots must have been ordered to risk the rain because of the attack. The men were making for the front of the aircraft where there had to be a ladder or another ramp. Eve made for the huge ramp on her side, where the cargo had been loaded. When she reached it, she just kept running, straight up it into the hold of the plane.

Not a moment too soon. Up ahead of her, she heard the pilots talking fast in the cockpit. Couldn't make out what they were saying because the noise had quadrupled outside, German weapons adding to British-supplied

ones. So she saw, rather than heard, men coming from the front to close the rear door. She ducked behind the last crate just in time.

The engines started. She saw them spinning through a porthole, and the noise of all six rapidly rose to deafening. She was grateful for that, because the men now pulling closed the bay doors could not hear her as she reached into her pack and took out the plastic explosive.

Their job completed, the men moved back up the craft to their posts. She looked for the optimum place to lay the five pounds of *plastique*, as the French called it. It would make a pretty big hole in this plane. *But will it be enough?* she wondered. In London, she'd heard of bombers that had been so badly shot up over Germany that they'd flown back on "a wing and a prayer." Something this size? Could this plane somehow still fly on after the explosion? Land somewhere, its cargo safe?

Then Eve realized exactly where she would put her explosive—under one of the crates marked *SVK*. She was pretty sure that six thousand ball bearings blown through a fuselage would bring down any plane. And they were what she had come to destroy, after all.

As the plane's engines went to higher revs, she knelt and moulded the plastic to the underside of the crate. There was a wide-webbed strap on the floor near her, and she snagged it with her foot, dragged it over and wedged it under the charge to hold that firm. Then she inserted the clock timer, set it for six minutes and clicked it on.

Done, she thought, as the plane started to move. *Now, out!*

There was a smaller hatch door set within the larger hold one. The plane was still taxiing, slowly, moving over to the main strip. *Who'd have thought that all that training in the Lizzie would come in so handy*, she thought with a smile, and stepped out from behind the crate.

There was a man sitting by the door, strapping himself into the webbed seating that ran the length of the bay. He saw her just as she saw him. But since her Sten gun was on her back, and his Luger was in a shoulder holster, Henrik Ridelsson was able to draw his gun first.

Over the muzzle, his eyes were wide with a shock that must have mirrored her own. Then they narrowed. She couldn't hear him over the

engines, but she saw him mouth her name: “Eve Sinclair.”

He motioned her to raise her hands. She did, swaying as the plane swung hard on to what had to be the runway. Then he shouted loud enough so she could hear the question over the engines revving ever higher, “Where’s the bomb?”

Not much for small talk, her former lover, she thought. Yet of course there could be no other reason for her to be there. “What bomb?” she shouted, but clearly he didn’t catch it. So she just shrugged.

He glanced to the cockpit. The pilots and radio operator were visible in their seats, busy with takeoff preparations. The Gigant was beginning to roll forward, the engines’ whine rising in pitch and volume. He shouted, but there was no way they could hear him. His eyes swivelled back to her, widening again as he saw that she’d taken a step closer. He fumbled out of the belt he’d put over his shoulder but hadn’t fastened, then stood up, stepped forward, thrusting the Luger’s muzzle into her forehead. He was close enough now for her to hear him clearly despite the noise. “Defuse the bomb or die!” he yelled.

Eve didn’t want to die. She had so much to live for. Not least her lover, waiting at the wire, staring in horror now that the plane she’d entered, but not exited from, was about to take off. But she also knew she wouldn’t give this man anything, this man who had taken so much from her. So she shook her head.

Henrik took a pace back, lifted the gun high. She knew what he planned—to pistol-whip her. She crouched, wondering if there was a move she’d learned in one of her courses for this.

The explosions came loud, piercing the noise in the cabin. Terror surged through her; her plastic had gone off early! But then, when death didn’t instantly follow, she remembered: This plane needed rockets to fire it into the sky.

