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The Saengerfest Invasion

by Jake Lynne

The second Operative No. 68 thriller

Sixteenth Draught

74,231 words

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This story is a fiction – a ‘what-if’ history, if you like.

It is built upon a series of actual events

that may or may not have been related.

The characters, likewise, are fictional, even

when they are built upon people who actually existed.

New York City is real, as are some of

the corporations and agencies mentioned herein,

although some names have been changed

to protect the innocent (me) from being sued.

*Jace Lynne
April 2021*

P. S. And, by the way, back then, ‘operative’ was

pronounced with a long ‘a’, as in ‘operator’.

*See the 1941 movie of ***The Maltese Falcon***.*

Jd

PROLOG

January 8, 1915

Growing up in a place like Wilmington is, at first, a wonderful experience for small children, then an angering experience as the child grows older, then a stifling experience as a young adult, until, often, it is once again a wonderful experience from the outlook of age. It all depends on the stage you're in.

Mrs. Christopher Bayard, wife of Mr. Christopher Bayard, accountant, was not quite into the final stage of her experience in Wilmington. She was twenty-seven, had three children, and, when not cooking, washing, cleaning, doctoring, ironing, washing again, and preparing to cook some more, often thought about her future. Said future generally consisted of raising her children until, one by one, they left to make children of their own; quietly growing older with Mr. Christopher Bayard; then quietly becoming the widow of Mr. Christopher Bayard; and, eventually, quietly living with one or more of her children, and with their children, until, one day, she did not.

Don't mistake her feelings about that. It wasn't a terrifying thing to her. She was genuinely content with it and, honestly, what better future can you have than leaving a legacy of a happy life, well-lived, and well-fulfilled, to be passed on to your children's future?

Even Mr. Christopher Bayard, to whom his wife's prognostications generally dealt a short hand, would have agreed, but he didn't tend to think much about such things. He was busy.

So, when her two eldest children left for school that cold January morning, she did not anticipate any real changes. This was her life and she was fine with that. She waved them goodbye, shivered in the cold wind, and went back into the house to change and feed the baby.

School for young Robert Bayard (Robby, please, because Bobby Bayard was goopy) and his even younger sister Melissa was a long day of quiet toil and occasional cold outdoor fun. Robby was learning his times tables; Melissa her ABC's. She sat four rows in front of him in the classroom but neither ever looked at the other during the day. Likewise, at recess and lunch, Robby played rough-and-tumble on the boys' yard, while Melissa, like the other girls, stuck close to the building and played the kind of rhythm games they liked. Like all the other kids did.

When school let out at four o'clock, the evening shadows were already gathering. In fact, it was little short of full dark. Robby Bayard was under strict orders to keep his sister safe on the way to and from school, but long custom makes for lax practice. Melissa had her own friends with whom she walked, at her own pace, and always arrived home fifteen minutes after Robby.

That particular day would have ended like all the others had Melissa not broken a boot lace. She was very proud of being able to tie her own laces, but it took some time to fashion a knot in the broken lace that let her retie the boot. When she picked up her books and set out for home once again, she was well behind the other girls, and the boys were long out of sight in the

dark. It was actually the first time she'd walked the pathway alone.

As she walked along, feeling cold and a little put-upon, she saw the mysterious bridge over the creek. In fact, it was a rather unimpressive bridge, with only one lane and that only loosely covered with planks. Melissa, however, liked to explore, so she turned right onto the bridge and began to pick her way across. As it happened, there was no traffic that day.

The Brandywine, mostly frozen over, made its sluggish journey twenty feet below but she was fascinated by the electric lights that had come to life on the far side of the creek. They had electricity at home but still mostly used oil-lamps because Daddy said the electricity was too expensive to use too often and Mommy was afraid it might leak out of the wires and hurt them. So, she wanted to get close to the wonderfully bright lights to see what they were like.

Melissa was cold and knew she should go home, but she just wanted to get a little closer. At the far end of the bridge, she stopped, stared upward at the miraculous glow and marvelled at how it drove back the shadows beneath each lamp. Why didn't it melt the snow, she wondered.

If Melissa could read, she would have read the sign that said "Deerbrook Experimental Station No. 1 – Keep Out", and she probably wouldn't have ventured further. The sad fact is, while she knew her ABC's, she couldn't make out very many words, yet.

So, she kept on.

If the guard on duty at the gate just off to the right, there, had seen the little girl, he would certainly have rushed out to take her to safety and made an effort to locate her parents. He was a conscientious man with a family of his own, so he certainly would have done that, but it was cold and he had been at his post nearly eight hours.

He just didn't see her.

Just as Melissa realized how late and how dark it had become, and just as she began to be worried that she might not remember how to get home, she heard a wonderful sound. Even though she was a town girl, she knew what the sound was. It was sheep.

She knew it was sheep because sheep said 'baa!', and these animals were saying 'baa' just like the sheep she'd seen at the fair before school started for second grade. She liked sheep, who doesn't?, so she set off in search of them.

Now, there were a dozen men between her and the building where the sheep were. Any one of them could have seen her and stopped her. Any one of them. They, however, were all busy with their own, very important, tasks that kept them occupied. A little girl was a very small thing.

They just didn't see her.

Melissa slipped unseen into Building 1 (though she couldn't yet read the word, she knew the number) and, in a few moments, found herself in the midst of sheep, all tied up to posts and 'baa'-ing like music. It was such fun.

Robby arrived home at more or less his usual time. He was cold and he went directly to the fire to warm himself, while looking at his homework, a stupid poem about stupid George Washington, that he had to learn for next day.

Twenty-five minutes later, his mother came in to ask him where Melissa was.

A half-hour later, policemen and others were scouring the route home to find the lost and presumably frightened little girl. Mr. Christopher Bayard, who had come home from the office early after a telephone call from his frantic wife, sat with one arm around her and one around a sobbing Robby. He was doing his best to keep his fears, and his tears, in check.

More than a week later, two boys who were intent on some Saturday ice fishing on the

Delaware River on their holiday came across Melissa's body snagged by low-hanging branches, some seven miles below Wilmington. Their fright and panic took them back up the river bank to grocer on the main street, who listened to their story, laughed at them, then had a vague recollection of a newspaper story about a missing girl from Wilmington. Police were summoned; Melissa was found.

The coroner took more than a week to do the autopsy, delayed by the condition of the body and by its tiny size. From the fluid in her lungs, the coroner determined that she had drowned, probably after slipping under the ice on the half-frozen river while playing. That she was missing a boot spoke to that theory, as it probably came off when she slipped.

So the coroner concluded.

He was more puzzled by the curious lesions and blisters on the girl's skin, especially around her mouth, nose, eyes, and genitals. In the end, as they were not the immediate cause of death, he didn't bother to emphasize them in his report.

CHAPTER ONE

January 20, 1915

It would have been hard to find a more nondescript tavern in a more nondescript section of a more nondescript town than the Central House. The atmosphere was blue with smoke from a half-dozen late drinkers; two or three street-girls sat in the Ladies & Escorts section, unescorted tonight; a couple of hard-luck petes stood hunched over the bar, drinking away the last of their dole. It was the kind of place that was a haven from the January weather outside and the January thoughts inside.

“Last call, there, Mr. Devon?” The guy had to repeat himself before Devon realized he was being talked at.

He shook his head, pushed back his glass and hauled his foot off the bar-rail. Time to go

home, he told himself, tomorrow is another day.

Much like this one, of course. Much the same as all of them. He'd done it all before.

“Night, Mr. Devon,” from the woman behind the bar. She was fairly good-looking, maybe a few years older than him, but those years had been good to her. She'd let it be known that she was interested, if he was interested, but Devon wasn't interested in much, these days. “Night, honey,” he said. For the life of him, he couldn't remember her name.

He stepped out into the winter winds blowing across William Street and saw that snow had started falling since he'd started drinking. The streets were slick with ice, and snow had begun to pile up underfoot. There would be hip-deep snowdrifts in the streets before morning – a good day to stay indoors and drink. He turned toward home, collar up against the wind, hands slid most gently into pockets.

He could afford this for a while, he thought. In fact, he could afford this for quite a while. And, when he couldn't afford it any more, he'd keep on doing it anyway because it was easy. That was important – easy.

Easier, anyway. Easier than fighting; easier than thinking; easier than ... feeling. He remembered what Eva said that last afternoon they were together: neither of them could feel – or maybe neither of them could let themselves feel. Because to let yourself feel meant that you had to think about the future, and if you have no future, it's best not to think about it. And, from where he was, on this night, he had no future.

The wind hit him sharply and stung his face with tiny icy needles, so he pulled his collar tighter and carefully placed his hands back in their pockets.

A giggling gaggle of girls with Women's Temperance League sashes came down St. Paul

Street toward him. They must have just left the Temperance Hall, despite the hour and the snow. They were very pretty young things and a few years ago, he'd have been happy to make their acquaintance, although their temperance philosophy was a long way from his. You never knew, though; sometimes those kind surprised you most. Tonight, however, he crossed the street as they approached.

Two of the gaggle separated themselves and crossed to meet him.

“Hello, handsome,” said one in a red coat with a blue sash. “Nothing else to do, tonight?”

Now, that was a puzzler. These girls certainly weren’t that type. He smiled and tried to step past. The other girl, in a brown coat and white sash, moved in front of him.

“All alone with no companions?” she asked, looking very fetching, despite her winter bundling. Devon stepped back a couple of steps. Some instinct made his wary.

They both suddenly reached out and pushed small white feathers into Devon’s face.

“Why haven’t you joined up!” yelled the first.

“Real men have joined! Real men are facing the Hun!” yelled the second.

“Shirker! Coward!” they hollered in unison. “Shame on you!”

From across the street, the rest of the gaggle chimed in: “Shame! Shame! Coward!”

The two continued to push their feathers at him and, suddenly, he’d had enough. He pulled his hands from his pockets, slapped the girls’ hands down, grabbed their coat fronts and shook them until their shrieks had ended and they went very quiet and wide-eyed. He held his own hands in front of the girls’ faces.

“DO YOU SEE THESE!” His shout topped their’s by a wide margin. “LOOK AT THEM!” His hands were covered in scar tissue, white and pink and red under the street-lamp.

“I’VE DONE MY FUCKING DUTY!” Both girls were shivering now and not from the cold.

Devon carefully slid his hands back into his coat pockets. Very quietly, he said “Now, fuck off.”

The two scuttled back across the street, to join the group in resenting Devon for spoiling their fun. The white feathers blew down the street along with the snow and were forgotten.

Devon’s walk to his hotel was only four blocks, and it took two blocks to calm his shaking rage – and for the pain in his hands to recede. In the middle of the third block, a figure came out of the shadows and fell into step beside him.

Devon took a moment to try to focus on the face, then looked back down to his own feet. He was too damn drunk to focus, and too damn tired to care, and besides he knew what the man was going to say before he said it.

“He wants to see you.”

Devon kept his head down and continued trudging, until a machine drove up and stopped.

“Now.”

Without a word and without changing his pace, he stepped into the car. The figure from the shadows stepped in beside him and the car moved away from the curb.

His backseat companion he didn’t know, but the driver was an old ... let’s say friend.

“McCain.”

“Devon,” from the man at the wheel. There was a silence, reminding Devon of his personal nickname for McCain: “Hear-No-Evil”. McCain swung the machine around and they headed back from where Devon had just come. For lack of any better conversation, he turned to the one beside him. “How’s tricks?” he asked, with his friendliest smile, but got nothing back.

After a few more blocks, McCain turned his head. “You healed up, yet?”

“Only just. I still ache in a few places when the weather turns cold.” After the last encounter he had with McCain, the bruises, contusions and cuts he’d acquired had taken some time to heal. The only bullet-hole, despite McCain’s best efforts, had been through a sleeve. The burns on his hands and arms and the pneumonia from his last boating trip across Lake Erie had taken much longer to mend.

When they crossed Twelve Mile Creek, Devon knew where they were going. “I’m not getting on any train to the States, Hear-No. I’ve got too many strikes against me down there.”

“Don’t complain to me. Talk to Janus. I’m sure he’ll give you a shoulder to cry on.”

“Yeah, right.”

He’d left a lot of hard feelings behind in New York city, from a cop whose nose he’d broken to the remains of a gang of saboteurs who’d like to see him floating down the Hudson.

Not to mention a face or two he’d rather not see again.

The most egregious charges against him had been settled by Lt. Col. Girdwood and the Dominion Police, or so Girdwood had told Devon. Break and enter, unlawful discharge of a firearm, criminal assault, possession and use of explosives – oh, and the murder charge – had all been explained away to the satisfaction of American authorities. It’s good to know people or, at least, people who know people.

The other thing in his favour down there was the simple fact that he was dead.

At the Grand Trunk Railway station on Great Western Street, McCain stopped the machine. His silent companion climbed out and waited for Devon to do so.

“In,” the guy said.

Why do these things always start off with a string of monosyllables? Devon didn’t expect

a Ph.D. but someone with some conversation would be a bonus.

At least, the train station was warm inside. The arrivals board was empty, which explained why the station was dark, except for one patch of light coming from the ticket office. Devon was pretty sure what he'd find there.

"You're late," Janus griped as soon as Devon stepped into the office.

"I was much earlier yesterday. You should have been here then." Why make it easy?

"Is that supposed to be funny?" asked the older man and Devon shrugged. Janus wouldn't have recognized a joke if one jumped out of his sock drawer, said 'Hi! I'm a joke!', and cartwheeled out the door.

Still not much more than fifty, the director of the Janus Agency looked as though he'd lost some weight since Devon had seen him last. Devon had lost some as well – pneumonia and hands so badly burned you can't use them to eat with will do that.

He was looking for a chair, but it seemed there was only the one behind the table. Janus was sitting on that.

"You're drunk" was the next attempt at conversation.

"Yeah, I am. And, if McCain tries to sober me up, again, I'll punch his teeth down his throat." The bucket of water last time hadn't been funny, then; would be less so, now.

Janus dismissed that train of thought with a wave. "Show me your hands."

"Go to hell. I don't work for you." He used to, but he sure didn't anymore.

It was Janus's turn to shrug. "She asked me to check, so I checked." Naturally, he hadn't asked out of concern for an injured ex-employee.

"Where is she? I assume she's not here." Who wants to be in St. Catharines, Ontario in

January, if you don't have to be?

"Chicago. Having a swell time."

"Swell. Tell her I said hello." Devon and Janus's daughter had been lovers for a while, a few months back, then things got in the way: murder, sabotage, espionage, a world war, and Devon nearly drowning in the middle of Lake Erie. In the end, it had been better for him to stay north of the border, after the Canadian patrol boat pulled him out of the water. That she was in Chicago meant she'd gone back to her nursing training.

"I'm more interested in what you say about this," Janus said, and slid a framed photograph across the table. Devon inspected it.

A family photo: parents in Sunday best, a boy about eight, a girl about six, a baby. One of those fall fair photos. Nobody looked particularly happy, but who does in a photograph?

"Okay. Nice family. Do they have a dog, too?"

Janus threw a second photograph, unframed, at him. Devon caught it mid-flight, turned it right side up.

"Dear lord," he breathed, then looked to Janus for explanation. "What happened to her?"

"If we knew, I wouldn't be here. Acid of some kind is all the coroner could say. He'd never seen anything like it. She was on her way home from school. They found her on a riverbank, dead five or six days. Drowned was the verdict."

"Sounds like something just made for the local bulls. Send out a public statement. Make a few loud pronouncements. Run around in circles. I'm sure they picked up any 'boes in the neighborhood."

"They did."

“And any *faygeleh* boys in town.”

“Naturally.”

“So, nobody could expect them to do more than that.”

“Of course not.”

“Then, why am I standing here and you sitting there?”

“Because little Melissa was found seven miles downstream from a place you and I used to be pretty interested in.”

“Enlighten me, please.”

“Deerbrook Explosives Works.”

It was four seconds before Devon said: “Damn.” Deerbrook liked to supply explosives to people whom Devon would rather they didn’t. “Where’s von Papen?”

“*Herr Kapitan* is still in Washington. Diplomatic immunity.” The man had tried to destroy the canal that ran not a mile from where Devon was standing. If he’d succeeded, it would probably have killed thousands – Devon among them. Devon had stopped him, but it nearly cost him his life. “From down in Washington, it just looked like you blowing up a private yacht. Do you have any idea how much diplomatic pressure it took to keep you on this side of the lake?”

“Which is why I intend to stay on this side of the lake.” Devon was pretty sure he wouldn’t like where this was going. “Where’s Koenig?” Paul Koenig was a sort of second in command, or, at any rate, second to get the blame for anything.

“Nobody knows. Either hiding in New York or at the bottom of Lake Erie where you tried to send him. Take your pick.”

“I’ll take neither, thanks. I’m thinking of enlisting. Some nice girls I spoke to tonight

think I should.”

“There’s another part to this story.” Janus threw a small booklet across the table. “What’s that look like?”

It looked like an American passport – passport Number 42104, issued to a Howard Paul Wright. Janus threw another booklet across. This one was passport Number 45573, issued to a Howard Paul Wright. The pictures, while similar, were not the same man, by any means.

“Are they both genuine?” he asked and Janus nodded. “So which one is Wright?” Devon had a small internal laugh over his pun: internal, because he knew Janus wouldn’t share it.

“The left one is the right Wright. The right one is Arthur Sachse, lieutenant in the German Army Reserve. The Brits took that off of him last December, when they stopped the Norwegian liner *Bergensfjord*. They arrested Sachse and three others, all German reservists, all using falsified American passports.”

Devon thought back to the ‘Cinderella’ Riot, last October, when a thousand German nationals took to the streets of New York, smashing and burning to protest America’s neutrality in the war and demand the U.S. join with Germany and Austria.

“They’re using these to get their people back to Germany. How many others?” he asked, and Janus shrugged, saying “Who knows? Thousands? More?”

“That would take planning, people, and money. Who’s doing it?” Janus simply looked at him. “Von Papen.” Janus gave the slightest of nods. “Busy man, isn’t he?”

“The whole operation may already have been shut down by the Justice Department. Von Papen was paying for it, but it was a lawyer in New York who was running it, a German-American immigrant. Justice got wind of it and sent in a man – Howard Paul Wright, in fact. The

lawyer skipped to Cuba and tried to get to Germany. A Brit cruiser stopped his ship and took him off."

"So, they've got him and it will all come out."

"Except the cruiser hit a German mine off Gibraltar and went down with all hands."

"Ain't that ironic?"

End of story. Apart from who's doing the job now, where are they doing it from, and a couple of dozen other questions.

"So, is the DOJ agent, the fellow with two passport – Wright – still on the case?"

"They found him in an alley last week. He no longer needs even one passport."

Meaning someone will have to replace him. Devon looked at the coroner's photo again. "That wasn't any explosive. Not black-powder; not smokeless powder; not gun-cotton – not nitroglycerin."

"Exactly. So what was it?"

"You're asking me?"

"I'm asking you to find out."

"I don't work for you."

"Back in the fall, you took a year's pay from me for one month's work. I say you still owe me seven or eight months."

What Devon said was much more tersely phrased.

"Your country needs you."

"I'm not an American." This conversation was sounding familiar.

"Who mentioned America? Choose a country."

“I’ve had all the flag-waving I can stomach, from either side of the border. I’m here and I’m staying put.” He started to walk away.

“That’s the thing, isn’t it?” Janus said to Devon’s back. “Percy Girdwood – you remember my good friend, Lieutenant Colonel Girdwood, commissioner of the Dominion Police? – well, Perc and I were talking on the phone, just yesterday, in fact.” Devon had stopped walking and now turned back to face Janus. “Perc mentioned that he didn’t think all the signatures had been put on that deal about your new birth certificate, and especially about the murder charge in New York. Odd thing, that. It turns out that Canada might have to allow you to be extradited, after all. Funny, isn’t it? To stop yourself being extradited back to the U.S., all you have to do is go back to the U.S.”

“You have an odd definition of funny.”

“Think of it as a direct request from the Dominion of Canada. For King and Country, eh?” Was that last syllable a jab at Canada? Or just a Yankee unthinkingly using the words they laugh at Canadians for using?

Whichever it was, Devon felt the knot starting in his gut and his pulse beginning to pound. “You’re a bastard.”

“You’re a bastard, *boss*, please.”

Janus and Girdwood had, between them, set him up very neatly. When Janus decides to lay your neck under the guillotine’s blade, sometimes all you can do is wait for the drop.

“You’re a bastard, *boss*, please.” Janus nearly smiled, but caught himself. Devon slammed his palms on the table, and instantly wished he hadn’t. They were still too tender for that treatment. “I do this and then I’m out – I don’t hear from you again.”

“Naturally.” That time, he did smile. Behind Devon, McCain quietly entered the station.

“And, *that* one stays well away from me.” Devon didn’t bother looking to McCain as he said it. He’d heard the door open and close and knew it had to be Hear-No-Evil McCain.

“Naturally.” This time the smile let Devon know that he and McCain would be joined at the elbow for the foreseeable future.

“Eva comes from Chicago to work with me.”

“Not a chance.” The smile didn’t waver and Devon knew that Janus wouldn’t, either.

“Where is she, really?”

“None of your business.”

“I’ll need a thousand up front.” Janus slid an envelope from his inside pocket across the table. “Okay, boss bastard, which part first: dead little girls or posing for a passport photo?”

“Wherever it leads you.”

“Straight to hell, is my guess. I’m sure I’ll see you there.” Devon wasn’t his usual cheerful self at that moment. Maybe a train trip south would help.

“We can only hope,” said Janus. “Oh, one more thing.” He produced a shiny-new brass badge bearing the famous two-faced Janus symbol with the words ‘Always vigilant’ and the number ‘68’ on it. Devon shook his head, put a foot on the table and reached into his sock.

The badge he produced had the same words and number, but it was not nearly as shiny, and had a streak across it – a gouge left by a bullet.

“I’ll stick with the tried and true.”

“Good luck charm?”

“It’s worked for me, so far.”

CHAPTER TWO

January 22, 1915

Where do you start when you've nowhere to start?

Janus wanted them to start in Wilmington, chasing down the truth about the death of the little girl by confronting the Deerbrook officials. McCain, who had the car and perforce accompanied Devon everywhere, wanted to head to Washington to watch the German Embassy for the presence of spies. While either of those were good safe ways to go about things, Devon patiently explained, neither of those would get them anywhere.

The way to get acorns from an oak tree is not to squeeze the trunk, but to shake the branches, so, when McCain pulled the machine up to the curb near Jane and Hudson, Devon climbed out, leaned back in over the door and said "Wait for me, my good man. If I'm gone more than an hour, call the undertaker."

McCain's reply was predictable.

The place looked pretty much the same, although the winter's snow had lifted the garbage cans a foot in the air and the ice on the steps made them even more treacherous than usual. The door bell still ratcheted rather than rang.

After a long minute, he ratcheted again and, finally, a noise was heard from within: someone shuffling down the hallway. The shuffling stopped and he knew someone was on the other side of the door. It took several seconds, but the nearly opaque linen curtain was twitched aside and Devon was looking at a familiar face. By the expression he saw, the familiar face was also looking at a familiar face.

The passage of a year had not been kind to Frau Seithen. She'd packed on another twenty pounds, making her nearly square in dimension. Her stringy gray-ish hair was now gray string-ish hair and her monstrous bosom had not decreased in monstrosity. There was no smile of welcome. Devon stood and waited. Eventually, the curtain was dropped and the door opened.

"*Frau!* It's so good to see you, again!" he called out, a smile on his face and pure hatred on hers.

"What do you do here? *Du bist verrückt!*" she whispered, eyes searching the street for things that should not be there.

"I'm crazy? All I want to do is collect my things, *Frau*. I'm sure you packed them carefully for me after I left."

"I packed all of your things most carefully, yes. That is the law and I do not break the law."

Devon had to laugh. Not break the law? The last time he'd been in this house, there were

bombs in the upstairs and murderers in the back rooms. Even now, there was a lot of old garbage lying loose on the pavement out front that surely had to contravene some city ordnance.

“So, can I come in?” She hadn’t budged from the doorway, effectively blocking it entirely – or at least the bottom five feet of it.

“*Ja, ja, komm’ herein.*” She stepped aside and let him come in. The familiar cabbage smell remained but the hall runner was new, to replace the old stained one. By now, it had new stains on it.

He started to turn toward his old, front-parlor room, but she stopped him. “No, another man is there. To the back, please.”

He’d never been down that particular hallway, leading, as it did, to the Seithen *sanctum sanctorum*. Even when he had been sleeping with Margit, the *frau*’s astonishingly beautiful daughter, it had always been in his front-parlor lodgings. He felt privileged, in a slightly nauseated way.

In fact, the door to Margit’s bedroom was open, and he saw it laid out, as if for her return: powder puff and makeup on the dresser, negligee laid on the bed, furred slippers waiting below. The last he’d seen of her, she’d been on the deck of a U.S. Coast Guard cutter on Lake Erie, watching the cruiser she’d been on (and which he had torpedoed) burn and sink.

“Where’s Margit, these days, *Frau*?” There was no answer from the German woman, who was busy selecting a key from her key ring to open her own bedroom on the opposite side of the hall. “Surely, you know where your own daughter is, don’t you?”

She fixed him with the strangest stare he’d seen in some time, then pushed the bedroom door open and went in. Devon, out of respect for the lady’s privacy, stayed at the threshold – nor

did he really want to go in there, anyway. There were some things he just didn't want to know.

The lady went to her wardrobe and extracted Devon's battered, made-in-Germany suitcase. From the way it bulged, he guessed that all the belongings he'd left behind had been stuffed haphazardly into it.

Not that he cared about anything he'd left here. He simply hoped that by showing up here, he'd find some starter hint that might lead him to other places.

"Not going to offer me coffee, *Frau*? Some of your famous *Apfelkuchen*?"

"With the joking always. If you are found here, you know they will kill you. And me – they will kill me, also." That was a surprise – he'd been under the impression that it was she who gave the orders to kill, including killing him. Had the pecking order changed since he'd been here last?

"Why would they kill you, *Frau Seithen*? Everyone I ever talked to was afraid of you – I sure was."

"But you are not, now." He shook his head, looking her in the eye.

"You don't know," she snapped. "Just go before he comes back."

"Who's that?" You see, he thought, the right question starts to lead places.

"Fuchs. George Fuchs." She pronounced it Gay-org-uh.

Devon nearly laughed aloud. Unless Gay-org-uh had quit drinking since he saw him last, the man was less of a threat than the woman in front of him. The first time they'd met, Devon had slapped him silly and taken his gun away. Or, to be honest, Eva Janus had slapped him silly and Devon had taken the gun away. The second time, there had been broken fingers added.

"What's Georgy-Porgy doing here? I thought he'd be the first to run when things went

bad – or the first in jail when the police kicked in the door.”

“He was the first in jail. He was the only one in jail. The police beat him, then let him go. He had nowhere else, so ...” So, Seithen let the man in for charity’s sake? Devon doubted that.

“And, why aren’t you in jail?” he asked. “Last time I was here, there was enough dynamite upstairs to level the block. You should be doing laundry in Auburn for the next twenty.” Devon didn’t really wish Auburn Women’s Prison on anyone – hard labor twelve hours a day; solitary confinement the other twelve. Devon knew about hard labor, and he knew about solitary.

“I am a woman; how could I know what the men were doing in my house? They were brutes and savages – and I cannot understand these things. I am just a woman.”

“Oh, you crack me up!” Devon had to laugh. “Where’d the brutes and savages from upstairs go? And what did they do with the high explosives?” Say it casually, so she doesn’t know it’s a crucial question.

“I don’t know. Paul telephoned before the police came; they left. The *bomben* were not here. I have not seen them or the men since.” Oddly enough, looking at her face, it seemed to be true. Maybe.

“And, Margit never came back?” Devon was sure she’d lived through the sinking of Koenig’s cruiser last November; it was definitely her he’d seen on the deck of the cutter – there just wasn’t anybody else it could have been. And, apparently, Koenig had survived as well, which was too bad. Devon liked the idea of the bullet-headed German as perch-food.

“Margit is with the *Kapitan*, at Number 123.”

“The *Kapitan*? Franz von Papen?”

“Ja, ja. Natürlich.” Frau Seithen was getting very nervous; her fingers twisted at her apron; her mouth twitched as she licked her lips repeatedly. Was it possible that little Fuchs-y was really a danger to her – or to anyone? “She has become one of *them*. She mostly stays at Number 123. She sleeps with the *Kapitan*. *Sie ist seine Hure*.”

Devon was surprised by that summation. Sure, Margit, despite assurances to Devon the first time they’d made love that she was a virgin, was a girl who liked her fun, but a whore? And, von Papen’s whore? And, this from her own mother? On the other hand, that she might be such with von Papen surprised him not at all.

Devon didn’t like Franz von Papen. Not one little bit. There was just something about that arrogant bastard that pissed Devon off. And throwing Devon into a powerboat in the middle of Lake Erie, tied to over a hundred pounds of nitro, had done nothing to change that opinion.

He picked up his valise and started for the door, reaching it just as it opened and the slightly-balding, now-mustached man who entered looked at him in shock.

Devon, having the advantage of being reasonably certain the man was coming, skipped the shock and went directly to hauling the pistol from his belt. By the time Devon’s suitcase hit the floor, and before the man had his hand behind his back, Fuchs was looking into the muzzle of Devon’s automatic.

If truth be told, he was looking into the muzzle of his own automatic, because this was the gun Devon had taken away from him at their last meeting. Devon had kept it because it had just seemed to fit him perfectly, like Arthur and Excalibur, Roland and Durendal.

Devon shook his head. “Tsk, tsk, tsk! Slow, Gay-org-uh, slow. It’s got to be one smooth motion. You’re going to have to practice that. Right now, though: *Hande hoch!*”

“*Nicht schiesen!*” That came from both *Herr* Fuchs and *Frau* Seithen at nearly the same moment. Fuchs also put his hands *hoch*.

“Turn about, George. Hands on the glass. Feet back.” When Fuchs’s hands were pressed against the lights in the door, Devon ran a hand along the German’s waist and relieved him of the pistol he’d been reaching for.

“*Erschiess ihn nicht! Nicht in meinem Haus!*” *Frau* Seithen begged.

“Don’t shoot him in your house? Are you more worried about him or your new hall runner? It’s very nice, by the way.” Devon had a chuckle over that, but the others didn’t. “I’m not going to shoot him – this time. Listen, George, I’m getting real tired of taking guns away from you. Why don’t I set up a post box and you can just mail them directly to me?”

“*Verdammter Bastard,*” was Fuchs’s contribution.

“Lady present, Georgie.” Devon was going through Fuchs’s pockets, hoping to find more ammunition to go with the weapon he’d taken. Fuchs’s pistol was an older 7.65 mm ‘Luger’ automatic and, at a pinch, the ammunition could be used in Devon’s Dreyse ’07. He used up a lot of bullets the last time he chased Seithen and her various guests around. It’d be nice to have some spare cartridges.

He’d found, last time, that the Dreyse was a far better-shooting gun than the Luger. Luggers may have become famous since the beginning of the war, but they were awkward, complicated, had a heavy recoil and weren’t particularly accurate. The Dreyse was a shooter’s dream in comparison, as far as Devon was concerned. Quirky as it was, he just liked it.

He found loose loads in Fuchs’s pocket and transferred them to his own. The Luger’s magazine went in as well and the pistol itself went out of sight. He picked up his valise again.

“You are leaving now, yes?” The *Frau* was more and more anxious to be rid of him, which was beginning to make him wonder why. Was she expecting anyone else?

“I am leaving now, yes. I assume it’s Paul Koenig you’re waiting for, *Frau*. Or maybe, von Papen.” He thought that over. “But, no, Franz von Papen wouldn’t soil his boots in this place.” But, if he did show up before Devon left, there would be gun play.

“Get out! You go!” She actually swung a fist at him, which made him laugh.

“Georgie, don’t tell Paul I took another gun from you. He’d be sore about you losing every gun he gives you. In fact, I suggest you move – someplace where there aren’t any Germans. Mexico, maybe, because, Georgie, one of these days, it isn’t going to go well for you – and you’re ’way too slow on the draw. I could have gone down the block and had a drink while I was waiting for you. *Frau*, get him out of the house, before something bad happens – because if I come back and find this one still here, or some of the others back, something bad will happen.”

He pushed Fuchs away, opened the door and walked out, valise under his arm. As he walked, he stripped the Luger and, one by one, dropped the pieces into successive garbage cans along the street. Meanwhile, McCain, in the auto, followed along behind, sounding the Klaxon every few yards. The last piece Devon had in his hand was the gun’s trigger. That went into the storm sewer and he ran around the car and jumped into the passenger’s seat.

“Was that one of those Lugers?” Devon nodded, and McCain exploded. “The hell did you do that? I could have used that. Maybe you didn’t want it, but others might.”

“I made it safe. Kids live around here, you know. Besides, I’m sure you’ve got one of Janus’s Smith & Wesson .35’s. Who needs anything else?” That set him laughing as the car tooled west down Hudson and had nearly reached the Bowery before he stopped chuckling. “We

need to be going the other way.”

“I’m going to the office.”

“What for?”

“In case you forgot, it’s pay day. I kinda like to eat. You don’t want your pay?”

“He pays you? Isn’t that something? Me, he just throws some money at when he figures enough stuff is on fire.” Actually, he’d put a little dent in that thousand dollars and bought himself a suit and some shirts – and shoes; he bought new shoes. The ripped bullet-scarred overcoat with the singed cuffs he kept for old times’ sake.

They rolled up Bowery until it became 8th Ave., continued on up to 42nd Street, then McCain pulled over to the curb. He stopped the engine and looked over to Devon.

“You coming?”

“Oh, heck, I wouldn’t miss it. Old Home Week and my birthday rolled into one.”

The Janus Agency head office was as busy as ever; agents moving in and out, intent on their assignments, all looking very fit and healthy. As always, Devon felt like the poor cousin, as one nattily dressed agent brushed past him with a quizzical look at his scorched and mended coat.

The reception halfback, McCall, was in his usual place behind the front desk, and he and McCain nodded to each other as McCain went straight across the lobby and into Hilda Rosen’s office. Hilda didn’t talk to Devon anymore, now that he’d moved up to reporting to the Holy of Holies, but she was still in charge of handing assignments to lower level agents. Why McCain went in there, Devon didn’t know. Speaking of which, he planted himself in front of the reception desk, and McCall looked him over.

“So, do we arm wrestle or what?” the guy said.

Devon pulled his hands from his coat pockets and held them up. The halfback's eyes narrowed and he whistled. "Not good. You still active?"

"I'm back to being active. I'm going up to seven."

"Be my guest," was the reply, and McCall put the receiver to his ear and picked up the candlestick to warn Mrs. Coulter at the desk on seven.

At the elevator, Devon stepped in and the boy closed the doors.

"How you doing, Otis?" The boy was now shaving the fuzz on his chin and was sporting the beginnings of what might generously be called a moustache. He grinned at his passenger.

"Doing great, Number 68. I got a girlfriend, now."

"Good for you! I hope you let Number 14 down gently."

"I tried to, but you know women! I'm afraid she took it hard." He stopped the cage at the seventh floor and slide the doors open.

"It's her loss, my friend. Thanks for the trip."

Mrs. Coulter was at her desk, of course. Devon was pretty sure she had never missed a day's work, for any reason. If she had kids, she probably gave birth in the elevator on the way up and nursed in between phone calls. As the lift door slid open, she watched with narrowed eyes.

"Mrs. Coulter! It's great to be back!" Devon would have hugged her, but she was probably armed.

"Number 68." Her stare was still as cold as ever. "Let me see your hands."

When Janus had said that, he got a rude answer. Now, Devon meekly took them from his pockets and held them up. She looked at them with no change of expression.

"What do you need?" Good old, straight to the point Mrs. Coulter.

“The German Consulate in New York – and any reference you have to Number 123.”

“Number 123 what?”

“No idea.”

“You could look the Consulate up in a phone book.”

“I didn’t happen to have one ready to hand.” He looked down the hall to Janus’s dark office. “He’s not in, then?”

“No.”

“I’ll go visit Number 14.”

“She’s not in, either.” Mrs. Coulter did have a phone book ready to hand.

He strolled down the hallway to the office three from Janus’s, with the number 14 on the door. He entered without knocking and the man behind the desk looked up.

“Not here,” he said, when he recognized Devon.

“I know that. Still in Chicago?”

“So I’m told.” The man had a large chip on his shoulder.

“She’s back when?”

“They haven’t told me.”

“All right. Got an address?”

“Just through the agency office there. Do you mind? I’m busy.”

Devon whispered “Oh!” and closed the door softly. It must be hard on a man to be secretary to a woman. Devon didn’t think he’d like it.

Mrs. Coulter held up a slip of paper as he passed, and he took it.

“No number 123,” she said, “at least, not in connection.”

“Thanks.” He rang for the elevator and waited, feeling her eyes on him as he did. Finally, he turned to her and, sure enough, she was watching him.

“What? What is it?” he asked and finally, she shook her head before going back to her work. Her voice came to him while she was looking down at the log-book she was marking.

“He shouldn’t have called you back. You’re not ready, yet.”

“Fit as a fiddle, Mrs. Coulter. He needed the best on this one, so he called me.”

She snorted, something he didn’t think she could do. “You break too many things.”

“Only if it needs breaking.”

“In your humble opinion.”

“In the opinion of the man on the spot when the breaking needs to happen.”

The elevator arrived and he stepped in with Otis, rode down the seven floors to the lobby and stopped again at McCall’s desk.

“Where’s McCain?”

The big man laughed and pointed. “Still in there.”

Raised voices came from behind the door McCain had entered. It sounded as if it might not be payday for him after all. Hilda could be tight with the boss’s money, some days.

“I’m going to the Ford – when and if he comes out.”

McCall nodded and Devon strolled out onto the sidewalk, crossed the street and climbed into the machine.

Ten minutes later, when McCain finally came out of the building, Devon and the Ford were gone.

CHAPTER THREE

January 22, 1915

Bowling Green is the oldest park in New York. That's what the sign says. The little triangular strip of summer greenery was sandwiched in between the two sides of Broadway at the split. It wasn't green now, of course. It was a collection of icy sticks.

11 Broadway, right across the street from the park offered the German staff a great view from the consulate. It even overlooked the Battery, but, if there were any big guns still there, they were pointing the wrong way, as far as Devon was concerned. Turn them around and blast hell out of 11 Broadway would be his choice.

Afternoon traffic was heavier than usual and moving nose to tail – though, with the number of automobiles on the road any more, engine to trunk is what people will soon be saying, he thought. If automobiles did take over the majority of traffic, at least it would solve the

pollution problem: the amount of horse shit that had to be shoveled up every day had reached crisis proportions. Pedestrians were in as much peril from horse pucks as from being bowled over at Bowling Green. Delivery carts, private coaches, plenty of buzz buggies, and foot traffic of all kinds filled Broadway from Battery Park to the south and on up as far north as he could see.

That was another peeve of his. The growth of downtown was not only in square blocks but in vertical storeys. There were at least ten buildings he could see that were more than ten floors high. A dozen blocks uptown, the Woolworth Building towered over everything, topping out at more than twenty storeys. Manhattan was becoming a concrete canyon, with the sun barely able to peek into its depths.

Speaking of peeking: if the Germans in the consulate had a good view of the city, Devon had a great view of the consulate, from the other side of Bowling Green. He was on Beaver Street, tucked in underneath a giant billboard telling him about all the fun of owning an Eastman-Kodak camera. His black Ford – rather, McCain's black Ford – blended nicely into the shadow of the billboard, so, while he had a clear view of goings on across the way, the chances of him being seen in return were small.

Number 11 Broadway was an elegant old mansion, with a nice front lawn. It had probably been built with old Dutch money more than a hundred years ago. It had three storeys, a broad porch, and a double-headed eagle on a coat of arms out front, beside the flapping red, white and black of a German flag. A sign below both of them, in German and English, read "*Konsulat General des Reiches Deutschland / Consulate General of the German Empire*". He wondered whether the British embassy boasted of the presence of their empire on American soil. Probably not, he decided: Americans took a dimmer view of British empire-building. They held a long

grudge.