All these thoughts came in a flash as the plane leapt forward and Henrik stumbled, his gun arm going high for balance...and she was on him then, closing the space between them in a blink, one hand reaching for the wrist of his gun hand, the other turned to fist and driven hard into his sternum.

He fell, pulling her down by the wrist she gripped. Dropped the gun, which skittered away across the metal floor. She was on top then, her hands around his throat. But he grabbed her throat, his fingers pinching hard. Maybe a one-armed man developed more strength in his remaining hand, maybe he was lucky, but fingers like iron bars gripped her windpipe. She gagged, had to release him, throw herself off him.

Suddenly the plane was climbing, the floor angled steeply backwards. She slid, her hands above her head, trying to find something to grasp to halt her. She didn't—but something hit her hand, so she grabbed that instead, just as her feet slammed into the last crate.

Henrik was also sliding toward her feet-first, boot soles aimed for her face. She rolled hard to the side, came onto her knees, used one hand to steady herself on the crate—and the other to raise the Luger.

It was strange how, in all that noise, there could almost be a silence. She felt she could hear her heart beating, hear Henrik's heaved breaths. So maybe he heard her say, "For Richard." Maybe he didn't. But he died anyway as she shot him between the eyes.

Now there wasn't time to feel, only to do. To glance at her watch and realize that the bomb was going off in just under three minutes. To wonder if she should defuse it—to save herself. The last thought for only a moment, because she remembered what this mission was for. The fine margin the colonel had talked about between an invasion's success or failure. All the young lives she'd save, on whatever beach they landed on in France in a few months' time. All the lives that would be saved when Hitler was defeated sooner rather than later.

So there was no choice. She sighed—then looked up and saw them. A row of them.

Parachutes.

She put the gun down, crossed to them. There were six, one for each member of the crew, and a spare. They were German, but a quick survey told her that the basic mechanics were the same as the British ones she'd failed to use at Tatton Park.

It was only when she was standing at the hatch she'd opened in the big door, staring down at the land far below through patches of grey cloud, that she remembered: She was terrified of parachuting. She'd never managed a single jump. She had told the colonel to just have someone push her out. But there was no one here to do that. She didn't think the Nazis up front would oblige.

Her legs were frozen. She didn't think she could do this. Until she suddenly remembered the last words Erik had said to her.

"Come back to me."

She looked at the speeding land, then at her watch. Thirty seconds.

What had that American woman said on the *Empress of Britain* five years before, when she was about to re-enter the fray?

"Tits up!" Eve yelled, and hurled herself from the plane.

Because she'd never done it, she'd forgotten the protocol. Terrified, she yanked the cord straightaway. The chute shot up; she jerked as it suddenly spread.

There was silence again, a weird, strangely beautiful one after the roar of the plane. She drifted through torn wisps of cloud. *You know*, she thought, *this is actually rather lovely*. Until the quiet was broken by, somewhere in the distance, a faint explosion. She twisted, saw above her a fiery star that then began to plummet much faster than her toward the earth. Mere moments later, there was something else. *Hail*, she thought. Until she realized what it was.

No ball bearings hit her. But she was pretty sure some must have hit her chute. She thought that probably wasn't good. That now, she was falling a little quicker.

As the ground got nearer faster, Eve closed her eyes.

EPILOGUE

One year later—Oslo, Norway. May 17, 1945

LIKE EVERY NORWEGIAN he knew, Erik had always enjoyed Constitution Day. His first parade was when he was five years old, proudly dressed in his *bunad*, an exact copy of his father's regional costume. He'd done it every year after that—walked down Karl Johans, the city's main street, to the Royal Palace, waving his Norwegian flag along with all his schoolmates, their parents lining the roadway and waving back. Saluting and cheering the king and his family, who returned the salutes on their balcony as each cohort trooped by.

Now he was doing it again. Not in a *bunad*. In his Norwegian army uniform. The new major's pips on his epaulettes, the new medals and ribbons on his chest: the Distinguished Service Order from Britain, and the *Krigskorset*, his own country's highest military award for bravery. It was not the medals, though, that made this parade so special. It was the flurry of flags, taken from the places they'd been hidden these five years. It was the fervour in the cheers of the packed crowd. This was the first May 17th parade in Oslo since 1939, because the city had been conquered in April 1940. Now capital and country were free again.

Erik had pulled a lot of strings to be here. Peace had only come to Europe nine days before, and every man serving in the Norwegian forces in the UK had been angling to be at this celebration. SOE had finally decided, and only two days before, that Erik should be allowed to represent its Scandinavian Section.

He marched with others, some of whom he knew from operations and training camps. Lars and Mikel, two of the five survivors of the assault on

Rygge Airfield, were a few ranks back with the rest of the privates. Marching with a gap between them where their friend Christian would be marching if he'd survived. It was officers only up front, though all the men would be taking the salute of King Haakon and Crown Prince Olav on the royal balcony. The monarch and his son, in exile, had both done such amazing work during the long, dark nights of occupation and war. Kept the flames of Norway's hope alive. Erik had never been much of a monarchist before the war. But he knew that, like all his fellow officers and every man who followed them, he'd have proudly given his life for his king and his country.

The men weren't marching in step. It was a peace parade, not a war one. So Erik didn't need to have his eyes fixed front—was able to look around. At the cheering crowds. At the people who were there. At those who were missing.

No women marched among the soldiery. As if they hadn't contributed as much as the men. There was someone he'd have liked to see in the gap between him and the next man, shoulder to his shoulder.

Most of those missing were the dead. Though they were still there, in a way. Ghosts in the parade. Every *jøssing* patriot. Every commando. Every hostage, shot in German reprisals. All who'd given his or her life for the cause. His own ghosts were there too. Aleksandra. Even the men he'd killed.

The soldiers led the way through the palace's main gates. Saluted the royals on their balcony, cheered, passed on and around the back. Dismissed there, Erik dodged the requests from brother officers to join them at their mess. "Maybe later," he told them. "I want to watch the children first."

It was an excuse. He glimpsed the kids, of course, heard their voices as he moved as fast as he could back down Karl Johans. The crowds were thick on the curbs, and mostly blocked his sight of the roadway. But people had come from all over Norway to greet their king on his return, so the parade would continue for a while. He'd watch the rest of it from the window of the room his university friend Søren, naval officer and son of a wealthy family, had managed to nab in the Grand Hotel.

He reached it, ran through the lobby and up the stairs to the second floor. He could hear the noise of the party before he even reached the landing.

He pushed in. Most people were at the big bay windows, standing three deep, waving flags, cheering each passing troop of children. He approached, looked left and right, seeking.

A hand slipped into his. "Hello, stranger," said Eve Sinclair.

He turned and grabbed her tight to him. "You made it!"

"Only landed this morning. You have some pull, I must say."

He felt her legs give a little, so he led her to a chair off to the side. She sank into it.

"I'll get us a drink," he said, and ran off. When he returned with two shots of aquavit, she was rubbing her knee. He handed her a glass. "Is it hurting more?"

"More? No. Getting better every day. I had to walk up from the harbour."

"I can't believe they didn't allow women into the parade. When you did as much as any man. Especially you."

"Easy, Tiger. I couldn't have walked it anyway. And they did give me this." She tapped one of the medals on her chest. "Nearly as pretty as yours."

He hadn't seen it before. "The Distinguished Conduct Medal," he said. "Same as mine, then."

"Not quite. Yours is for officers, mine for non-comms."

He shook his head. "I'm amazed you can walk at all. I didn't think you ever would again, when I first saw you in that farmer's barn."

"Told you I hated parachutes." She shuddered, then smiled, and lifted her glass. "So what are we toasting?"

"Same as everyone else? Liberation and victory?"

"Aw, we can do better than that, surely."

"OK. Us? Our love?"

"Always, of course." But when he pushed his glass closer, she pulled hers back. "But maybe this first one should be to something else."

Especially”—she nodded to the window—“given all that out there.”