What he figured on finding at the Consulate was not clear. It's not like von Papen and his friends would be filing in and out of the building with signs on their backs saying "German spy". He'd told Janus it was useless to sit in front of the German Embassy in Washington, and now he was doing just that in New York. Call it intuition, call it a hunch. Call it wasting time when plot were being laid, but he just knew something would break.

He hoped.

Frau Seithen, on stuffing into his grip the items he had left behind last fall, had seen fit to stuff in his well-used binoculars, and that battered item gave him a close-up look at who was coming in and out, and even a few glimpses behind the windows. So far, none of the consulate's visitors had either signs on their backs or faces he knew. Nevertheless, he was reasonably certain that a good few of them were spies. From what he'd seen, there were layers within layers of plots being hatched on the other side of that little park, and Franz von Papen was hatching them.

There were a lot of men making their way in and out; a steady stream, almost. Yet, virtually no women. Well, the men could reasonably have business to look into; the women, not so much. The lack of feminine traffic might be related to that but, like everything else related to von Papen, he had his doubts about it. It just didn't look right.

The men in question were mostly in their twenties; some in their thirties; almost none over forty. Wasn't that an interesting thing? While he watched, he saw nearly half a hundred of them enter, eager looks on their faces. What were the chances of there being that many young men in Manhattan who had legitimate business with the German consulate on the same morning?

Of course, what the German consulate would consider as legitimate business and what the

American government (or King George the V's government for that matter) might consider as legitimate business were almost certainly two different things. He'd love to be able to compare and contrast the two interpretations.

As he continued to watch, he saw the same faces coming out, a half hour or so late. The stream coming out was nearly as fast moving as the stream going in – whatever was happening inside, it was running as smoothly as ... as German clockwork. When they did come out, they all had squared up their shoulders and taken their hands out of their pockets. All of them military age, when you thought about it. Wasn't *that* an interesting thing?

It was getting downright chilly, sitting in that cold lump of metal, rubber and leather. Janus really should pay McCain more, so he could afford a more expensive car – one with a heater. Fords were well and good as far as they went but 'as far as they went' wasn't far as far as luxury went. It really was inconsiderate of McCain to force him to steal a car like this. He blew on his fingers and went back to staring through the field glasses.

"What are you looking for, chum?"

You can always count on New York's best to be around when you don't need them. He didn't know if the flip side was true as he'd never felt any particular need to look for a cop.

"Afternoon, officer. Chilly day, isn't it?"

"I didn't notice, but I did notice you having a peep into people's windows across there."

The cop tapped his nightstick on Devon's field glasses. "Now, why are you doing that?"

Another one of those life-changing moral dilemmas stared Devon in the face. Tell the truth, and not be believed by cop, desk sergeant, or judge – or make up a lie that could lead to all kinds of unforeseen complications. His mother had always said it was better to tell the truth.

Then, again, his mother was dead.

“To tell the truth, officer, I’m looking for my wife.” Oh, Devon told himself, now you’re going to hell.

“Your wife? Is your wife behind one of those windows over there?” The cop waved more or less generally across the park to the other side of Broadway.

“Yes, officer, I’m afraid she is. She’s … she’s with a man. And, not even an American! I think it’s a German she’s with.”

“And, why would your wife have taken up with another man?” This guy was a tough audience. It was going to be a challenge.

Devon was going to have to get creative.

“Well, sir, I’m a traveling salesman. I work for the Swift Meat Packing plant over in Hoboken. You know our motto: ‘If you didn’t like your meat, it wasn’t Swift enough.’ Anyway, I don’t get home much. In fact, I’ve just been on the road for a long time, and, when I got back yesterday, my wife was gone. She left the house, left the kids, left the pot boiling on the stove. Left everything.”

“Oh, you’ve got kids, have you?”

“Yes, sir. A little girl named Coulter and a little boy named McCain. Darling little things, they are.”

“Those are strange names for little kids.”

“We’re Scotch, sir. The wife and me. Especially me – I’m mostly scotch.” This was starting to be fun.

“I can believe that. And, what’s your name?”

“McDevon. I left the kids with my mother while I came to look for her.”

“What’s her name?” Even the cop was starting to play along.

“Mother McDevon.”

“I meant your wife’s name.”

“Mrs. McDevon.”

“Her first name, smart boy.”

“Eva. Eva Paine McDevon.”

“Paine?”

“Yes, sir. She was a Paine on her father’s side.”

The cop was well into by now. “And what was his name, pray tell.”

It’s all in the timing. Wait, two, three. “Royal.”

But all good things must come to an end. Devon hadn’t taken his eyes off his target and, just as the game was starting to get good, Paul Koenig walked out the front door of the Consulate. There was no mistaking Koenig’s bull-neck and bullet-head. Now, he was holding the door open for a dark-haired girl of about twenty. She had an oval face with a cupid’s bow mouth and dark, mascara-ed eyes. She’d cut her hair in the new fashion he was starting to see around town: a bob, he thought they called it. Her blue coat and the skirts underneath it came just a few inches below her knee. Her hat was scarlet, which didn’t surprise him, with two tall matching-red feathers drawing attention to themselves.

Devon was sure he’d seen her face somewhere before.

She and Koenig seemed to be well acquainted with each other; quite friendly, in fact.

Koenig’s assistance down the sidewalk for the girl involved hands on posterior and more. And

the girl didn't seem to mind.

Afraid to lose them in the dense traffic, Devon jumped out to crank-start the car.

"Where do you think you're going?" The cop was tapping things with his club, again.

"That's her, officer. In the red hat! That's my beloved Anna." He mustn't lose sight of her – and, of course, by the time he thought that, he had.

"I thought you said her name was Eva!"

"No, no, no. That's not Eva. Eva is much taller. They're twins, you see."

"Oh, I suppose she's a Paine, as well?"

"Oh, no, sir. Anna's one of the sweetest girls you ever met. It's Eva's got the temper – which explains why I'm on the road as much as I am. She's got a left hook that would lay out Jack Johnson."

"And her right?"

"Well, after she caught me with Anna, I suppose it was her right. Took a month for my eye to get back to normal."

Over traffic and park bushes, he could just see the tips of two red feathers at the curb. If she would just stay there until he could dump this cop, he had in mind to follow them, see where they ended up and, somehow, find a way to get to that girl. If Koenig was so hands on in escorting her around town, the chances were very good that the two were more than passing acquaintances. She must know something useful.

The problem was the cop wasn't going to be ditched so easily.

"Now, just a minute! I still want to know why you think Anna is over across the way, there!"

He gave the crank another whirl, thumb tucked carefully beside his fingers in case of bounce-back.

“Not Anna; Eva!” A little more choke from the gadget sticking out the front of the engine cover. Another whirl.

“Well, where’s Anna?” The cop sounded very concerned.

“I wish I knew! She ran off with an Italian and I think they’re in Guatemala – or maybe it was Pensacola. At any rate, it was someplace foreign.”

The Model T was turning over now and Devon was surprised to hear the idle, spark advanced for startup, smooth out. On the other side of the windshield, McCain was behind the wheel, hand on the spark advance lever. McCain, the Janus agent, not McCain, Devon’s imaginary son. McCain the agent was about 30; McCain the imaginary son had just been invented a few moments ago.

He was trying to keep one eye on the cop, one eye on McCain, one eye on Koenig, and one eye on the brunette with the red feathers in her hat. That produced a deficit of eyes and only resulted in making him a little bit dizzy. He jumped into the passenger side of the machine and the cop came back to the driver’s side.

“Now, just a minute, here!” he said. “Who’s this man, then?” He used his night stick to specify which man he was talking about.

Devon looked to his fellow agent and back to the cop. “This guy? That’s McCain. He’s Anna’s husband.” That was plain as the nose on his face – certainly the one on the cop’s face.

“I thought your son’s name was McCain!” The cop sounded skeptical, for some reason. Really, cops were becoming quite suspicious, these days.

“It is. This is his father.”

“His father! I thought ... you said ... then who’s the girl’s father?”

“Little Coulter? I don’t know, but if I ever find the guy, I’ll punch his lights out! Never be a traveling salesman, officer, it only leads to heartbreak. Eva was complaining, last time I was home, that I was always too tired to satisfy her – and then Anna told me the same thing. They’re twins, you see. They were born just one year apart. Their mothers were astonished when they found out. Well, anyway, not being able to satisfy either of them started to worry me, you know. Then, one worry leads to another, and pretty soon, I find myself in a dreadful situation ...”

The cop suddenly threw up his hands. “Don’t tell me any more! I don’t want to know!” he shouted, and wandered off, shaking his head. McCain watched him go then turned to Devon, but Devon forestalled his righteous wrath.

“Look, I’m sorry I stole your car, but, in my defense, I really wanted it.”

“Oh, well, that makes it all right, then.”

“I thought so at the time.” While they were talking, Koenig and the girl were disappearing. “Did you see where she went?”

“The brunette in the red hat, with the guy looks like a wild boar? Got in a landau and went south.”

Devon tried to estimate where they’d be by now, and realized he’d never catch them. Much too far, was the estimate.

“Damn it! She’s the way to get to Koenig. Maybe higher up, too. I know it. I’d swear I know that face. Now, how do I find out who she is?”

“You could walk into the Consulate over there and ask them who the flirty-looking dame

with the red hat on her head and the boarish looking guy on her arm is.”

“And, tomorrow, you’ll find me floating down the Hudson. Well, you won’t find me, but somebody will.”

“Drive randomly around New York until you see them again? I mean, what are the odds of that happening in New York City?”

“Thanks for the help. So, what do I do? How the hell do I find her? Do I sit here, day after day, until she comes back and then follow her around or something? Hire an aeroplane and fly around between buildings until I see a red hat with feathers?” Devon punched the dashboard in frustration, regretting it at once. Those Fords are build of very solid steel. He sucked on his knuckles until the pain eased.

And, looked up to see that McCain was looking at him with a smug, self-satisfied expression that was both annoying and unsettling. Devon hated people to look smug around him; it gave them the probably true notion that they knew more than him.

“All right, what?”

McCain remained smug, possibly even a little more so. His grin turned into a smirk.

“Give me a minute, here. I want to let this sink in, so that I can enjoy every moment of it.”

“What is it? Stop wasting time. There’s a war on, you know.”

“Oh, even the war will stop for this. It’s too good.”

“Out with it!” Really, there are limits. He grabbed McCain’s lapels and shook him.

“McCain! Girl!”

“You want to find that girl?” His smug little smile kept getting wider. It was just begging

to be wiped on his Hear-No-Evil face.

“Obviously.”

“You don’t know how to find her?”

At this point, there wasn’t a jury in America who would convict, no matter what he did to this smug annoyance. “Obviously – or I wouldn’t be wasting my time talking to a moron.”

“Oh, this is too good.” He was chuckling, now. “You want to find that girl with the red hat and the piggy-looking guy who just got into that big expensive car and drove away?”

“Yes!” He was pretty sure the jury would find it to be justifiable homicide: ‘I’m sorry, Your Honor, but if you’d seen his face at that moment, you’d have shot him, too.’ Justifiable homicide, clearly.

“Why don’t you try the Hochstern Agency, 60 Broadway? I’ll bet you can contact her there.”

Wait, what? There was a load of self-satisfaction in that voice. Devon hated self-satisfaction even more than he hated smugness – unless they were the same thing, in which case, he hated them equally.

“And what makes you think I could find her at ... ?”

“The Hochstern Agency, 60 Broadway.”

That was a curiously specific address for McCain to pull out of the air. McCain was absolutely laughing, now. He raised a finger and pointed it beyond Devon’s shoulder, like you’d point out a lost toy to a toddler.

Devon turned and saw nothing.

“Look up.”

He did and there was the reason for the laughter.

She was staring over his shoulder, laughing as hard as McCain, holding a big Kodak camera and taking a lovely shot of her two children – Coulter and McCain, presumably. She was also sixteen feet high and in full color. Three-foot high letters told him that she was the Eastman Girl. Six inch letters down in the corner said Hochstern Agency, 60 Broadway.

If there was one thing Devon really hated, it was being treated like an idiot.

If there was one thing he hated even worse, it was being an idiot.

CHAPTER FOUR

January 24, 1915

Feet stretched out onto an ottoman in the lobby of the Empire Hotel, he sat reading a copy of the New Castle County coroner's report on the death of little Melissa Bayard. Not a big thing, really, so there shouldn't have been any problem with the request. Devon had forgotten the problem with bureaucracy.

The desk clerk at the county office didn't want to send him a copy, but Devon pointed out that it was a public document, freely accessible to the public – and that he was the public. The clerk informed him that the public only included the taxpayers of New Castle county, Delaware and not some nosy parker from New York. Devon countered that, per the Constitution, the public included all citizens of the republic (which he was not, but ...) The clerk suggested that Devon come to New Castle County and collect the copy himself. Devon suggested that the clerk didn't

like his job much, to risk it over such a silly thing. The clerk intimated that Devon's threats weren't very effective, coming, as they did, long distance from New York. Devon intimated that a conversation with the County Clerk, whom Devon could call directly, by the way, might make him change his mind. The document arrived three days later, postage due.

So, he was reading it in the lobby, because his room was too dark for most such activities. At \$2 a night, it was the most expensive flop he'd ever stayed in, and you'd think it would have modern conveniences like decent lights, but here he was. Still, it made *Frau Seithen*'s place look like, well, like *Frau Seithen*'s place. And, damn it, the last year had seen considerable indignities committed upon his body. He deserved a little luxury, didn't he?

As reading material, the report was low in entertainment value and high in nauseating content. The coroner had nothing unexpected to say: death by misfortune; accidental drowning due to a mishap while the child was playing by the riverside. Due to prolonged exposure, the body was in a considerable state of decomposition, and had been partially eaten by aquatic or other animals, making the autopsy difficult. There were no signs of bruising or abrasions that might suggest mistreatment of the girl. There were a number of blisters or pustules around the various mucous membranes that were not immediately identifiable, but were likely the result of decomposition while immersed in water. The child was missing one boot, which will probably show up on the bank of the creek come spring. There was no reason for the coroner to suspect that foul play may have been involved.

Of course, it was Devon's job to suspect foul play, or at least to look into it until he couldn't suspect it any more, and that coroner's report left a lot of suspicion in Devon's mind. The coroner had no reason to suspect anything out of the ordinary, consequently, nothing out of

the ordinary was found. That alone suggested foul play to Devon.

So, that little girl's death was one side of what he was supposed to be looking into. The other was here in New York. Counterfeit passports could become a real problem. Agents, saboteurs, bombers and worse could be flooding into the country daily – and fleeing from the country with equal ease. He had two possible leads: Paul Koenig at the Consulate with the Eastman Girl, together with the ad agency named on the billboard; and the number 123 given him by *Frau Seithen*, which meant nothing in itself. That's not a lot to go on in a city of five million people.

Manhattan, alone, had about two-hundred and fifty streets going east/west, and about twelve major avenues going north/south. That's nearly ... Devon did some quick mental math ... nearly three thousand potential '123' street addresses. The war would be over before he could track all of those down. Not every street would have a number 123 but, still, he needed something else to go with it. A region, a neighborhood, a landmark.

Hell, he didn't even know if it was an address.

Tracking down the Eastman Girl was a different matter. At the Empire's one lobby telephone, he hunted for, and failed to find, the Hochstern Agency in the Home book, then looked for, and found it, in the Bell book. It was becoming a real nuisance to have to shuffle between two phone books; somebody should do something about that.

"*Jawohl? Die Hochstern Agentur.*" came the prompt answer. German, of course.

"*Ja, ich bin Franck Steickternott. Ich bin bie der Lily Cream Siefenfirma.*" Just a small lie and he was sure the Lily Cream soap company wouldn't mind claiming affiliation. After all, what harm could come of it. That made him chuckle into the phone.

“*Ja, ja? Ich benutz’ Lily Cream selbst!*” said the voice on the other end. It was a female.

She must have very soft skin, if she used Lily Cream herself. Soft and fragrant, if the ads were to be believed.

“*So? Zehr gut! Können wir bitte das auf Englisch fortsetzen?*”

“Oh, sure, Mr. Steickternott. We’re supposed to start off in German because a lot of our clients are German, but we can talk in English. That’s fine.”

“That’s great.” It saves a lot of time, speaking English – fewer syllables. “So, I was passing a billboard your company did and I looked at the young woman up there and thought, now that girl is just right for Lily Cream soap’s new campaign. It showed the Eastman Girl – you know, Kodak cameras.”

“Oh, sure! Miss Edwards. She’s a swell kid. You want to talk to *Herr Stegler*; he can give you the details. *Bleiben Sie bitte.*”

He *bleibt* for a little more than a minute, then a man’s voice came on the other end. “*Hier ist Stegler,*” was the curt introduction.

He took a deep breath and launched into his explanation a second time. No, Stegler told him, Hochstern didn’t represent the models; they represented the advertisers. He wouldn’t be able to put him in touch with the girl. What kind of campaign were Lily Cream contemplating? That much? Well, Mr. Stegler certainly hoped that Lily Cream would consider Hochstern when it came to laying out the campaign. Oh, you wanted to meet the girl ahead of time? Well, he wasn’t supposed to do it, but, if the campaign was as big as Mr. Steickternott indicated, he was sure Miss Edwards wouldn’t mind. Here was her personal number. She’s home most afternoons. And, Hochstern would be hearing from Lily Cream, soon? That’s excellent; be sure, please, to ask for

him, Stegler. “*Wiedersehen.*”

“*Wiedersehen.*” Devon wondered what Lily Cream Soap’s reaction would be when Stegler started pestering them about their new advertising campaign.

And how did *Herr Stegler* know the girl was home most afternoons? For that matter, how did he have her phone number at hand, once he decided he could help?

The phone call to Miss Edwards was easier.

“Yeah, hello?” She sounded sleepy, even though it was late afternoon.

“Miss Edwards?”

“Sure.”

“My name is Franck Steickernott. I’m with the Lily Cream Soap company.” A slight pause, but Devon guessed she didn’t use it, herself. “I hope I haven’t called at an inconvenient time.”

“Naw, it’s fine. What can I do you for, Mister ... what was your name again?”

“Steickernott. It’s German.”

“They always are. What do you want?”

“Lily Cream is laying out a new advertising campaign and we’ve looked around and decided you are just the girl to be the new face of Lily Cream Soap.”

“Is that right? How big is this campaign going to be?”

That question came out sharply. Devon made up some numbers on the spot.

“That’s huge!” she exclaimed. “And, I’m the face?”

“You are the whole thing.” The girl must be ready to explode.

“Wow. I’m knocked out, here. So ...” And, she suddenly didn’t sound sleepy, anymore.

“... what kind of contract are we talking?” She might be a pretty face, but she had a business head firmly screwed on, as well.

“Well, it’ll be about three years, I’m thinking. First, though, we hoped to do an initial photography session, to get to know you, to see how you work, then we’ll talk about contracts and so on.”

“Well, it’ll cost you hourly for a session.” She told him her rates for a one-hour shoot and additional fees and he agreed. Finding a date and time was harder, but they finally set a session for one week on, at 2:00 p.m. He told her the address.

“Hey, that’s in Hell’s Kitchen, ain’t it? I don’t know about that.”

“It’s not really in Hell’s Kitchen; it’s just outside it. I call it Hell’s Pantry. The building’s pretty rough but it’s a nice apartment, very clean.”

“Well, all right then,” she said reluctantly. “As long as the place is clean. You’ll be there, will you?”

He assured her he would be. They confirmed date and time and hung up.

Now, if only hunting down Number 123 could be that easy.

Checking off the avenues shouldn’t be hard. Just start in the 100 block at the east side of Manhattan and walk across to the west. What is it, a couple of miles, at most? Of course, that’s just Manhattan; there’s also Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx – not forgetting Staten Island, which is not so easy to get to. And, Number 123 could be in New Jersey or even up in Connecticut. Or it could be in Berlin.

And, McCain had demanded his Ford back. Not that it was a great automobile but, once you get used to it, any auto is better than none. Devon decided he needed a car; a used Ford

would be cheap. A new Ford like McCain's was a little beyond him at this moment. Then he decided he had other things to think about.

There was his own health to start with. He was no hypochondriac, by any means, but, to be fair, his last foray into the world of international espionage had left him beaten, burned, shot at, frozen, almost drowned, pneumonia-ed (if that's a word) and very nearly exploded. He'd like to avoid as much of that as possible this time around, and therefore he planned to do as much of this assignment as possible over the telephone. Of course, sooner or later, he'd have to go outside into the cold cruel world. Precautions were in order. He had his automatic in a drawer in his room upstairs, two spare magazines with it and about twenty extra cartridges, his folding knife was in his hip pocket – and his brass knuckles were in his jacket pocket. Another couple of illegal weapons and he'd set a new record for Sullivan Act violations, if and when the New York police ever caught up with him.

With all that in mind, and with the coroner's report under his arm, and thinking about what he needed to accomplish the 'photo session' with Miss Edwards, and, always, wondering in the back of his mind where Eva was, he was probably not paying that much attention when he climbed sixteen flights of stairs to the eighth floor and opened the stairway door to get to his room.

He began to pay attention when a pair of fists, one from each side of the door, slammed into his stomach and his legs were kicked out from under him – his face hit the terraza first. In very short order, he was being dragged down the hall and tossed, very rudely, into the middle of the floor in his own room.

"Awfully sorry about that, old chap, but we needed to get your attention quickly and

quietly. Breathing again, are you?"

From shining toe caps on a very expensive pair of brogues up beyond razor-crisp creases in a pair of tweed pants, a tweed suit jacket and vest, a school tie of maroon and navy silk, neatly trimmed moustache and carefully groomed hair, the speaker was so thoroughly English that Devon expected to be offered tea and perhaps some spotted dick to go along with it. In fact, as the man was clearly a public school wallah, he might already have one of the latter. Devon had heard about those schools.

A couple of slow gasps began to bring air back into his lungs and he staggered toward his feet, to be rabbit punched back to the floor.

"All right, lads, that's enough, I think," the gentleman graciously allowed. Devon lunged toward the bureau and his hand went into the top drawer as he slid it open, but it came away empty. The metaphorical cupboard was bare.

"I think you were looking for this, were you?" The man dropped Devon's Dreyse onto the bedside table and put three magazines beside it. Devon hated people who were more professional than he was.

"Who the fuck are they? Who the fuck are you? And what the fuck do you want?" He was barely able to get that out past a diaphragm that was still a center of hot pain. He had to pause to drag in a couple more breaths.

The mustached man tsk'ed and shook his head. "Hardly gentlemanly, old fellow. But, then, of course, you're a Canadian. I've always felt it was impossible for a colonial to be a gentleman. Too much bear manure in the bloodstream." He paused to chuckle at what he thought was a joke. "So far, you bear out my prejudice. To answer as much as needs to be answered,

these are *Pané* Voska and *Pané* Svoboda."

Devon was just beginning to get his breath back. "A pair of krauts," he managed.

"No, a pair of Czechs."

"So, what's the difference?" He looked at the toughs. Before the rabbit punch, he'd have been willing to forgive a number of things; not so much, now. A fair-ish fight is one thing, a rabbit punch is not. He'd remember them. "Is this how you treat everybody you meet? Or do you save this treatment for special friends?" His right kidney was searing with pain from the rabbit punch.

"Not at all. We're very civil to most people, actually. The Americans we can't touch because it will cause an incident; the Germans we can't touch because it will tip them off to what we're doing over here. The British we don't touch for obvious reasons. But you're a Canadian, and we can do anything we damned well please to you. Isn't that jolly?"

He decided he was beginning to dislike this Englishman. "I'm beginning to think I don't like you, limey. And, just so I have a name to go with the hate, who the hell are you?"

"Let's just say that I'm your ... 'boss' – in a way." Devon was trying to decide whether he hated an arrogant German or a supercilious Englishman more. So far, the German still had the edge, but the gap was closing.

Devon was counting ribs to see what might be broken. "I don't work for you. I've never met you. In what way are you my 'boss'?"

"Everything you do makes its way into my hands, at some point."

"Really? I'll have to have a talk with some people. Get the hell out of my room and take the goons with you." He turned, rubbing himself front and back, opened the second bureau

drawer, took out a bottle, and poured himself a generous amount. After he'd knocked it back, he looked at the Englishman again. "Why are you still here? I distinctly remember telling you to get the hell out."

The Englishman smiled, in a supercilious sort of way. "You're up to something, my man, and we need to know what before you go running around, blowing things up again, and disrupting a lot of carefully laid plans."

Devon poured himself another drink – well, a drink and a half, actually. "Well, I'll tell you what, 'old boy,'" he said, piling as much upper class sneer as he could into the accent. "There's really only one proper answer for you and, as it's just not the gentlemanly thing to say, I'll just say go bugger yourself. You're a public school chap, eh, what? You should know about buggery."

"Now, don't take that attitude. You were seen looking in windows at the German consulate; you've been seen at a certain address on Hudson which is frequented by some very unfriendly people; and you were involved in a very messy affair last autumn up on one of those lakes on the border. We want to know why."

It began to twig for Devon. "Oh, now I'm on the trolley! You're British intelligence, aren't you? Good disguise, pal; no one would take you for a Brit – they'd take you for a twit, but not a Brit. Well, let me answer those points in reverse order. Thirdly, it's called Lake Erie, ya putz, and it's one of the Great Lakes – you know, the largest set of lakes in the world? – it'd do you good to learn a few things about what you're doing before you start talking. What do they teach you in those public schools, besides jiggering and poker? Secondly, you've obviously only been watching *Frau Seithen*'s place for about six weeks, because, 'last autumn' as you put

it, it wasn't unsavory characters coming out of there, it was god damn war and god damn murder, and some of us were trying to put a god damn stop to it. Where the fuck were you?" He jerked a thumb at the two Czechs. "Where the fuck were these two? And firstly, I'll look in any god-damned window I like – your mother's, for instance. And if that clapped-up Czech moves another step, I'll break his jaw." He'd seen the one called Voska start to move in the mirror – but he wasn't going to mention that. Let them think he had superhuman powers.

"Well, I'd rather you didn't," the Britisher said. "He's quite valuable to me."

"He's just a pain in the ass to me. Here's what you do, Oxford. You get on a train, you go to Ottawa – that's in Canada; if you don't know where that is, buy a map – and you talk to Lieutenant Colonel Percy Girdwood of the Dominion Police. He might tell you to go to hell, or, if he feels like it, he'll tell you what went on 'last autumn'. He might even tell you what's going on, now. But I doubt it and I won't. Now get out."

The man rose and smiled. "It's Cambridge, actually." He fluffed up his tie. "Jesus College. Well, I guess we'll just have to keep tailing you, then."

"Try to keep up."

A business card was produced. "Here's my card, by the way, in case you ever feel like you need it."

The card read 'Walter Wisdom, W. A. WISDOM FILMS, New York.' The world just kept getting stranger.

As the men filed out, Devon stepped in front of the Czechs, his hands back in his pockets. "By the way, which one of you guys kidney punched me?"

Svoboda turned with a grin on his face, and Devon drove his right hard into the man's

gut. Twice. He stepped back as the man fell to his knees and raised his right fist again, brass knuckles displayed, ready to strike if Voska took exception.

Instead, Voska got the other man to his feet and helped him from the room. Wisdom, another supercilious grin on his face, closed the door softly.

Devon locked it and dropped the brass knuckles to the floor. The new skin and newly healed scars on his hand had been ripped open and blood was dripping from his own knuckles. It hurt like hell.

But, it was a good hurt.

CHAPTER FIVE

January 26, 1915

If he didn't know better, he'd say his old sparring partners, Betke and Horrell, were following him, but he did know better because he was following them.

Not on purpose. It just so happened they were going in the same direction he was, and it just so happened he was behind them in going there. He was a few seconds behind them turning off Broadway onto Jane. If they'd been two minutes later turning onto Jane Street, the situation would have been reversed – and the chances were very good that it might not have gone well. For him.

Horrell was a 6' 4" German national who'd had been a hard-rock miner north of the border; Betke, nearly as big, was an active-service gunner in the German Navy. They both knew explosives and they'd been chased out of Canada back in the fall of '14, where they admitted

they'd been surveilling potential targets for bomb attacks – *before* the war started! Someone at the Imperial High Command had a lot of foresight. Since they talked their way into the States, they'd been allowed to run the length and breadth of the country, with mischief, not sight-seeing, in mind. Before he put a fiery and explosive end to one of the German embassy's big schemes in the middle of Lake Erie, he'd both helped them with, and then put a stop to, their plan to blow up a meat plant in Jersey. That and, of course, arranging funding through Janus to build the bombs to blow up the meat. It had been a busy fall.

The long and the short of it was that neither Betke nor Horrell had any cause to like him.

After a few blocks, it became apparent they were heading in the same direction he was, which was disappointing, as he hoped they might take him some place new. Instead they were back in Little Germany, and the *Seithen Wohnhaus für deutsche Seemann*. There really wasn't much more he could glean from the well-picked field of the boarding house. Going back there was becoming a habit – a bad habit and one he wished he could kick.

It was also still too light for him to get close; he wished for the winter sun to set, but no amount of wishing could hurry that event along. He crossed Jane before they got to Greenwich Street, and dropped back a little. Sure enough, the two men strode up Seithen's steps and entered the house.

Now, what were they doing back here, and why did they think they could be so open about it? They didn't even bother to look around before they entered the building. Were they really that dumb?

The obvious answer was that they thought he was dead. And, he was quite happy for them to go on believing it. They also thought that, with him dead, nobody else would take his place.

Wrong on both counts.

So, yes, they were that dumb.

He continued past and crossed Hudson. There was a bar on the corner and he had a good view of the front of Seithen's place from there. It was much cozier than standing under a tree, letting the winter wind blow up his coat-tails. The beer was good, the sandwich was adequate, and he would have been quite willing to spend the rest of the war there, getting quietly drunk and letting the world go to hell without any further help from him – if, in the last few rays of daylight, Paul Koenig hadn't climbed the front steps and been let in by the *Frau*. If Koenig was there, it was more than a couple of simple saboteurs going home for the night. There were plans afoot. Damn it, now he had to do something.

There was an alley behind Seithen's, between the backs of the buildings on Jane and on Horatio. It was littered, unshoveled, unlit, and, even in January, stank of rotting cabbage from Seithen's kitchen. It was perfect. He spent a few minutes in solitary concentration, working on the mechanism of Seithen's lock and soon stood in the mud room at the back of the house, pulling the back door closed and pocketing his wallet of lock picks. Useful tools, those; everyone should have some. The kitchen was dark and empty – dishes were in the sink, which was not unusual for the Seithen household. The hallway beyond, leading to the front of the house, had (as he already knew) a single hanging bulb lighting it at the street end. As he watched, Horrell (or Betke) came from the direction of the stairs with beer bottles in his hands and went into the dining room. The meeting was in there, apparently.

The inside kitchen door wasn't even on a latch. Think about that – planning a world conspiracy in the front room and not bothering to lock the back door. Anybody could walk in

with the intention of disrupting things and, as it happened, Devon did walk in, shaking his head as he stood silently in the kitchen and listened. He wasn't sure what his intention was at the moment, but a rumble of voices from the dining room at the front of the house, as he knew there would be, had to be investigated. The sound of a small gramophone (he assumed it was small, as it was not very loud) coming from the *Frau*'s room on the left of the hall. Nothing from Margit's room on the right. Nothing from upstairs.

All the action was in the front, then. All he had to do was put his ear against the keyhole and hear the whole thing. So, why was he still standing in the kitchen?

Because at that moment, George Fuchs left Devon's old room at the left front and made his way up the stair, never looking into the shadows of the kitchen. In a couple of minutes, Devon heard the flush from above and waited for Fuchs, who returned at length and shuffled down the hall into the meeting. The rumble of voices stopped as the door opened; door closed, the rumble continued. The music from the gramophone stopped and was replaced by another piece as realization dawned: they were trying to cover their voices with music.

Ten fast strides down the hall, a hall where he knew every creak and squeak, put him with his ear against the crack of the dining room door. He tried to pick out voices under the music, heard three distinct ones.

“*Wir brauch'n vierssig Boot' für jeden.*”

“*Vierssig? Ist das genug?*”

“*Mach 'n Sie hundert draus.*”

A third voice rumbled in. “*Können wir überhaupt vierssig finden?*”

They need forty boats – for each place. Why not make it a hundred? Can they even find

forty?

What are they going to do with a hundred boats per destination? Or even forty boats?

Hold a regatta? Cross the Atlantic back to Germany?

“*Wie viel’ Maschin’ngewehr’ werd’n versproch’n?*” That was Fuchs’s voice.

“*Sechs und dreissig. So heisst es.*”

Who the hell is promising them thirty-six machine guns? And, what are they going to do with them? And how much ammunition?

The rumbler spoke again – it had to be Horrell. “*Sech’ Boote mit montierter Maschin’ngewehr’ lass’n vier-und-dreissig Boot’ zur Fähr’ zurück.*” Thirty-four boats for each trip. Not counting the boats with machine-guns in them. Devon assumed the gun-boats would remain at the destination, wherever they were, to support the first, and each succeeding, set of boatloads.

“*Zehn in jedem, das sind über tausend pro Stunde.*” That was Paul Koenig.

At ten to a boat, they’re going to be transporting a thousand of something every hour. Not counting the boats with machine-guns in them.

A new voice joined the conversation, pinched, superior-sounding. “*Vergiss erst mal die Boote. Wie bringen wir sie hier?*” He knew the voice, but couldn’t place him.

Fuchs answered that. “*Mox drückt die Blätter. Sie gehen sofort raus.*”

Someone named Mox is printing flyers, starting right now. Flyers for what? For when? For where? He was trying to place the voice. The remaining question, of course, was who are they getting the word out to?

Koenig snarled. “*Ich hass’ Mox. Er ist ein Schwein.*”

Oh, he had to meet Mox. If Paul Koenig hated Mox, Devon liked Mox.

The fourth voice, which must be Betke, added, “*Er hat Nutz’n, aber er ist verrückt.*”

Koenig, again. “*Hat er wirklich dies’ Mädchen getötet?*”

Wait a minute. Mox killed girls? Devon didn’t like Mox as much as he used to. What girls? When? Where?

“*Ja, hat er.*” Fuchs, this time. “*Und er mocht’ es.*”

“*Scheisse!*” in Horrell’s bass rumble. “*Ich mocht’ die Kleine.*”

“*Du würd’st die Klein’n mög’n.*” Fuchs needed to watch his mouth, accusing Horrell of liking little girls; Horrell made up more than two of him. A warning rumble from the sailor made him pipe down, but the new voice forestalled any squashing of Fuchs for the moment.

“Gentlemen!” he said, surprisingly in English. “We do not bicker. Together, we make history!”

And the voice clicked in Devon’s mind and the face sprang into his memory. Franz von Papen! *Herr Kapitan Franz Joseph Hermann Michael Maria von Papen, Erbsälzer zu Werl und Neuwerk*, in fact. All six feet, one inch of Prussian cavalry officer, and the man who tried to kill Devon last fall – or one of the men who tried to kill Devon last fall. Things had just taken a decidedly interesting twist. If von Papen was here, this wasn’t some low-level group of flunkies. This had the backing of the Embassy, the *Deutsches Heer*, and even the Kaiser. These orders came from *Unter den Linden*, the Imperial Secret Service, and, ultimately, they had to come from the Imperial High Command.

Betke, surprisingly, was the one who changed the subject abruptly. “*Ich brauche noch ein Bier! Wie viele haben wir?*”

“*Vier*,” answered Horrell, who’d been sidetracked nicely.

“Let’s get them, then.” Devon had never heard either of them speak that much English.

His surprise was such that he was nearly caught eavesdropping.

Devon was already tip-toeing rapidly back to the kitchen, but he heard *Frau* Seithen’s door begin to open as he passed. Leaning to his left, he slid to door into Margit’s room open, eased through, and squeezed the door shut. He heard the *Frau* go to the back of the building and two sets of heavy feet go upstairs, returning a minute later, presumably with beer. His erstwhile landlady puttered in the kitchen for a ridiculously long time, banging pots and slamming the icebox door several times. Making herself some warm milk before bed, maybe. Topping it up with some cold schnapps, likely.

He didn’t dare to move all the while, because he didn’t know what squeaks may be lurking in the floorboards. Thankfully, he had the door knob there to provide support or he might have wobbled and fallen in the dark. The steam heat was doing a fine job this night, and he soon sweated into his overcoat. He also, as usual, hadn’t planned things very well. Three beers were not ideal for sneaking secretly through the lair of the enemy, with the only bathroom upstairs. He wasn’t drunk – but he had to pee something fierce.

All he could do was stand inside the pitch dark room and think happy thoughts about deserts, cacti, and dried cattle skulls.

At long last, the German woman made her way back into her bedroom and the door across the hall slammed. Just a few seconds later, voices at the front of the building got suddenly louder, along with several pairs of boots clumping into the hallway. Next, he heard the heavy footsteps go upstairs again, then Koenig’s voice bidding them goodnight, the front door slam and

a smaller slam as the front parlor door closed.

The meeting was over; the milk was heated; the schnapps was cooled, and everyone was going to where they should be – including Devon, which was out as fast as he could sneak. Easing the door open, listening carefully, it seemed that everyone who lived there was truly going to bed. The front light in the hall was on, which was usual, and lit the room with a soft glow. He was about to slide into the hall and out the back, when he looked over his shoulder.

Illuminated in the sliver of light from the hallway, Margit Seithen lay sprawled on the bed, stretched out on her back, head tilted, mouth hanging open, right arm and leg rag-dolled off the side of the bed, looking for all the world to be someone who had left the world. He thought it might be good to find out if she had.

He eased the door closed and, now in pitch dark, felt his way to her side, ignoring the few squeaks along the way. He'd seen a small light on the bed table before the darkness fell and he found the switch for it.

Her eyes were half open, pupils rolled upward. A thin trickle of drool ran down her chin. Both of those, believe it or not, were good signs and, as he watched, her eyelids fluttered slightly and her tongue pushed forward a little. She was alive, breathing, capable of movement, but how far out of it was she?

He laid a finger on the pulse at her neck – it was there and strong, if pretty fast and a little irregular. He pressed an ear against her chest and heard a strong heartbeat. She'd probably live, he guessed. Then again, he was no doctor, just somebody who'd had to deal with such things a number of times – for some reason he was the one they called on to deal with situations like this. On a hunch, he held her arms to the light, sliding his fingers down the inside and found what he

expected. It took just a moment or two to find the paraphernalia the girl needed to inject herself.

He'd seen it in prison and later south of the border in Mexico. It was a new thing that was making itself known in recent years and, from the outside, it was horrible. They called it smack in Sing Sing, and *caballo*, or horse down in Jaurez and places south of there. From the inside, he'd been told, it was warm and safe and happy beyond imagining. It took away every pain and replaced it with oblivious ecstasy. From the outside, it was something different. He'd seen strong men turned into useless shivering hulks in no time at all.

The other thing it did was make whoever took it a slave to the habit in just a few uses. It was so powerful that it made them crave ever bigger and ever more frequent doses to keep getting the thrill. Soon, they were at a point where they needed it constantly and spent the time in between doses shivering, crying, scratching – and willing to do *anything* to get what they needed. Having seen all that, he didn't want ever to become one of its victims.

Margit was certainly one of its victims. She had two looks: as she had been when he first met her, tall and cool and beautiful beyond belief; and another he'd seen twice now, haggard, shadowed, withdrawn, haunted, and almost frightened by her own reflection. He had wondered what the switch was that changed her between *Fraulein Jekyll* and *Monster Hyde*. And, which was the real Margit?

Now, he knew. The switch was in the little foil packets, 'bindles', the users in prison called them, that he had found along with a syringe and other items. It was out of India and places like that, from poppies, if he remembered correctly. The real Margit was, more and more, what he saw in front of him, now – a prisoner of heroin.

He pulled her up on the bed, drew her robe closed over her nakedness and put the little kit

within reach. He brushed her hair away from her face, snapped off the light and left.

He did pause for a moment in the kitchen and consider before dismissing the notion. No, he thought, he'd wait until he was in the alley. That would do better than the bathroom at this time of night.

CHAPTER SIX

January 27, 1915

The last time he'd been in Apartment 515 had been one of the lowest days of his life.

That it got worse after he left was no fault of the apartment. West 39th and 10th, Hell's Pantry as he'd said to the Eastman Girl on the telephone, and the building Apartment 515 was in was one of the worst on the block.

He carried a half-dozen arm loads of equipment up the many flights of stairs and piled them all in the hallway, gratified but a little surprised that the first loads were still there by the time he returned with the later ones. It was that kind of neighborhood; it was that kind of building. The smells of cabbage, urine and bodies were as strong as ever. He didn't have a key because this wasn't his apartment, so he knelt down to pick the lock, hoping no one would be inside when he did get the door open. For once, Mrs. There Ain't Nobody There across the way

didn't come out of her apartment to inform him of the state of the occupancy. She may have been off having another baby.

Lock picked, door opened, Apartment 515 was, as he had promised the model, very nice: good carpet, soft sofa and chairs; draperies; very cozy bed in the bedroom; functional dining set and even an ice-box in the kitchen. It had been cleaned up since he was last in it, dishes washed and put away, garbage taken out – bed made. All it really lacked was occupants. It belonged to Janus, or rather, he corrected himself, the Janus Agency. The furnishings were theirs; the ice-box was theirs; the bed was theirs. It was very nice of them to make the place available to him – even if they didn't know they were.

The equipment he now piled in the middle of the living room was, in a way, theirs, as well. They'd paid for it: \$65 for the camera; \$45 for the tripod; a dozen of the new strip-like rolls of photography film; flash tray and flash powder the man said he'd need to photograph indoors; reflector panels to catch the suns rays from outdoors. It all came to a considerable portion of the money Janus had fronted him. All in all, he'd better get something useful from all of this. And, he wasn't talking about photographs.

He'd seen photographers at work, of course, and he spent two hours at the Public Library reading some books about photography, and the man at the photography shop had explained all of the various bits and pieces to him, so he was confident that he could pass himself off as a photographer for an hour. After all, it wasn't like he really cared about the quality of the resulting photos. He just had to make it look like he knew what he was doing.

How hard could it be?

By the time the knock came on the door, he had the camera on the tripod, a roll of film

loaded into the camera, reflector panels up at the windows and his flash tray loaded. He didn't trust the flash tray – that looked like a lot of explosive. He had bad memories of explosives and his hands quivered a little bit while he read the instructions on the packaging. Best, perhaps, to trust the reflectors and not blow the model, or himself, to kingdom come.

But, on top of all that, he couldn't shake the odd feeling that he actually was a new photographer about to meet his first model for his first shoot – which, if you thought about it, he was. How did photographers treat their models? What did photographers and their models talk about? Should he have made sandwiches?

A last look around assured him that he presented a very professional appearance and, with the second knock, he put his jacket back on, squared his shoulders, tried to look casual, and called "Come on in!"

Mena Edwards was not what you'd call a classical beauty. Her teeth were a little too prominent and her chin receded somewhat. She had fetching eyes, though, which she accented with mascara and shadow, along with a shocking amount of lip and cheek rouge – she was a model, after all, so he shouldn't be too surprised at that. Most surprising was her short, bobbed-off hair. It was the latest fashion, Devon knew, but he didn't know if he liked it. He was still used to the Gibson-girl look, with upswept coifs under cartwheel hats. Some of his favorite people had been Gibson girls or reasonable facsimiles thereof. He regretted never taking pictures of them.

"Lily Cream soap?" she said, putting her head into the room. She had a slight lisp.

"That's right. You're Miss Edwards, are you?"

"Sure am, Jack." She stepped all the way in, bringing a good-sized carpet bag with her. She surveyed the room, approvingly. "Well, the apartment's nice enough, but the neighborhood

ain't exactly Park Avenue. Whew! Somebody cooks a lot of cabbage in this building. Say, what's your name, anyway?"

"Jack will do, just fine."

"Uh-huh. I'll bet it will. Where do I throw my things?" She had dropped the carpet bag near the door and was taking off her coat, hat and galoshes.

"On the bed, I guess. Just in – " He stopped speaking because she was already in the bedroom, testing the mattress for firmness.

"Won't we be needing this?" She tossed the remark over her shoulder from the bedroom as if it was a question she asked every day. Devon nearly tripped over his feet. Or maybe it was his jaw.

"No. I don't think we'll need that. We'll just use the furniture out here." He gestured vaguely. "The light's better out here."

She looked curiously at the couch, chairs and dining room table. "Okay, Jack. Your choice. Have you got anything special for me to wear?"

Devon hadn't thought about costumes. After all, he was new to this photography business.

"No. I didn't bring anything special."

"It's all right. I brought some things." She opened the carpet-bag and began to rummage in it, stopping to come up with something lacy in her hands. She eyed him over top of the three-and-a-half ounces of lace. "So, what's this about?"

"What's what about?"

"What's the shoot about?" she asked, pointing to the camera and other items. She put the

lacy thing back and held up another, eyed him again.

“Well, for Lily Cream soap, of course.”

“Lily Cream soap. Okay, so – negligee? Bath-towel?” She had both items and held one up in each hand.

It was becoming clear to Devon that he hadn’t thought this all the way through. “No, no. What you’re wearing is good.”

She looked down at her modest skirt and waister. “Really? Doesn’t shout Lily Cream soap, to me, but you’re the photog.” She dropped the negligee and its predecessor back into the carpet bag, kept the towel out.

Devon fussed with the camera. “We’re not going for anything ... *outré*. We’re trying for the every-day girl look. You know, working around the house, reading, relaxing, using Lily Cream soap.”

“*Outré*, huh? Uh-huh. La-dee-dah!” She pursed her lips and looked at him a little aslant. “Look, Jack, I don’t do the weird stuff. Straight up is okay, costumes is fine. Nude is ten bucks extra.”

He wasn’t quite sure where this change in direction was leading. She obviously had a lot more experience in the field than he did.

“I’m only interested in photography, Miss Edwards.”

“Call me Mena. And, that’s what I was talking about. Just what did you think I meant, bub?”

“I wasn’t sure. The phrasing was a little ambiguous.”

She thought back over her words. “Oh! No, that would cost you a lot more, Jackie. Where

do we start?"

"Why don't you stand by the window and look out? Just gaze on the day."

"Okay. How's this?"

It was very graceful and very fetching and he realized that she did know her business. He fumbled with advancing the film and setting the focus, while she shifted from pose to pose quite gracefully. He could see why Koenig was taken with her.

He'd captured a dozen shots when she left the window and looked around the room, sizing up the furniture.

"Why don't I move over here, Jack?" she asked, moving to one of the over-stuffed arm-chairs.

"Sure, that's good. Give me a minute here." Even though he knew perfectly well that none of these shots would ever be developed, he found himself trying to line up good ones. Call it professional pride.

"So, tell me about yourself, Mena. Where are you from?"

"I'm from Jersey, living in SoHo, now. Where are you from, Jack? You sure as heck don't sound like you're from New York." She was moving from pose to pose, waiting for his focus and click, then moving again.

"Well, I'm not from Jersey. I've lived a lot of places. I've been doing this job for Lily Cream for a few years, now."

She smiled as she shifted position. "No, you haven't."

He hit the camera with his elbow just as he squeezed the plunger. That was a ruined shot.

"What do you mean, I haven't?"

She walked up to the camera and crossed her arms over it. "You never took a photo in your life up to today, did you?" She went back to the armchair and sat crossways in it, with her feet over the arm, kicking at the air. "Well, take it!" He squeezed the plunger. "How about this one?" She kept her feet raised and let her skirt slide up above her knees. "Go on, Jack, take it!" He did.

She was smiling broadly, now. "Is this your first time doing this?" When he nodded, she laughed. "I could tell. No need to be shy. I do these all the time. Relax. I know what the guys want to shoot," she said, raising her feet higher so the skirt slid up past garters. "Take it!" He clicked again. "How did you find me?" She kept changing her pose and Devon kept clicking. He wondered what the photos would be like.

"I was near the German consulate, down on Broadway and I saw your face on the billboard, there."

"Oh, yeah! The Eastman Girl! That's me!"

"There was an address for the agency on the board, so I called and asked for you."

"That silly ad. Taking happy pictures of my little brats. Believe me, Jack, I ain't got no brats. If I have my way, I never will." Back at the window, she went through more poses, none of them 'looking out at the day' although each pose contained many points of interest..

Devon tried to take the lead, again. "So, while I was looking at you on the bill-board, I turned around and I was looking at you for real – coming out of the consulate in a red hat, with a heavy-set man." Click.

"Oh! Paul!" She made a face, just as he clicked again. Another ruined shot.

"He seemed very attached to you." He repositioned the camera as she moved over to the

sofa and arranged some pillows.

“He’d like to be. Paul would like a lot of things.”

“You seemed very attached to him.”

“So, I’m a good actress.” She laid on her stomach, laced her fingers under her chin and lifted her feet behind. Devon clicked and tried to advance the film, but it wouldn’t budge. “End of the roll, Jack. You’d better change it. We’re just getting rolling.” She waited until he started to change the film roll.

“Paul who?” asked Devon, while he re-wound the film. She got up and went into the bedroom, behind him.

“Aren’t you nosy? Watch it, Jack. You almost sound like you’re jealous.” Her laughter trilled from inside the bedroom. “Anyway, I wouldn’t let him touch me – if I could help it. It’s Franz I really like. He’s a baron or a duke or something – in Germany, I mean. He’s got that funny word in front of his name.”

Devon was struggling to get the camera to accept the new roll of film. “You mean he’s like a ‘von’ or something?”

“Yeah,” she said, “a ‘von’ – von Papen. He’s nice, but he’s kinda weird, too. Not like you’re weird, Jack. Different weird.”

He finally got the film threaded and closed up the camera. It was strange, but he was actually enjoying being a photographer. Maybe he’d do that, after the war. If he survived.

She came out of the bedroom, past him. She’d removed the skirt and waister, and whatever had been underneath, and was now wrapped in her large towel. That’s it, just the towel.

“I thought you said nude was ten bucks extra?”

Sitting on her knees on an armchair, she tucked the towel between her legs. "So, who's nude? Take it."

Click.

"How did you meet the German guy, von Popcorn or whatever his name is?" Click.

"There's a woman, up on West 15th. She invites girls to come and they get to meet people like Paul and Franz." Click. "You know, diplomats and generals and things." Click. "It's not, you know, a whore house, or anything. I mean, some of the girls ... but not me."

"Of course not." Click. "So, who is it runs this place?" Trying not to let his hand shake while he wound the film forward. He was getting more information from this girl than anybody else had given him.

"Believe it or not, she's a baroness. A Russian baroness or something like that. Baroness Anna something – Herdick or Herdicha, or something like that."

Devon knocked over the camera and only just caught it before it hit the floor.

"Take it easy, there, Jack! You're going to lose that roll of film, and I think we're getting some really good shots, don't you?"

He set up the camera again, taking a moment to think through the implications of what he'd just heard. She'd moved to the couch, again, and he began clicking. She was going through poses, while technically keeping her towel in place.

"So, there are generals and people like that at this place?" Click.

"I don't know about generals, but captains – like ship captains, you know." Click.

"And, you meet a lot of diplomats and things, do you? Must be fun, talking to all the big shots." Click.

“Who talks? They talk – in German, mostly. We sit around until they decide they’re ... you know.” Click. “Marie likes Paul a lot. She says he’s kind of cute and that he goes right to sleep after.”

“That’s always a bonus.” Click. He may have been guilty of that himself a few times. “Who’s Marie?”

“My roommate. Marie Wells. She wants to be an actress. She’s pretty good, too.” Click.

“But you like Franz von Popcorn, do you?”

“Ooh, Jackie, you are jealous, ain’t cha? He’s pretty good-looking.” Click. “And, he’s tall, and he’s a baron, so ...” She shifted position and the towel fell away. She didn’t bother to close it up. “He’s pretty weird, though. I mean, pret-tee weird! He likes me to ... well, no, I’d better not.”

“I need to change rolls, again.”

“See, you’re getting the hang of it, Jack.” She got up and went into the bathroom. The towel remained where it had fallen.

He called to her. “When I saw you that day, there were a bunch of young men, all going in and out of the consulate. An awful lot of them.”

Her voice came from behind the door. “Oh, yeah. I saw them when I was waiting for Paul to talk to the Consul. They’re all wanting to join up for something. Join the army or something, maybe, but why go to the German Consulate if you want to join the army? And, something about new passports, too.”

The water was running in the bathroom, now. He’d almost finished changing the roll of film. It was getting easier, although, he thought, if he did become a photographer, maybe he’d

stick to landscapes. A lot less ... tension involved in that. And, if you do go to the German Consulate to join the army – his head was still spinning – it's not the American army you're joining.

“Mena!” After a moment, the water shut off, and she called “You say something?”

“You must get awfully bored, just sitting around waiting for the old guys to stop talking German.”

She came back into the room with him, drying her hands. “Yeah, it's kind of dull, but they take us to lots of dinners and shows and things. I mean, these guys have got money! How they've got money! They take us out a lot. Franz likes to ride in the morning, and then he likes to ... ride – if you know what I mean.” She lowered her voice and whispered “I mean, with riding crops!”

“Really? That's ... uh ... that's interesting.

She leaned on the camera once again, only this time, she stretched her arms out to him and played with his tie. “That's what I thought – the first time. After a while, it gets a little dull.”

“Do you have any idea what those guys talk about? In between the riding crop stuff.”

“I don't talk German, Jack. Sometimes, you can make out a word or two. All last week, Franz was talking to one guy night after night, all about “Das Invasion”. So, I guess they want to invade somewhere. Germany's at war with somebody right now, aren't they? Like, England or something?” She was still playing with his tie. “So, Jackie, where are we going to do this?”

“You're being ambiguous, again.”

She smiled. “Yeah, I am, aren't I? Now, do I spread that towel out on the floor and we try it there, or should I go move my stuff off the bed, and we'll try it there?”

“I thought that was extra.”

“Usually, but ... you told me this is your first time, Jack. There’s no extra charge for virgins.” She took hold of his tie again. “Let’s try it on the bed.” And she walked past him toward the bedroom. Not for the first time that afternoon, Devon was speechless. She paused, framed in the bedroom doorway and turned to him. “Jack! Come on!” She smiled as if a new thought had just hit her. “And, bring the camera.”

And, here was another of those moral dilemmas that can change your life. How a man reacts in a situation like that is a true test of the moral fiber of his being – a true tempering of the steel that makes up his character. Devon honestly had no idea what he was about to do in the next few moments but, if he was honest with himself, he began to suspect his moral fiber was made, not of steel, but putty.

In fact, he was almost grateful when, before his feet had a chance to move, a key turned in the lock, the door swung open, and Eva stepped into the apartment – surprise, then shock, then something else on her face.

The two women spoke together. “Who the hell is she?”

CHAPTER SEVEN

February 3, 1915

He was a hundred and thirty miles from his bed.

The cabbie thought he was nuts when Devon asked to be dropped in the middle of nowhere. Still in the middle of nowhere, Devon was thinking the same thing.. There was a decent sized town not two miles behind him where he could probably find a reasonable hotel room until the morning train to New York came in. Why was he here? Freezing rain had begun to slice down and stung his cheeks like needles. He was nearly a mile from anywhere civilized; it was dark; he was hungry; the evening was cold, wet, and just plain unpleasant. That was all right, though; so was Devon's mood.

When he'd started out to follow the two men who'd come out of 123 West 15th that morning, he'd no idea where they were heading. Grand Central Station had been the first stop,

and it cost Devon twenty bucks before the ticket vendor would tell him what their destination was. The ticket he bought to follow them was only five-fifty. A half-hour wait at the train station led to a four-hour rail journey to Wilmington, Delaware. He wished he'd brought a lunch. Or a flask. When his quarry took a cab from the Wilmington train station he'd been lucky to find a cab himself, in this one-horse, two-cab town. When, at a spot more than a mile out of town, the cab he was following crossed a little river on an unsafe one-lane bridge to the compound he was now watching, he'd let his own cab go on the town-side of the river, or creek, he supposed; the same creek, the Brandywine he mentally noted, where the little Bayard girl had drowned (he wondered idly whether it was also the same Brandywine Creek where Washington had been beaten by the redcoats). Now, he was crouched on the far bank, in the dark, in the freezing rain, in the cold, waiting for two men to come out of the building they'd entered two hours ago. And, he wondered whether the building had anything to do with the little girl's death. It would certainly be an odd coincidence if it didn't and Devon didn't like coincidence, odd or even. And he was willing to lay long odds that it wasn't a coincidence, at all.

He was following the two men because where Betke and Horrell went, destruction followed, sooner or later. They were a truly charming pair of butchers; his entire relationship with them had bordered on violence. One Friday night, they had banged on his door and demanded that he drive a Ford for them so they could plant bombs in New Jersey, like you do on a Friday night, then calmly stood twenty feet away from the car and discussed his murder which, he was happy to reflect, hadn't taken place – at least, not at that time. He was sure they would be happy to encompass it now, if they found out that he'd found them. Together, they could wreak a lot of havoc. What they were doing in Wilmington was a topic of intense interest to him.

His used binoculars had come in handy until the icy rain started and the darkness fell.

Now, he could see little around the set of sheds and concrete buildings ahead. The drizzle blew in frigid sheets in front of the pole lights. He decided, not for the first time, that he was a damn fool.

Many thoughts entered his head as he squinted into the haze. Vivacious Mena Edwards, wrapped only in a towel, which soon fell off. Happy thought. The argument with Eva afterward, a thought he wished he didn't have. The thought of all those lost, unrecoverable photos. Oh, well. He thought of re-crossing the creek to the town-side and heading back to New York. It was either that or get closer to the buildings and find out what was happening.

If the two Germans were here to pick up more explosives of the types they had acquired for their would-be bombing conspiracy last fall, why weren't they at the Deerbrook Explosives Works proper, a half mile back up the road? From the cab, he'd seen the signs directing people there. In fact, you could see the works from the town itself – and how safe was that? At any rate, they were at this place, where the signs only said 'Deerbrook Experimental Station – DANGER – Keep Out', with no indication of what kind of experiments were being conducted there. They'd been met with enthusiasm by men who led them into Building 1. That had been two hours ago. What could be so interesting inside that set of buildings to keep the pair of them occupied for two hours or more?

Having thought of the question, he knew he had no choice but to go in and find out. He got up from his hiding spot and started for Building 1, keeping in shadow where possible. He was already exhausted and it was only Wednesday; the week was far from over and had already far too many 'highlights' for comfort.

Highlight number one: "Who the hell is she?" Eva and Mena had shouted together. The

difference was that Eva finished her sentence with “Mike” while Mena finished hers with “Jack”. They each regarded the other with suspicion and wariness. It was probably confusing for both of them.

It was confusing the hell out of Devon and he was supposed to be the one who actually knew what was happening.

Mena hadn’t bothered to cover herself, and Eva stared at her. Devon decided that ‘gob-smacked’ was the only word in English that fit the expression on her face, because ‘flabbergasted’ was too mild an expression.

Mena was still framed in the bathroom doorway; Eva’s hand was still on the doorknob.
“Mike?” Eva repeated, and Mena followed that with “Jack?”
“Eva, this is Mena; Mena, this is Eva. She’s … uh … no, *she’s* … uh …” He ran out of words.

Mena crossed her arms. “Look, Jack, I told you I don’t do the weird stuff. And two girls is definitely the weird stuff.”

Eva slammed the apartment door. “For god’s sake, girl, will you put some clothes on?”
“Hey, I’m workin’ here!” Mena shouted. She hadn’t been lying about being from Jersey.
“Working? You’re working?” Eva turned her attention to Devon. “Exactly how is this work?”

Mena could and did answer for herself, thank you very much. “We’re taking shots for the Lily Cream account, aren’t we, Jack?”

“His name is Mike.”

“He’s Jack to me.” She still hadn’t moved to dress.

Eva turned back to Devon. “What is a ‘Lily Cream account’? What does that mean?” She still hadn’t moved from the doorway.

“Lily Cream soap. I’m doing shots for the new advertising campaign, dear. It’s a test shoot.” Short of winking outrageously at her, what would it take for her to twig?

“And, that requires her to be naked?”

“Well, not ‘requires’ – I wouldn’t say ‘requires’, exactly.” Devon busied himself collapsing the tripod.

“So, what’s the big idea? And, why am I standing here looking at a naked woman?”

“If you don’t like it, lady, don’t look. Jack never had any complaints about it.” Three seconds of awkwardness, then Mena finally went into the bedroom, shouting back, “It was my idea, not his. I was just trying to give him the kinds of shots he wanted. I didn’t know he had a wife.” She slammed the bedroom door.

If silence could be measured in buckets, the ensuing one could have filled several. It was a considerable amount of silence, until Eva said “I’m waiting.”

And, Devon decided he’d had enough of being flummoxed by women for one day. “You know what? You can keep on waiting. I’ve done nothing that needs explaining, sure as hell not to you, and you’ve got no right to demand explanations. Like the lady said, I’m workin’ here! So take that look off your face, right now!”

“This apartment belongs to Janus!”

“And, I’m working for Janus!” He lowered his voice. “I’m following my assignment in my own way, using agency assets to obtain information the agency is looking for. And I was getting some until you walked in the door.”

“It looked like you were about to get some.” It spoke volumes about Eva’s blood pressure level that she would stoop to a pun like that at a time like this.

“Is that you talking or Operative 14? Either way, I don’t have to answer. He told me to get information. He didn’t say where or how.”

“So, this is where you decided and this is how you chose? Oh, god! I was going to sleep in that bed, tonight!” He couldn’t help but think of the afternoon they’d shared in it. That had been too short and he didn’t think there’d be another meeting here.

“Mena and I never went near the bed. We did everything out here.” That, while being strictly the truth, didn’t really make things better, he decided.

Eva sat on the sofa and put her face in her hands. Devon listened to Mena rustling around in the bedroom. When Eva looked up, she was not crying. “You’re right. I’ve got no right to ask questions. None at all. You’re a free man.”

“You know I’m not,” he began but Mena came from the bedroom just then, dressed, hat on her head, coat over one arm, carpet bag in her hand, galoshes on her feet. She retrieved her towel from the floor.

“Okay, Jack, I’ll skedaddle. That’s forty bucks for the hour and another ten for extras, but you’ve still got a few minutes in your hour, so we’ll say the extras make up for that, shall we?” Devon reached into his pocket and handed over the full forty-five dollars, anyway. “Thanks, Jack. I had a good time. Let me know how them pictures come out. I think you’ve got a real flare for it.” She stretched up on tip-toe to kiss his cheek. “So, I guess I’m not hanging around the phone waiting for a contract, am I?” Devon shook his head. “Oh, well. See ya later, alligator.” Devon hated that kind of slang. Mena stopped at the door to look at Eva. “Sister, I’m sorry. I

didn't know his wife would come walking in the door. I didn't know he *had* a wife."

Eva stared at Devon while she replied, "He doesn't."

Mena's eyes went to Devon, then back to Eva before she shrugged. "You could have fooled me."

She went out the door and closed it behind her. There was an even longer silence as Mena's heels clicked down the hallway and faded down the stairs. When they were well gone, Eva asked, "So, what did you learn, then, Operative Number 68?"

Devon was packing up photographic equipment. "Let's see. I learned that Franz von Papen is probably still in charge in New York; I learned that Paul Koenig is probably his second in command; I learned that he's overseeing things, at least in part, from a brothel that is probably at Number 123 West 15th. I learned that Number 123 West 15th is being run, or at least managed, by Baroness Anna Herdizcka, who, in another life, is Max von Louden's wife, or ex-wife, Lalia Florence Jansen. I learned that Franz von Papen likes things spicy, with riding crops, no less, and I learned that he's planning an invasion – somewhere, sometime – all of which corroborates information I got listening at key-holes and invading ladies' boudoirs. And, I'd probably have got more Mischievous Mean, there, if you hadn't come in."

He said all that while pulling film from the spools, yard after yard of it, exposing every frame to the light. Every picture he'd taken that afternoon was gone. The photographer in him winced at every foot that got exposed.

Eva watched until he was done, and finally said, "You know, Mike, if you wanted pictures like that, you could have asked me."

For the second time that afternoon, Devon was flummoxed by a woman. At last, he

managed to say, "I didn't ask for pictures like that. I just needed pictures while she gave me info. And, I don't need pictures like that of you – I've got them all – in color – up here." He tapped his temple. "Where I keep them very safe."

She didn't know what to say about that.

Crouching on the riverbank in Delaware, he smiled ruefully at remembrances and shook his head. Even at his ripe old age, women were a complete mystery to him. He laughed out loud. It was half his lifetime ago that a nice woman had shown him what went where. He wiped the cold sleet from his face and sprinted through the lighted area toward the first of the Deerbrook out-buildings.

The building he reached first was labeled simply 'G' and seemed empty. 'F' was the same. The rest were closer to the main buildings and might yield more results. 'D' and 'E' were filled with grass rakes, cutters and a couple of old automobiles – more than 10 years old by the look of them. He doubted they'd run. 'C' was filled with – hay. Hay and nothing else that he could see. 'A' and 'B' were bigger than the others and, the closer he got, the more he knew what they contained. 'A' was sheep; 'B' was pigs. It was easy to distinguish between the species. Olfactorily, of the two, he preferred the sheep.

What, did Old Deerbrook have a farm? Ee-aye-ee-aye-oh?

That left the two concrete main buildings. They were larger still, with heavy concrete walls. He ducked as low as he could and ran to the closest building. Up and down each side, painted lettering read: "Deerbrook Experimental Station, Building 2. CAUTION: Dangerous Chemicals In Use." Well, he couldn't argue with them: nitroglycerin was dangerous.

Around what he assumed was Deerbrook Experimental Station, Building 1, a quarter mile

away, he saw guards patrolling the walkways. A truck approached the building and was stopped by the guards. Evidently all was well, for they waived it through, toward Devon's building and he pulled back into what shadows he could find.

The truck didn't come to him, though, but turned off and went up the lane to outbuilding 'B'. In a couple of minutes, the squeal of pigs was heard and, a minute later, the truck made its way back to Building 1. From his hiding place, Devon saw the pigs being off-loaded and herded into the building (do you herd pigs? He'd met a couple of shepherds, but never a pigherd.).

So, what was going on inside that building? And, why pigs? Were they blowing them up? Shooting them? Something else? That was a lot of pork chops on the hoof they'd herded in there just to blow into small pieces.

Maybe they were experimenting with concentrated meat rations; experimental ways to create bacon for the troops. Or, maybe the cold and the sleet were making him groggy. His brain was wandering in all directions, like back to the afternoon photo shoot with Mischievous Mean Edwards. Concentrate, Devon!

Swineherd! People who herded pigs were swineherds. He felt better.

Highlight number two: He'd packed away all the photographic equipment before she spoke again.

"I didn't know if I'd see you again, Mike. Are you good?"

He held out his hands to her. "I'm healing. It's taking a while."

"Yeah," she said. "These things take a while."

"Did you have a good time in Chicago?"

"Chicago?"

“Your dad told me you were there.”

“Right.” There was another pause. “Yeah, I had a great time in Chicago. The best.”

He sat beside her as she sat on the sofa and took her hand. “Then what’s wrong? I’m glad to see you, even if you’re not glad to see me.”

“Yeah, it looked like it when I came in.”

He laughed. “That was business, I promise. Just business. She ... surprised me with that.

She seemed to think it was standard procedure. You’ve got to wonder what kind of sessions she’s used to. Eva, I never asked her to take anything off. And, I never touched her.” He wasn’t sure how much longer that statement would have been true, if Eva hadn’t come in when she did.

She pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes. “You were thinking about it when I opened the door.”

“Yes. I was. You went to Chicago, remember? Not even a note. Nothing.” He looked into her face. “We said a final goodbye – you in that bed right there; me at that door, right there. I tried to get an address from your secretary, but he cut me dead. I didn’t know how to even try to talk to you.”

At long last, she burst into tears, threw her arms around his neck and held on as if her life depended on it.

“Eva! What? What’s wrong? I never touched her, I promise.” Surely that wasn’t the cause of the outburst. Not from Eva.

Her cheek was against his, her lips close to his ear as she whispered, her breath hot against his face.

“I’m sorry, Mike. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry!” Her arms tightened even more.

“Sorry? For what? Eva! What?”

Her whisper was even more urgent, “I lost him, sweetheart. I lost our baby.”

And, then she had breathed twice, hot and shaky, risen from the sofa, walked out the door and closed it behind her.

And he hadn’t seen her since.

He hadn’t known. Didn’t have an inkling. Should have known; should have realized the possibility. It had happened before and she had ended up dead at the bottom of a mountain pass.

Dear god, not again!

As he felt tears sting his eyes afresh along with the ice rain that was stinging his cheeks, red lights above every door in Building 1 came on, a klaxon began to sound, and the guards moved back a good distance from the building.

Everything paused, and Devon waited. Two minutes; five minutes; ten minutes and no boom. The lights went out, the klaxon stopped and the guards moved back closer.

Another several minutes passed; the door opened; a line of men pushing handcarts with something on them came out of the building and proceeded to the truck, where the truck crew loaded whatever was on the handcarts onto the back of the truck. Men and handcarts went back into the building; the truck started up and drove off toward where it originally appeared. The guards continued to guard whatever it was they were guarding.

Devon was starting to get sleepy when Betke and Horrell came out of the building, shook hands with a couple of men who had accompanied them, waited until a cab arrived, boarded it and went back toward the town.

That was it? That was what he had followed them a hundred and thirty miles for? If so, it

was very disappointing.

Devon wasn't sleepy anymore, but it was going to be a long, cold walk back to the train station. And it was going to be a long cold ride back to New York. The freezing rain was piling up in slush-filled puddles and his shoes were the worse for wear. He really needed to plan these little trips better.

He really needed to plan a lot of things better: his life, his loves, his women. His family. If ever he was going to have family.

He doubted that at the moment. All he was certain of now was a cold.

CHAPTER EIGHT

February 5, 1915

Number 123 West 15th was a gray stone walk-up surrounded by brownstones. There was absolutely nothing to distinguish it from its neighbors, apart from being gray instead of brown.

It was four storeys with nine steps leading up to the front door and three front windows on each of the floors above. Light came from the two first floor windows, flanking the entryway, and light could be seen coming from under the shades of a couple of the windows farther up. The gable crowning the building was also illuminated.

In short, a typical New York walk-up, like thousands around the city. It was hard to imagine that, inside, it was a flop-house, a bar, a brothel for German sailors—oh, and a haven for

German spies and saboteurs, too.

It was actually a rather nice building, which surprised Devon no end. Not that he didn't know nice buildings existed in Manhattan, it was just that he almost never got to enter them.

He hadn't entered this one, yet. He walked past it twice, once on each side of the street, just to sniff it out. Nobody had gone in or come out since he started watching, but it may have been a slow night.

He crossed to the far side of the street once again and walked back to Broadway. Three minutes there, keeping an eye on Number 123 gave him nothing more than a few shadows falling on the drawn curtains of the second storey windows. In fact, all of the curtains were firmly drawn – a reasonable precaution, given the building's purpose.

Which left him two options: stand there for the rest of the night; or go knock on the door. Well, he could also go home and get a good night's sleep but that wasn't likely to happen.

When his hand was raised to knock, the door opened and a slightly drunken young woman, accompanied by a more drunken, not particularly young man, pulled up short at seeing him. "*Entschuldigen Sie uns,*" the man managed to get out and Devon, suddenly equally drunk, managed "*Ich bitt' um Verzeihung!*" He stumbled into the building as the pair tumbled out.

The air was heavy with smoke – cigar smoke mostly, by the smell – and was too thickly hot for comfort. German music was thumping from down the hall, tinny and a little wobbly, out of a phonograph. Laughter and loud talk came from the lower level, an intriguing soft light came down the stairway. Up seemed a more attractive direction; he wasn't about to get involved with whoever was throwing the party downstairs.

The carpet on the stairway was so plush that it was actually a pleasure to walk on. His

footsteps were noiseless as he climbed, which is probably the reason for the carpet: who wants to advertise who's going up and down the stairs?

The second floor showed a spill of light from two rooms and vague noises coming out into the hall from them. He wouldn't disturb the pair in each – assuming it was a pair. The other two rooms were empty and silent and locked. He thought about picking the locks, but decided there were other fish farther up.

The third floor was similar but with only one occupied room. No amorous sounds emanated from that room, just a small glow of light and the sound of deep snoring. At least one person was sleeping. The rest of the rooms were locked.

That left the garret, which had shown lights from outside. The stairs leading up to the top were narrow and bare; each foot was set down as lightly as possible on the extreme sides of the tread but even so, there were a number of creaks. As he neared the top, he reached behind and slid the cold gray Dreyse automatic out of his belt. The safety eased off with barely a sound.

He'd reached the last tread and placed his hand on the door-knob when the voice called through the door.

“You might as well come in, Frank. I saw you prowling around outside ten minutes ago.”

He hadn't thought he'd ever hear that voice again, and when he stepped into the attic, it was a face he hadn't thought he'd ever see again.

“Hello, Countess. You look good.” When he'd first met her, her sole covering had been a lace shawl – and she looked good then. Now, she was wonderfully elegant in what were surely the latest fashions, dripping with jewelry, real or not, he couldn't say. And, she looked good, now, too.

“I’m merely a baroness, now, Frank. I’ve been demoted a bit. How the mighty have fallen.” Her cigarette was held in a ridiculously long ivory tube. Devon, who had kept his promise to his mother never to smoke, was both a little shocked and a little titillated to see a woman smoking. It seemed unnatural and arousing at the same time.

“Yes, I’d heard about that. Still, it’s better than a hash-slinger from Queens, isn’t it?” He smiled at her. There had been a day when he could have had her for the asking; now, he was sure, the price would be much higher. “Baroness Anna Herdzcka lives again, and not just on stage. Are you still Russian nobility?”

“Of course not. I am Hungarian.” She said it in a thick accent that might have been Hungarian, then laughed with him, and threw one end of her shawl over her shoulder, reminiscent of the first time they’d met.

“Lalia Florence Janson. How did you end up here, Lal?”

She seemed shocked at the question. “What do you mean, how?” She pointed an accusing finger. “You’re to blame, of course. What did you tell the authorities about Max?”

“Lal, I’m innocent! I promise I never said a word about your hubbie to the authorities. It was the Pinkertons working with the cops, not me.” Technically true. He’d passed everything to Janus. What happened from there, who knew?

“Truly? Oh, well. That stupid show Max was in closed within a couple of weeks; we lost the apartment, and Max had the beautiful idea of going back to Boston. He had ... old friends there he could get money from. Lots of them. A dozen or so. All women, all desperate for a man. All panting for Baron Max von Louden.”

Something clicked in Devon’s brain. “Let me guess: he’s under arrest for breach of

promise?"

"How did you guess? Many breached promises. He's even accused of jilting me – or jilting the Baroness, at least, but, of course, she's in Hungary and can't be contacted!"

Devon shook his head. "It must have been a fun game while it lasted."

"Mostly, but ... there was another girl. The idiot married her and, when she found out the truth, she killed herself. They're trying to hold him on that, too. And, little Lally needed a roof over her head, so you take what you can get ..."

"And, you ended up here – through Paul Koenig's good offices?" Not just a strong arm man, but a pimp, too. Koenig's list of redeeming qualities never ended.

She took a drag on her cigarette and raised a painted eyebrow in assent. "It's not bad, really. It's not like I go up with the sailors. I run the place, keep the bar stocked, throw out a few drunken sailors. When they bring in a new girl, I get her invited for a dance and a romantic supper. Mostly it's officers, though."

"Drunken officers?"

She shrugged and her diamonds glittered. Or her paste.

"Like Franz von Papen?"

"Franz doesn't drink ... much. He's fond of other things."

"Women."

"Franz has his favorites."

"Mena Edwards." Test Mena's story a bit.

"How do you know her? She's one of them, but she's a little too prissy. Doesn't take money for it – she's an artist or something. He's got others – there's a French girl: Vera. Now,

she's a goer. She has ... specialties – used to be an acrobat or something. Not to be confused with Veruska, as the men call her. A big girl. She's trouble. A real Hungarian, so I've got to be careful around her. Ze ecksent, dawlink."

She finished her cigarette and pulled the butt from the ivory tube, stubbing it in an ashtray.

"Look, Frank. I've got to go back down. I'd tell you to leave, but I know you won't. Don't stick your head into any of the rooms, please. They're not doing anything you need to butt into but ... there are people in those rooms who would hurt you badly. Koenig is in one of them, right now."

"Which one?"

"I'm not going to tell you – and in the others there are great big German sailors who will beat you senseless and throw you out a window."

"I promise I won't interrupt any coupling couples."

She laughed aloud. "There's only one actual couple in those rooms. The others – you'd be surprised. Listen to me, Frank. It's downstairs you're interested in. The basement. The stuff they've got going on down there scares hell out of me."

"Stuff like what?" but she shook her head.

"Go down and find out for yourself. Just be careful. Don't linger. There are some very nasty people under this roof, right now."

She started to move toward the stair, with an elegant swish. He caught her hand as she passed him.

"Lal, I'm sorry it didn't work out better for you. None of this was your fault."

Her voice was suddenly husky and full of danger. “Don’t worry about me, dawlink. In zis place, I am finally beck on ze stage! I am playink ze greatest role of my life! Lalia Florence Jansen is now, for all time, ze Baroness Anna Herdizcka!” She clasped the back of his hand to her breast, looked deeply into his eyes and brushed her lips softly against his, before sweeping majestically down the stair.

She really was a great actress.

Waiting for her to pass out of sight below, he listened for any sounds from the rooms on the top floor. All was nicely quiet, and even the gramophone from the parlor was silent for a while.

The basement was a distant three floors away, and probably only accessible from the back of the house. He made it down the two long flights, thankful for the carpeting. Even the parlor party had quieted down, although the sounds told him they definitely weren’t asleep. Peering into the building’s depths, he made his way quietly toward the back. With even a little luck, nobody would even know he had been here.

The parlor door opened and, from inside, a woman’s voice pleaded “*Karlie! Komm zurück!*”

“*Ich muss Lulu gehen. Wart’st du!*” The backside of a fat, balding man in union underwear and gartered socks appeared, just as Devon saw that the door under the stairway was standing open. Before the man could turn and head for the *Lulu*, Devon stepped into the opening, eased the door to behind him, and realized he was at the top of the basement stair.

He heard the underwear-clad man pad down the hallway toward him, stop at the basement door and grunt. “*Idioten!*” was his summary and the door clicked closed. That he considered

leaving the basement door ajar an '*Idioten*' move meant there was, indeed, something going on down below.

As the door closed, it got suddenly dark in the stairway and a lot less solid than he might have liked. Hands groping on either side of the door didn't turn up a light switch and he didn't even have matches to relieve the dank darkness. He might have to take up smoking, after all.

Thirteen steps, an ominous number, down to the dirt floor of the basement and still no sign of a light switch. The walls were clammy with condensation and there was a pervading oily, musty smell. From somewhere far in the stygian depths of the basement, he heard the continuing sound of an electric motor, running what sounded like a pump of some kind.

Hands still groping, he found that the wall fell away to his left, presumably making a small room under the building's vestibule above. Following the line of the stair riser, he felt out the depth of the room, which ended maybe half-way to the back of the house. There was probably another room on the other side of the stone wall he bumped into.

And, he found a light switch. And, he turned it.

A pair of high-wattage bulbs lit the basement with a white glare, and suddenly he was standing in the middle of the German army's high command center. Or, at least, the North American branch of it.

The basement was adorned with blueprints, maps, and photographs. Racks of small arms lined the walls beneath them. Tables interspersed between racks showed weapons that were being worked on, equipment of mysterious types being assembled, and what looked to be theatrical disguises hanging on hooks. What kind of wonder world had he stumbled upon?

The stair he had come down looked even more frail than he had felt it to be, with a couple

of well decayed treads in the middle. He vowed not to go up it, if it could be helped. A door at the far end offered a promise of exit out the back way.