“You’re right.” He looked above her. ““To all who sacrificed so much?””

She considered him for a moment. Spoke softly. “How about ‘To absent friends’?”

He stared at her, then nodded and held his glass out again. The ritual of aquavit had to be strictly observed. Began with looking deep into the other’s eyes. Then a name.

“Eve.”

“Erik.”

“To absent friends.”

“Absent friends.”

They both shot the contents down, then raised the glasses again to each other, returning to each other’s eyes.

My God, how beautiful they are, he thought. He knew every shade and curlicue in them. Now, though, he didn’t see just their beauty. Saw fully now what he’d only glimpsed for many years: those she’d lost. And he knew that she was seeing those he’d lost in his. They’d always be there, those absent friends. Yet he also knew one thing for certain.

No ghosts would ever come between them again.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My agent, Jon Wood, is WhatsApp-ing me from London, UK. It's 5 p.m. there, 9 a.m. where I am on Salt Spring Island, in western Canada.

"*Someday I'll Find You* sold pretty well," he says, "and Doubleday in Toronto want another book from you."

"Great. A sequel? I see Billy and Ilse going—"

He interrupts. "Not a sequel. Sequels are hard sells. But they want more of the same." He starts to tick off his fingers. "World War Two. Spies. Romance. Oh, and Canadian content. Maybe a Canadian female protagonist? Any ideas?" he queries.

Now, Jon was my editor before he became my agent. Twice he radically changed my career with good advice over the writing direction I should take. So, I tend to listen. "Not yet," I reply. "But I'll do what I always do."

"What's that again?"

"Sit down with a pad and a pen. Start writing."

We ring off. I pick up a pad.

At noon, my partner, Cat Cooper, comes back from work. "Can I read you something?" I say. Then I tell her the story of the novel I have provisionally titled *Eve Sinclair*. The whole plot. The characters. The scope. The twists.

"It's good." She raises an eyebrow. "When did you come up with all that?"

"Oh," I reply, "this morning."

"What the actual f—"



I truly love all stages of the writing process. But there is something special about that first inspiration. What I find extraordinary is that though many things change in all the further iterations—as research teaches me about the world I am going to inhabit, as imagination takes wing, as my editor gets involved and suggests improvements and clarifications—the novel at its heart is essentially the same as in those first scribbles on paper.

This book felt kind of blessed from the get-go. From that spark, through the pitches and discussions with agent, commissioning editor, publisher. Through all the research I then undertook to give me the historical and social context for my characters' journeys. As I jotted facts down in one of my Clairefontaine A4 notebooks, the plot was running in my head like the soundtrack to a movie. To give you an example: on page 128 of the book *Sweden, the Swastika, and Stalin* by John Gilmour, beneath a note on “how German companies were hidden within Swedish ones,” I scrawled: *N.B. That's Henrik's plan for Bootstraps*. (If you've read the novel—hopefully you have, otherwise *spoilers*—you'll know *exactly* what this refers to!)

As I always say, research isn't only about getting the facts right. I believe its greatest importance is actually in acting as what I call “the springboard for the imagination.” A good fact, well used, not only grounds the reader in the reality of the time and place, but it also gives something for the character within the plot to bounce off.

A few other examples:

—Discovering that in 1940, in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, *The Kitchen Maid* by Rembrandt was in the collection. So Henrik can then pretend to be in love with the girl in the painting and thus convince Eve that he is the funny and carefree lover he appears to be...not a Nazi plotting to blackmail and ruin her.

—Learning from real-life SOE spy Josephine Butler that agents could be dropped from a low-flying Lysander plane in enemy territory wearing a quilted “Lysander suit” that protects them in the fall—perfect for scared-of-heights Eve! Miss Butler also talked about a course she'd taken on how to get out of handcuffs by using a nail on a wall. Who knew? Well, she did, obviously.

—Realizing that Erik the idealist could belong to the Confédération Internationale des Étudiants, striving for world peace in 1939, and thus find himself in a Polish forest as the Germans invade.