At the front of the building, in the alcove to the left of the stairs, crates were stacked, each marked '40% DXW' inside the famous antlered oval logo – dynamite from Deerbrook Explosive Works. Things just got better and better with these people. *Frau Seithen* had allowed enough 40% to be stored in her back room to level a few buildings – the pile in front of him would level a block and dig a hole the same size beneath it. He used a screwdriver sitting conveniently on a bench to open one crate to be sure and there were the deadly sticks lying like sausages in a row.

Devon was suddenly glad he didn't smoke. He closed up the crate, stopping at the last minute to tuck a couple of samples into his inside coat pocket. It's always good to have evidence.

Back at the work tables, he found German Mausers and British Lee Enfields, even a Canadian Ross, being worked on, while, in the racks along the walls, many of the rifles were still wrapped in waxed paper and Cosmoline grease – rack after rack of Krag-Jorgensens, the rifle the U.S. had taken to fight the Spanish in '98; a rifle that, in North America, would only be found in those quantities in U.S. armories. Yet, there they were – looking fresh from the factory, and not like they'd been dragged through a Cuban jungle. Or a Philippine swamp.

Dozens of papers lined the walls: sketches of buildings and waterworks; photos, most from long distance, of locks and canals, of ports and piers, of ships and factories. There were even blueprints of power-generators – in all, page after page of drawings. He decided it was only locations that were important and tried to turn his memory into a camera, taking in the 'where and what' on as many as he could.

Feet moved overhead, and he was back at the light switch, turning the knob and dipping

the basement into darkness once more.

The door to the rear of the cellar was four steps back and two steps left of the light switch. He was through it in short order. A single small-wattage bulb, already burning, lit this space. Shelves filled with supplies for Lal's kitchen lined three walls, canned and bottled goods, preserves, even a well-stocked wine store. The reason for the small-wattage bulb was probably because all the rest of the electrical current in this room was taken up by the motor and pump that were whirring and chugging beside a large metal enclosure with a door on the front. He put a hand on the door and pulled it back in surprise, eyes wide, jaw hanging.

There was frost on the door.

He'd never seen one before, only read about them, but there was no doubting what this was. A refrigeration box! They made things inside them cold, perhaps even frozen, without needing ice. A modern marvel! His curiosity over how it worked was tempered by his curiosity over what these Teutonic slobs wanted to keep cold.

A heavy chain with a padlock kept intruders, like Devon, out but where there's a will, there's a set of lock-picks. And, when the lock-picks fail, the screwdriver from the other room will remove a hinge in short order. The door, without hinges, simply slid away from the front of the unit.

Inside, the box was lined with shelves, all filled with interesting items. From the top of the box hung meat, frozen solidly. More meat, fish and boxed goods were stacked on the left hand shelves.

On the right hand shelves, a dozen small metal boxes were carefully packed among straw bedding. The marking 'C3H5N3O9 – DXW' was prominent on each. Even more prominent was

the stamp 'DANGER – HIGH EXPLOSIVE.'

The idiots were storing nitroglycerin in the basement.

The safest thing to do was to run screaming from the building and call in the police, the fire department, the army and the navy. Maybe a priest or two, as well. What he did was lift the lid on the furthest box and remove a half-ounce glass vial.

He convinced himself that was safe. The stuff was frozen and, from what he'd read, was safe to handle as long as it was. Relatively safe, that is. Say, reducing your chance of scattered body parts below 50/50.

He hoped.

Nitro vial laid carefully down, he wrestled the freezer door back into place, replaced the screws and put the screwdriver back. Nobody would know the unit had been opened, and, with any luck, nobody would miss that one vial until they looked in the back crate. A lot of things would be blown up before they opened that tin. He'd be long gone by then.

Speaking of which, it was time to go.

A final check to make sure the refrigeration box door was closed properly, the hinges were rescrewed tightly, and to retrieve his deadly little vial from its resting place, then he was ready to climb the rear staircase, presumably to the kitchen, when he noticed a low door at the very end of the basement, probably leading outside. He passed up on the stair and chose the door instead. With his hand on its latch, he was stopped by a snarly little voice behind him that spat a challenge across the room.

“Du! Was machst du hier! Antworten sie – schnell!”

Oh, he was tired of Germans. Why couldn't Canada go to war with someone else? Italy,

for example. Italian was a nice-sounding language – no snarling or spitting involved.

Devon was suddenly staggeringly drunk. As he turned, he knocked a jar of pickles off a shelf, and stared down at the spreading mess.

“Entschuldigen Sie mir, Kumpel! Wo ist der Pisser?”

He looked at whoever had spoken and stopped. He was facing a little, blond, monkey-faced bastard with the meanest eyes he'd ever seen. They were the palest blue – almost white, and they glared from eye-sockets that were deeply set and rimmed with red. His eyes were close together, his mouth pushed forward by badly set teeth, his nose small and turned up – there was no other way to describe him: he looked like a monkey. Devon recovered and continued his drunken lurch. *“Ich hab’ die Gurken zerbroch’n!”* He stared, deliberately stupid, at the mess of pickles, glass and brine on the floor.

“Verdammte Gurken! Was machst du hier?” For a little man, he seemed to assume a lot of authority. Perhaps, because he had a lot of authority? That was a question to be considered.

“Ich suche der Pisser! Ich muss mal pissen!” When he thought about it, he realized he did have to piss.

“Oben, Idiot! Raus hier!” He'd have *raus*'ed two minutes ago, if the guy hadn't come in.

“Okay,” Devon spread his hands in surrender. “Don't get your garters twisted, pal. I'm going.”

“I speak English as well as I do German ... pal. Get out.” Devon started for the door to the front of the basement. “Not that way! Up these stairs.” Devon held up his hands and started up the back staircase, when the little man stopped him again. “Why did you try to go through that door? Did you come in that way? What did you see?” The little eyes got meaner. “Answer me!”

CHAPTER NINE

February 6, 1915

The little man's eyes got little and paler. Devon felt a little nauseated just looking at them. "I didn't come that way. I didn't see anything but pickles. I just need to find the pisser."

"I think you saw more than you should have. I think you need to see less."

The man began to reach inside his coat; Devon's hand went behind his waist. It would be close, but Devon's safety was already off.

"Jackie! Where are you? Jackie! I'm going to find you!" The door at the top of the stair opened and the female voice became louder. "Jackie! Are you down there?"

Both men paused with hands out of sight. Neither took their eyes off the other. Devon was confident now that he could shoot faster than the other, but a pretty girl is better company than a corpse, any day.

A second's reflection made up his mind. "Yeah, down here!" There was only one person it could be.

A pair of nice ankles he'd seen before, followed by equally familiar calves and thighs in a tight skirt preceded the rest of Mena Edwards down the steps.

"What are you doing down here? I told you not to get lost." She reached his side and took his hand. Turning, she saw the other man. "Moxie! Did you bring Jackie down here? What are *you* doing down here?"

So, this was Mox? Devon decided he didn't like him after all.

The pale-eyed gnome stared hard at both of them. "Nothing. Now, get him out of here!"

"We're going, Moxie, we're going." She led Devon up the stairs by the hand.

"*Auf wiedersehen, Moxie. Tut mir leid weg'n der Gurk'n.*" The apology was sincere. It was a shame to waste good pickles, like that.

"Enough with the squarehead talk, already. Are you two down here, jabberin' away in kraut talk to each other? Let's go, Jackie. It's past my bedtime." She was pulling him up that stair with each word.

At the top of the stairs, she closed the door quickly, and he turned to her, ready to join in a laugh. She, however, was in no laughing mood, grabbing a coat from where she'd left it on the back of a chair and whispering urgently. "Come on! Now! Out the door and run for the street! Run!"

She pushed him out of the building, hiked her skirts, and they ran down the back alley, Mena looking back every few strides and urging him to run faster.

On Broadway, she tugged him into a streetcar and watched the corner urgently until they

were a dozen blocks away. At last, she relaxed and turned to look at him.

“Jack, you’re a disaster waiting to happen! Do I have to rescue you every time? First, you’re the worst photographer ever, and now, you’re an even worse spy!”

Devon had to agree with both assessments. He also had to keep up pretenses.

“A spy? What makes you think ... ?”

“I can put two and two together, Jackie. And this time it comes up five!”

She wouldn’t say anything else all the way from West 27th to West 86th. As they neared West 86th, she grabbed his hand again and pulled him off the tram before it had stopped. Still dragging him along, she stepped into the lobby of a nearly-new establishment that called itself the Hotel Bretton Hall.

It was far nicer, and newer, than Devon’s flop at the Empire, and it made you wonder how a photography model’s uncertain income might have afforded it. He decided not to think about that but, rather, just admire the thick carpet in the lobby which had just been freshly cleaned; the brass door handles, freshly shone; the soft but solid furniture. The night clerk, put there precisely to stop such things as young ladies taking gentlemen up to their rooms late at night, didn’t even twitch as they went past him and up the stairs. Eight flights later, he was ushered into an apartment on the fourth floor.

“Okay,” she said, at last. “You can talk now.”

“First things first. You got an ice-box?”

“A what? Yeah, a’ course.”

“Is there ice in it?”

“Maybe.”

“Go look.”

She went into the kitchenette and opened the box. “Yeah, new block.”

“Okay. Leave it open and step out here.”

“Jack, you get weirder all the time.” But, she stepped out of the little kitchen.

At the ice-box, he grabbed a dish-towel off the counter and formed a cushion on top of the ice. Moving very carefully and slowly, he took the vial of nitroglycerin from his upper pocket and stood it upright in the middle of the towel, the bottom touching the ice. The liquid in the vial was still frozen. As an after-thought, he put the two sticks of 40% DXW in with it. It probably wouldn’t help, but it wouldn’t hurt, either.

Back from the kitchen, he smiled at her and said, “All right. Now we can talk.”

She pointed a finger toward the kitchen. “What did you put in there?” Somehow, she didn’t seem to trust him implicitly.

“The less you know, the better. Just don’t shake the ice-box.” He forestalled any further conversation on that topic by cleverly changing the subject.

“So, to cleverly change the subject, how did you know I was in the basement, back there?”

“Oh, boy, Jack! Where would you be if you didn’t have people looking out for you? The Baroness hunted me up in one of the back rooms and told me to go rescue you. She’d seen Mox go down and hadn’t seen you come up. That’s not a good thing. The Baroness likes you, lover, likes you a lot.”

He thought about that and decided to take it with a grain of salt. He’d also, for the time being, pass up asking why she was in one of the back rooms. He sat on a sofa and leaned back.

“So, the monkey-faced boy *is* the infamous Mox?”

“Mox is Mox and he’s ... he’s ... well, it’s best not to get him angry.” A slight shiver while she said it.

“What happens when Mox gets angry?”

There was a space of two breaths. Her face was frightened. “Bad things happen – maybe to you; maybe to me.”

“What’s Mox do back at No. 123, anyway?”

“He ... brings people in, I guess. Not girls; the Baroness finds girls. Mox brings in men: ’boes, molly boys, winos, goof balls, anybody he can put the twist on.”

“What’s the twist for?”

“So they’ll do the dirty jobs. If some old queer has got a business going, or a wife and kids, he’ll do a lot to keep his name out of the papers. So, they do the jobs none of the officers want.”

“What kind of jobs?”

“You’re nosy. Don’t ask me; I don’t want to know. None of it’s nice.”

“What do the officers want?”

“What the officers want mostly is the girls – although a few of them ...” She raised her eyebrows and shrugged, then came over and sat beside him, slipped off her shoes, pulled stocking feet under her, elbow on the back of the sofa, head resting on her hand.

He continued. “And, he gives the goof balls the stuff they need, and the ’boes get a flop and a meal ...”

“And a bottle,” she added. “And, sometimes, he helps girls get rid of problems – the kind

working girls can suddenly develop. You know. Or so the girls say. I don't know." She suddenly changed her tone. "I don't know. Forget I said anything."

"What kind of things does he make people do?"

"I told you before, it's all in German. Let's not talk about Mox, any more, Jackie."

"Oh, let's. I find him infinitely intriguing."

She leaned back to focus on him better. "Really? I sure didn't read you that way back at the Lily Cream Soap shoot."

"He's a plug-ugly, poisonous little maniac – and I've only just met him. He looks like he'd kill somebody for a match and I'm pretty sure he's done so already. And yet, for all that, I find myself desirous of making his further acquaintance."

She laughed out loud at that, then stopped suddenly. "Why do you want to know about Mox?"

He looked at her very seriously. "Because some people are going to get hurt and other people are going to get killed if your friends Mox and Koenig and von Papen and some others get to keep on doing what they're planning to do."

She looked at him for a long time. "Mox is ... I don't know ... the other girls ... they said that he ... killed two girls that wanted to tell the police ... what they had to do at Number 123. He gave them pills so that it looked like they ... killed themselves."

"Who were these girls?"

"I don't know. Just two of the girls. I just don't want him to do it to me, Jack." She was shaking.

Devon spoke very quietly. "He won't."

She looked at him again, with searching eyes. "What are you?" but she got no answer from his eyes. "'Cause you sure ain't no photographer, and you ain't no shutter-happy lech, neither." She laughed again. "Well, you're a lech, but you're a gentleman about it. You ain't even put a hand on me, yet, despite me leaving it wide open for ya. Could give a girl a complex." A new idea popped into her head. "Say, Jackie, did those pix come out? I wanted to see them. There were some good ones, I bet."

"I'm afraid they were all exposed before I could develop them. All of them. All lost."

She put her left hand on his cheek. "Ain't that too bad. I think there were some good ones, there." Pulling his head in close, she whispered. "Maybe we should do some more."

Her lips nearly brushed his and Devon was having another character-building moment, when the apartment door was flung open and someone entered with a bang. Or several bangs.

"Mena-a-a-a!" the newcomer wailed. Another female.

"Oh, Christ!" Mena called back over her shoulder. "In here, honey!" Eyes fixed on Devon's. "Man in the house, kiddo!" She put her lips close to his, again, and whispered, "We never get a break, do we, Jack?"

The newcomer came around the corner, shedding hat and coat and galoshes as she came. She was perhaps twenty. She had a head of gloriously curly dark hair. She was vivaciously pretty. She was unbelievably drunk.

"Oh, Marie, you poor kid!" Mena said. "Come over here and sit before you fall." She patted the sofa beside her.

Marie negotiated the narrow path between the sofa and the cocktail table in front of it. When she got to her friend, she flopped down onto Mena's lap, her back toward Devon and her

arms around Mena's neck.

"He doesn't want me any more!" The sentence began as a whisper and ended as a wail.

The waterworks were turned on about halfway through it and she collapsed in sobs on Mena's shoulder at the end of it.

"Who doesn't, sweetie?" Mena's look to Devon across the sobbing girl's back told him she knew.

"Paul! He said he could get ten girls better than me anywhere."

"That's not true." Mena was rocking her friend in her arms. Devon was feeling very much a fifth wheel. Or, at least, a third party.

"All the things I let him do to me!" She lifted her head to look at Mena. "He's weird, you know?"

"Yes, honey, I do know." She looked over to Devon and shrugged a little apology.

"He kept wanting me to ..."

Mena put a hand over Marie's mouth at that point. "Man in the house, sweetie." Marie became aware that someone else was occupying part of the sofa and leaned back until she practically fell into Devon's arms. Mena looked to the ceiling, or maybe to God, for strength and shook her head.

"Who're you?" Marie slurred. "Who's that, Mena?"

"That's Jack. And, Jack, that's Marie. Marie drinks, sometimes. And, Marie's got terrible taste in men, all the time. And, Marie, Jack's a spy!" Devon opened his mouth to protest, but Mena cut him off. "Oh, she's never going to remember this. Are you, honey? Because Marie got in a fight with Paul, tonight, and she drank 'way too much, and in the morning, she'll be sick as a

dog, and the next day, she'll go right back to him. 'Cause that's the way it happens every time, doesn't it, Marie?"

Marie had snuggled up to Devon's chest and closed her eyes. "He's big," she said sleepily, then she opened her eyes again. "Oh, Mena! I'm sorry! You two were going to play tangletoes, weren't you?" She rubbed Devon's chest with her free hand. "He's big. So ... what was your name ... Jack! So, Jack, I was playing tangletoes tonight and Paul got mad because I wouldn't do some stuff he wanted, and he said I was just ..." She gulped a breath before continuing. "... a whore and he could get ten girls better than me! And, he went downstairs and he got one! And, they started right in front of me! So I got dressed and I stole his precious little book because he's always writing stuff in it and I know he's writing stuff about me, and I left. And I don't think he even noticed!" She dipped a hand into her neckline and fumbled around for a few moments before pulling her top wide and looking down in. Devon tried not to look along with her but, hey, he's just a man. Raising his eyes, he met Mena's sardonic smile. After much searching, Marie finally produced a leather-bound book that made Devon's heart beat faster than did having two women with their arms around him.

Marie began to cry onto Devon's chest. "And, Mena, I know what you always say, but I'm never going back there!" She continued to rub tears and mascara and rouge onto Devon's nearly-new shirt.

The last time he'd seen the book now in Marie's hand, he'd been on von Papen's cruiser in the middle of Lake Erie, the smoke of rifle-fire in the air, the softness of Margit Seithen's nakedness under him, the futility of everything he'd done to that point burning at his gut, as he slid the book across the cabin floor and surrendered to Koenig and his thugs.

What was the book? Nothing less than Paul Koenig's journal, filled with delicious details Devon had only had time to glance at before it was forcibly taken from him. This time, there were no guns, saboteurs, international agents or secret plots between it and him, nothing but a girl who'd imbibed far too much. And, now, it was back down in the depths of her bosom.

"Come on, sweetie. Let's put you to bed." Mena tried to take Marie's arms from around Devon, but Marie stirred herself enough to push Mena's hands away. "No! Not you." She snuggled up to Devon again. "I want Paul to put me to bed. Put me to bed, Paul. Please."

Devon looked helplessly to Mena, who shrugged and rolled her eyes again. He gathered the drunken girl up in his arms and stood. Mena led the way to Marie's bedroom and he placed her on the bed as gently as he could.

Marie wasn't going to let go. With her left arm tightly around his neck, she whispered "You're not Paul. You're Jack. I remember – you're big. Can you get ten girls better than me anywhere, Jack?" He shook his head. "No, you can't. 'Cause I'm good. I am. Are you going to stay with me, tonight, Jack?" He shook his head, again, and she pulled him down and kissed him. "Okay. You go play tangletoes with Mena. I'll let you in on a secret. She's good, too."

She released his neck and he stood. Marie turned her head away and fell asleep in as much time as it takes to say it. Devon was in another of his moral quandaries. Does stealing an object, like a book, from someone who stole it from someone else still constitute stealing? He couldn't decide. Not that it made any difference. Either way, it went into his pocket.

Mena was at the bedroom door, waiting. He passed by her, went into the kitchen and removed his items from the ice-box, and made for the door of the apartment. She followed, putting her arms around his neck at the door.

“No tangletoes, tonight?” Devon shook his head one last time. She put her hand into his jacket, pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped his lips. “I’m not kissing you goodbye over somebody else’s lipstick. Not even Sleeping Beauty’s in there.” She put the handkerchief back, pausing to touch the items he’d placed there. “Oh my, Jack. You really are dangerous, aren’t you? I like that in a man. Even when he steals books from under my friend’s tits.” That sardonic smirk again. “Yes, I saw it. Did you have a good feel while you were there?”

“Strictly business, ma’am. I’d never take advantage.”

“No. I don’t think you would. You’re a strange one, Jack.”

She raised herself up and kissed him, hard and long. Devon’s moral fiber was in danger of turning to putty again. Finally, she let him go and stepped back.

“But, I know … you’ve got a wife.” He had nothing to say to that. She pulled out the handkerchief again and wiped his lips. “Get rid of that hankie before you go home.” And he left her at the door. She stepped into the hallway to watch him go. Halfway down the hall, her voice reached him again. “Jack! Come back when you don’t have a wife.”

Crossing the lobby, he was beginning to believe that he really was a morally upright kind of guy. Two years ago – six months ago – he’d never have walked out of that apartment that night – and maybe not for a week. He paused at the desk to ring the bell, then exited the building, as the night clerk woke and tried to figure out what had happened.

On the streetcar, thumbing through Koenig’s journal, flipping page after page, Devon realized it was the diary of every meeting Koenig had with his higher ups – von Papen, of course, but also a man called von Rintelen and another called Boy-Ed. He’d heard that last name before. Koenig was an idiot. In English and German, the journal was a day-to-day account of his

dealings with von Papen and his cohorts. Paul Koenig was the gate through which a flow of information and activity passed and he'd detailed it all, right here.

Damn it! Should he head back to Janus right now, or digest the book first to see what other connections he could make?

Also, should he continue to bump and thump his way across New York with half-an-ounce of rapidly thawing nitroglycerin and two sticks of dynamite in his pockets, or should he find a safer place for the items before the inevitable happened?

And, on a related note, why was he doing this in the first place, and why the hell wasn't he with Mena, right now? Or Eva?

These are the questions you must find answers for when you are a confidential operative of the Janus Agency.

The question he should have been asking was who was the man at the back of the tram.

CHAPTER TEN

February 6, 1915

With the equivalent of a mere forty pounds of gunpowder chilling in the far corner of the ledge outside his window, eight storeys above the pavement, Devon sat down with a drink to absorb the day. It had been an exciting one: a trip through a brothel, meeting an old friend, making a new enemy, turning down an offer that she'll instantly regret making – if she remembers it – turning down another offer that he instantly regretted turning down.

Oh, and, of course, finding a cache of arms and explosives big enough to open up a second front in the European war – along with photos and plans of possible targets. That one may need to be moved to the top of the list. The first task had been to write down all of the targets that he could remember, for inclusion in his next, if any, report to Janus.

He finished the first drink, poured another and opened the small leather journal he'd

stolen. And he honestly hadn't taken time for any recreational liberties while he was stealing it. He must be getting old.

'17. Januar 1913. Hatte heute Nachmittag ein Treffen mit zwei Männern von der Botschaft.' As far back as January of '13, Koenig was having meetings with Embassy people. Who and why? *'Ich schreibe das auf, um die Wahrheit aufzuzeichnen.'* And, he was writing it down because he was worried even then that he might be stuck with the sticky end of the stick.

'Der Krieg kommt. Got in Himmel, der Krieg kommt.'

You can't put it any plainer than that. 'The war is coming. God in Heaven, the war is coming.' A year and a half before the war started, Koenig had been told it was coming – and, unlike so many who had marched off last summer with flowers in their rifle barrels, it seemed that he had an inkling of what this war might be.

The further Devon read, the more complicated, convoluted, and improbable the plans being set in motion by the Germans from the Embassy seemed. On the face, they were nothing short of ridiculous. According to Koenig, what seemed at first to be a little nest of New York spies and saboteurs was actually spread out like a claw across the continent. Devon tried to categorize their activities and the catalogue grew impressively long.

- Foster and use pro-German feeling in the United States to prevent the U. S. joining the Entente Cordiale or, if possible, to pressure them to join the Central Powers. (Which is why, Devon noted, they'd deliberately turned the rally at the Cinderella Hall last year into a riot – to exert pressure.)
- Create false American passports to convey German officers back to Germany on neutral shipping and to install agents in other countries, including the U. S.

- Execute sabotage in Canadian factories and other Canadian installations and even on the American side of the border.
- Execute sabotage in American factories and installations involved in producing or shipping materiel to the Entente.
- Buy or destroy American materiel that might otherwise supply the Entente.
- Destroy Canadian railroad bridges and tunnels to prevent Japanese and Canadian troops from being transported across Canada to the Atlantic coast. (Devon hadn't even known the Japanese had joined the war on the Entente side, but there it was.)
- Place agents within American and Canadian companies to warn the Embassy of shipments and to stall them wherever possible.
- Place agents near North American ports to transmit wireless warnings of ship departures to submarines waiting off the American and Canadian coasts and further into the Atlantic.
- Destroy warehouses and docks holding materiel to be shipped to the Entente, even if those cargoes were in American ports, even if on American ships. And, Devon noted, loss of American life was specifically *not* to be considered as a factor.

And all of this was only what Koenig had been told of. What other things were in the works?

He knew all too well at least some of these plans were happening: using pro-German 'Saengerfest' groups, thinly disguised singing societies, to plan marches and riots; bombings of American factories; attempts to destroy Canadian installations and transport. All of these had been dropped in Devon's lap last fall – and had literally blown up in his face. The passport

scheme was lying in his lap, now. He was interested to find out how a tiny booklet like a passport would blow up on him.

There was another more ominous thread that he couldn't shape definitely. Notes about arms shipments; ammunition deliveries; high-speed motorboats; details of timings on shipping schedules. All wrapped up with mentions of the *Saengerfest Bunds*. What does a bunch of yodeling Bavarians in *lederhosen* have to do with motorboats? And, are those the motorboats that the conspirators in Seithen's front dining room were talking about? Interesting that he should find mention of them from two directions.

Devon thought of last October's 'Cinderella' riot in New York's Little Germany, with a half-dozen killed when German patriotism boiled out of the 'Cinderella Hall' and onto the streets. He thought of his friend Hirsch lying dead in his own beer because he objected. He thought he'd heard enough oom-pah music to last him a lifetime, and about how much he'd have to suffer through if the Germans won. Despite the riot, Koenig's book was implying that the singing bunds were still central to the plans. If the German Saengerfests were gathering again, nothing good would come out of it.

There was no one spot for all this, and no one date, but there was one name associated with it: Deerbrook Explosive Works. There were a half-dozen times when the company was mentioned in Koenig's journal and that was a half-dozen too many. Deerbrook was becoming a thorn – no, an antler – in his side. Another trip to Wilmington was in order. He was beginning to hate Delaware and all Delawareans. Delawarites?

And, then there was another item. '*Ruhroede wurde verhaftet, auch von Weddell. Ihre Aufgaben wurden von Stegler übernommen. Stegler stellt weiterhin Pässe in Hochstern aus.*'

A man named Ruhroede, whom he'd never heard of, and a man named Weddell, whom he'd also never heard of, have been arrested. Their work has been taken over by Stegler. Stegler continues to make passports at Hochstern.

Thank god for the Teutonic mentality. Make sure you document everything, in case you are questioned later. That's going to get a lot of Germans hung one day, Devon predicted, as he documented everything for his own notes.

The pages were getting hard to read in the gloom. He should turn on the light. He forced his eyes open, then rested them for a few moments. The book fell from his fingers and he should retrieve it, but he didn't have the energy at the moment.

He woke in the dark, the impact of his dream bringing him wide awake instantly. Stegler continues to make passports at Hochstern.

Stegler continues to make passports at Hochstern!

Sometimes his own ability to be stupid impressed even him. Hochstern was the ad agency that had steered him to Mena Edwards. Stegler – *Herr* Stegler, the man who wants the Lily Cream soap account. Devon grinned in the dark and corrected himself: the man who's going to get the Lily Cream soap account, if need be.

Under the guise of a harmless advertising agency, the Germans were smuggling spies in and out of the country – with perfectly legitimate, thoroughly false American passports.

You've got to admire that. A visit to the Hochstern Agency specifically to meet *Herr* Stegler became a high priority.

The click of the door latch had him moving before the door swung open. Half-way to the top drawer of the bureau, his legs went out from under him, his head hit the floor, his shoulders

were pinned down, and a stinking cloth slammed over his face. He knew that sm...

He woke for the second time that night and, for some reason, couldn't remember anything beyond reaching for his gun.

On top of that, he was freezing cold and couldn't understand that, either. Bad as the Empire Hotel was in a lot of ways, they had a good heating system. He was wearing his suit, even his vest, so he shouldn't be ...

Lying on the open window sill, head and shoulders out over the eight storey drop, could account for it.

Moving from there would almost certainly be a good idea, but, try as he might, his legs wouldn't cooperate. They were pulled up tightly behind him. His hands, too, were behind him and wouldn't move. Some bastard had hog-tied him!

He tried to yell, but the sound got no further than his throat, barely a grunt escaping past the rag in his mouth and the cloth around his head.

Two men had taken him down, he remembered that now. Someone had doped him. He tried to remember the smell. Some of it was still lingering in his mouth – yeah, chloroform. They came prepared, didn't they?

He tried to yell again, and managed a little more volume this time. A face appeared over him at the window. A monkey-face. A blue-eyed monkey-face. A blue-eyed blond monkey-face.

Mox hadn't wasted much time finding him. Devon decided he was getting careless in his old age, letting himself be tailed – oh, wait! They knew where Mena lived, of course, so they picked him up there. Either way, careless.

And, dangerous. Eight storeys is a long way down.

“Gut, dass du wach bist.” Mox was gloating. *“Jetzt kannst du es geniessen.”*

“Yeah, I’m awake enough and the only thing I’m going to enjoy is smashing your face in,” he tried to say, but the gag stopped it. Mox, however, could read minds.

“That won’t happen. We both know. Whatever it is you want to do to me.” Mox held up a stretch of rope and gave it a little tug. Devon felt his hands being tugged as well. The rope in Mox’s hand was tied to Devon’s bonds. Well, he’d gotten out of bonds before – although this time, there was no exhaust from a roaring speedboat engine to burn them off, and his skin along with them.

Mox tugged the rope again, and Devon felt himself rock toward the outside of the window, scabbled with his fingernails at the sill. His captor released the tension on the rope and Devon felt himself rock back toward level.

“You see? I pull; you drop. It’s very simple. Why bother with tortures and poisons and such? Let gravity do the work and, what do you know? Another poor lonely dipsomaniac has killed himself in New York City. How sad.”

“Nobody will believe that,” came out as “Mmm-mm-mm-mmm-mm-mmmmm-mm.”

“This is not my first suicide, you know. Not even my tenth. Suicide is so easy to arrange. And always so satisfying.” Mox smiled and his little monkey-face showed monkey teeth, too.

“Your next question, I am sure, is ‘How do I explain a suicide that is bound hand and foot when the body hits the pavement?’ Well, why would I need to explain? I was never here – and I won’t be here a minute after you hit the ground. But – and this is the beautiful part – there is not even that question. This rope – can you see? – This rope is the free end of your bonds. It’s tied to the stand-pipe, over there. You’re tied with a slip-knot – when you fall, the knot will slip, the

bonds open, and you continue on down. I gather the rope and walk out.” He pushed his monkey-face closer. “Are you enjoying it, so far?”

“Mm-mmm? Mmm-mmm-mmm-mmm?”

“No, I didn’t get that.” Mox gently undid the wrap and Devon spat the cloth from his mouth. It took a minute to get his voice back.

“So far?” he said, at last. “You mean, there’s more?” Devon had found the loop in the knot, was testing it with his fingers.

“What more could you want? We will even leave all of your things here. Your gun in the drawer; your brass-knuckles in your pocket. Even your pathetic little badge.” Now that it was mentioned, Devon felt the brass weight in his jacket pocket. Mox dug out Devon’s Janus shield. “I’m curious. Did the bullet that made that gouge in the badge hit you?”

“Wasn’t my badge, then. The bullet hit somebody else.” Could he tug the loop free?

“It’s not a very lucky badge, is it? Not just one, but two Janus men died carrying this little bit of metal.”

“Two?”

“The original owner … and you.”

“I’m not dead.”

“You soon will be.” Mox tucked the badge into Devon’s breast pocket and tugged the rope again. Devon felt the loop slip a quarter of an inch. It could be moved. He needed time. Time and luck.

“So where are the two big guys who floored me?”

“Pfeil and Bertrom? Old friends of yours, they say. They were looking forward to this job.

I don't think they have much like for you. That is not the way: I don't think they much like you.

Did I say that right?"

"Now, you've got it. There's so much of me to like not. You sent them home, once I was hog-tied? Confident, aren't you?"

"What is hog-tied?"

"You're looking at it."

"Oh! Hog-tied! Very good." Mox straightened. "Well, this has been – what is the word? *Faszinierend*?"

"Fascinating. Well, it certainly is, Moxie. It's holding my attention. I'm willing to continue as long as you like." He had the free end of the rope between two fingers and was tugging.

Mox smiled. "And, yet – I like not."

"I'm sure that's what the girls you killed said. Is that right, Moxie?" Just keep him talking – keep him bragging.

"I have killed no girls."

"That's not the rumor. Two at least. Did you rape them first, Mox? Is that why they had to be killed? Or did you rape them after you killed them? That sounds more like your style; more like what you can handle, too. Killing and raping helpless little girls – how old were they, Moxie? How little?"

"I have killed no girls. I have killed whores, only whores – as should be." Mox's eyes were popping as he spoke and he was getting angry. Better and better, thought Devon. That's what he was hoping for. As long as he didn't get the little monkey man too angry, too quickly.

“I’m sure your mother would love that attitude – given her profession. Going out after you finish with me – find yourself another girl, kill her and rape her in the dirt, in a back alley?”

“No, I think I shall sleep – in my bed.”

Devon was still working the slip knot. Why hadn’t Mox noticed the wiggling that was necessary? “You’ve got a bed? I thought you just hung from the tree tops by your tail.” Surely, the knot was loosening.

“You understand this is past jokes, do you? You will soon be down there – in the snow; in your own blood. And, I will be free to do as I please. Perhaps it will please me to have your little girlfriend, what is her name? Mena! Yes, it would please me to have her – over and over again. Before I kill her.”

Devon decided Mox had just signed his own death warrant. “So, what do you want, Moxie?” Devon suddenly sounded panicked. “Do you want me to talk?” Mox looked surprised which added to the monkey effect. “Because I’ll tell you right now, I’m quite willing to tell you anything you want to hear.”

Mox smiled his monkey-smile again and chuckled. “No, I think the only sound I want to hear from you is the ... is there an English word? *Knirschen*?”

Devon shook his head. “I don’t know that one. Untie me and I’ll go look it up for you, if you like.”

Mox chuckled again, then his face brightened. “Crunch! Yes, the ‘crunch’ of your head hitting the concrete – all – that – way – down – there.” Mox was looking past Devon’s shoulder to the ground below and obviously enjoying the delicious thrill of the anticipation. “That will tell me everything I want to know about you: it will tell me that you are dead.” Mox managed to tear

his gaze from the pavement below and bring it back to Devon. “And, now, Mister – what was it your whore called you? Jackie! And, now, Jackie – time, I think.”

Mox moved close to Devon’s knees and began to lift him past the point of balance. Devon’s heels came off the window sill and he knew he was just at the tipping point. He must have yelled a bit.

“Don’t be impatient, friend. I never rush this part.” Mox began to push a little harder and Devon managed to hook his fingertips on the window trim, nails biting into the wood.

Mox pulled again. The knot came free; Devon’s heels shot out and caught Mox in the pit of the stomach. The little man fell backward across the bed as Devon, balance restored by the extension of his legs, rolled off the window ledge and back into the room, his bonds falling away as they were intended to do.

Balance restored, he kicked free of the rope, as Mox rolled forward and came to his feet. Devon twisted his body and put a heel into Mox’s solar plexus. Mox went down again while Devon freed his hands of the last of the rope.

The rope fell to the floor, Mox lay gasping at Devon’s feet, and Devon was suddenly undergoing another of his moral dilemmas. He had promised this character that he’d smash his face in but the guy had just confessed to a bunch of murders. Should he forego the smashing? Turn him in to the police? Allow the slow course of justice to meander along?

Fuck that.

Mox began to climb to his feet. Devon watched and Mox’s hand came up with a gun – not a big one, but still … a gun. Devon grabbed the gun arm and twisted, while prying the finger off the trigger. He kept prying until he heard the finger snap like a twig. Mox screamed. The gun

fell to the floor and Devon kicked it under the bed, still twisting the arm he held. Just for fun, he grabbed another finger, a little finger this time, and bent it backward until it, too, snapped.

When he'd done screaming a second time, Mox got out, "I am with the German Embassy! You cannot touch me! I have diplomatic immunity in America!" Devon was getting tired of hearing that. Mox hollered again as Devon twisted one of the broken fingers.

"I'm not an American." Devon's moral dilemma resolved itself. Throwing a forearm around Mox's throat to cut off his air, he lifted him by the back of his belt and frog-marched him toward the window. "This is for the girls, Moxie. Both of them, or all of them, or whatever the truth is." He leaned in to whisper in Mox's ear. "And this is for Mena, whom you'll never have."

"No! Wait!" Mox managed to gasp. "I can tell you what you want to know! Everything!" They'd reached the window now and Mox tried to hold the sash, but was no match for Devon's fury. "I can answer questions!" Mox, face down, hanging over the edge, was held only by Devon's rage.

"I've only got one question, Moxie. Do you think you can scream all the way down or will you run out of breath before the crunch?"

It was hard to say, but there might just have been a gap before the *Knirschen*.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

February 7, 1915

He kept hearing the crunch in his dreams, all night long.

Never quite enough to wake him, of course. He didn't feel particularly bad about what he did to Mox: if ever anybody deserved it, it was Mox. On the other hand, he didn't feel particularly good about it, either. The thing of it was, though, in a long history of making people unalive, Mox was the first one that, on the surface and underneath, had a word attached to it that he'd never had to face his own guilt over.

Murder.

He had to face that.

Sure, Mox had been attempting to murder him, that was unarguable. Sure, he had the right to defend himself, that was unarguable. But, as soon as he leaned the monkey-faced boy out

the window and let go, the line was crossed.

What was he going to do? March in to a police precinct and announce the deed? Take the consequences? Head himself back to the Big House – or the Dance Floor? A date with Old Sparky?

Or tell himself that Mox was an enemy agent, a murderous piece of woman-killing – no, girl-killing! – slime that the world was better off without?

And, tell himself that he was alive and Mox wasn't and that's the way it should be?

But he still heard the crunch.

The police had arrived within an hour of it. Checking every room that the jumper might have jumped from and, sure enough, Devon's was directly over the landing zone. By that time, there was no trace of a fight, no sign of a struggle, just a man who'd been in bed, asleep. 'Yeah, he'd heard the cops arrive – the whole neighborhood did. Sure, he was curious, but it was none of his business. 'Sides, he was already snuggled up in bed, warm and toasty. No, alone – nobody with him, worse luck.' The cops looked around a bit. "The rope? Oh, that's for his job; he'll be using it tomorrow. Oh, his job. Well, officers, I'm not supposed to tell anybody, but ... do you recognize this?" They recognized it. "Following up on an ex-husband who stole furniture from his ex-wife. The rope is for tying the stolen goods up when they get repossessed and carted away. Sorry, gents, it's confidential. You'll have to talk to his boss to get the name. All right, officers. Anything I can do to help. What happened anyway? A jumper! My goodness!"

And, he was alone again.

Below his window, the police were wrapping up their work. Just another poor mook who couldn't take it any more. Happened a few times a day in New York. Pick up the pieces, wash

down the sidewalk. Be happy this guy had chosen the roof rather than a window for the big swan dive – no broken glass to clean up; no window to repair.

Well, he was awake. For the whole night, it seemed. What to do? He wasn't going to sleep in this room tonight. Too many happy memories. Where else could he be?

He'd read Koenig's journal, front to back and back again. The only thing he could do with it now is hand it over to Janus, which would have to wait until morning. Even Janus was rarely in the office past two a.m. – unless it was to call Devon in to rake him over the coals.

When he left the building, he stayed well clear of the spot where Mox had made the biggest impact of his life. Two men were scrubbing down the concrete, sweeping it quickly away before it froze into pink mush. He noticed that one of the section of the walk was well and truly smashed. He was surprised Mox was heavy enough to do that. If it had been his own head that hit, Devon estimated three or four sidewalk sections would need replacing.

What to do at going on for three on a Sunday morning in New York ...

Apartment 515, West 39th and 10th. He had settled on his trysting place with Mena Edwards as the least objectionable of the possible places he could land. At least he would have a roof over his head and, last time he was there, a bed to sleep in. That it was Janus's safe house for dangerous or otherwise problem guests held out the possibility that it would be occupied but he'd cross that Rubicon when he came to it.