I could give so many more examples of when and where historical fiction oscillates between the history and the fiction. But my favourite research, of course, is on my feet, on the ground.

Two stories. The first was when I went to Stockholm to explore what I'd already written based on what I'd learned in books, on websites, on the Apple Maps app. I'd selected a location that sounded cool for Eve's attack on Henrik—the Temple of Echo, part of the former royal summer palace in Hagaparken. Climbing aboard my rented e-bike, I headed out there from downtown...to find the reality significantly different from my research. I hadn't reckoned on the steep slopes that led up to the Temple. How would you handle those if they were slick with icy snow? The echo was different, more cavernous than I'd imagined. And I'd calculated the lake to be only a hundred metres away from the Temple, not the two hundred and twenty I carefully paced out.

The second story is from Norway. I needed to confirm the terrain for the epic denouement, Eve's attempt to blow up the bridge and derail the train. So, I recruited my lovely cousin, Sidsel, to take a trip from Oslo down to Sarpsborg and drive along the Østfold railway line. I'd chosen Eve's bridge from my studies of local maps—only to discover on the ground that the bridge I'd selected was tiny and over water barely a foot deep! Sidsel had to abandon me at Rygge station so I could catch the next train south and try to find that confounded bridge. (And yes, Led Zeppelin fans, that is a reference!) I did find it, but further along, just outside Fredrikstad. Re-writing and much “phew-ing” ensued! (There's a video on my Instagram account, shot at Rygge station, if you care to witness my live perplexity!)

Some personal stuff...

All novels are personal. I have written fantasy books about unicorns and dragons, and they are deeply personal. So even if *The Double Life of Eve Sinclair* is not quite as directly so as *Someday I'll Find You*, which dealt,

albeit loosely, with my parents' war adventures, there is still a lot in it that draws from my own life. A few examples:

—My mother's brother, Tord Holter, was a Norwegian volunteer fighting the Russians in Finland during the Winter War of 1939–1940. (There's a funny story about my mother making him some underwear from a catskin to cope with the minus-forty-degree temperatures, which I'll save for a live re-telling.)

—Richard's car in Montreal is a Jaguar SS100. My car in British Columbia is a Dodge Caliber. They are alike only in that they are yellow and are both called Dizzy.

—Erik's surname, Strom, is the same as that of the Norwegian pathologist I played on the BBC's *Silent Witness*: Jan Strom.

—The Dog and Duck pub from which Eve sets out to stalk the Nazi agent is my favourite pub in Soho, an area I fell in love with when I was eighteen and became a motorcycle messenger for the year before I went to college.

—When the *Empress of Britain* liner sets out from Quebec City, Eve is on the deck, regarding the sheer cliffs. She remembers that, in 1759, the British Light Infantry had scaled them in the dead of night to attack the French sentries in the rear, the action that began the battle of the Plains of Abraham. England won it, and that was the reason why, as she recalls, "Canada was English, not French." What she couldn't know, of course, was that another C.C. Humphreys character was among the cliff-climbers—Jack Absolute, in the novel *The Blooding of Jack Absolute*. (Sometimes I think I only write to amuse myself!)

There are many, many more personal connections. (My father sang "Fuck 'Em All" to me when I was, I think, eight years old!) In fact, I feel that there are bits of me—my own history, observations I have made sometime in my life—on nearly every page I write. And every page I have written of this novel has felt especially joyful. I can't quite put my finger on why. Each time I start a new novel I set out with only one goal: to write the best novel I've ever written. Almost as if it is my first, so I am not intimidated by any past successes I may have had, nor daunted by books

that didn't do as well as they might have. It is only about this story, now. Whose is it? What do they want? What stops them getting it? How do they overcome that?

I know one other thing about this novel: I have never written a first draft faster—102,000 words in just shy of seven weeks. I took that as a good sign! Truly, though, the whole process was blessed, from the adventures I undertook researching it to the beautiful places where I have written it, both in Canada and England. Believe me, I never take for granted how privileged I am to have this as my job.