It was far too late for a cab or a street car, so he shanked it all the way, meaning it was closer to four o'clock than three when he arrived in Hell's Pantry. The building he was looking for was the same, with just a little more garbage piled up outside. The stairs, even in the cold, were still sticky as he climbed to the fifth floor. An argument was happening on the third, along

with a few crying babies at various levels. Mrs. There Ain't Nobody There was asleep, he decided, so there was nothing to interrupt him while he picked the lock. Despite frigid and scarred fingers, that only took a minute. From the left side of the door, still on one knee from picking the lock, he turned the knob and pushed the door open.

BAM!

The shot came from the depths of the apartment and he heard the bullet embed itself in the crown molding on the other side of the hall. He didn't wait for the second shot but dove through the doorway, kicking the thing shut behind him as he did, rolled once and came to his feet, heading for the relative safety of the heavy chair he knew was in the center of the room.

No second shot followed. Up and down the hall, he heard screams and shouts from other apartments, along with a renewed chorus of babies crying. Crouching behind the imaginary protection of the chair back, he freed his pistol and tried to sort out what was happening.

The shot had come from the bedroom, or from just in front of it. There were two other possible spots for the shooter: the bathroom, in the center of that wall and the kitchenette, against the inner wall of the unit. Had the shooter switched locations while he was entering or retreated back into the bedroom? The guy sure as hell knew where Devon was and the soft padding and pine frame of the arm chair wasn't going to stop even a .22 at that range. The report of that gun had been bigger than a .22.

Time to do something.

Pop up over the top and try a shot straight toward to the bedroom? Pop out one side of the other and have an extra half second to locate the target? Can't stick his head out the left side of the chair, there's a side table with a lamp on it, there – he remembered it from his last visit.

Lamp.

Eyes squeezed tight shut. Slowly reach out and slide his hand up the stem of the lamp.

Find the switch. One. Two. Three.

Turn the switch! Stand, Dreyse out front. Eyes open, protected from the first glare. A female figure, head turned away from the light. Right arm outstretched. Nickel-plated revolver aimed generally toward him.

BAM!

That one hit the lamp and the light went out. More screams and shouts from outside the apartment. His calmest voice.

“Eva. Please stop shooting at me.”

Three seconds.

“Mike?”

“Well, it ain’t Jack Johnson. Don’t shoot; I’m going to turn on the light.”

“Okay.”

He crunched through the remains of the table lamp on his way to the hall door to switch on the ceiling light. The ceiling light was a much higher wattage than the table lamp. They both squinted and protected their eyes for a moment before they could really see.

She still held the revolver at arm’s length, pointed more or less at him. He saw that it was the same nickel-plated H&A .38 that she’d used to hold George Fuchs a prisoner. “I see you found some ammunition for that.”

“Dad made me get some after ... sorry.”

She lowered the weapon and carefully lowered the hammer. Single action, no accidental

discharge now.

Breathing easier, they both took time to look the other over. She saw an unshaven man six weeks overdue for a haircut in weather – and god knows what else – beaten clothes. He saw a woman who made his mouth go dry, no matter what she was wearing, which in this case happened to be a flannel night-gown, who had obviously just woken from heavy sleep. Beyond her, the bed was well-rumpled.

“Are you here, now?”

She nodded, looked at the gun and put it on the chest-of-drawers inside the bedroom door. “Why are you here?”

“Oh, the usual. Couldn’t sleep. Went for a walk. Ended up here. A woman shot at me.”

“Why couldn’t you sleep?”

“Guy tried to kill me. I dropped him out my window. Police woke me up with questions. Didn’t feel like staying there. Why are you here?”

Neither had really moved from their spots. Outside, heavy footsteps were coming up stairs and voices were being raised. He went to the window and opened one wide, letting the frigid air in but blowing some of the powder smoke out. “Put the gun in the drawer ...” but she was already doing it. The slug from her second shot was lying amid the debris from the table lamp, so he sent that out of the window along with the smoke. She was at the bed, pounding the second pillow into ‘been slept on’ shape. He removed his coat and hung it on a hook, likewise hat. He even got his wet shoes and socks, his suit coat and vest thrown into the bedroom, and his suspenders off his shoulders before the police pounded on the door.

Two cops. More below. Nobody patrolled Hell’s Kitchen alone.

“Sorry, folks.” Devon had opened the door to the cops, who saw a married couple, he half-dressed, she in her nightclothes, clinging to her husband’s arm for protection. “People are saying they heard gunshots and somebody thought it came from this apartment. You folks hear anything?”

“We sure did! Bang! And we thought it was on this floor. Scared the heck out of the wife, didn’t it, hon?” She nodded vigorously while clinging tightly to him. “Well, I jumped up to see what was going on and I stubbed my toe on the chair over there in the dark and knocked over the lamp. Made a heck of a crash – almost as loud as the gunshot.”

“Did you catch whoever was shooting, officer?” Eva was doing a good impression of a helpless, frightened female. “Are they still in the building?”

“We’ll keep looking, missus, but I don’t think you have to worry. If it was a gunshot, it was probably just somebody shooting by accident. Sorry to have troubled you. Goodnight.”

Devon and Eva, arms around each other, leaned out of the door to watch the cops go down the stairs. Almost every other doorway on the floor had a similar picture. There was a moment of awkwardness as the neighbors were forced to acknowledge each others’ presence, then all the doors closed at almost the same instant.

Door closed and locked, Devon and Eva looked at each other with wide-eyed disbelief before laughter took over, as they clung to each other in relief. It was easy to do, as they were used to each other’s body and hands fell into familiar places. When the laughter subsides, though, they remembered all that had happened and, slowly, let go.

“Sorry,” Devon muttered, when he realized where his hands had been.

“No, it’s fine … I … sorry.” She moved away to look down at the shattered lamp. “We

broke daddy's lamp."

"We?"

"All right. *I* broke daddy's lamp."

"I'll buy him a new one. Why are you here?" He moved closer to her and she avoided him by kneeling to pick up ceramic shards. "Eva, please tell me."

Hands full of broken ceramic, she went into the kitchen to drop the pieces into the garbage. She kept up the stall by washing her hands and drying them carefully. Back at the kitchenette door, she leaned on the frame. "Watch your bare feet over there. There's lots of sharp little pieces on the carpet."

"Eva."

"After you ... went north ... a few days later, I started seeing men ... hanging around the corner at my old place, like Fuchs was that night. They were watching. I went to see Dad and he told me to get out but, when I got back to start moving, somebody was in the apartment, throwing things around. They obviously didn't care who knew – maybe they were sending me a warning. I ran like hell, got a cab and went straight back to dad. He told me to move in here, sent three men to get all of my stuff, kept it at the Janus building until he knew no one was watching, and moved me in here." She waved her hands around the apartment. "He barely lets me leave the place."

"Which explains why he wouldn't tell me where you were when he dragged me back across the border. And why you shot."

"I didn't know it was you! It was dark and you were breaking in and ..." She smiled slowly. "If I'd known it was you, I might have shot straighter."

"Did I do anything to deserve that?"

“Knocked me up, for starters.” She was still on that.

“I didn’t hear any complaints at the time.” Were they going to argue?

“Are we going to argue?” His question exactly.

“I hope not.” He made his way to the bathroom. “I missed you.”

“What’s that?”

“I was talking to the can.”

When he came out, she was sitting in the arm chair, watching the first glimmer of dawn at the window. Like most days in the neighborhood, it was coming up gray, although much of that was the grime on the glass. Still, there were plenty of clouds in the east. He stood behind her, hands on the sides of the chair back, not touching.

“Mike?”

“Yeah?”

“Mike, if ...”

“What?”

“Mike, if you had known ...”

“If I had known ...”

“Yeah, if you had known ...”

He lifted her from the seat and turned her around in the chair. “I wouldn’t ever have let you out of my sight.”

“Oh, god, Mike ... if I’d known ...”

“... you’d never have left.”

“I don’t know. I really don’t.”

The kiss was different because they both were different. Both had changed. Both had ... grown up, a little, perhaps. Maybe, they'd grown apart.

They finally broke away from each other.

“What did you mean, ‘you dropped a guy out a window’? What did you mean, ‘he tried to kill you’?”

He'd thought the morning was going to go another way. Oh, well.

“He was just a little guy. He fit through the window with no trouble, at all. Didn’t even muss the curtains.”

Her shock might have been comical if the circumstances were different. “You mean, you threw a guy out a window!”

“Well, don’t tell Mrs. There Ain’t Nobody There. Yeah, I deemed it the appropriate thing to do, so I did it.” Why was he getting his back up? Well, maybe she should trust him a little more.

“For god’s sake, Mike, who? Why? How?”

She was making him more than a little angry. “Eva, it is far too late at night – or early in the morning – for this kind of nonsense!”

“Mike, if I am going to climb into bed with you tonight –” If she what? “– or this morning! – you’d better tell me the whole truth of it. Now!” That put a different twist on it.

“Okay – in a nutshell: Mox was his name and worked for some very nasty people at a whore house over on West 59th that I happened to be in last night. When he caught me snooping in around among the high explosives cached in the cellar, he was going to try to kill me, until one of the hookers at the whore house came in and rescued me and took me home with her – don’t

interrupt, please! Now, this girl – the same one that you saw me doing the photo session with last fall – was quite intent on playing tangletoes with me until her room-mate came home drunk. So I put her to bed – the room-mate that is – and stole a book I'd been looking for from between her tits. I kissed the first girl good-night, or rather she kissed me, and I went home. Alone; no tangletoes. I read the book, put it away, and went to bed – still alone! About three, something woke me up and I got about half-way out of bed before I was down for the count."

"Is all this the truth, Mike?"

"Every word and stop interrupting. I came to tied up like an Easter porker, hanging halfway out the window. Mox (remember him?) had a way figured out to make it look like suicide. In fact, he used it on girls who worked at the whore house, if they made any trouble. In fact, I already knew about two girls he'd done it to. So, through virtue and clean living, I turned the tables on him, leaned him out the window and let go of him."

"How far?"

"All the way to the ground. Eight storeys."

"Oh, god."

"Then the police came, just like they did here. I convinced them that my heart was pure and that Mox came off the roof. I went for a walk. I came here. You shot at me. The rest you know."

He sat on the sofa. She took a long time to let it all sink in.

"Oh, god."

"You already said that."

"And, the guy is dead?"

“Most emphatically so.”

Again, it took her a long time to work it through.

“What are you going to do?”

“Do? Absolutely nothing.” Summing it up had confirmed his decision: fuck Mox.

“But, you ... pushed him ...”

“Out the window and the cops won’t think another thought about it. Just another New York jumper. The guy killed young women; the guy tried to kill me; the guy would absolutely have killed other women – including the girl you met at the photo shoot – if he was let loose.”

He saw it all fall into place in her mind. “Then, the world is better off without him.”

“*Sic dicit Domina.*”

“What?”

“That’s Latin for ‘Sister, you said a mouthful’.

“Somehow, I doubt that.” She rose and held out a hand. “All right, mister. Enough talk. Into the bedroom and get your pants off.”

“*Sic dicit Domina.*”

CHAPTER TWELVE

February 8, 1915

He was getting to know the one librarian very well. Every time he came in, she made it a point to intercept him before he could get to the card catalog. He had the distinct impression that she didn't trust him alone with the cards, afraid, perhaps, that he'd go mad and run naked down the aisles, throwing thousands upon thousands of Dewey Decimal cards in every direction. Perhaps his singed, bullet-pierced coat (now repaired, of course, but still much the worse for wear) could account for it. His occasional appearances with bruises and cuts may have added to the general sense of mistrust.

Certainly, his very reasonable requests for books on high explosives and photographing the female body couldn't have anything to do with it. He was sure there were lots of library users with an interest in naked women and blowing things up.

He liked libraries. As a kid, he had memorized every book his mother had brought to the Yukon with them. One of the major parts of his advanced education had been books loaned to him by a teacher in Dawson City he later tried to run away with. The teacher, not the books. That hadn't ended well. When he discovered public libraries while staying in Seattle, he could barely believe the concept. Millions of pages of knowledge – for free! In New York, when he wasn't driving a very important Italian business man around, he spent every hour he could in libraries. Even in prison, he had devoured everything the prison library had. Once out on the streets again, he made it a point to spend as much time as possible in the library wherever he was. The hushed, yet echoing atmosphere; the sense of so many secrets waiting to be freed from the shelves, all pulled him inside. And, in New York again, his favorite building was, still and always, the Main Branch, no matter how much the New York library system wanted people to call it the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. Over the years, he'd given himself what amounted to a master's level understanding of many subjects from technical to philosophic. There were few subjects he hadn't touched upon in some way.

Up to now, his actual requests at the Main Branch had all been in the 540s and 770s. His knowledge of the Dewey system was nearly encyclopedic, acquired while in prison chains, under a librarian's strict tutelage – between bouts of amorous grappling. Then she'd helped him to escape, one bloody Christmas.

So, he was fond of libraries – and librarians.

Today, his personal librarian was approaching rapidly, but he forestalled her, this time, by handing over slips of paper with call numbers for a map of Wilmington, Delaware, and for a history of New Castle County, Delaware, which she received with trepidation. She seemed even

more unsure of this request than the others, being so out of character for him, so he mollified her slightly by handing over another slip with a call number for a history of the Deerbrook Explosive Works. That was more in keeping with his past history.

When he added a request for a map showing all rail lines in upstate New York, she seemed positively happy. He was obviously going to blow up trains, so she gave him a table number in the Grand Reading Hall and told him the material would be available in ten minutes. It was a veritable potpourri of requests from the 300s, the 910s and the 970s. Gossip must just be flying behind the librarians' desk.

He passed the time by wandering into the Reference room and hunting up the Wilmington telephone directory. It didn't take long to find a handful of bars near Brandywine Creek along with a couple of hotels. He noted their names and addresses. This time, he was going to be prepared.

He noted, too, the man in the homburg, black overcoat, red tie, and celluloid collar who had been in the lobby, hanging back near the front desk, and who now was studying the New York Times in the Periodicals room, in a place where he could still keep an eye on the door of the Reference Room. Devon put the Wilmington telephone book back and headed to the Grand Reading Hall.

His material was waiting when he got to the pickup window, a good armful of sheets and volumes of various sizes. When he got to his assigned seat, he found people on both sides spread into his area, with no intention of moving, so he did his best to unfold the multiple sheets of the Wilmington map without interfering with them. No need to make a scene, was there? All he got for his trouble was dirty looks.

He'd been to Wilmington once and now he was trying to make sense of what he knew. The Deerbrook Explosives Works were *here*, on this side of the river – or creek, actually (and, yes, it was the same Brandywine where Washington had got his tail whipped by the British. Devon had checked). Just south of the town, there was an actual river which the creek joined downstream. Most of the town was *here*, on the other side of the creek. A few bridges joined the two sides, including the rather rickety one Devon had crossed, once each way, to get to the Deerbrook Experimental Station No. 1.

The one-room school from where the kids had been walking when the little girl disappeared was *here*, so they had walked along *this* road toward home, over *there*. He tried to open another fold of the map and got another dirty look.

So, the girl had walked past *this* bridge before going down to the river bank. Or if she'd gone over the bridge, she would be at the back of the Deerbrook Experimental Station. But, if she got near there, they'd have seen her and turned her back.

Or would they?

They hadn't seen Devon when he visited, and he was a lot bigger than a second-grader. To be fair, he was also a lot more devious than most second-graders. Not all, but most.

What could she have found on the other side of the river? Five outbuildings and two main buildings. The outbuildings he'd peered into. There was nothing much in them. The main buildings he hadn't investigated.

He was going to Wilmington, again, but, this time, he was going to have a good lunch before he did. And he'd take a flask. Then he remembered he wasn't drinking. A flask of tea. With some brandy in it, maybe. Brandywine.

The books about the Deerbrook Works were more disappointing. Both written by the same local author, they contained much of the same information. How Deerbrook had practically built the town with the founder's own hands – or own money, at least – how money from DXW had built schools, hospitals, parks and more; how the family had bequeathed large areas to the town for development and for parkland.

How in the hundred and some years DXW had been in operation, there had been over two hundred explosions, killing nearly two hundred people. How much money do you have to put into a city council's coffers (and pockets?) to make that go away? A lot, he assumed, or the city would have made Deerbrook go away.

There was no mention of what experiments were being conducted at the Deerbrook Experimental Station, nor of what was being experimented on. In fact, there was no mention of the Deerbrook Experimental Station at all, which made him curious. How new was it and what were they doing there?

His final requested item was simple: a map of every rail-line from New York, upstate to the Canadian border. How were von Papen and his growing list of co-conspirators going to move whatever they were planning? And, again and again, what were they planning? From New York, north to *here*. From Wilmington, north to *here*. Crossing *here*. After twenty minutes of studying it, he realized that he was gaining nothing. He was simply staring at lines on a paper.

When he stretched back and looked around, the library was nearly empty and it was growing dark outside the windows. His table-mates had packed it in some time ago, and he'd been able to spread his materials out. Time to go home.

He had to find a rest-room, and he was willing to bet that his homburg-ed friend, still

hanging about, pretending to be involved in a volume he'd picked at random off the shelf, needed one, too. Being a private dick isn't all pretty girls and excitement – often it was just the misery of a full bladder and aching feet. Devon was determined to make this guy's job as miserable as possible.

Stretching cramped muscles, he folded his maps, stacked his books and placed them neatly at the return desk. His favorite book-slinger was watching him with wary eyes, but, as he laid the materials down, he could have sworn there was a quick smile in his direction. Had the old Devon charm struck at last?

The rest-rooms were off the main lobby where homburg was dawdling about now, looking at a subway map.

At the latrine, keeping a watch from the corner of his eye, a half-dozen men came and went before homburg decided it was inconspicuous for him to do so, as well. The man took the spot closest to the door. Two others were also standing in the line, when Devon went to the lav to wash his hands. He stalled at the hand towel while the two others finished their business.

At last, the other two left, and Devon and homburg were alone in the room. Homburg finished drying his hands while Devon strode to the door and slid a refuse bin under the handle.

“So how do you want to do this?” Devon asked.

“Depends on what we’re going to do,” replied the other. English, of course.

“I believe you’re about to try to hand me six of the best, if that’s your public school expression, while I try to do the American equivalent to you.”

“You’ve got me wrong, chum. I’m no public school ponce. My da got his hands dirty, he did.”

“You’re working for Walter Wisdom?”

“Who?” Devon took out Wisdom’s card and held it up. “Ha! That’s good. I like that! I didn’t know we were making pictures.”

Someone was rattling the door handle from the outside. They weren’t happy.

“I’ll tell you what,” said the other. “There’s a pub ’round the corner on 42nd. Why don’t we grab a pint and talk it over?”

It is far better to drink than to fight.

The atmosphere was dense and sweaty, from tobacco smoke and the heat of bodies.

Sitting at the bar, they were as private as if they were in a boat at sea. Or so Devon told himself.

“I’ve no intention of trying to lay a thrashing on you, old fellow. I’m just supposed to report your movements.”

“I’ll bet.” He’d become very untrusting in the last few years.

The man swished the last of his beer around in his glass. “If there is anything thrashing to be done, William Wiseman has men for that.” He finished the beer in a gulp.

“Voska and/or Svoboda.” Devon’s Czech acquaintances, with whom he’d exchanged a few punches.

“Oh, you know them! I’ll tell you this for free,” said the Englishman, starting in on his fourth pint. “He’s good, is our William. He thinks things through and he’s usually right about them. The Yanks tolerate him because he discovers things for them but even they don’t know what he’s doing – he’s got people everywhere.”

“No kidding? Everywhere?” Devon was still working on the bottom two inches of his first, with his second waiting and his third having just been drained by the Englishman.

“He sees things or he sets people in places where they see things. I see things. Outside your hotel, for instance. I got there one cold night not long ago just in time to see a tiny li’l man come plummeting to earth from on high. Terrible shock it was, nearly as mush for me as it was for him – until a copper told me he was German. After that, it was jus’ one more on the plush shide of the leisure – ledger.”

“I’ve got no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Of coursh, not. Listen, friend, I approve of dropping as many Jerries from a great height as conveniently possible, but –” He took another pull at his beer. “– a little dishcreshion is needed for our ’merican cousins. Y’un’erstand?” Devon shook his head. “After the li’l man hit the pavement, I looked up and saw somebody cloash their window. The cops showed up pretty much instantly and I was standing there, so they asked me what I knew about it, and I said I arrived just in time to see him jump from the roof. They seem to have believed me. Look, the Yanks aren’t in this war, and they don’t intend to be, so why should they take any of it sheriously? They’re just letting the Jerries run around the country dynamiting anything they want. But, Wiseman, he’s putting them … wise.” He stopped to chuckle over his wit and seemed put out that Devon didn’t join in. “Last November, they tried to blow up a meat plant over in New Jersey.” He hooked a thumb over his shoulder, in the direction of Queen’s. “You never heard about that, did you? Because Wiseman put the Yanks onto it and they sh-shtopped the guy and chashed him across town an’ *shot* him. Shot him dead. But, it was Wiseman who shtopped the bombings. He gets the credit for that. ’Cept, a’ coursh, he doesn’t ever take credit – he just keeps low and lets other people get the credit.”

“You don’t say?” Devon silently fingered the sewn up bullet holes in his coat and

reflected sadly on the ironies of life.

“And, then there was some kind of boat that got blown up – up north, there – and it was Jerry behind it again, but it was Wiseman who p-put the Yanksh onto them. He knew all about what they were planning and he moved in an’ –” He failed to snap his fingers. “An’ got ’em.”

“He sounds like some kind of hero.”

“Oh, he is. He’s a shuperman, he is. Somebody should write a book about him.” The man looked into his empty glass. “How many is that?”

“Just the two,” Devon assured him, pushing another beer toward him. “Here’s your third.”

The man picked up the beer and looked dubiously at it. “You’re sure thish ishn’t yoursh?”

“No, no. Here’s mine.” Devon touched his nearly empty glass to the other’s full one.

“Confusion to the enemy!”

“Confusion t’t’enemy!” The man downed a third of the pint. “Ach!” he said, grimacing. “American piss! How can they call this beer?” He downed another third of the glass. “Do you know what? They said you were a Can-can-n-nadian. But you can hardly tell! I mean, you don’t look it; you don’t sound it. An’ you’re not shtupid, at all!”

“Canadians are stupid, are they?”

“Well, a’ coursh they are. Who’d live there if they weren’t?” There was a certain unarguable truth behind the statement. Devon had walked through too many blizzards not to recognize that. The guy made up his mind.

“You know what? I think you’re ’merican! Can I tell you a s-shecret?”

“Sure! You can tell me anything, buddy.” For American piss, the beer had done its work

in short order.

“Don’t tell the Yanks, but my great-great-great-something-grand-da was one of the laddies who marched up Bunker Hill. What do you think of that?”

“But did he march back down again?”

“He did. Marched all the way back to England and did the business with my great-great-great-something-grand-ma and, eventually, I was born.”

“And, we’re all happy that you were.”

“All the way up Bunker Hill,” the man said, and Devon caught the bar-keep’s eye, slid a five across the bar while his chum began humming The British Grenadiers, and beckoned the bar-keep closer.

“Give him one more and put him in a cab, would you?” He laid another five down and spoke into the man’s ear. “Don’t let him get in a fight, huh? He’s not a bad guy.”

“For a redcoat?” The bar-keep grinned. “Don’t worry, I’ll drop him in the cab myself.”

“Thanks, pal.” Behind him, the British secret agent was singing “Toe-row-row-row-row-row! For the British Grenadiersh!”

Once out on 42nd, he realized he was just about in time to get to where he had hoped to get to tonight. It took him a while to hail a cab whose driver, it turned out, had been heading uptown and wasn’t happy about being turned around and taken back downtown, especially that far downtown, but a five dropped on the front seat persuaded him. Just once, he wanted to get a cabbie who was cheerful and friendly and didn’t complain about every place Devon wanted to go. You’d think that New York was full of unfriendly people and dangerous neighborhoods.

As the blocks passed, Devon sat in the back and thought about the secrets that the British

secret agent had secretly divulged. Walter Wisdom of Wisdom Films is William Wiseman of British Intelligence – the American station supervisor, or whatever they wanted to call it. Well, Devon knew that. Thinking back to Wisdom's upper crust accent, it was probably *Sir* William Wiseman, probably with a C. M. G. or even a K. C. M. G. behind it. The next question would be: did Girdwood, up in Ottawa, report to him as an Imperial agent, or was it separate? Because somebody sure as hell had reported Devon's activities and, given his boss's resentment of 'the English', he didn't think it would be Janus.

Not that it made much difference to Devon. He still didn't like supercilious Brits. He realized that might be unfair of him, but he could still feel the bruise from the kidney punch – he didn't like supercilious Brits. Or rabbit-punching Czechs. Come to think of it, there were a lot of groups of people he didn't like. Was he becoming American? Maybe he could get a job as a cabbie.

Which thought led him back to thoughts about Janus, and that reminded him that he really should check in with his employer, just to let him know about the things he'd been doing: going to the library, hanging out in the basements of brothels, holding pornographic photo sessions, dropping snivelling blue-eyed monkey-faced killers out of hotel windows.

That last one might be hard to explain. Maybe he'd go visit Janus and company – tomorrow.

He paid the hack when he pulled up in front of the building Devon wanted and stepped onto the sidewalk. Broadway is never empty, so Devon walked a bit to ensure he was unobserved before slipping into shadows at the side of number 60 Broadway. Being one of the new super-tall buildings, there was plenty of shadow between it and its neighbor.

He found a door – any door would do, as long as it was out of sight. It was a new type of lock, new to him at least, and it presented an interesting challenge – a 5-pin cylinder that took every tool Devon had and careful placement of his tongue against his teeth before it yielded. Ease the door open and step inside. No alarm. Close the door and re-lock it. The phone book had told him Hochstern Advertising was on the twenty-second floor.

Time for an adventure.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

February 8, 1915

60 Broadway was an impressive building, even as buildings on Broadway go. Twenty-four storeys or so – and not a building directory in sight in the lobby.

The elevators were shut down for the night, of course – the building was shut down, in fact, but climbing stairs in the dark was getting to be old hat for him. Somewhere above or below him, he was sure a night-watchman was prowling, but being confronted by some 70-year old Civil War veteran wouldn't upset his plans too much, unless he'd brought his musket with him. Devon didn't bring a musket; he was going to rifle the place.

The climb was merely long and tedious. Passing the twelfth floor made him realize how lucky he was to have a room on the eighth floor of the Empire hotel. Only ten more floors, twenty more flights, to go. Then he could stop for a rest and a coronary.

The Hochstern Advertising suite took up the whole south side of the building on the twenty-second floor, with an entrance off the main hallway, facing the elevators, and another from the side corridor at the end. The back way in is always the best. Devon knew that from long experience.

The suite's back door was a much easier lock than the building's side door. It opened in seconds with three pries and some pressure. All was quiet inside, as expected: no late-night work to meet a deadline. Not even a late-night assignation between executive and receptionist. A boring place to work, really. What he hadn't counted on was that the entire office suite was windowed the full length of the hallway. He couldn't turn on a light without it being seen, if and when the watchman came past.

Stegler's office was easy to find, just a few doors along the corridor. Surprisingly, the lock was new, and a different brand than the one he'd opened to get into the suite. It seemed that *Herr Stegler* had installed his own lock. Which meant that *Herr Stegler* had secrets he wanted kept secret. Which meant that *Herr Stegler* was a naughty boy. The new lock slowed Devon down by about a minute.

Herr Stegler also kept a neat office: there were no loose papers; no pile of forms on his desk. There was no mail to be sent in the morning and no cabinet drawers left unlocked. *Herr Stegler* was a very annoying man.

His desk was also locked, but that sort of thing wasn't even a holdup, if you knew how to do it. Arm in the back, reach for the front, two fingers push down – desk is unlocked. It was a good thing that desk manufacturers didn't realize that, or Devon's job would be much harder.

The center drawer held pins and clips and pencils. The right hand drawers held nothing,

not even the ubiquitous bottle of whiskey that every good American office desk had. The left side was one full-height drawer. Opened, it held many flat sheets of paper, inserted vertically and separated by cardboard spacers. Each spacer had a letter raised up on the top of it. Devon realized that this was an alphabetized system of storing documents *without folding them!* He'd never seen such a thing. There must have been hundreds of papers in that drawer, one which would only hold fifty or sixty when they were folded and stacked the usual way. And (and here was the mind-boggling part of the idea), to find a paper, simply select the cardboard spacer with the correct letter and finger walk through the papers in that section. It pre-supposed that the papers had been inserted in alphabetical order to start with but, given that, the simple genius of the idea held him in admiration for a full minute, then he began to dig through the sheets. The light through the window behind him let him read titles and names on the pages, but none he looked at seemed to be anything other than what it purported to be: advertising.

Advertising for hats, cars, parasols, cigarettes, tooth cleanser, false teeth (for when the tooth cleanser didn't work, he guessed), trans-Atlantic shipping, soap (but not Lily Cream), seeds, soda, children's shoes, ladies' shoes, men's shoes, farm equipment ...

Trans-Atlantic shipping. The last time he had checked Germany was on the other side of the Atlantic. He was pretty sure it still was. What was being shipped across the Atlantic these days that needed an advertising campaign to accomplish?

Holding the papers up to the moonlight, he wondered what kind of advertising simply had a list of ship departures with another list of individual names beside it. None of the names, German names, and none of the ships, German ships. The law of averages made that suspicious, right there.

Despite the war, it seemed that a lot of people were making plans to cross the Atlantic through Hochstern Advertising, which, if you thought about it, was a strange thing for an advertising company to be arranging. The list of ships had an interesting feature that took him some time to sort out. When he added them up, they were all vessels registered to neutral countries: Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark. There was even one with Swiss registry, which would be a neat trick for a land-locked country. Was the registry literally a false-flag operation? He wondered.

He flipped through more of the pages in the drawer but none were connected with shipping. He did find a number of contracts with the Eastman-Kodak company, all with photos of Mena Edwards paper-clipped to them. At the back of that file were more photos of Mena, but none of them had anything to do with advertising. He admired the shots, wondering how the shots he and Mena had taken might have turned out if he had developed them. Which led him to speculate on what might have developed if he had taken a shot the night he declined to play tangletoes with her. Then he shook his head and got back to work. Still: Mena was popular.

Putting everything back in the place and order it had come from, he closed the left hand drawer and turned to the right hand side. Nobody leaves a set of drawers completely empty. There had to be something in them. Each drawer was pulled completely out, turned over, nothing found. It was too dark to see into the back of the desk, but he could just reach the back panel with his fingers. A bundle of paper suspended on a hook at the back of the desk seemed unusual and interesting.

Wrapped in ribbon, the bundle contained about two dozen familiar booklets. The moonlight revealed the eagle stamp and the words on the cover. U. S. passports. He knew

without checking (although he did check) that the names on the passports would match the names on the shipping list. He pocketed two at random, placed the bundle back into the desk and the drawers in their slots. With any luck, it would be a long time before the absence of the two passports was noticed.

Time to go.

Down is much easier than up. He managed to reach the fourth floor landing, with everything closed up behind him, before he met the night-man on his rounds. This guy was no Civil War veteran, but he might have been a Mexican Incursion vet. He was a few years younger and had a good two inches of reach on Devon.

“Who are you?” the watchman hollered on seeing him, flashing an electric torch down the hallway.

Devon lifted his Janus badge without slowing down. “Security check. Where the hell have you been? I’ve been up and down the hall for ten minutes!”

The man lowered his light to see the badge, then stepped back at the sight. “I’ve been on my rounds; I’ve clocked in on time at every station.”

“So you say, now. I think you’ve been having a snooze somewhere, haven’t you? Don’t bother to deny it. We can compare the punch tapes. What’s your name? Hold on a second! Let me see your badge number.” The man started to reply. “No, never mind. They’ve got it at the office. I’ll check in with them. They know who you are. Last guy I caught sleeping on the job got booted so fast he didn’t have time to pick up his lunch pail.”

“I’ve been on my rounds! I didn’t do anything wrong!” As if Devon was really going to report him to anyone. He was just looking for a way out.

“Yeah? How come I found a door open in that suite, there?” Devon pointed to a random set of offices. “I closed it, of course, but you’d better clock in, take your pass key and check that whole suite from one end to the other. Come to think of it, I’ll phone in and let the boss know about the open door.”

“Hey, wait a minute! Don’t tell him that; I’ll get fired!” The guy was desperate. He probably hadn’t done anything really wrong. Just took a minute for a piss break or something. Probably had a young family and needed the job.

“Well, I don’t know. Letting this slide could get *me* in trouble, you know. What if there’s a burglar in this building, right now, and I didn’t report you? All right. I don’t want you to get fired. I just want you to tighten things up. Get in there and check that suite. I’ll keep my mouth shut – this time.”

“Oh, thanks, pal! I’ll check right now! Thanks, a lot!” And, the man opened up the suite and went in.

Down being easier than up, Devon was out of the building in half the time it took him to get in, putting distance between himself and the guard, who was probably just now beginning to wonder what had happened. And how much trouble he was in. If any. And whether or not he should call the office to find out if there was supposed to be an upper level security guy checking up on him.

The day was young, but the night was old. He didn’t intend to go back to his room at the Empire if he could help it; there might be some angry people there with a lot of questions for him about falling monkeys and such other phenomena – and only a few of them were likely to be on the right side of the law. It was a mere six hours before the Janus building would open for

business. He'd wait.

Across town and back up to 42nd Street took two hours – most of that simply trying to flag a hack. At that time in the morning, not a lot of cabbies were willing to pick up an unshaven 'bo in a ruined overcoat. When he did get to the Janus headquarters, he first tried the doors – locked, of course – thought about opening them, but decided to settle down on a bench across 3rd Ave. for a long wait. It was too damn cold, too damn dark and too damn February for this game, but it seemed the best option. Under the thick covering of freshly falling snow, the city was as quiet as New York ever got; traffic was sparse; the wind was nearly still; it was late. The lullaby of 3rd Ave. soon caught up with him and his head drooped.

The prod of a cop's nightstick on his shoulder woke him. Even before he opened his eyes, he knew what it was. He'd felt that prod before.

"Oh, you're alive, are you? You can't sleep here, pal. You'll freeze before morning. Get yourself a flop and sleep it off." For once, the cop was a little more concerned about a 'bo's welfare than about disorder on his beat.

Devon roused himself and realized that the gentle snowfall had nearly covered him in a white blanket. With stiff knees and back, he rose and brushed himself off.

"I don't need a flop, sir. I'm just waiting for my office to open." Devon held out his Janus badge and pointed to the building across the way. The cop was dubious, but had to admit that the badge looked official.

"Hmph," he snorted. "Pretend cops! You want to be a cop? Join the force and do some real policing. Then you won't have to be out in the snow on a February night."

Devon raised a finger to draw attention to the contradiction in the man's logic but decided

to let it slide. If the cop couldn't see it, who was he to point it out?

The cop continued. "I've dealt with your bunch before, you know. Flashing your badges and pretending you're doing something important. What, did you find some rich dame's lost doggie and you need to report it right away? Never mind. You still can't sleep here. Keep moving or get a flop."

"I guess I'll keep moving, then, thank you, officer." The cop grunted and began walking away. "Can you tell me the time, sir?" Always be polite to cops, even if you intend to break their nose a minute later. Although he didn't have to break this one's nose: he already broke it last fall – and the guy didn't even remember him. Devon wondered just how much his appearance had changed in four months.

"It's after two. Now, get moving or I'll run you in."

"No need, officer," Eva broke in from behind Devon. "I'll take charge of him, now, if that's all right."

In the snow-filtered light of the street-lamps, she was a vision in fur and Devon felt his heart go thumpy-thump. Some tough guy he was. The cop was sizing Eva up and had come to the same conclusion. In fact, his heart may even have been thumpy-thumping, too, from the expression on his face.

"If you want him, ma'am, I'm happy to hand him over to you. Just keep him off my bench."

Devon didn't bother to argue that it was as much his bench as the cop's, instead, he allowed Eva to take his arm and lead him across the street to the Janus building. Opening the front door, she took him into its warmth. It's good to be the boss's daughter; you get a key to the

building. On the other hand, you also get dragged out in the middle of the night to deal with vagrants sleeping in front of your door. He wondered who was keeping watch on the front door and where they were. And, on the *other* other hand, when the vagrant was an ex-lover whom you probably hadn't figured on ever seeing again, it can be awkward.

The steam-heat in the lobby had already begun to make him drip, and Eva looked him over with disapproval. "Come on," she said and led him into the inner corridors. He'd never been anywhere other than the lobby, Hilda Rosen's office, and seventh floor, but they weren't going to any of those places this night. After several turnings and mounting four flights of stairs to the third floor (making an even hundred flights of stairs he'd climbed, up or down, that night), she opened a door and stepped inside.

There was a bed, a chair, a toilet, a sink – and no window.

There was also a small table with paper, pencils, and a typewriter on it.

She pointed as she spoke. "Wash, sleep, type up a report."

"I don't know how to use a typewriter. Takes years to learn, doesn't it?"

"You've got six hours. Make a start."

"Wouldn't know how to begin."

She started to leave, but he caught her hand.

"Eva," he began, but she stopped him with her voice alone.

"No." Very flat. She'd broken down in the apartment last week, but that was fleeting.

Their hour in Hell's Pantry had been final. Now, there was nothing.

"Are you that angry with me?" but she shook her head quickly and forcefully. She was biting her lip.

“I’m not angry. I don’t know what I am. I know I need to go away.”

“Back to Chicago?”

Her face contorted quickly, but she overcame it nearly as fast. “Don’t joke. Not about that.”

“I’m sorry; I didn’t think.” What had happened in Chicago that she had lost the baby?

She pressed her forehead against the edge of the door. “There was a border between us and I didn’t think you’d ever come back. And then, when it happened, I was glad you were where you were – because I didn’t want you to come back. And now, you are – and I don’t know what I think.”

“Eva ...” but again she cut his reply off.

“Just don’t. Just ... type up a report.”

He turned away to look at the typewriter and he heard her whisper from the door. “The mother of that little girl must feel like this, now that they found her other boot.” She was holding herself up by the edge of the door and pressing her forehead against it.

“What little girl?

“That little girl – in Wilmington.”

“They found the boot?” That was the first he’d heard about it.

“Yesterday – in a garbage pile at the Deerbrook Explosives Works. Someone must have picked it up off the river bank and dropped it there.”

That just didn’t sound likely, given the geography of the place. Was he going back to Wilmington?

He looked back at her and saw that she was still pressing her forehead against the edge of

the door. She had her eyes closed. "Mike," she said, and he barely heard her, "they don't think I can have babies, anymore." The door clicked and she was gone.

And he felt like he'd been kidney punched from both sides.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

February 9, 1915

When they came to fetch him, they'd find the door wrenched off its hinges and a piece of paper in the typewriter with one sentence on it: "^I can't typ~~w~~ e". As a statement of his frustration, they should get the message.

He had started, as Eva had ordered, with a wash. There were, fortunately, a good supply of face-cloths and towels in the lavatory, so the wash became a sponge-bath. Looking in the mirror, he ran a hand over his chin and lamented the lack of shaving gear. Come to think of it, it was just about time for a haircut, as well.

A short nap was the next order of business – which turned into a solid three uninterrupted hours. It didn't refresh him; it just took the edge off. He was ready for another forty hours without sleep – or so he told himself. He was finding that he couldn't do the forty hour days as

well as he used to. Was it possible that old age was creeping up? He was pushing thirty, after all. That thought got him up and out of bed. Through sheer impudence, he made the bed up so that no one would know he had slept in it. Don't give them the satisfaction of thinking he was human.

After his nap, though, it was time to leave – if he could. Simple, right? He'd walked into the place; he'd walk out. Just turn the knob and go.

When Eva had left quietly, he distinctly heard the door latch – now, try as he might, it wouldn't open from inside. Evidently, this room was more for keeping people safely within it than for keeping them safe from what was outside of it. In other words, it was Janus's private little prison cell. Devon had been in too many such to take it lightly. He didn't think of it as an obstacle; to him, it was more in the way of ... going out of their way to piss him off. Well, it worked. After fifteen minutes of trying to open the door, he was pissed off.

There was no lock on the inside for him to pick, so that narrowed the options a bit. The door opened outward, so there were no hinges available to work on. He had no pry bar he could use on the latch – even the bed-spring had crossers that were too thin to pry with.

That left brute strength as best available option, and he was determined that no two-inch piece of solid oak was going to get the better of him. He didn't even think about hitting it with his shoulder; that was a mug's game that would lead, at best, to a broken collar-bone. There were more direct and satisfying ways to skin this particular cat. Two large panels below the center divider and three above – shouldn't be too difficult. At that, the door was surprisingly strong: it took him a full five minutes to kick through it. Once the panels were gone, the outside knob turned easily and he was free.

When he got the door open, he took an extra moment to slam it back against its hinges a

dozen times, until the hinge screws ripped from splintered woodwork and the door was left hanging askew. That would take more than rehanging – it would take advanced carpentry. That'll teach them, he thought, and kicked it once more, for luck.

Breathing free air once again was good. A man like him shouldn't be locked up – he'd spent too much time that way to want to do more of it. It took effort to control his breathing and nerves, as he threaded through the building to the front. Outside, the sun was rising and traffic was beginning to build, so he decided not to smash his way through the street door, but jimmied the lock with a fire-ax, breathing frigid free air as the door finally swung open.

He had to smile as he walked away: those repairs were going to cost Janus a pretty penny. Serves him right.

And, now that he was free, where should he go? He still needed the answers to two questions, so it was another trek across town, on foot this time, to the place where his answers lay. The sun had fully risen as he left the Janus Building, and the Library had just opened when he arrived there. Taking matters into his own hands, he forestalled any objections and sought out his personal librarian.

“Oh, Mr. Steickternott!” was her shocked exclamation at his unkempt, unshaven appearance. “You shouldn't be in the library like that! It's not proper ...”

“I've got two things I have to learn and almost no time to learn them!” He took her arm and hustled her into the stacks, found a secluded spot to explain. “Quickly now, everything from 541 through 547!” She began to sputter and fume, but he silenced her with: “My dear woman, this is life or death! Life or death!”

In five minutes, he had two piles of material three feet high stacked before him, books

and periodicals and papers on everything from analytical chemistry to quantitative analysis. She started to return to the circulation desk, but he caught her hand and pulled her down beside him, explaining what he was looking for. They were soon shoulder to shoulder, each putting items in front of the other, comparing notes, and selecting the best guesses. The useful pile grew at about a quarter the rate of the reject piles.

After two hours, he looked at the clock and slammed his current book closed. "I have to go. I've a train to catch and a man to catch, but not in that order. Thank you, Irene. You've saved lives, today."

He stood, and she stood with him. He raised her hand to kiss it, but looked at her face first, saw her smile – and kissed her lips, instead. For a mid-thirties spinster, she was quite enthusiastic about it. Devon was a little taken aback; it wasn't the response he expected. Luckily, there was no one in sight, or she might have faced some tough questions about best use of time on the job.

Back out on the street, he had to get down to Jane and Hudson, then back to Grand Central Station before the 1:45 p.m. train. The Broadway car went past in three minutes and took him the forty-odd blocks south to canal. From there, shanks mares the ten shorter blocks west to Hudson.

If there was one thing in New York he could count on, it was that *Frau Seithen*'s place would never change. A circumspect inspection from a distance showed no activity, in or out, and no watchers on the door. Up the stairs, avoiding the rotted sections by habit, he stopped to listen again. The door was unlocked this time so, with a deep breath, he simply walked in.

The new runner in the hall was no longer new. It well-stained with mud and, on closer

view, something more. The overhead light was still on in the middle of the day.

The cabbage smell remained.

To his right, the door to his old room was closed. He rapped with his knuckles. Silence.

He pounded with the side of his fist. A groan from inside.

“Was ist?”

“Room service.”

“Was?” Fuchs’s voice.

This seemed to be his day for breaking woodwork, so he kicked in the door.

Fuchs was just rolling off the bed, in his unions, as the door bounced open, so Devon crossed the floor in two strides, picked up the little German and threw him toward the front window, followed him, picked him up again, and threw him back toward the bed. Fuchs came staggering off the bed and Devon grabbed the German’s throat.

Holding Fuchs against the wall, he squeezed the man’s face until his eyes opened.

“Number 123!”

“What?”

“Nummer hundertdreundzwanzig!”

“Vest 15th!”

“Yeah, Vest 15th. Tell me about it.”

Fuchs managed to look at him from where his face was twisted. “Many girls. *Hübsche kleine Madchen!*”

“Never mind the girls.”

“You don’t like the girls, Steickternott? You like the boys, maybe?”

“What I like is beating the hell out of you every few weeks, Gay-or-guh. It’s been a couple of weeks now, hasn’t it? Got another gun you’d like to give me?” Fuchs’s eyes went to the bed, and Devon decided he’d better look under the pillow. “Number 123. Koenig’s hoard in the basement. Where’s it going to?”

“I don’t know.” Even frightened, the man was a lousy liar.

“Guns, explosives, photos, plans. What’s it for?” He squeezed Fuchs’s face a little harder.

“*Das Invasion!*” the man squeaked. German-style, four syllables.

“Who’s getting *Invasion*-ed?”

“You are that stupid? Canada.”

“I know that, dummy. It’s a big place, Canada. Where?”

“How do I know?”

“You know because I’ve read Koenig’s book and you’re all over every page! You were at the meeting on Tuesday across the hall there. Don’t bother sputtering – I was there. Where and when is *Das Invasion*?”

“I don’t kn...” Devon cut that answer off by twisting until Fuchs stopped talking. After a few moments, Devon let up the pressure, and Fuchs gasped, “All along the lakes, crossing the lakes and the rivers.”

“Niagara?”

“And Detroit, and across the Saint ... the Saint ...”

“Lawrence? Across the Saint Lawrence?”

“Sure, *Sankt Lorenz*. Speedboats. Speedboats and guns – machine guns and big guns!”

That sounded crazy enough to be true. Koenig said he had speedboats. He was getting

machine-guns. Big guns, too? From where? You don't get artillery at Woolworth's – and you don't keep it supplied from your milk money.

A familiar square filled the doorway to his left.

"*Du! Du sollte 't nicht hier sein! Verschwind'!*" They always think they can order you around. Disappear? Was he a magician?

Devon explained in two languages and four words what the good *Frau* Seithen could do. She shouted "*Hilfe! Hilfe!*" and Devon wondered from which direction that help was coming.

Having called for help, the little German woman took matters into her own hands, rushed into the room and began slapping Devon around the head and shoulders. No question, she was strong. He nearly lost his grip on Fuchs, and he couldn't hold the little man and hold off Seithen, too – so he did what he had to do and *Frau* Seithen fell back across the bed, stunned. He turned his attention back to Fuchs.

"How many?"

"How many v-wat?" Devon twisted again. "He bragged he's got eight thousand rifles in the stash at Detroit! That is but ten minutes across the river. And that is just Detroit. Ogdensburg, too. Buffalo." It's always Buffalo, isn't it?

"Who's he? Koenig?" Fuchs shook his head, or tried to. "Who, then? Von Papen?" Fuchs grunted assent. "And where else?"

"I don't know. Ahh!" The man didn't like his neck twisted. "Niagara, Cornv-wall, Kings-tone. It's the *Saengerfests*. Where they are having the singing. Look for them."

Saengerfest-ers, again. God, he hated German music. He heard footsteps coming down the stairs.

“One last question: when?” He was squeezing again.

“It’s all timed with happenings at the border!” Fuchs gasped.

“What happens at the border?”

There was another second of indecision, and Devon squeezed harder. The footsteps were nearly at the bottom of the stairs.

Fuchs gabbled between squeals. “Koenig says it all depends on the Deerbrook experiments and the guns. When the guns get there; when the cylinders get there.” Cylinders? What cylinders? What did he mean, ‘cylinders’?

“From where?”

Fuchs shrugged. “Where do guns come from?”

The footsteps reached the doorway. Push was coming to shove in the worst way. He threw Fuchs so that he fell on *Frau Seithen*, who was just beginning to recover. Turning to meet the new threat at the door, he was ready for anything up to four large, hairy, tattooed sailors.

“Johnny,” she said, in the gentlest of voices. “Why do you keep coming back?” He took his eyes off Fuchs to have a look at her.

Margit Seithen was framed there, in elegant winter attire of what he assumed was the latest fashion. He remembered her fashionable garb last fall, the way she looked in it – and out of it. He didn’t ask where she got the money for such things. If he assumed the worst, he’d probably be underestimating the situation.

“I just can’t stay away from you, sweetheart. Something just keeps drawing me back to you like a beating jungle drum. And, because I like beating on snivelling little Germans like him.” He jerked a thumb toward Fuchs.

Margit looked toward *Frau Seithen*, sitting on the bed and nursing her jaw. “You just like beating people, I think. How hard did you hit her?”

“Only as hard as I needed to,” Devon answered.

She looked at Fuchs, who was trying to put on his pants. “And him?”

“Beating? Not at all. I just threw him a bit.” And, that was true. Apart from throwing Fuchs from wall to wall and twisting his neck a bit, he’d hardly laid a finger on him.

She smiled that smile he remembered. “Did you get what you came for?”

“Sure! Of course! Why wouldn’t I?” He took in her coat, hat and fur-topped boots. “What are you here for?” He was keeping one eye on Fuchs, who, in pants and shirt now, was showing signs of getting restless.

“Why else would I be here? I’m here to see my mother, of course.” The old lady, still sitting and rubbing her jaw, didn’t seem anxious for comfort from her daughter. She was eyeing Devon with pure hatred.

“Now, you’ve seen her. Who else are you here to see? Seen Paul, lately?” He was fairly sure of the answer to that.

Was there hesitation before her answer? “I see Paul almost every day.”

“And, every night?” asked Devon, not sure whether the question was prompted by international conspiracy or old-fashioned jealousy. He decided to give himself a break and go for conspiracy. That was an easier explanation to believe. There was so much conspiracy going around, these days. It must be catching.

The old woman snorted at the mention of ‘night’, then held her jaw once again, as if the snort was too much for her. Fuchs was tucking in his shirt and watching the door. Devon was

watching Fuchs.

“I think you’re jealous, Johnny. Shall I tell you something, lover?”

“Go ahead. Surprise me.”

“He’s not half the man you are.”

“I said surprise me.”

“Oh, that’s not like you at all, Johnny!” Her tone changed. “Why don’t we go somewhere, Johnny? You and me? Somewhere nice. You know you’ve never even bought me a drink.” She smiled again and he had a flash of her, in the dark, looking up at him through tousled blond hair: ‘Johnny? One more time?’

Margit was at her best right now: in command, able to think fast and keep two steps ahead of him. She’d spent most of her life keeping boys and men bewildered and unsure of how to take her. Unsure of what she was going to do or what she would demand they do next. She’d had lots of experience at the job and she was good at it.

But she’d practiced it on Devon before and he was good at his job, too. He was looking for some sign that Margit’s switch was ready to flick off and let the other Margit appear. It was not an attractive sight when she did.

“What do you say, Johnny? I need a drink. Don’t you? I’ll bet you do.”

“I’ve just got one more question for *Herr* Fuchs, if he can spare me the time. What do you say, Gay-or-guh?”

Gay-or-guh had been working his way behind Devon and suddenly dove across *Frau* Seithen for the top of the bed. The old woman got his knee in her jaw as he dove, but Devon caught him by his pants waist and yanked hard, flinging him back across the room. One hand

under the pillow and Devon came up with a tiny pocket-sized .25 caliber automatic.

Before Fuchs could get his balance, Devon was back at him, catching him by the neck again and pushing him backward. Slammed against the opposite wall, held up on tiptoe by his collar, Fuchs could do little but squirm as Devon leaned in to whisper a question into his ear. The little German looked at Devon with surprise before he answered “*Ja. Natürlich. Glücklich.*”

“Thanks, Gay-or-guh. You can keep this one.” Devon released the magazine from the .25 and dropped it into his pocket, racked the slide and caught the ejected cartridge. He held it up. “I’ll keep this one for good luck.” He tossed the empty pistol to Fuchs.

“You really can be a brute, Johnny.” Margit was pulling winter gloves on, paying no attention to Fuchs or to her mother. “I never saw you in action, before. It’s terrifying, lover. Where did you learn to fight like that?”

“In a cantina in Juarez, one Friday night. I’ll tell you about it sometime. It’s a tale that involves *mezcal*, two sad American dobies and a girl named ...” He stopped in surprise. “Damned if I can remember her name!”

She shook her head and finished tucking her fingers into her gloves. “Oh, Johnny! What will I do with you? Bye-bye ... mummy. Put some ice on that before it bruises.” *Frau Seithen* didn’t reply. “*Auf wiedersehen, George. Das hat Spass gemacht.*” What was fun, thought Devon. Fuchs didn’t bother to reply to her, either. She stepped to the hallway door. “Are you ready, Johnny?”

“Where you are concerned, always.” They smiled at each other, this time and he had to admit he did feel some affection toward her. “Where should we go?”

“I know a place,” she said, smoothly, with another little smile. She was already heading to

the door, clearly expecting it to be open when she got there and he had to rush to open it for her.

“Thank you, sweetheart. *Du bist ein Erhenmann.*”

Yeah, a gentleman, who’d opened up a gentlemanly can of worms. He followed her into the chilly February day, and knew that all hell was about to break loose behind him.

She pulled her hat down to keep the wind off, and looked sideways toward him. “You know, of course, that all hell is about to break loose behind you.”

“Couldn’t have worked out better if I planned it that way,” he said with a smile.

So far, it had been a good morning. Two busted doors, a kiss from a librarian, a good fight and, now, drinks with a stunning beauty. Would the afternoon be as good?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

February 9, 1915

Devon hailed a cab, Margit gave an address, the cabbie complained about going crosstown in this traffic, and they eventually arrived at a destination. Always the gentleman, he handed Margit out of the car, and followed her up the steps to Number 123, West 15th. This should be interesting, he told himself, and wished he had brought his pistol, or even Fuchs's .25 with him. He didn't mention to her that he'd been there before. It would be an adventure, meeting new people, he told himself.

As it was, there were likely a lot of people in that building he didn't want to run into. From drunken 250-pound sailors, to international conspirators, to overly clingy good time girls. He wondered which he'd run into first.

It was none of the above.

The music was silent at this time of day and the good time girls were probably asleep, if

they were still there. The drunken 250-pound sailors were off doing whatever drunken 250-pound sailors do when they're no longer drunk – what *do* you do with a drunken sailor, early in the morning?

The conspirators were probably in the basement, conspiring. The atmosphere down there was very conducive to conspiracy.

“I thought we were going to have a drink,” he complained as she led the way to the back of the house. He’d explored these hallways before, but hadn’t actually gone so far as to open any of the doors.

“We’ll get a drink, Johnny, but I want to show you this, first.” She opened a door Devon remembered quite distinctly from his last crazy flight from the basement of this place and led the way down. She kept one hand firmly pressed to the wall of the fragile staircase. Devon didn’t have that luxury, as he was settling his brass knucks on his hand and making himself as ready as he could for whatever was about to happen. The brass knucks were cold on his scarred fingers. Any gang of international conspirators were going to get a good punch in the nose before they gunned him down with one, or more, of the five hundred weapons down there.

The larder at the foot of the stairs still sported wine and canned goods. The chain was gone from the refrigerator unit. Someone had cleaned up the pickles.

He pulled open the door of the cooler and found what he expected: hanging meat cuts and frozen goods – and not a trace of any kind of C₃H₅N₃O₉, C₇H₅N₃O₆, or even good old-fashioned 2 KNO₃ + S + 3 C. The current content of this freezer wouldn’t go boom if you whacked it with a frozen leg of lamb.

He left it open and yanked the door of the front chamber open, went straight to the light

switch and turned it. The electric light revealed stone walls, dirt floor, and no sign of photos, maps, drawings, guns or explosives. He'd been too clever for his own good.

"So, where'd they move it to?" He didn't expect an answer.

"Oh, Johnny, I don't know. It's gone, that's all."

"Word's got out that I've been here, then?"

"Do you think Paul and Franzie are stupid?"

"Franzie? No. Paul – the jury's still out."

"How did Mox end up on the pavement outside your window?"

"Who?" He'd have to find new digs. He turned the switch again and closed the door.

"Where's that drink?"

She led him back upstairs and into the front parlor. It was actually very nicely arranged and included a pianola and two gramophones, a small one and one with the biggest horn he'd ever seen. The first for intimate, quiet moments, the second for parties. The neighbors must love this place on Saturday nights.

She lifted the top of a bureau and a self-contained liquor bar rose from its depths. A nice bit of joinery, that. "What's your poison, Johnny?"

"Not funny, but bourbon."

"Cute. This is a German bar: schnapps, vodka, brandy – even a bottle of scotch, but no bourbon."

"Surprise me."

A minute later, he was seated at ease on a large sofa, with Margit curled up against him, both sipping drinks. Devon was surprised to find that his was scotch.

“Where’s Lalia?” he asked, between sips.

“Who?”

“Lalia Florence Louden.” She looked up at him with puzzlement. “The Baroness.”

“Oh!” She took another sip of her – Devon didn’t know what, but it was bright yellow.

“She went to Boston to be with her husband during the trial.”

“More fool she.” This was getting to be too comfortable, especially when she moved one knee onto his thigh. Too many late-night recollections for that to be anything but distracting. “So who has taken over?”

“One of the girls. Veruska … somebody.” She snuggled in a little tighter.

“Is the Baroness really in Boston?” He’d say this for her, she really was very good; she was soft, warm, pliable – very pliable! no corsets – and he was rapidly forgetting the train schedule. What time, again, was his ticket? He looked around the room for a clock, but, of course, found none.

“According to the newspapers, she is. She’s defending his truthfulness while beating back the horde of adoring women who all claim they’re his one true love.” Now, she was playing with his shirt buttons with her free hand.

“Women! I never have figured them out.” She laughed and ran a hand over his chest.

“No,” she said. “You never have, Johnny.”

A creak in the hall, the door knob turned a fraction of an inch, and Devon was on his feet and at the door before it fully opened. He had one arm around the newcomer’s throat and was squeezing before he realized it was a woman, and one who was struggling for breath – her feet being six inches off the ground.

“Johnny! That’s Veruska! That’s the new Baroness! Let her go.” Margit was wiping at his spilled scotch and her yellow drink as they dripped off her dress and the sofa. “Put her down!”

He lowered the woman to a standing position and steadied her as she drew in gasps of air. What can you say about a mistake like that? “Sorry.”

She was well beyond plump, not overly tall and just beginning to turn gray. Surprisingly, he guessed her age at not much more than the departed Lalia’s, who made late thirties look very good. Right now, Veruska grasped at her throat and seemed to drag air through it with difficulty. She looked resentfully toward Margit. “Who is this pig?” Her voice was a little strained, which was understandable, given the circumstances. “I’ll have the boys work him over. Pig!” She swung a fist at him and tried to kick. He simply stepped back. “What the hell’s wrong with you? Pfeil and Bertrom will kick you to pieces.” She had a New Jersey accent.

Margit laughed merrily at that. “Johnny can handle both of those two any day. I’ve seen him do it, so save yourself the trouble. And save them the bruises. Johnny, this is Veruska; she runs the place, now.”

“I’m really sorry, lady. I’m a bit on edge.” He smiled ingratiatingly, but decided he must be slipping. She didn’t look the least bit gratiated. “Wait a minute! Somebody told me you were Hungarian!” She sure didn’t sound it.

“I’m more Hungarian than that last bitch, Lalia! She’s from Queen’s, I bet. One of my grannies was from Hungaria – or some place like that.” Veruska turned to Margit. “You tell your drunken boyfriends to keep their hands off me. I’m not one of the girls –” Margit raised an eyebrow at that. “– not anymore, I’m not.” She narrowed her eyes and looked at Devon with venom. “I don’t like him; I don’t want him here.” She was looking now at the shattered remains

of the drinks glasses.

“Veruska.” Margit waited until the woman looked up at her. “I want him here. You understand?”

The change was instant.

“Yeah, yeah. Sure, sure.”

Damn it! Every time he began to reconsider his opinion of *Fraulein Seithen*, some little thing like that goes by and he had to go right back to where he was. What was it about her that made people bow to her? Whatever it was, it made it very difficult, as he could grow to like having her cuddled up beside him.

Veruska, not so much.

“I think I should go, anyway. I’ve got a train to catch.” There! Nobody could say he wasn’t doing his duty.

Margit jumped to her feet. “No! You can’t leave yet. You have to come up to my room, Johnny.”

“Isn’t it a little early in the day for that?” sneered Veruska who, although she had been ‘one of the girls’ and should know better, apparently had some set timetable she adhered to. He didn’t know the profession worked that way.

“It may be a little late in the day,” Devon said. “I’ve got a train to catch.”

“Come on, Johnny. Upstairs. I’ve got something to show you up there.” An arch smile on her beautiful face, she took his hand and pulled him past Veruska who was eyeing the broken glassware.

“Hey! Who’s going to clean that up?” Neither Margit nor Devon deigned to answer her.

He knew the stairs well and still liked the carpet. There was a dark stain on the wall-paper near the top of the stair that he hadn't noticed last time, but he didn't think it was blood. Or rather, he hoped it wasn't blood.

"That's blood," she said. "There was a fight a few nights ago."

"Anybody killed?"

"Nobody anyone will miss." Scattered throughout the area of the stain were thirty or so small holes, each about the size of a #2 pellet. Somebody had caught a chestful of buckshot. From very close range.

On the second floor, she led him down the hallway to the back of the house. Her room here was very much nicer than at the Seithen place, much softer, much gentler. He had to ask himself how long she'd been staying here. He took a turn, smelled her perfumes, touched lace curtains. When he turned back, she had her waister off and was removing her skirt. Even in the chill of February, she was wearing only drawers and stockings. He had always been in favor of that and remained so, now.

She looked up and saw him looking, smiled indulgently as she dropped her blouse to the floor. She wasn't wearing corsets, either. "You spilled Goldschlager on my nicest outfit, Johnny. It'll take forever to get that out." She did take the time to pose for him for a moment, which sent memories racing up and down his spine.

He threw his hat on the bed and sat in a comfy wicker arm chair by the window. "Is that what you wanted to show me? Because, nice as it is, I've seen it before." You'd think that would throw her off stride, but it didn't. She laughed, instead.

Drawing on a lacy bed-jacket as she walked to him, she stopped in front, then sat straddle

on his lap. She tousled his hair and scraped a finger along his unshaven jaw.

“Oh, Johnny, you’re as big a mess as ever.” She picked up his hands and held them in front of her, fingers entwined with his. “How did this happen?” She kissed the scars on his hands.

“When von Papen tried to blow me and the Welland Canal to pieces. You remember. I blew up your boat instead. Did you have to swim for it?”

“No, but I lost some furs I was very fond of. Are you going to replace them for me, Johnny?” He shook his head. “That’s all right, Franzie did.” She brushed his hair aside again and looked deep into his eyes.

“What are you snooping into now, Johnny?”

“You already know what I’m snooping into. What was downstairs; what *is* upstairs; and everything in the middle.”

“You think you can stop them? They’ve got thousands of people, tens of thousands, and millions of *Deutsch marks* behind them. Johnny, they’ve got so much money, that Franz wrote that boat and my furs off against the money the Embassy is providing. Nobody will even notice it. You can’t stop them, Johnny. They’ll roll right over you.”

“That’s what you said last fall.”

“They nearly did.” She held up one of his hands, and kissed the scars, again. “I don’t want you dead, Johnny. You’re too good a lover for that.” Boy, if he had a nickel for every time a voluptuous young woman in her underwear had told him that – he’d have a nickel.

“Thank you very much.” Her proximity and weight were rather distracting – and she knew it.

“I don’t have that many lovers I can spare, Johnny.”

“I can think of three in this house.”

“I’m only thinking of one.” She lowered her head to kiss him fiercely.

With her lips still locked onto his, he rose from the chair and she wrapped her legs around him, clinging to him as he carried her to the bed and placed her on her back against the pillows. He reached behind and pulled her legs loose, freed her arms and ran his hands down them, pausing at the inside of the elbows for a hard look, then he took a long look from blond hair, past rounded breasts and slim body, to long legs, then straightened and picked up his hat from the bed. All the while, she said nothing.

“What did you want to show me, Margit?”

There was a long silence.

“Top drawer of the bureau. Right hand side.” She flipped the front of her bed-jacket closed.

He slid the drawer open and pulled out the only item it held.

It was a flimsy: a single-color, offset-printed flyer on foolscap paper. Laid out in German script that was nearly impossible to read if you weren’t used to it, it had the Imperial Crest in the upper corner. He wondered whether that was authorized or plagiarized. Devon had never had much experience with the script but, deciphered, it read:

“Alte Deutsche!

Die Saengerfest Ist Hier!

Die Zeit Ist Gekommen, Sich Zu Erinnern!

Alle Deutschen Saengerbund Werden!

Kommt, Singt Die Hymne Deutschlands!

Kommt, Marschiert Den Marsch Deutschlands!

Die Zeit Ist Gekommen, Dem Ruf Des Vaterlandes Zu Folgen!"

Well! 'Old Germans! The Songfest is here! All the German singing groups are alerted!

Come sing the hymns, come march the march. Come answer the call of the Fatherland. All true Germans are called.' And, below that, a list of six cities along the border with Canada – and a date. And, one final line of text:

"Bringen Sie Die Musikinstrumente Die Sie Gegeben Haben!"

Just a final reminder that the musical instruments they've been given were to be brought with them to the festival. Nice of Imperial Germany to spend money on thousands of wind instruments for the oom-pah festival. Strange that, in all the things he'd seen stacked in the basement before, there hadn't been even one piccolo, let alone a euphonium.

"Why show me this?"

"Steer clear of those places, Johnny, please. Let it happen. Stay away! Stay with me!" She had drawn her knees up and her arms were wrapped around her calves. She seemed less sure of herself than before.

He read out loud from the flyer. "*Die Saengerfest ist hier! Die Zeit ist gekommen!*" The time has come! Ominous.

"That's right."

“You know I can’t stay away from something like that.” He folded the sheet carefully and pocketed it.

“Johnny, they printed a hundred thousand of them. A hundred thousand!” She let that sink in. “They’ve gone out across the country. Those musical instruments? I saw invoices for twenty thousand of them – and for bullets – and ... oh, what didn’t I see?”

“Did you see any big guns while you were looking around?”

“Big guns? What’s that?”

“Artillery. Cannons!”

“Cannons! Of course not. If I had, I’d have told you.”

“You would? So, why betray Franzie and Paul? If von Papen’s going to win, why stick your neck out?”

There was another long silence.

“I love you, Johnny. I truly do.”

Jesus Christ, she was good. She said it so simply and so quietly that he immediately believed her. He looked at those green eyes and that sweet mouth, and he believed her. He couldn’t help it.

He also couldn’t help being one of those knights in white armor, *sans peur et sans reproche*, who all too often get killed in the last chapter. Well, he was nearly *sans peur*, at any rate. Enough so to make him keep questioning his own motives. He hated that about himself. He probably held an overly inflated opinion of his own virtue – which meant that he and the lady were both going to be unsatisfied today. Too bad for the lady. Too bad for him.

But he had no intention of dying in the last chapter. At least, not if he could possibly

avoid it.

On the other hand, he was nowhere near the last chapter, yet.

“Bertröm and Pfeil are upstairs, aren’t they?” She nodded. “Why are they spending time at the Deerbrook plant?”

“I didn’t know they were.”

“Sure, you do. We’re neither of us fools, Margit.”

“They’re cooking something up at Deerbrook. That’s the phrase they used: cooking something up. When it’s ready, the bottles get shipped north.”

“The bottles?” She nodded again. Yeah, ‘the cylinders’, Fuchs had said. What did they mean, cylinders? Now, she said ‘bottles’. So, they contained something. “What, are they making down there, schnapps?”

She didn’t smile. “Johnny, walk away. I don’t want you dead, but, next time, I can’t help. Next time, somebody has to die.”

“Know what I asked Fuchs, at the end, there, on our way out?”

“No.”

“I asked him if you’d rather kill me than fuck me. Remember what he said? ‘Sure; of course; happily’. ” He leaned over and kissed those very red lips while she was still thinking about that. Even distracted, it was still a very good kiss. “Now, why do I feel inclined to believe slimy little George Fuchs?”

He closed the door gently, began to make his way downstairs. He was only a couple of steps down the staircase when he heard a door open back where he had just come from. She yelled down the hall after him.

“And can you tell me you would not do the same to me, Johnny? Can you? *Du Fotze!*”

The door was slammed with intent and he continued down. He had a feeling Margit’s switch might be trembling on the edge.

Veruska was carrying a dustpan with the remains of two broken glasses down the hallway toward the kitchen when he reached her and she pressed her back against the wall as he did. He nodded as he passed and went out into the street.

The air outside was much fresher than it was inside No. 123 West 15th.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

February 11, 1915

At least it wasn't freezing rain.

The reason for that, of course, is that it was too damn cold for rain – and he was, once again, lying on a river bank, watching the concrete buildings of Deerbrook Experimental Station No. 1. Buildings Nos. 1 and 2, that is. This time, at least, he'd had a bowl of hot soup at a tavern in Wilmington to fortify himself before he crossed the river.

The whole crux of von Papen's plan had to lie in those two buildings, Building No. 1 and Building No. 2. What was inside? A new high explosive? A new smokeless powder? Some deadly new fragmentation shell? Whatever it was, he was never going to discover it lying here in the mud. On your feet, you lazy bastard, he ordered himself, and was more than a little surprised when his legs obeyed him.

Rather than dodge between the outbuildings as he had the first time, he worked his way

along the riverbank to a point closest to Building No. 2. A short sprint would take him into the shadows of the structure.

He'd not been able to see into it on the first trip, but he might get a glimpse this time. It was Building No. 1 that most caught his attention, though. The armed guards, shotguns prominent, were still stationed outside it and lights illuminated the entrances. Whatever they were guarding, somebody was paying a good price for it.

He pulled his hat down over the red wig and beard he'd stolen from Max von Louden last year (that's thinking ahead!) and made a dash for Building No. 2. He wasn't sure why he'd decided to bring the disguise with him; it probably wouldn't fool anyone up close, but you never know. At least, from a distance, it might cause some confusion, and, up close, it might make up the one or two seconds that made all the difference. The shotguns the guards were carrying pointed up the seriousness of it all.

Building No. 2 was locked up as it had been on his first visit but, as he made his way down the end closest to the river, he heard voices coming from the other side of the big sliding doors. There were people in there; doing what, he had no idea. As he pressed his back up against the end doors to avoid the floodlights, a thought struck him.

Those doors were big enough to allow a flying machine to pass through. Was that what they were hiding – some new high-flying aeroplane that could spy on troop movements untouched by rifle or artillery fire? Perhaps even drop explosive devices on those below? He recoiled from the thought. That kind of terror weapon was unthinkable, uncivilized – un-American! The fact that he'd done it himself in Mexico didn't count: Mexico wasn't America and, besides, he wasn't American.

But, he forced himself to admit, if he had done it, others would do it, too – or were doing it, too.

These thoughts while he was making his way alcove by alcove down the length of the concrete slab buttresses. At the end, he could see the layout of Building No. 1 and saw that it was not going to be easy to approach it.

His best bet would be to work his way to the far end, flat on his belly and try to get in at the final door on the side. If he could get past the Pinkerton with the pump gun – if he could get the door open – if there were no alarms – if, if, if.

Not one to let an ‘if’ stop him – when there was no other choice or all other choices had been exhausted – he was on his belly and snaking the two hundred yards through long, snow-crusted grass toward the primary structure. Outside of the lighted area, it was pitch black, and he was praying that the lights would ruin the guards’ night vision enough to make him invisible for a while.

It almost worked.

About twenty yards from his goal, a surprised voice called “Hey, wut chall doin’ thar?”

He immediately stood up and pointed down to the ground, waving the man forward. He continued to inspect the ground as the guard approached, apparently intent on some discovery.

“Wut is it? Wut chall see?”

“Right here,” he said, pointing down once again. “And, there’s more up there.” He pointed toward the river with his left hand and, as the man predictably looked to the river, Devon cold-cocked him with a left cross that spun him completely around. Devon caught the shotgun as it fell and the man as he fell, lowering him carefully.

Pinkerton really should hire better people than that.

He racked the shells out of the gun and threw them into the darkness, then calmly walked into the light to the spot where the man had been. A voice from his right called "Hey, you all right over there?" Devon waved a hand and nodded. "Just thought I saw sump'n. It were a ol' rabbit!" The other guard laughed and resumed his patrol while Devon resumed his. He kept up the patrol until his hands quit shaking.

For a good five minutes, he copied the same patrol pattern he'd seen the guard make then, as fast as he could, slid into the shadow by the end door. Being much better at his job than the now-unconscious Pinkerton behind him, he'd thought to bring a jimmy with him. His task was helped by the discovery that the door in front of him wasn't designed to keep people from getting in; the guards around the building served that purpose. No, if Devon had it figured correctly, the doors were designed to let people out quickly, and, if so, its lock wouldn't be jimmy-proof.

It wasn't.

He eased the door closed behind him and looked up and down the hall. It ran to the other end of the building. Overhead, a multitude of pipes of various sizes snaked along the hall, ducked through the inside wall and came back out at various places. Water? Heat? Electricity? Other?

The three feet of concrete thickness on the outside of the door he'd used to sneak in was matched by another three feet inside. It must be one hell of an explosive they were testing.

To his right, he could hear the sound of sheep and pigs. That must be the ones from the barns – outbuildings A and B, as he'd discovered last time he was here. He could also hear voices, but couldn't make out what was being said.

A klaxon began to sound and red lights over each door came on. Oh, crap. Had they

found him? Or was it something else? Should he dash for the outside and safety or trust that the building wasn't going to go up? Well, it hadn't gone up so far, so he watched as the lights flashed for nearly twenty seconds, then stopped. The red lights went out and the voices at the far end resumed, raised in anger this time. He still couldn't understand what they were arguing over, but it was clear that somebody was angry with somebody else. As long as it wasn't him.

What was causing the argument? And who was arguing? These seemed very good questions to find answers to.

Whatever the answers were, Devon was sure that they were the other side of the inner wall. For each door in the outer wall, there was a corresponding one in the inner wall. The one closest to him was firmly closed, with no outer latch to open it. So were the next six as he tried each, coming closer and closer to the voices at the end.

At the last door, a clipboard hung on the wall, holding a thick stack of papers. Good idea to look that over, he thought, but had only just reached out to lift it, when the door swung open and a young man with high collars, a fussy tie and thick glasses came through.

“Oh! It’s about time! You’re from Building 2?” he exclaimed, grabbing Devon’s forearm. “Yeah – yes, that’s right. Building 2,” he said. He wondered, not for the first time, what was in Building 2. He must make a point of finding out.

“Good, come on!” The man pulled Devon through the door and into the inner section. Were his glasses so strong that he couldn’t see that Devon’s beard and hair were fake? Or, was he just too intent on his technical problem, assuming it was a technical problem?

The inner area was basically a large arena, dirt covered, with stakes set out in concentric circles at measured intervals. There were observation windows in the far end and a couple of

doors leading through at that point.

Most intriguingly, there were sheep and pigs tethered at each stake.

“Look at this! This one here,” the man directed, pointing at one of the numerous steel cylinders he could see up and down the sides of the arena. “You guys are sending us bum valves. Well, not the valves themselves but the actuators. Watch.” He inserted a pin into a hole in the valve he had pointed to. “Don’t want to let that stuff out, yet, do we?”

Devon shook his head. “Don’t want a repeat of when that little girl got in here, that’s for sure.”

The man matched Devon’s head shake. “That was too bad. Poor little thing. I wish we’d been able to let her family know what happened, but ... too much at stake.”

“Yeah,” Devon agreed. “Too much at stake.” Devon hazarded a guess. “Still, taking a little girl’s body out and dumping it in the river like that. Must have been tough.”

“It was, yeah. It was those lousy German guys insisted on that. Still, it’s all over and done with, and at least we know the stuff works. Now, watch,” the Deerbrook guy instructed. He reached down and tripped an electric solenoid on the device. There was a loud hum, a click – and nothing else happened. The mechanical valve attached to it did not even try to open, even with the safety pin in place.

“Now, it’s just one or two bum actuators, but it’s holding up the run.”

“Yeah, I can see the problem,” Devon said. “They were all right when they left Building 2, so maybe they got banged along the way. I’ll go back and check with them.”

At that moment, a much amplified voice came over a set of loudspeakers somewhere at the far end of the arena. “The team from Building 2 will be another five minutes. In the

meantime, check each of the actuators and report all defective ones.”

Devon’s buddy straightened and looked curiously at him. “I thought you were from Building 2.”

“I am. I just came on ahead. The rest of the team will be along.”

The man took off his glasses in order to look at Devon closely for the first time. “Is that beard real? Say, where’s your company badge?”

Sure, enough, the man was wearing a very shiny Deerbrook badge. Devon looked down to where his own badge should be and chuckled. “Oh, right!” he said, and put his hand in his coat pocket to search for it. “Funny story about that ...” and hit him as hard as he could. The fellow obligingly went down and stayed there.

It really wasn’t fair. While the man was a couple of inches taller than Devon, he was gawky and all elbows; a pencil and paper type, who’d probably never thought of throwing a punch in his life. Also, he wasn’t expecting it.

Also also Devon was wearing brass knuckles – as he had been when he hit the guard outside.

He grabbed the fallen technician by the collar and dragged him back into the shadow of the doorway. He may have broken the man’s jaw, but it couldn’t be helped. “Sorry, pal, but this is war.” He remembered something else and kicked the prostrate man once. “That’s for a little girl, asshole. No matter what’s at stake. You know how it is.” He put the man’s glasses back on him, freed his victim’s company badge and clipped it on his own pocket.

He took a last look back at the arena, trying to put a mental picture of it in his head, then headed back to the hallway, taking the clipboard from its hook beside the door and heading

straight out through the corresponding exit door. They were obviously there as emergency exits in case of fire, explosion, or whatever else might be happening in that building.

Another Pinkerton guy with a pump Remington spun around at the sound of the door's opening, leveling the scattergun, but Devon just waved to him. "Just heading back to Building 2. We've got some bad actuators."

The man hooked a thumb over his shoulder. "Truck's just leaving Building 2, now." Sure enough, he saw headlights on the drive-path from Building 2.

"Thanks, I'll head them off." And, Devon began to dog-trot toward the approaching truck. As they neared him, he lifted a hand to wave them down and hopped onto the running boards as they pulled up beside him.

"What is it?" said the driver. Two others occupied the rest of the bench seat of the C-cab Ford.

"How many actuators did you bring?" asked Devon, trying to keep his face out of clear sight.

"Enough to replace the defectives – four."

"That's what I thought. No, they want to replace them all before the next run." They'd have to build new ones first, if Devon had anything to say about it. Anything to slow down the process of whatever was going on.

"What, all thirty? Come on!"

"All thirty. We'd better go back and get them, or you know where the shit will land."

"Oh, yeah." The man reversed and cranked the truck around, then pulled it onto the lane to head back. "Have we even got thirty?"

“Better hope so.” Devon clung to the side of the truck as they bounced along the dirt lane, keeping, he hoped, his head above the level of the cab.

One of the others in the cab leaned forward. “Do I know you?”

Devon smiled his friendliest smile. “I’m from Building 1.” As if that explained it.

The man didn’t look very convinced. Devon lifted the badge pinned to his lapel, glancing at it as he did. “I’m ... Delaney. Tom Delaney. Just came to Building 1 from the Powder Works last month.”

“Frying pan to the fire, eh, Delaney?” The man grinned as he sat back.

The truck pulled up in front of Building 2, and Devon stepped off the running board to let the others climb out. He started toward the back of the truck, saying casually, “I’ll open up the back.”

“Yeah, okay,” the driver called back as the three men entered the building. He didn’t bother to open the back, just checked to see what was in it. Four foot-square boxes rested on the floor, probably the actuators in question. He could hear voices in the building as the men conveyed the news that they now needed thirty of them. He lifted the lid of one box and saw something that rang a bunch of alarm bells. The device was very similar to one he’d once seen in the back bedroom at Seithen’s. Back when they were building bombs to blow up meat-packing plants.