Now for the final stage—hoping that whoever you are, reading this note, you enjoyed the novel. If so, then my work here is done.

Until the next inspiration, that is.

HISTORICAL NOTE

This is a novel and however much I strive to get the history accurate, I will inevitably make mistakes. I welcome any corrections you care to email to me. If you are right, I'll buy you a pint at the Dog and Duck and see that your amendment makes it into the next edition.

On a rare occasion, I deliberately bend history a little to suit my plot. Two examples here:

—Ian Fleming, creator of that marvellous fictional rogue James Bond, *was* working as spy in Lisbon...but in 1941. One year *after* Eve and Erik were there. I couldn't resist making their timelines, and their paths, cross.

—Haugsbysgd. It is in the history books that one of the few successes the Norwegian army had in the early days of the German invasion happened at this village. I couldn't trace any eyewitness accounts of the ambush, so I studied the map and terrain hard to come up with a plausible plan. I would be thrilled to hear from anyone who could tell me if I even came close.

Now, as for Sweden and the war...

As I learned in many discussions in Stockholm, and over much reading, the role of "neutral" Sweden in World War Two remains controversial to this day. There were two main arguments, for and against neutrality, during the war. The first, that with vast German forces on their doorstep in Norway, and an antiquated Swedish army that was no match for the Wehrmacht, they had no choice but to appease and supply. The second, the opposite: that they needed to recognize the evil that was Nazism and get on the right side of history "no matter the cost," as Winston Churchill said about Britain facing a similar perilous choice in 1940.

Neutrality, however, didn't simply mean staying aloof. It meant Swedish factories making vast profits from supplying Hitler with much of what his war machine needed, especially iron ore and precision ball

bearings. The war was undoubtedly prolonged because of Swedish “blood money,” as some would call it, and many people died because of it. Some might say that the concentration camps remained open that much longer to do their horrendous work because of Swedish steel.

I am not a judge. My job, as I see it, is to write an entertaining thriller. But the Second World War is a dark canvas to set a novel against, and dark subjects need to be discussed, as they were at the time. The case for and against Swedish neutrality is certainly one of those subjects and I have characters who put forward both points of view.

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Once again, I have been aided and abetted by so many people during the creation of this book:

—My partner, Cat Cooper, always an inspiration in love, as well as a wonderful distraction when I get lost in the thickets.

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—Paul and Carole Hussell, my landlords and new dear friends when I re-located to Totnes, Devon, UK.

—My friend and fellow scribe, Jonas Saul, who invited me to teach beside him at a writing retreat on the island of Amorgos in Greece last year—and who taught me there that short chapters often work best.

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—My cousins in Norway, the land of my heart. Line Beck, who always gives me shelter in Oslo in her gorgeous Majorstuen apartment and who every morning makes me laugh over the world's strongest coffee. While her sister, Sidsel Solvaer, was my wonderful companion and chauffeur on the perilous journey to find blowable bridges on the Østfold line.

—My agent, Jon Wood, with his sage advice. Keep it coming.

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—My copy editors, Melanie Little and Chandra Wohleber, who, rather like substitutes in a soccer match, came on the field in its later stages and scored some great goals. They rooted out historical errors, corrected many a syntactical faux pas and made astute observations that improved the novel so much. What a great team I play for!

—Most especially my closest contact there, my editor, my partner-in-crime, Melanie Tutino, back for Round Two, whose acute notes, close observations and grammatical smarts kept me firmly on track to the best novel I could write.

—Finally, to every bookseller out there. I would achieve little without your hard work and your support.

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Because *The Double Life of Eve Sinclair* is set in the same world of war and espionage as my previous novel, *Someday I'll Find You*, there is overlap in the research, and many of the books I reread were already in my library. These, and the new books, are listed below. There are also myriad amazing specialist websites, far too many to list, dealing with everything from Waffen-SS platoon tactics to the cigarettes smoked in Lisbon in 1940. To their curators I am massively indebted.

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