The big loading doors of Building 2 were open and light spilled from inside. He could see about a dozen men walking about, a lot of boxes and crates piled along one side, and metal lathes, drill presses, shapers and other equipment along the other.

From inside his coat, he pulled out the emergency equipment he’d brought with him,

along with a match from his pocket. Once in the doors, he took a quick survey, saw an alarm pull beside him and stepped to it. Heads were starting to turn toward him as he judged the positions of the men he could see and decided they'd all have time to get out – as long as they didn't dawdle about it.

He struck the match on the door frame, held it and his emergency equipment aloft in front of him, and bellowed at the top of his lungs. "HEY, FELLAS!"

Everyone in the building stopped to look toward him. He shook the sticks of dynamite and the match overhead. Surely, everybody would get the message.

"TEN SECOND FUSE! EVERYBODY, GET OUT FAST!"

Then he touched the match to the entwined fuses on his two rubber-banded sticks of dynamite, and threw them toward the middle of the building. He yanked the alarm as he passed it, sprinting hard for the truck, which the driver had obligingly left idling – Devon had made sure of that before he started this insane 'plan'. He had no wish to play with hand-crank and spark advance levers with dynamite about to go off behind him. Nearly ten seconds had elapsed. Actually, the sticks had fifteen second fuses but he didn't want anyone in the building to think about trying to pick them up and throw them clear. He was the only hero who was going to be doing anything heroic around here. It was his job.

He hit the driver's seat with a bounce and already had his hand on the brake lever and his foot on the gear selector pedal. Brake lever to vertical and gear selector down as he advanced the hand throttle about half-way. With a judder, the C-cab lurched forward, just as the first of the workers began to exit the building, all of them in one big hurry. He advanced the spark to smooth out the engine.

The truck was moving just a little faster than the men could run, now, and he pushed the brake lever all the way forward and let his foot off the gear selector. In high gear, now, he pulled the spark advance and the throttle all the way down.

At that moment, the lights outside Building 1 all came on and the klaxon began to sound. A second later, his emergency equipment went off with a very satisfying boom, sending blast waves out each end of Building 2.

Behind him, the last of the men had quit chasing him and ducked for cover, the ones nearest the building getting knocked flat by the blast. He reached the end of the lane and took the turn onto the main road without slowing. Barney Oldfield would never buy one of these as a speedster, but with no load in the back, the truck had enough oomph to fairly fly down the road toward the river.

He did, however, slow as he approached the bridge, if only to take a look behind. It was an interesting scene of chaos, with men running and flames climbing out of Building 2 and, looking over the other shoulder, nearly as much pandemonium at Building 1. He sincerely hoped no one had been hurt by the explosion – they were just doing a job. He silently apologized again to the guard and technician whose jaws he'd probably broken. Then he silently took back the apology to the technician: the guard was only doing his job, just like him, but the technician had helped cover up the death of that little girl. Screw him.

At any rate, it looked like the sheep and pigs at Building 1 would get to live another day.

The truck bounced over the planks of the bridge. At the highway on the other side of the river, he brought it to a stop. Did he dare risk driving this truck with its clearly marked company logo on each side the five or six hours to New York, or should he ditch it and try to find other

transport? And, by ditch, he meant drive it into the river.

He'd just decided to compromise with himself, drive it part way and then ditch it, when another vehicle came up beside him and stopped. It was a brand new Buick 6, fifteen hundred bucks at least. It had to be a top level company car. He hadn't seen it come across the bridge, but maybe they'd phoned into town and had this machine hurried out to intercept him. He felt under the seat and his hand found a tire iron. Damn it, he should have brought a gun, he thought, then realized that was sloppy thinking. No surprise – guns make for sloppy thinking. Still, one good thump with the tire iron would settle the discussion just as effectively as a .32. It was a matter of getting close enough to do the thumping.

The driver of the luxury car opened the door and stepped out into the roadway. A wide-brimmed fedora was the first thing he saw, then dark curls and dark eyes.

"Hey, there, Big Red," Eva said, chin resting on arms crossed on the machine's roof.
"Need a lift?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

February 12, 1915

“Let me get this straight! You blew up a secret test facility of a key American military supplier, criminally assaulted two members of that company’s staff, threw lit dynamite at an unknown number of other employees, and did your best to sabotage operations that could be of vital importance to American war preparedness. Is that right? Just so that I’ve got everything clear.” Janus was not a happy employer.

Devon went over the list in his head. “Yeah, that’s about it, boss.”

“That’s about it, boss’,” said the older man, who was so upset that he’d actually risen from his swivel chair and was standing in front of his window, looking out over 3rd Ave. “Is that all? Is there anything else you might have overlooked?”

Devon thought for a bit. “Oh, yes. I stole one of their trucks and left it a few miles down

the road but, in my defense, I didn't drive it into the river. And, I beat hell out of a British Intelligence agent." He thought briefly again. "And, I may have, kind of, sort of thrown a murdering German maniac out an eighth floor window ... a little bit."

There was a very long silence as Janus stared down at the traffic on 3rd Ave. Devon decided that he could wait longer than Janus – after all, he was twenty-five years younger.

At long length, Janus cleared his throat. "How did you know he was an English agent?"

You sometimes have to make allowances for your boss's quirks. "I didn't. I knew he was a British agent. They don't wear redcoats and wigs anymore, you know. And, I knew because his boss told me he was."

Another long pause, then Janus turned. "What's his boss's name?"

For some reason, Devon found that very amusing. At last, he said "Nope. You don't pay me for that. You pay me to chase Germans. Any other nationality is a different matter."

Janus sat and swivelled to face Devon. "And did this unknown boss object to your beating up his agent?"

"Do you know, he never said a word."

Mrs. Coulter came through the door, carrying a stack of newspapers, which she laid on Janus' desk. "Delaware Gazette on top; Times second. Number 14 is outside. Number 91 is below, ready." She stopped by Devon, took his left hand and inspected it. After a glance at Janus, and shaking her head, she left as quickly as she came in.

Janus picked up the top paper and read the headlines aloud. "Outrage at Deerbrook. Saboteurs hurl dynamite at workers. Many buildings destroyed. Dozens of Deerbrook workers savagely attacked by bearded wild man in sledge hammer rampage."

“One building, boss; I blew up one building. And I wasn’t rampaging: I was marauding. There’s a difference. And all I had was my brass knucks. And two sticks of 40%. If you think about it, I was just giving Deerbrook back their own dynamite. And I gave them plenty of warning to get out. And, in my defense, they *are* selling arms to the enemy.”

“Germany is not an enemy.”

“They sure ain’t a friend.”

“America is not at war with Germany.”

“... not at war with Germany *yet*.”

“Not for you to decide! I leave you on this, we’ll be at war next week!”

“I’m sorry about the people. Anybody seriously hurt?”

“Two broken jaws; some teeth gone. There’s a picture here of the technician, Delaney. Did you really use brass knucks on a skinny guy wearing glasses?”

“Of course not. What do you think I am? He took the glasses off, first. And, look, boss, that Delaney guy knows all about what happened to the little Bayard girl. He was part of it. He may have dropped her in the river, himself.”

“The Bayard girl slipped while playing and drowned in the Brandywine.”

“The Bayard girl wandered into Building 1 at the Deerbrook Experimental Station, was accidentally caught in a test – and was gassed to death.”

“The coroner says she drowned.”

“Yeah, she did, but not in the river. The coroner doesn’t know to look for anything else. I did some reading. She drowned in her own lung fluid after she was gassed. Deerbrook, egged on by Pfeil and Bertrom – German agents; von Papen’s men on this job – then dumped her in the

river. How's that for good citizenship? The guy deserved what he got – and a whole lot more.

What about the Pinkerton I clobbered?"

"Who cares? *He* deserved what he got. He should have blown a hole in you from twenty yards off. I would have. I still might." He picked up the New York Times and hit the front page in a fury. "You're just a one-man crime wave, aren't you? Blowing things up; defenestrating anybody you want. Commissioner McKay should strike up a special unit to crack down on you, personally."

"Maybe we should consider that the bastard originally had me hog-tied and was going to drop me out the window! I kind of look on the result as a good thing. He's dead; I'm not."

"Yet, it's not an eight-storey drop you're lined up for. More like eighteen inches."

"New York uses the electric chair. Ask me how I know."

At that point, Eva came in and perched herself on the end of Janus's desk. She glanced to Devon, to Janus and to the newspapers, and demurely brushed her skirt smooth.

"Don't turn him in, Dad. Just drop him into the Hudson." she asked, keeping her eyes fixed on Devon, who wasn't at all sure that she was joking.

"That's enough out of you! Get off my desk!" He reached out and smacked her backside as she jumped down from her perch. Janus looked at his hand in surprise. "Why aren't you wearing corsets? Never mind. I don't want to know. Where did you learn to hot-start an auto?"

"From you?"

"Little Miss Smartie. You know you didn't. A Buick? You had to steal a Buick? Ford's are cheap."

"And not very fast. Dad, this was a new Buick 6! Three hundred, thirty-one cubic inches!"

Three-speed transmission! Five inch tires! It's sweet!"

"Don't care! Where is it?"

"47's taking it back. He'll say he found it south of Wilmington. 73's trailing him – in a Ford – to bring him back."

"Wiped clean?"

"Clean as a baby's ..." She changed the subject, looking at Devon. "We nearly didn't get there in time – in a Ford! – but 73 kept an eye on you while I stole the Buick. It's a good thing he saw you leaving Number 123." Eva's look at the mention of the house of ill repute was exceptionally frosty. "Who was the one you went in with?"

"You've heard about her, before. And her offer still stands." That was mean, but he was mad.

"I'm surprised you came out so soon."

"You know why."

She stopped talking and closed her mouth tightly.

Janus looked from her to Devon. "He keeps some interesting company, doesn't he?" His gaze went back to his daughter. "I won't let him risk you. How many are dead already – and there's more to come. *Him*, I can afford to lose. In fact, I might enjoy it."

Eva walked behind Janus's desk to gaze out the window in her turn. Devon watched her hands twist at the drapery, while the rest of her remained still. He stayed on his side of the desk and waited.

Janus dropped the newspapers into the waste-basket at the end of his desk. He swivelled his chair a full 360 degrees, stopping to look at his daughter before swinging to focus on Devon.

“If you can do so without exposing any other country’s secrets, tell me what you found,” Janus said, and Eva left the window to return to the front of the desk.

“Oh, boy! Where to begin?” Devon dropped two booklets onto Janus’s desk. “Those are passports, same as the ones you showed me back in St. Catharines. State Department thinks they’ve arrested everybody involved, but no. It’s still going on, all located in the Hochstern Advertising Agency, 22nd floor, 60 Broadway. Tell the Bureau of Investigation to ask for *Herr* Stegler. I’ve never seen him, but I imagine he’s short, with a balding head, little round glasses and a bristle moustache. Tell them to look in his drawers – his desk drawers. Stegler doctors real passports, adds new pictures and duplicates the seals. The consulate at 11 Broadway is where it starts; German nationals go about their perfectly legal business of going into the consulate as German citizens – every man-jack who’s immigrated here and was born between 1876 and 1897. They go in as Franz and come out as Steven or Archibald, with a genuine American passport and a ticket home on a neutral-flagged ship.”

“As simple as that?”

“Except for finding the passports he’s already distributed. What next? Okay, 123 West 15th. You knew about the consulate; you don’t know about that place. What do you call a place that offers liquor, music and relaxation on the first floor, whores on the second and third, and conspiracy, weapons- and explosives-trafficking in the basement?”

Eva said “I don’t think there’s a word for it, except dangerous.”

Devon tossed Koenig’s notebook onto the desk. “Courtesy of one of the ladies on the second floor there. The State Department will find that very interesting. It should put a few hundred people away for a lot of years.”

Janus dropped the notebook and the passports into his ubiquitous right hand drawer.

“One of the ladies on the second floor?” Eva was still on a slow boil.

“But I took it from her while she was in her bed elsewhere.”

Devon drew a folded piece of foolscap paper from a pocket, opened it up, and laid it flat on the desk. “And, here’s the piece of resistance. Feast your eyes on that.”

Janus and Eva both looked over the page and shook their heads. Janus said “I can’t make out a letter. Damned German script.”

Devon was shocked at Janus’s admission. There was something he wasn’t a master of. “It’s an announcement. An invitation to join the big German People’s Singing Festival and to bring your own musical instruments. There’s going to be gatherings from Port Huron to Detroit to Buffalo to Ogdensburg. All up and down the Great Lakes border with Canada.”

“So?”

“Nobody who gets one of these is the least bit interested in singing. And the instruments they’ll be bringing will all be all be tuned alike – to .30 caliber. According to that notebook, they’re counting on a ‘corps’ of little song birds to show up to the border towns listed on that flimsy.”

Janus was silent again, while Eva looked at the flyer.

“Where do you get this information?” was all Janus had.

“Oh, from a spy here and a whore there. Listening with my ear to a keyhole, beating it out of a kraut who’s too little to fight back, or lying with my arms wrapped around a blond.” That was a nasty way to put it, but he was starting to get a little hot under the collar. “There’s maybe a hundred thousand German reservists in this country. Koenig’s book says there’s an army corps

and more, either already armed or waiting to be, equipment and guns arriving daily, waiting on orders to head for the border.”

“Orders from who?” Janus broke in. Again, Devon nearly corrected his grammar, but bit his tongue until it hurt.

“Well, see, that’s the question. And that question is tied up with the question of where?”

“Where, what?”

“Where does the equipment come from?” Devon’s voice had started to get quiet.

“Tell me.”

“No, I’m asking you. I think you’ve got a better idea than I do. Don’t you, boss?”

Janus twined his fingers in front of his face and touched his lips with his thumbs before he replied. “You need to be careful, here, son.”

“I’ve said it before: I’m not your son. I doubt I ever will be.”

Eva drew away from him with an unreadable expression on her face. Janus remained very still.

Devon laid it all out. “Fifty or more years ago, a half-dozen armies made up of American vets – you remember the Civil War? – decided they could take Canada and exchange it for Ireland. Would never have happened, but the curious thing was that a lot of the guns they used seemed to be practically new, almost like they were fresh from Yankee depots. Some of those dumb Canucks up there got the idea that the Yanks may have been hoping it worked – so they could rescue poor little Canada from Britain – and annex it. Who knows whether that was true?”

“See, here’s what I’m thinking, *Mr. Janus*. An army corps is, what, thirty thousand men? Maybe forty thousand. Koenig’s book talks about two regiments of artillery! That’s another ...

five thousand? And, he says, a regiment of sharpshooters. That's about a thousand. So, we're talking forty-five to fifty thousand. All needing weapons, uniforms, supplies, food, transport and ammunition. Where are they going to get that, *Mr. Janus*? Any ideas?"

"It's your story. Why don't you tell me?"

"I know for a fact von Papen has got shipments of up to 20,000 rifles floating around the country right now – Army Krag-Jorgensens. Yeah, Army! Spanish War surplus. I've seen some of them. I know he's got huge stashes of them already hidden in various places. Where do they come from? I doubt there are two companies in the U. S. who would have the ability to turn out that many small arms in a short time – but, then, they're already turning out guns for the army, aren't they? So, von Papen needs a supply of ready-made weapons. And, where could someone lay hands on two batteries of artillery – 40 big guns, limbers, trails – and shells? That's not something you pick up at the five-and-dime. That takes government. Ammunition: that's the big thing. Say, five million rounds of .30-'06; 10,000 rounds for the guns, whatever caliber they are. Oh, and transport for all that, too. Oh, yes, transport is really important."

"Transport to where?" This was from Eva.

Janus said "The Canadian border, of course" and Devon interrupted him.

"And beyond! Nobody's attacking the United States – *not yet* – but Canada's just laying there for the picking, isn't that right? Koenig says the Germans have the men in place. Now, where to get the guns?"

Janus leaned back in his chair and swivelled a few degrees back and forth. "I'm still waiting for the enlightenment, Mr. Devon."

"There's only one source for all that: the U. S. military. Thousands of moth-balled Krag-

Jorgensens, millions of rounds of ammunition – .30-40, not .30-06, hundreds of surplus big guns, shells by the warehouse. And transport to get it where it needs to go. All it would take is a couple of off-the-record orders to move them.” He was pleased to see Eva’s bewilderment – and not surprised to see Janus’s lack of it.

“Interesting. And why would the United States military help German infiltrators attack and probably defeat Canada? You may not have seen the news but the papers are full of it: the Canadian Contingent has safely arrived in England. They were just about all the trained soldiers you had up there, weren’t they?” Janus seemed particularly happy about that. “What would we get out of a German army in Canada?”

“What you’ve always wanted: Canada. You’re right, the Canucks couldn’t stop a coordinated assault from a full corps, supported by artillery. Not now, they couldn’t. Ottawa would fall in a week. The east coast a week after that. The west – well, the west would break away and ask to join the U. S., or at least call for help.”

“Makes sense.”

“And, then! – the U. S. cavalry would come galloping over the hill – galloping over the bridges, I mean – followed by the infantry, mop up the German invasion force, who, by that time, will be nearly out of ammunition, rations, and supplies, save Canada by slaughtering the heathen horde (many of whom, of course, are U. S. citizens), and Uncle Sam will, finally, get his wish.”

Eva broke in. “What wish?”

Her father looked at her in surprise. “What did they teach you in school? Canada, of course. Or, maybe, a better way to put it is ‘U. S. A., from Hudson’s Bay to the Gulf of Mexico.’ It’s our Manifest Destiny.”

“Manifest Destiny. Sounds a lot like what we’re hearing from Berlin these days, doesn’t it? *Weltmacht oder Niedergang!*” Eva was puzzled again. “We make the world or we destroy it!” Devon made up his mind.

Eva was still confused. “But wouldn’t England just take it back?”

Janus looked very smug, as if he had personally planned the World War. “Britain is at war to their eyeballs, right now. They’re in no position to even try. They can’t risk war with America: they’d win on the sea but lose on the land. And, there’s no point in doing that. Most of all, they can’t risk losing grain and much more from all of North America. They’ll fume and smile ... and accept it.”

“And the Canadian people will just smile and accept it, too. Right, Janus?” Devon thought that a trace of irony may just have crept into his voice, there.

“What’s your problem with that? *You* get to be Americans.” Was Janus being a trifle ironic, as well?

Eva still couldn’t grasp it. “But why do we want Canada? It’s no more than a handful of people.”

Devon was fishing around in a cloth bag he had brought with him. “You want to enlighten your daughter, Janus?” They both noticed that he had dropped the ‘mister’.

Janus ticked off the reasons. “Wood, ore, gold, grains, fish, oil, coal, hydro-electric ...”

“What’s that?” from Eva.

“The coming thing in the next twenty years. What else? Diamonds, nickel, bauxite, radium ...”

Devon topped him. “Water.”

“Yep. Soon. Sooner than you’d think.”

“Water?” asked Eva. “Why do we need water?”

“It’s a hundred years away, yet, but it’s coming. The U.S. has lots of desert with millions of people wanting to live on it. And Canada has more water than anybody else in the world.”

“And, all you Yanks have to do is let a bunch of expendable German immigrants do the dirty work, take the blame, then get slaughtered when you walk in to save the day at the cost of a few hundred leathernecks and dobies.”

“It nearly worked before,” Janus said quietly.

“Yep. ’Way back when – back when you Irish thought you could do it. But, faith and begorrah!, it didn’t work, did it, me boyo?” He pulled a small girl’s boot from the bag and threw it at Janus.

Janus knocked it from the air, then picked it up and looked it over. “What’s special about it?”

“What do you see?”

“A kid’s boot.”

“And every bit of brass on it has turned green. That’s Melissa Bayard’s; keep it as a reminder, why don’t you? Put it on your mantel piece, so you can look at it every day. It took me a while, because it’s a new thing, but I figured out the final surprise that von Papen is planning. Christ, the money the German Embassy is throwing at this plan! What chemical turns brass green and causes lungs to fill with fluid? Give up? Chlorine – chlorine so thick that it hangs in the air and settles into every crevice. Chlorine gas – to kill thousands.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

February 14, 1915

“Chlorine,” said Eva. “Like laundry bleach?”

He nodded. “That’s von Papen’s surprise and, god, it’s so elegant. The bastard likes to talk about making history and, with this, he would. The first time ever: poison gas as a weapon of war – something so unthinkable that no one’s ever done it. Chlorine gas. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of cylinders filled with poison gas that they plan to release and let float across the water at the border – you know, the undefended border – followed up by machine guns on high speed motor boats to cover landings by thousands of Imperial army reservists.

Eva broke in. "Can't Canada fight?"

"With what? With who? Their trained soldiers have gone to war, leaving a few hundred militiamen and cops, here and there, who'll get cut down like grass. It'd probably work without the gas, but von Papen wants his place in history. And, you know what really makes me sick? The Deerbrook Experimental Station. They didn't come up with this on a few months notice. They've been working on it for years, making a weapon that'll eat the lungs out of anything that breathes; kill everything in its path."

"No! No! No one would do that!" Eva cried out. "That's horrible! Who would dream up something like that?" Eva was horrified; Janus wasn't even surprised.

Devon ground in his point. "Men, women, children, animals, insects, probably plants, as well, 'cause it's chlorine, see? It's breathing bleach."

Eva held the edge of her father's desk for support. "No one could be that evil! That's beyond murder! That's ... that's ..."

"War," said Janus. "So ...?"

"So, I've done what you paid me for. I found out what happened and what's going to happen. I've reported it to you. What you do from here is up to you. I doubt it's going to go much further than some friends of yours at the War Department. Tell me I'm wrong."

Janus's face was impossible to read. "And what are you going to do, now?"

"I'm going to go kill the fucker that came up with the plan – and every other fucker that helped him until they kill me or I run out of bullets." He produced Fuchs's Dreyse, put it back.

Janus slid open a drawer and withdrew a brand-new Pattern 1911 Colt. He leveled it at Devon. "Dad!" screamed Eva, and Janus thumbed the mag release and dropped the magazine

from the grip. He looked to see that it was full, slid it back into the pistol, and offered it, butt first, to Devon.

“There’s another seven.”

“I’m going to clear out my room at the Empire. There’s a few things I’ll need – a little vial on the window ledge, among others.”

Janus’s hand went to his right hand drawer instinctively, then he laughed softly.

“You’re dangerous enough without that stuff, Number 68. Some advice: when you shoot, make sure it’s a head-shot. That little .32 of yours won’t have enough of a bang-splat to risk just a body shot.”

“Mike!” Eva stepped up to him and Devon pulled her to him, despite her father’s presence. “Last time,” he said, and kissed her hard. “I’m so sorry, my love. I didn’t want it to be like this.” He let go and walked out of the room.

“MIKE!” she screamed after him.

Once again, heads were stuck out of offices to see what the noise was, but they pulled back quickly as he approached. As he came up behind Mrs. Coulter’s desk, she turned her chair to him and held out an envelope.

“You’ll need this,” she said. “See McCall downstairs.”

He took the envelope, nodded to Otis in the elevator, rode in silence to the first floor. Behind the desk was someone he didn’t know.

“Where’s McCall?”

“Taking a break out back. He said to talk to him out there.” The man inclined his head over his right shoulder and went back to his paper.

Devon found McCall lounging outside the loading door, back against the wall, smoking.

He flicked the butt away as he saw Devon approach.

“Hey, buddy.”

“McCall. Mrs. Coulter said to talk to you.”

“Yeah. Well, I’m sorry to be the one to break it to you, but it’s this way ...”

And Devon’s vision exploded into stars and fireworks – and then blackness.

The first thought in Devon’s head, when he finally managed to remember that he had a head, was “Ow!”, but he couldn’t decide whether that was in response to the throbbing in his skull, now, or to being hit by whatever had hit him, earlier. Whenever earlier was.

He was on his stomach and decided that, maybe, being on his back might help. It didn’t, but he was surprised that he was able to turn over at all. He hadn’t felt so proud of himself since he was six months old. After a few minutes of that, he decided that sitting up was his next logical goal.

It wasn’t.

When he came to this time, he was face down in a heap on a floor. It was not a clean floor, from the amount of grit digging into his cheek, but its coolness was actually somewhat comforting. He thought that, perhaps, trying to open his eyes would be good. It worked this time, but didn’t help much.

He guessed he was in a basement, somewhere. He could not hear traffic. In fact, all he could hear were some faint bird sounds. This was either heaven or some place out in the country. Deciding that his head wouldn’t throb like that in heaven and that it was unlikely he’d ever wake up there, anyway, he chose the latter.

How long had he been out? It had been just before noon when he'd been suckered behind the Janus building. It would take at least a couple of hours to transport him to wherever he was. Plus time for him to lie in a heap like a rag-doll. The sun should be down by now – but it wasn't. Light crept in through cracks in the foundation, giving him enough illumination to see by.

Was he out all night? Maybe. He had to piss something awful. Taking a chance, he rotated his head to the other side and found himself looking under the bed. Conveniently, there was a thunder mug there, a little worn and chipped, but he'd use it – if he could manage.

Slow and steady won the race, and, in less time than it takes to sail to Madagascar, he had even managed to re-button his own flies, like a big boy. Sitting on the edge of the bed, his head still hurt and his vision still swam a trifle, but he felt he was in shape to take on any five toddlers you'd care to name. One at a time, of course.

He desperately needed some water, but there was none in evidence. Or food. Or anything, really. Not even any sounds from the building over his head. Were they sleeping? Were they dead? Were they even there?

And, where and what was 'there'? After some thought, he decided this must be a house out in the country that the agency maintained for safe-keeping of people who were problems, certainly targets, maybe clients, and, apparently, agents. Ex-agents, he figured.

Well, ex- or not, no cellar was going to hold him. If he could stand up, he could break out. If he could stand up ... he couldn't.

It took a bunch of attempts but, at the cost of a severely aching head, he achieved vertical. It was only a few small steps to the door, just visible in the chinks of light from outside. The first step was fairly easy; the second was wobbly; the third was never quite completed. He tumbled

onto the floor again, coming up against the foot of the door.

It was easy – comfortable, in fact – lying with his face pushed into the door frame.

Somewhere far off, a rooster raised his head and crowed. The thought entered his mind that it might well be morning. He'd had a good sleep; he ought to be well-rested, by now. None of this wobbling around and falling down stuff. Get up and get out!

He used the frame to lever himself to his feet, again. There was no handle or latch on the inside of the door, so it was probably barred or padlocked on the outside. He held onto a diagonal brace on the door to steady himself while he looked around for a tool of some kind.

The door swung open. It was neither locked nor barred. It didn't even have a latch. Whoever had put him here wasn't even trying.

He was in the basement of a fairly large house and daylight came in through four or five small windows. A massive wood-burning furnace occupied a good portion of the space; a stair in the middle led up to the house above. There wasn't a thing in the basement to use as a weapon.

It took every available support to get to the stair and crawl up it on hands and knees. That effort alone took him a half-hour and, when he got to the top, the knob was just out of reach. He didn't dare to stand. Finally, wedged backward on the stair, feet braced against the step, he managed to reach overheard and turn the knob. The door swung open at once and he flopped onto his back onto the linoleum floor of an old country farm kitchen. The room smelled of eggs and old milk spread into oil-cloth and he remembered his childhood while he crawled/clambered/clung to any support to reach the sink. Wonder of wonders, there was a pump there.

Even more wonderful was the cold well-water that poured from it. He drank as much as

he needed and pumped gallons of it over the back of his head until the throbbing subsided somewhat and he could stand without gripping the counter-top. Or not much, anyway. As he did, his eyes were raised to the level of the window over the sink and he gazed out.

He had no idea of where he was. There was a barn out there, but no animals to be seen and, from his angle, no machinery or tools, either. The snow, except for a single set of tracks up the drive, was unbroken, the fence drifted in. No one had lived here for years.

Keeping a hand on sink, counter, kitchen table, wood-stove and door-frame, in that order, he made his way to the next room, which proved to be the dining room. On the table, along with the coat he'd been wearing when he got slugged, there were a box, his battered old suitcase, an envelope, and a note. The box contained his personal belongings from the Empire Hotel, which he had, apparently, vacated. The suitcase contained his clothes from the same place. The envelope was the one Mrs. Coulter had given him. It contained a thousand dollars and his birth certificate. The note read:

Mike:

This was the best I could do for you. They had other plans, but I persuaded them differently. Please don't be angry: my father tells me there is too much at stake for you to get what you wanted. Stay here and wait. McCall will pick you up and drive you to the border. You're a Canadian, again. Please stay one.

Sweetheart, I'm sorry, too. I lost our baby. I lost

you. I don't think I 'll ever see you again. Don't hate me.

Eva.

There were smudges in the ink.

His head swam, his vision darkened. He tried to sit on one of the chairs and he was pretty sure that he fainted again. At least, the next thing he knew he was slumped in one of the chairs, head down on the table, Eva's note still in his hand. Not even when his mother died had he felt like this.

In the meantime, he hadn't eaten in 24 hours; he was pretty sure he had a serious concussion; and McCall, whom he couldn't have taken on his best day, was coming to deport him, probably sooner than later. The odds needed to be evened.

Because he was damned if he was a Canadian.

He couldn't do anything about the news in Eva's note. He couldn't do anything about clearing his head; only time would do that. There didn't seem to be any food in the house and he had no desire to hunt down that distant rooster and wring its neck. The only thing he might be able to deal with was McCall. They'd searched him thoroughly and taken away Fuchs's Dreyse, Janus's Colt, his brass knuckles, and even his pocket knife. The kitchen turned up no knives, no iron frying pans, not even a rolling pin. There was a gun rack by the back door, but it was empty. However, as he stretched up to run his hand along its top shelf, he touched cold metal and swept down two 12-gauge shells. Whoever had cleared out this part of the house was shorter than Devon.

He stepped out the back onto the porch and let the screen-door slam behind him. The

glare of the sun off the snow made his head swim. The barn was not too far, he hoped, and a shed with a woodpile stood in between. There had to be some kind of tool in one of those. They couldn't have cleared everything out.

They had. The barn, as far as he dared climb in it, was empty. The shed was dark and empty. Behind him, the windmill squeaked lazily as the breeze picked up, so he went to inspect it. Not a loose bar of metal or twistable piece of pipe remained on the structure. Buried in the matted grass at the foot of the tower, though, he hit the jackpot: a bent and rusted screwdriver.

The woodpile was next and he sorted through discarded pieces of lumber until he found two more-or-less equal lengths of two-by-four, a couple of feet each, and two random-length shorter pieces. At the back porch, he used the screwdriver to scrape at the many coats of hard paint on the spring-loaded hinges until he was able to get at the screws. A weary, wrist-straining half-hour later, all the while trying to keep watch on the driveway as well, he had removed two of the three spring-hinges from the screen door, leaving the center hinge so the door would still swing.

In the mud room at the back door and in the vestibule at the front door, there was just enough room. A spring-hinge screwed onto a strip of two-by, so that it could be held sprung by the door. A screw that stuck out a quarter-inch went into the end of the two-by. Where the screw-point would hit the wall, he used the screwdriver to dig a hole through wallpaper, plaster and lath, and pushed a 12-gauge shell, brass out, into the hole. Opening the door would release the spring-arm, the protruding screw would fire the shell – into the wall, not into the unsuspecting door-opener. He was pissed off, but not that pissed off.

He piled enough weight against each door to hold them against the spring pressure, and,

after a couple of finishing touches, both front and back doors were now neatly, and safely, booby-trapped – if a booby-trap can be considered safe. He wouldn't hurt anybody, but he'd give them one hell of a scare. The whole process had taken more than an hour. He was drenched with sweat, his head throbbed, he was seeing flashes and stars, again – and he had no idea when McCall would show.

As many of his belongings from the box hastily packed into the suitcase as would fit, the envelope shoved into one pocket, Eva's note into another, he made his way to the living room window. It slid open easily enough. He dropped the suitcase and his coat outside, stuck his head through the opening, realized that wouldn't work, and worked his way out backward, dropping to the ground with a skull-exploding jar that left him too weak to walk for five minutes. When he'd recovered, he ran or, at least, he thought he ran to his chosen hiding place, pulled the door closed – and waited.

Apart from the stars and rockets in his head, he was reasonably comfortable. He could see through the gaps between the planking; he had a decent place to sit, and reading material, in the form of the remains of a mail-order catalog, hung on a convenient wire. If only it wasn't so damn cold, he'd be quite snug.

Now all he needed was McCall ...

... who took another hour to show up. A black Model-T, the first traffic of any kind Devon had seen, turned into the drive and came up with confidence. His heart did a turn when he saw there were two men in it. One he was ready for, but two? As the car drew closer, he was almost happy to see that the driver was his old friend Hear-no-evil McCain. It made almost for a family reunion. From his throne in the small building, he had an excellent view of the

proceedings.

The car stopped a convenient distance from the front door and McCall got out. McCain kept the machine idling while McCall mounted the front steps, two at a time, pulled open the screen door, and pushed the inner door. It didn't move, so he pushed harder. Still it didn't move, so he gave it a big shove.

A shotgun blast was heard; something fell on McCall's head, and he went down with a yell. McCain stopped the engine, jumped out and ran toward the house. As he did, he pulled a pistol from his pocket.

McCall re-appeared on the porch, dripping wet, holding a pistol. "He's got a shotgun!"

McCain saw the other's wet condition. "What the hell happened to you?"

McCall was quite definite in his diagnosis. "It's piss! It's goddamn piss! I'll kill him!

Back door! Back door! Watch it!"

McCall went back into the house, cautiously. In a few moments, there was another blast and a yell from the back. Two for two.

In fact, Devon laughed as he ran for the car, three for three. It hadn't been easy to balance the chamber pot above the front door, but it was worth it. He'd topped up the contents as much as possible before he put the pot above the door.

He heard the two men calling to each other from inside the house as he reached the car. A glance inside showed that it was an older model with no ignition key, just a switch. Thank god. Thank god, too, that they'd pulled the top up, so he'd at least have some cover. Suitcase thrown into the back, ignition switch to 'battery', spark up, throttle already set for idle. Back to the front of the car; one quick pull on the crank and the already-hot engine caught. He heard a yell from

inside the house and pounding feet. Into the seat, spark advanced, throttle down, hand brake all the way forward, gear selector pedal down for first gear and the T lurched forward. Throttle wide open, spark down, ignition to ‘magneto’, and he let up the selector pedal for high gear, and ducked as low as he could. He’d reached the end of the drive before anyone came out of the house.

A hard right onto the road, to keep as much shadow between him and the two very angry agents. A shot bounced off the road in front of him, then he was cresting a rise and well out of range.

God, he was good. And, those two guys: they were good enough to get jobs with Pinkerton. He hoped they would.

Christ, his head hurt. And Eva’s words still floated in front of him, along with the stars and shadows.

· I don’t think I ’ll ever see you again.

D on’t hate me.

Eva.·

CHAPTER NINETEEN

February 14, 1915

First things first: where the hell was he?

Second things second: where did he want to be?

Third things third: could he get there from here?

The dirt road ahead of him extended for miles, with only an occasional farm to interrupt the view. The gently rolling landscape suggested that he was still on the east coast – New Jersey, maybe. The sun was high but to his right, so he was heading east. Surely he had to hit a town or the ocean, eventually.

When he'd put about five miles between himself and the two angry Janus agents, he brought the Ford to a stop at the side of the road, engine puttng. Just as a matter of practicality, he decided to put third things first, so he climbed out, lifted the front seat, and uncapped the gas

tank. He could smell and hear gas, so that was hopeful. Peering into the depths of the tank, he decided it was about half full – maybe ninety miles of driving. He had plenty of cash to buy more fuel, but it might not be easy to find gasoline in the sticks. Some of these hayseeds probably hadn't even seen an automobile before.

Fuel cap replaced, about to drop the seat back down, he saw brown paper tucked in beside the tank. A brown paper bag, in fact, and in it were, among other things, his brass knuckles, his Dreyse, and the spare magazines. He wondered if Eva had done it, confident that he'd eventually be the one checking the fuel level in the T. If so, her faith in him exceeded his faith in himself. Still, he was the one looking into the bag.

So, he was armed; he was free; he was well funded; he had transportation that, being a Janus car, was even semi-legal. Second things second: where did he want to go? With money and a good car, the world was his oyster. He didn't like seafood, all that much.

He was back on the road, raising a tail of smoke and muddy snow, while he considered this. He was a wanted man in New York city, wanted by a long list of people, none of whom had his best interests at heart: the cops, Janus, probably Pinkerton, and almost certainly the German network. Not to mention the Walter Wisdom Film company. He no longer had a base; he no longer had support – he probably no longer had a single friend in the city.

His smart move was Canada, where his birth certificate would get him in, and his American cash would last a long time. Probably until after the invasion.

Yeah, Canada. That was the smart move, the path of least resistance – the safest choice, really. North to Canada.

So, why the hell was he still heading east with the throttle wide open?

Because he was stupid – stubborn – senseless – a sucker. And concussed, let's not forget concussed. Not because he was brave. Devon rejected that out of hand. Other people were brave; he was one of any combination of the previous list.

He'd been running about an hour, up one hill and down another, when he caught a glimpse of water ahead, and then a few buildings rising between him and the river valley. As he reached the edges of the town, the sign read "Newburgh. Pop. 9700." He slowed to an amble through the town and began to attract a lot of stares – hayseeds who'd never seen an automobile before. When he came to a stop at the town's one stop sign, Broadway and Grand, kids began to climb on the machine.

"Watch yourself, kids! That's hot! Don't touch it!" Two of them were bouncing in the back seat. "Hey, come on! Watch my suitcase!" Too late, as one came down hard and split the side. Such is the glamorous life of the undercover investigative agent.

The town cop was now there, lifting kids down from the vehicle. "Skedaddle, all of you!" He looked over the Ford. For a country cop not used to cars, his foot found a perch on the running board in a very natural fashion. "Where you coming from, mister?"

Devon pointed. "Back that way."

"Where you going to?"

He pointed again. "Up that way. Do you know if I can get some gasoline around here?"

"Gasoline? Well, there's a couple of machines in town, now, so they might have some at the hardware store. Next block."

"Thank you. How far to the City?"

"Far enough, I guess. You'll find it if you just keep on going that way."

The hardware store had five gallons, which would do, and Devon kept on ‘going that way’. Fifty miles, and an hour and a half later, New York City was in sight ahead of him. His head was throbbing.

Another hour and a half, and his machine nosed up to the curb a block from Seithen’s flophouse. If he had to explain why he ended up there, for some unknown reason, the place represented safety to his concussed brain. He thought he might sleep for a while. Twenty minutes, watching door and windows, but no activity. The place seemed to be empty and locked up tight.

Of course, he still had his key – which still fitted. Swinging the door open into the chilled hall, the only sounds were traffic and his footsteps. The dining room opposite was messed around, chairs shoved every which way. *Frau* Seithen’s infamous “dessert after every meal” had finally been cut up – and thrown on the floor.

The smell was the giveaway, one he hadn’t run into since he left Mexico.

The door to his old room on the right was partly open and he used two fingers to swing it the rest of the way. No sounds. Inside, clothes were thrown every which way; the mattress had been pulled off the bed; chairs turned over. The bedspring was on its end and blood was sprayed over it from floor to wall and soaked into the mattress below.

Beneath the mattress lay little Fuchs, whom he had been hard on in several incidents, and on whom he would never be hard again. Even when he was throwing Fuchs around the room, he’d never intended anything like this.

Step quietly back out into the hall and pull the door back to where it had been with the back of a thumbnail. Check shoes: no blood on the soles.

Up the stairs, now. The bathroom door was open, the room empty. The bedrooms along the hallway were deserted, even the two used by the four German sailors. Under the bed, he searched there for any sign of bomb-making or radio equipment but turned up nothing, not so much as a stray bit of wire.

At the rear of the building, narrow stairs led down to the kitchen below. Dirty pots, pans and plates piled on the sink and table. A mouse was chewing at the end of a loaf of bread, left on the sideboard. The stove was cold. Apart from the mouse, nothing was too unusual for the Seithen household. Even the rodent probably lived there.

He looked down the hall toward the front door. The room to the right was empty, but the air retained the smell of Margit's perfume. Compared to her room at No. 123, it was surprisingly spartan for a girl as extravagant as she was. Her drug paraphernalia was gone, along with her clothes.

Across the hall, the smell there was the giveaway, too. The door was pulled shut and locked. He no longer had his lock-picks, but two solid boots, one then the other, were a fair replacement when noise wasn't a problem.

She was tied by her wrists to the head of the bed, staring with wide eyes at nothing. The bullet in her forehead had spread her brains across the bedstead and wall behind. She'd been dead a day, perhaps.

Even someone as miserable as *Frau* Seithen didn't deserve to die like that.

He wiped down what he had touched on his way in, then made his way out the back. Two blocks over before coming back up took him one block from his car.

When he got there, she was seated in the front, in a white dress, white furs and hat, her

hands in a white fur muff. He cranked the engine to life and climbed into the driver's seat.

"Hi, Johnny," she said. "How have you been keeping?"

"Margit," he said with a nod. "My condolences on the passing of your mother. It must have been a shock to you."

"It was, yes. But not as much of a shock as it was to her." She leaned across the seat, hand behind his head, and kissed him gently on the cheek. "Happy Valentine's Day, lover." From the muff, the clicks of a pistol being cocked. It was a nice twist on an old theme. "Let's go downtown, Johnny, shall we?"

"My thought, exactly." He nosed the T out from the curb and pulled a fast U-turn across the traffic to head in the right direction. "Have we got a destination?" No point in driving aimlessly up and down the streets of Manhattan.

"Of course we do, Johnny. I'll let you know where to turn."

She kept the open end of the muff pointed toward him as he tooled down 4th Street. Traffic was surprisingly light, even for a Monday. He tried to be aware of everything happening three hundred and sixty degrees around him. Downtown from here was a lot of territory, and a lot of opportunities for a lot of things. The whole trick was to be fast enough to recognize an opportunity when it came.

And, even as he thought that, here was the perfect opportunity. He cranked the wheel left and bounced across the southbound tram tracks, across the center of the street and directly onto the northbound tracks. He held it until his left front wheel dropped into the trough for the right-hand track.

The wheel sparked and squealed against the steel rail. Margit yelled in alarm and grabbed

the car's roof frame for support, as he racheted the throttle open. The steering wheel pulled and shuddered at every joint in the track, but the car's suspension held.

The T, suddenly powering ahead under full throttle, was locked into the tram track, scraping and grinding down the street at more than thirty miles an hour. Ahead, there was no traffic at all – except the oncoming tram a block away.

“Johnny!” she screamed, trying to find something to brace herself on. He let go of the wheel and grabbed her wrist.

“Throw it out! Throw it out of the car! The muff, too! I want to see both your hands empty!”

In a second, the muff had disappeared into the roadway, the revolver bouncing out of it into the gutter. The tram was two hundred feet away, clanging its bell furiously. He let go of her and grabbed the wheel, yanking hard to pull the front tire from the track. He yanked harder, then harder still.

The tire was stuck firmly in the track. The tram was a hundred feet away.

He slammed the brake pedal down with his right foot and used both hands to haul the hand brake back.

The back wheels on the Ford locked up and the car bounced and juddered from forty miles an hour down to ten. Margit was hurled from the seat to come up hard against the dash. The car bucked forward and back and, with the tramcar a bare twenty feet away, the left front finally bounced free of the track and Devon cranked the wheel, slammed the hand brake forward, and pushed the gear selector down. With a foot to spare, the black auto cleared the tram and bounced back into the southbound lane, drawing shouts from the wagon driver behind him who

nearly overturned to avoid him and screams from a pair of pedestrians who had narrowly escaped injury or death at his hands.

Opportunity had knocked and he had seized upon it.

Just like he seized Margit now. She had the door open and was trying to climb out, despite the car gaining speed once more. He grabbed her arm and pulled her, hard, back into the seat.

“We’re not finished yet. Let’s have a talk.” An alley loomed to his right and he yanked the car into the space between two buildings and came to a stop – just in time to grab her arm and stop the six-inch hat pin from plunging into his eye. Twisting until she cried out, he slapped her twice with his free hand. All struggle stopped, so he relieved her of the pin and, just to be sure, the hat, as well. Both sailed from the car into the garbage and muck. He looked at her face and laughed.

“Yeah, I’ll hit a woman if I have to. So don’t make me have to.”

The sullen silence was an eloquent reply which was perfect, because he honestly didn’t know if he could hit her again, not with those eyes looking at him.

“How did you know I was there? You sitting watching the place? I didn’t see you.” She didn’t answer and kept her face turned away from him. “Margit, I’m just making conversation. You can have it with me, or you can have it with the Bureau of Investigation.” She looked at him quickly and he saw a flash of fear before she turned back. “Yeah! They play a lot rougher than me – and you’ve seen how rough I’ll play, if I have to.”

“Paul has a room across the street.” Despite her fur coat, she had drawn her arms tightly about herself.

“Paul? Koenig?”

“Mm-hmm. He telephoned me. I had plenty of time.”

“Where are the sailors?”

“Two are at Number 123, now.” When Margit had departed the flophouse, the sailors had moved to a place with more congenial scenery than Seithen’s.

“What’s Koenig’s job, now?”

“He is ... not trusted, any more.”

“Oh, ho! Scribbles too much, does he?” Devon had a number of scores to settle with Paul Koenig. “The other two?”

“I don’t know. They went to Delaware. There was a problem with the weapon, at the place where they make it. Explosions and other things.”

And, he couldn’t even take a bow. Well, chalk that up for later.

“What happened to your mother? She get in the way, like Fuchs?”

“Fuchs was of no value to the plan. He was a drunkard and a nobody. It seemed a good time to lay some blame on you. Maybe get you picked up. Maybe get you charged. Your fingerprints will be all over that room.”

Devon pictured the scene in the front parlor. “And, of course, it was easy, I guess. A guy like him, he must have figured he was about to have the best time of his life.” The poor stiff probably never even saw it coming. Devon knew how distracting she could be, sans clothing. Or even with clothing.

She shrugged and Devon had to admit even that was distracting.

“Why do in your mother? And, who gave the orders for that?”

She looked at him with puzzled eyes. "She tried to call the police to save Fuchs. Franz decided she wasn't reliable anymore. The two big sailors tied her down. I did what I was told to do. What I had to."

"Yeah, the itch gets real bad, doesn't it? Especially now that Mox can't fix you up when you need it. Do you get the hot needles all over? I've seen those – not pretty. I'm surprised the shakes even let you aim."

She was quiet for a while. "How do you know? I only ever do it in my room – or what was my room."

"Darling, it was me that picked things up the other night, cleaned you up, wrapped you up." She had nothing to say. "You're welcome." Another silence. "You killed your own mother?"

Again, the puzzled face. "Oh, Johnny! You really thought she was my mother! Silly boy. Look at me!" She held her face up proudly. "Look at this!" She pulled her coat open to show the curves of her uncorseted body thrusting against her form fitting dress. "Did you really think I could have come from her? After all the things we did together? Do you need me to remind you of some of those things?"

"I never really gave it any thought." And, he supposed, Barnum was right. There's one born every minute, and he was the one born this minute.

"Seithen is your name, then, not hers?" Another shrug. "So ... Fuchs ... your mo– whatever her name was." He thought back. "Back in the fall? You killed Nathan Hirsch as well?" She shrugged again. "Any others?"

"A few. Not that many really. Most are eager to join the cause. We really do have

overwhelming support, Johnny. Just think of the number of Germans in America. When we move on Canada, the President will have no choice but to back us up. Then America will be in the war, too – and the English and French will lose.”

“I spent last fall thinking your mother was giving the orders, but it was you?”

“In some things. In others, I follow orders. To have you killed, at the end – sorry, *Liebchen*, that was me.”

“How come you’re so willing to spill all this to me, now? I’m supposed to go straight to my boss, you know.” When he had a boss, he thought, which he no longer did.

“Johnny, don’t you understand? I’m sorry, *Schatzie*, but you can’t last the day. Paul will contact Franz and Franz will make sure you won’t last. Johnny, you’re a dead man.” She touched his face. “I’m so sorry.”

Now, that was just plain annoying. He really wasn’t ready to roll over and die, just yet – not unemployed and without even a roof over his head. That would be embarrassing. He wanted at least a roof before he died.

“How is Franz going to kill me from Washington?”

She slowly shook her head. “Oh, no, lover. He’s here. In New York. We were going to him before you got cute with the tramcar. But he’ll still find you – find us, because they’ll kill me, now, too.”

She suddenly slid close and pressed herself tightly to him. He could feel her breasts against his chest, her lips nuzzling his neck, her hand exploring. “Johnny, let’s go to my place. You and I, we’ll spend the time making love until ... well, until they kick down the door. Please, Johnny. You were the best ever, lover.” Her lips were placing small kisses on the side of his neck

and he suddenly realized what it reminded him of – that book he'd read, what was it? Oh, yes! Dracula.

He pushed her away and she quickly drew the coat around herself, once again. Her moods came and went with amazing rapidity.

"Tell you what, if it's all a foregone conclusion, I don't see any reason to wait. Let's go see Franz, right now. He doesn't even have to know how you fucked this up. Just smile and say "Hi, Franzie! Look who I brought!" He put the car into gear, stepped on the reverser and eased it out of the alley onto the street.

"All right, baby. Which way am I going?"

CHAPTER TWENTY

February 15, 1915

It really wasn't that much of a trip. 11 Broadway, just across from Bowling Green. Familiar stomping-grounds for him, now, but how do you conduct a continent-wide conspiracy from a comfortable three-storey colonial? Even if you're in a country that has pretty much given you free rein to do whatever you want.

At least parking wasn't a problem. He pulled the machine up near the building she indicated, ran around the car and handed the lady out. She smiled and walked ahead as if the world was still turning as it should. Maybe that was the way to make this work: audacity, always audacity.

As she walked toward the door, he lifted the seat momentarily and retrieved the last item from the paper bag that Eva had left him. Margit was waiting for him, head tilted in curiosity, so

he smiled at her, tucked the item into his breast pocket and caught up with her.

The old mansion, one of the few left downtown with a front lawn, was still the same. The three storeys, coat of arms, the German flag. To the south, the next building butted up against it, wall to wall. There was an alley beside it to the north. The sign, in German and English, still read '*Konsulat des Reiches Deutschland / Consulate of the German Empire*'. Devon had spent several hours peering into its secrets with binoculars. Now it looked like he was going to see much more. Whether he got to tell anyone about it was another story.

Margit led him inside, where a cruiserweight with a much broken nose came around his desk and reached out to search Devon. Devon slapped away the hands. "*Mutter sagt' zu schreien, wenn ein Mann mich dort berührt*.'" The guard looked puzzled; Margit looked amused; and Devon passed through without being searched, and without needing to scream, like Mother told him to do when a man touched him there. The girl at reception simply looked on in bewildered amusement.

Margit led him up the stairs to the second floor and into a lounge that was one room in a larger apartment. If the lounge at Number 123 was done in velvet gaucherie, this was the latest in modernism. An electrified gramophone, something Devon had never seen; an electric fire; severe, practically harsh furniture when compared to comfortable over-stuffed couches and chairs Devon had grown up with; a central area rug, rather than a carpet, over a geometric parquet floor. The artwork on the walls featured strange, linear, slashing lines and glaring colors that looked to Devon more like the painter had been cleaning his brushes than creating art. Devon didn't know art, but he knew what he didn't like.

There was also no one in sight. Margit did a little turn around the room, coming back to

stop in front of Devon and look straight into his eyes. It was almost as though she were challenging him to do something about what she was going to do next. He waited.

“Franzie! Look who I brought!” she called, loudly.

“You didn’t have to take me quite so literally, honey.”

“Johnny, I’ve always taken you literally – and look where that’s gotten us.” She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. “It’s not too late to go back to my place.”

Just then, he heard footsteps on parquet from farther into the apartment.

“Yes, it is.” He pulled his face away from hers and her arms from around his neck, stepping back and reaching behind to clasp the grip of his Dreyse. She stood apart from him and they watched the hallway.

Judging from the clicking of the hard heels on the hardwood, Devon expected a man in full Prussian military gear to come down the hallway: jack boots, monocle, and pickelhaube helmet. Maybe a saber and spurs. Instead, von Papen was wearing a plain grey suit; a tall, thin, somewhat seedy man in his mid-30s, definitely from the upper crust but, when you looked past the hauture, probably not one taken too seriously by the rest. Perhaps to make up for that, he clearly took himself very seriously.

He paused at the three steps leading down into the lounge and assumed a Teutonic pose. “*Hoch das Vaterland!*” he greeted them.

“Yeah, go *hoch* yourself,” was the reply from Devon, who very nearly pulled the gun and the trigger, too, simply at the arrogance on the man’s face.

“This is the one?” the man said, looking to Margit.

“I’m the one and only,” Devon interrupted, determined to be as rude as possible. “Any

minute now, and you'll find out why."

"Yes, I remember him from that night onboard *Das Camäleon*. Mister *Niemand*. Why is he still alive?" was the German's next question.

"Because I sank your fucking boat instead of blowing up with the canal, Franzie. How did you like them apples?"

"Apple? V-which apples?" Oh, god, not a trace of a sense of humor.

"Paul thought it better to bring him here," she said.

The man's right eyebrow rose an astonishing distance. "He should have been shot at first sight. Paul is an idiot."

Devon wasn't about to let anybody insult his good friend, Koenig. "Listen, Franzie –"

"Ich bin Kapitan Franz Joseph Hermann Michael Maria von Papen, Erbsälzer zu Werl und Neuwerk! Sie werden mich als solche ansprechen!"

"I'll address you anyway I like, sunshine! This ain't Bavaria, you know. This is America and I'm an American!"

"Your name is Devon. You are an English subject, born in Canada. In case the news has not yet reached that stupid country, Germany is at war with England – and this building is a German consulate. It is legally German territory. That makes you a spy, Mr. Devon! And, here in Germany, we shoot spies."

"You can try, chum. Some spies shoot back." Margit made a little sound in her throat and stepped a little further away from Devon, who stepped a small step the other way for better sight lines.

Devon's thumb flicked the Dreyse's safety to off. At the same moment, four figures

entered the room from the hallway, where they'd obviously been waiting. Betke, Pfeil, Berstrom, and Horrell spread out across the room. None had weapons that were visible but on the other hand, neither did he. He was sure they were carrying them. Overall, the number of Sullivan Act violations in that little room would add up to a substantial number of prison meals.

He was the worst offender, of course.

"Good to see you again, boys! Just to let you know," he announced to the room in general, "the first one who tries to draw is dead; the next one might live but it'll be touch and go. After that, it's anybody's guess, but I'm betting on me."

Margit went up the steps to von Papen, moved close to him. "Franz, why must anyone be killed today? Give the word and I'll take him away until after the invasion – keep him there until all is settled. Please, Franz." She placed a hand on his arm and the German looked down at the hand, then at the girl's pleading face. Once again, Devon was torn between believing that beauty and believing her past actions.

Von Papen pushed her away. "I am suddenly convinced we had the wrong Seithen killed. I think the old lady might have been more use than a fluttering girl who falls in love with a preposterous peasant. We can remedy that."

He slapped her face and Devon stepped forward. "Hey! Kraut!" Von Papen looked up, surprised at the effrontery. "Yeah, you! I've just decided I don't like squarehead *Arschlochs* who slap women. On top of that, if I did like squarehead *Arschlochs* who slap women, I still wouldn't like you. So, I'm making a promise that I'm going to save one bullet just for you."

"You make silly threats, Devon, just like your silly country. Your words are silly, empty threats with nothing to back them up. That is why both you and your country are impotent and

will be destroyed.” Devon decided that Von Papen’s face was truly one that needed artwork done on it – like the artwork on the walls – lines and stripes and colorful lumps.

“I’ve been doing some light reading the last couple of days, Von Papen. Koenig was a great deal of help, of course – kept a diary of every meeting and every word you’ve had with him. Did you know that? Just in case it went queer with your lot. And, I’ve already passed it to where it’ll do the most good. It’ll certainly land you behind bars for a long time; it might land you in front of a firing squad. Big plans, Franzie. Big plans! If it all weren’t so laughable, it would be magnificent. I almost congratulate you.”

“I almost thank you. Well ...” the German snapped at his thugs. “Why are you waiting?”
“Kill him!”

“They know better. My gun’s lighter and faster. Nobody wants to be first. How about you? I notice that you’re good at giving orders. Why don’t you try to back them up? Or is that beneath you?”

“I am of the *Hochadel* – the nobility. I order; others obey.”

Devon was still trying to find a way to get out of this alive, but was reaching the conclusion that there wasn’t one. Even if he got out of this room, there were more armed Germans downstairs. Keep the fool talking was the best bet.

“You know something, Franzie? On this side of the ocean, people don’t take to that kind of talk. We’re more for the everybody’s equal/ freedom idea. It’s worked out pretty good, so far. You guys ought to try it over there.”

Von Papen actually placed a hand on his hip, threw back his head, and laughed. It was a really good impression of somebody Devon really, really wanted to shoot.

“Your country is fighting for the English! Why would you fight for those inbred weak imbeciles? What people are more stupidly loyal to their aristocracy than the English, with their fat, dumpy little queen?”

“Well, she died a while back, now. You squareheads are still hoaching her simple-minded one-armed grandson, though.”

Von Papen’s face filled with rage and his voice shook. Oh-ho! Hit a sore nerve there! “No! The Kaiser is the hope of Germany! The hope in the hearts of millions of Germans! The destiny that can be fulfilled only by unquestioned authority that commands unquestioning loyalty and obedience! All must sacrifice themselves; all else is unimportant when Germany’s final fate is at stake.”

Boy, when that guy got going, he was a one-man band. A one-man oom-pah band, and Devon’s feelings about oom-pah bands were well known.

“Germany fights, now, for its life against the barbarians who would destroy us! Who attempt, even as we speak to surround us and crush us!”

That was a full crock of it. “Yeah? Where’s the war being fought, Franzie, outside Berlin or outside Paris?”

“In the Fatherland, and in this country, there are Germans in their millions who will give their lives, their souls, their everything for the German *Reich*!”

Where was he getting this stuff?

“In this country?” Devon butted in, timing it to best enrage the man. “Hey, we’ve got clean air, lots of land, and the choice of who makes up our government. How do you figure anybody in this country wants what you’re talking about? When your German emigrants, who

wanted to get out of your country, show up here it takes about twenty minutes before they realize they're never going back. Not when they can choose whether they actually *want* to eat sausage every day."

The sausage remark pushed von Papen over the top. "There are tens of thousands already waiting for the call. In just one week, one full army corps will be ready to launch itself into the heart of your stupid, undefended country. Our infantry will roll over what few half-trained soldiers you have still up there; our guns will flatten your defenseless cities!"

"Your guns, Franzie? Where the hell are you going to get guns – or rifles – or transport? Or ammunition?"

"The guns are, even now, on the move, you fool! It is a matter of hours, now."

"And the gas, Franzie? Is that moving, too? Using it on soldiers on a battlefield is horrible enough, Franzie, but have you stopped to think about what it will do to the women, and the children, and the pussy cats?"

"They will die, but they will do it for the glory of the Fatherland! What greater honor can there be?"

If Devon could keep the guy talking a little longer, the war in Europe might be over. Meanwhile, the four sailors were still spreading to the sides and Margit was stranded in the middle, unsure of where to go.

"All I hear is talk. Talk's easy, squarehead. It's what people like you do best."

"Do you think that all the Germans who have come over here are being farmers in Minnesota? Or cowboys in Arizona? No, many are now in the military; many are now sitting in depots and munitions warehouses. When we tell them what to send, it is sent. Two batteries of

artillery are, this very minute, on rail cars on their way to Niagara! The chlorine, too. How you know about that, I don't know, but it makes no difference. The talk will soon be drowned in the thunder of our guns. At that moment, the gas will pour across the border into pathetic little Canada. All through the means of the little wireless signals in the air."

And there was the final piece – wireless. The machines he had seen at Deerbrook were wireless receivers; Pfeil and Bertrom had designed them in their bedroom at *Frau Seithen's* place from their knowledge of radio telegraphy. One signal gets sent; the receivers are set to listen for it; plungers close – war is launched.

"You like wireless, don't you, squarehead? Worked out real good for you last time, didn't it? All it took was one stupid Canadian to blow up your boat. But let's say your invasion works and Kapitan Franz Katherine Susan Nancy Maria von Papen gets to be Kaiser-General of Canada! What a conquest! Do you think they'll let you live?"

"Germany is at war, you fool. I am at war. I do not make war by half measures. *Weltmacht oder Niedergang!* Do you know this? The General Staff in the *Willhelmstrasse* have taken it up. 'We make the world – or we destroy it!' And you, Mr. Devon, are not even a speck of dirt to be flicked off my conquest. Betke! Horrell! Pfeil! Bertrom!" The four sailors snapped to attention with clicking heels. "Clean this mess up." Von Papen swept out of the room and the sailors turned their attention to Devon ...

... who reached into his breast pocket and held up the item he'd taken from the car. As he thought, his body warmth had thawed it out quite a bit. "Know what this is, boys?" They paused momentarily. "Any guesses? Margit, how about you?" None cared to make any guesses. "All right, let me tell you, then. This is nitroglycerin. Oh, you've all heard of it, have you? You navy

boys have surely seen it. So, back up!"

Margit looked to the sailors. "He's lying! He took that out of the car before he came in. If that was nitroglycerin, we'd have been blown to pieces at the other end of Manhattan."

The four men began to move in, again. "Ah, ah, ah!" he chided. "Look at this stuff! We only got here in the car because it was frozen. Nitro can take a little bouncing around when it's frozen. It freezes quick, but it thaws quick, too. Look at it! It's thawing out, now. What do you think the temperature in here is, Betke? About 70? Shoot me, I drop this, and we all go up, *Arschloch*. I'll be dead, but you'll all be dead three-quarters of a second later. BOOM!" The others recoiled at his shout and he took the Dreyse from behind his waist. "And, of course, if I fired this, the concussion will set the nitro off. So, I'll be leaving and you'll be staying. Bye-bye, Margit. I've got to admit, we had some fun."

"Don't leave me, Johnny! They'll kill me!" she screamed, as the four Germans stepped forward. He shifted his grip on the vial, hanging it between thumb and forefinger and reached out with three fingers on his gun hand to haul Margit to him.

Betke's shot took Margit in the back of the neck, exploding outward toward him. She was dead instantly, and the Dreyse barked twice toward Betke before she had begun to crumple.

He heard the door behind him open and he fired blindly under his left arm twice, heard a grunt from behind while he watched Betke crumple to the floor ahead of him. The other three were still hauling their weapons out.

"Fuck it!" he thought, and dashed the vial of nitro onto the floor – – where it bounced slightly on the deep carpet and rolled with a tinkle onto the parquet. Devon and the three Germans stared in horror at the vial, then slowly they all raised their

gazes to each other.

Devon fired once and it took Pfeil/Bertrom in the thigh. By then, he was leaping over the man on the floor behind him and crashing through the door to the stairway. Two bullets followed, whining off the doorway and into the stairwell.

Down the stairs, three at a time, flinching as bullets hit the stair and rail beside him, firing upwards twice without looking, hitting the door at the bottom with all his weight and practically tearing it off its hinges.

The Ford was a hundred feet away. For the first time since he learned to drive, he wished for an electric start, but no such luck. He'd have to crank it which he did, expecting a party of gunmen to erupt from the front door of the consulate at any second while he cranked.

Why hadn't the damn stuff blown up? Had Eva given him a vial of water or something? Was the nitro still too frozen? He was alive, and he was happy about that, but it should have –

The center windows of the second floor erupted in flame, exploding outward and raining glass onto the street. The blast even came out through the ground floor entranceway, meaning it had slammed down through the stairwell.

Bye-bye, Betke. Bye-bye, Pfeil/Bertrom. Bye-bye, too, Horrell and Bertrom/Pfeil, if they had been near the top of the stair. Bye-bye, anybody who was climbing the stair at the moment of detonation.

Bye-bye, Margit. Happy Valentine's Day, sweetheart.

He was cut in a dozen places by flying glass. His ears rang like Quasimodo's. He was coughing from dust and from compression. He was pretty sure a bullet had gone clean through his right triceps.

Spattered with blood and more that he didn't want to think about, most of which had been Margit's, he slid into the driver's seat, dropped the handbrake forward, stepped on the gear selector and lurched forward as faces turned toward him then back to the smoke cloud billowing from the center of the consulate.

All in all, he was going to have a lot to answer for, if he was still alive.

A lucky escape. It was time to disappear.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

February 15, 1915

There was too damn much blood. He'd stopped for gas at one of the new filling stations that were popping up around the countryside, but the man had been too scared by Devon's appearance to even approach the car. Devon had worked the pump on his own and left a few bucks on the device. He'd also filled the crankcase with oil, and then thanked his lucky stars that you cranked over a T with your left hand – his right didn't seem to want to work anymore. Odd, that. He'd have to think about it.

So, what was he doing? He had to think about that, too; his brain wasn't concentrating well. Fuchs said everything was waiting on the cylinders from Wilmington and the big guns. Logically (if his concussed head still let him be logical), there was only one way to move that kind of freight. Rail. On the continental choo-choo system. He giggled and told himself to stop it.

How do you find one train among the hundreds (thousands?) that are moving across America at any moment? Especially when you don't know where it's coming from or where it's going to.

Easy, of course, you look for the one with the heavy artillery on it. That was funny. He started to giggle and told himself to stop. He might be losing his grip. And he was only gripping with his left arm, as it was. That was funny, too.

His head ached; his vision blurred; his back and arms were bleeding, his right ear, too. He discovered the reason his right arm didn't want to work: he had a bullet hole through his triceps, which dripped blood at an alarming rate. Other than that, there wasn't a thing wrong.

About midnight, he knew he had to stop. One: he would run out of gas soon and no gasoline filling station would be open until morning. Two: his head was about to explode.

He eased the throttle back and edged the car off to the side of the road and into a field. Engine off, he wobbled his way around to the front of the car and blew out the oil-lamps. He managed to make it around to the back seat, push his suitcase onto the floor, and climb in. Wrapping his coat closely around himself, he spoke to the empty air: "I have a concussion. I shouldn't fall asleep. I have to stay awa..."

It was morning. The sun was bright. The air was cold. His watch had stopped. His head still hurt. He had no idea where he was.

He pulled a fresh shirt from his suitcase and ripped up the old one, found a little water under the ice in the ditch to soak the old shirt and mop up some of the blood. There were bits of flesh stuck to him here and there that were not his own, but he swabbed them off and tried not to think about where they came from. He tied a torn shirt sleeve around his right arm and pulled on

the new shirt and his overcoat. That last was ripped afresh in a dozen new places, he assumed from flying glass when the consulate went up. And it was blood-soaked in several new places. He'd need a new coat soon, if he was still alive tomorrow. His arm hurt like hell, but he had more use of it than the night before.

The dipstick said he had about two gallons of gas left, which meant he must have come about 160 miles toward Niagara Falls. He could go maybe another forty before he ran dry. Call it thirty, to be safe.

No point in wasting time, so he splashed some ditch water on his face, cranked the machine to life and hit the road. There was probably a song to go with the situation but, for the life of him, he couldn't remember it.

An hour later and he was beginning to wonder about fuel when a crest brought into the view a fine little town, with church spires and broad streets. According to the signpost, it gloried in the name of 'Horseheads'. There had to be a story behind that name. Population: 900.

A hardware store at one end of town supplied a full tank of gas, although the kid who helped him was nearly as scared as the fellow yesterday. At the other end of town was the train-yard. You would not expect, when driving into such an inauspicious village, that sitting in that yard taking on fresh water, there would be a train with sixteen flat cars carrying canvas-covered artillery pieces, with four boxcars following behind marked with the blazon "CAUTION: DANGEROUS CARGO".

You wouldn't expect it, but you'd take it when it happened. By the laws of averages, something had to work out right for him at some point. When you added up the things that had gone wrong in the past few days, he was due for some luck.

You also wouldn't expect the cars to be guarded by a dozen armed Janus men, with McCall supervising the whole operation.

There he was, though, directing the crew, posting the watch, checking the coverings. He was pretty good at his job, which was too bad because, unfortunately, Devon's job was to do everything he could to put a stop to his.

He drew the T up to the rail car McCall was standing on and stepped out.

McCall straightened when he saw him, then looked left and right.

“You here for any good reason, Number 68?”

“I’m not Number 68 anymore. You know that. And, I’m not here for any reason you’d think was good. I’ve got my own reasons, though. Care to talk about them?”

“Would it do any good?” McCall started climbing down from the rail car.

“Doubt it. I’m kind of unreasonable, sometimes.”

“I’ve noticed that. The chamber pot was a nice touch.” He looked Devon up and down. “You’re kind of beat up, though, chum. Isn’t really a fair fight, is it?”

“Would it be, anyway?” Devon was five feet from the other man, hands easy, trying to conceal the stiffness in his right arm.

McCall smiled. “I’d like to find out, someday.” An awkward pause. “Does it have to do with this cargo?”

“Of course.”

Another pause for thought. “If you get hold of it, what are you going to do with it?”

“Stop a war.” Or try.

McCall whistled slow through his teeth. “Which war?”

“One that isn’t being fought, yet. One that doesn’t need to be fought. One that shouldn’t be fought.”

“People going to get killed?”

“Oh, yeah. Thousands.”

“You sure?”

“Yep.”

McCall looked around again and stepped forward. “You’d better hit me.”

“What?”

“Hit me. Make it good.”

“What’s the gag?”

“If I’m going to tell the rest of these guys to spread out and look for you, I need some blood. And, if I’m going to tell Janus we lost you *and* the train, then I’ll need some good bruises.”

“Why do this?”

“Janus has got his head up his ass on this one. He wanted us to dump you somewhere lethal but his daughter overruled him. He thinks, if the Germans can do this – invade Canada, I mean – America can leverage it to advantage, maybe even step into control up there. Ain’t going to happen and too many people are going to die. So – hit me.” He closed his eyes and stuck his chin out.

Devon came from low with a left cross into McCall’s jaw. McCall rocked back, closed his eyes – then opened them and shook his head a little.

“That the best you’ve got?”

“Holy cow,” was the best Devon had.

The man dug into his coat pocket and produced a set of brass knuckles. “Use these.”

“No, thanks. I’ll use my own” and Devon suited words to action with a straight right to McCall’s nose. He deliberately used his nearly limp right arm, but the brass knucks did the trick. McCall went down in a heap and blood began to flow from a broken nose.

Devon propped the bleeding agent against a train wheel.

McCall grinned at him. “How’s it look?”

“Perfect. That’ll swell beautifully. What now?”

“You know how to start this thing?” He lifted his chin upward toward the train.

“Hell, no. I can barely brush my teeth.”

“I’ve been watching them. All kinds of handles and faucets, but only three you need to worry about to get it going. Long bar on a ratchet, crossways at chest height – that’s the throttle. Use it carefully and slowly. You get the wheels spinning and you’ll never get away. Shiny brass handle at waist height below that, about eight inches long – that’s the brake. Forward is off. Long lever on a ratchet, standing up below the window – don’t know what that does, but he pushes it forward to start off and eases back to center as you get going.”

“Throttle, brake and spark advance. No problem. How do you steer it?”

Silence. “It’s a train. The tracks do that for you.”

“Right. I don’t have to crank it, do I?”

“Funny.” He closed his eyes for a moment. “Okay, that hurts. I owe you one.”

“I’ll buy you a beer. So, when I’ve stolen it, where do I hide it? My back pocket?”

“You’ve got to figure a way to run it off the track. Wreck the big guns; wreck the tracks,

maybe. Whether you're still in it is up to you. I don't know what's in the box cars, just pray they don't explode. Can I have the company car back?" He started to stand and Devon hauled him up. "Give me one minute to send these guys every which way and then do it."

On his way past the T, Devon cranked it over and set it to idle. It was the least he could do. In a few moments, he saw the Janus guards running to the middle of the train, where McCall gave them some fast orders. In another moment, they were running to every end of the rail-yard. Every end except the one where Devon was.

It was a short sprint to the engine and a quick haul up the step. The engineer was alone, eating a sandwich, which reminded Devon that he hadn't eaten since yesterday. The man stopped mid-bite.

"What do you want?"

"Are you all ready to go? Steam up? All watered?"

"Yeah, but we don't leave for ten minutes. We don't have a clear track."

"Train ahead?"

"No, just fouled points, about two miles up. They're fixing 'em, now. Where's that guy, McCall?"

"He's decided he'd rather drive. Where's the fireman?"

"Takin' a crap."

"Okay. That lever down by the window, on the ratchet. What's it called?"

"The Johnson bar."

"That's all I needed to know. Out." It's astonishing how big the bore of a .32 caliber looks from the other side of a ham sandwich.

“What is this?”

“I’m stealing your train, bub.”

“Stealing my ... you can’t steal a train! It only goes where the track goes!”

“So, I’ll be the first. Out.”

A couple of prods with the Dreyse sent the man running, and Devon seated himself. He felt like a kid – he was going to drive the train! Long brass handle at waist height – forward.

There was a release of steam or air. Johnson bar – forward. Nothing happened but what the heck? He was having fun. Throttle – forward or back? Wait, it was all the way forward. He eased it back a notch or two.

The train juddered as the engine took the strain, but it didn’t move.

A couple of more notches. A groan as wheels slowly turned.

A couple of more notches and the train actually began to pick up speed.

Guards and railway men were yelling now and running toward the train, but it was too far away.

Halfway out on the throttle and ease off the spark – no, wait! The Johnson bar! – and the drive wheels shrieked as they spun once and caught and the train was moving along well, now.

Looking back, he saw an agent try to leap onto the rungs of a mounting step, miss and fall into the gravel. That had to hurt. Nobody else was even close.

He opened the throttle more and more, easing the Johnson bar back to the top until the train was chugging along faster than he liked to think about. He surveyed the gauges and dials on the boiler-head, but could identify nothing that indicated speed. There must be one, but he couldn’t find it. This thing was definitely more complicated than a Model T.

The engineer had said about two miles up – it was time he started thinking about getting off. He should also warn the track crew ahead. That was only fair. When he was a kid, he always saw the engineers pulling a cable overhead to sound the whistle. No cable here, but then he thought to look out the window and follow the line from the whistle back. It was tied to a short handle just inside the cab.

Wow, getting to blow the whistle on the choo-choo! Won't the other kids be jealous?

After a big bend, a half-mile ahead, he saw a crew working on the track. He gave the whistle two short blasts, held it down for a long blast, then a couple of more short ones. As the men started to scatter ahead of him, he crossed the footplate of the cab and eased himself down onto the step. Squatting on the plate, gravel, weeds, rail ties, and debris whipping past just a couple of feet from his head, made him seriously question the wisdom of what he was about to do.

Now, or never, boy, he told himself, pulled his overcoat up around his head and leaped as far out as he could, tucking in as tightly as he could. He didn't have far to fall, so the drop wasn't bad, but scrubbing off his speed was rough. Frankly, it hurt like hell.

He skidded along on the loose gravel, then rolled to the bottom of the ditch and lay sprawled there, to take stock of himself. Some of the impact had been taken by water, and ice, and grass; most of it by his body. It just plain hurt. The last of the train cars passed him, just as the sound of the engine hitting the jammed points and leaving the track, a quarter mile away, reached him.

The train was still just rounding the bend, far too fast for the curve, and the cars, engine and all, left the track and tumbled over one another to the outside of the curve. That was luck, not

planning – the men he had seen had run to the inside of the curve, safely (he hoped) out of the way.

The noise was astounding. The engine nosed into the mud, gouging a ditch ten feet deep and fifty feet long. Steam boiled upward, along with sparks, flame, gravel and more, as the boiler ruptured. A half-dozen of the big guns were thrown into the air and somersaulted into the swampy land. The flat-cars mostly landed upside down, burying and smashing the remaining guns. The boxcars were shattered against each other, cartwheeling down the track and into the swamp. Overhead, dozens of steel bottles (the cylinders! That's what they were!) flew into the air, some spewing their contents of liquid chlorine, some just burying themselves in the mud, while the bottles that stayed in the cars were, like the guns, buried by their own weight and probably crushed, as well.

Let's see somebody salvage something out of *that*, he thought.

The train whistle began to shriek one last time, then faded away as the steam pressure dissipated.

Boy, the kids were going to be jealous of him, for sure! Not only did he get to drive the train, not only did he get to blow the whistle, but he got to crash the train, too! He tested his limbs and found nothing broken, but he'd added another layer of scrapes, cuts and bruises to his collection. He hoped the collection was now complete.

On the other side of the track, a dozen autos began to arrive and twice that many men jumped out. All of them ran to the scene of the wreck. All but one, who arrived last and stayed by his car.

McCall, lips and nose swollen, eyes puffed, nostrils stuffed with bits of rag, and a

delightful bruise beginning to show under his eyes, helped him over the track and across to the T.

“You’re sdill alibe,” he said.

“Am I? Nice to know. Are you?” For the second time that day, Devon used his handkerchief to dab at his own blood.

McCall tried to smile, but it hurt. “Aren’t we a team?” he said, but it sounded more like “Ard we a deeb?”

“You’d better see a doc.” And, Devon couldn’t help laughing at the idea of him giving out medical advice.

“Clean this up, first,” McCall said, indicating the destruction just ahead. “You’d better head for Canada. It’ll be a long time before you’re clear down here.”

“Can’t – still got things to do.” He waved toward the train wreckage. “This might stop von Papen’s invasion plans, but it hasn’t stopped him. I want to find him and settle it. Then there’s the explosives and weapons from Number 123 – wherever they went.”

McCall shook his head, and regretted it. “Janus tipped the Bureau of Investigation about Number 123; Koenig’s in the pokey, singing like a songbird. And, you’ve got a few little cutie-pie songbirds from Number 123, all singing your praises. Lucky you.”

“Yeah. Lucky me.”

A yell from down the track made McCall look up and wave. “Better go. See you, pal. One hell of a job, you did.”

The men shook hands and parted. Just as he was climbing in, Devon stopped and called after McCall. “Hey! Any idea where von Papen is?”

McCall turned back. “Janus said he’d be at the railhead, I think, waiting for his guns and

his gas! Good hunting!" Now, where might 'the railhead' be?

Sitting behind the wheel of the Ford, he actually was able to use his right hand to adjust the throttle and spark as he nosed the car back onto the road that ran along the track. Things were looking up. He'd need gas, he reminded himself, then set his mental compass to north-west and headed for Buffalo. How hard could it be to find Buffalo? He sniggered to himself.

Why, he was a modern Bill Cody, hunting Buffalo in the wilds of New York!

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

February 16, 1915

He was going to miss this car. It was a real soldier – hadn’t boiled over; hadn’t thrown a fan belt; hadn’t run out of gas or oil – and only now, almost at the end of the line, did it blow a tire – and, at that, it was the one he’d dragged along the tram track back in NYC. If only he had two good arms, he could easily change it. On the other hand, if he wasn’t a wanted fugitive whose very appearance would send honest people screaming into the distance, he could simply pay somebody to change it. He had the money. He probably also had his faced plastered on the front page of every newspaper: ‘BOMBER KILLS HUNDREDS AT NEW YORK EMBASSY!’

Well, maybe not hundreds.

Instead, here he was, sitting at Lockport and Hyde Park. He’d played a hunch and turned north to find the town of Niagara Falls. He could see the mists of the Falls maybe two miles distant. The Honeymoon Bridge was there, beckoning him to come home to Canada. It was an

easy walk across it – some jackass had actually flown an aeroplane under it, a few years back.

Maybe that was the best course of action: admit defeat and walk back to Canada with his tail between his legs. No shame in that, was there?

There was still a job to be done, but he knew he couldn't do it. It didn't matter how much he said 'I think I can', he had a bullet wound, a concussion, there were cuts, scrapes and bruises on most of his body by now; and he was really thirsty – that probably meant something. He was human, after all, not a little engine that could.

That little brown-noser was probably one of the engines in the rail yard to his left: eight or ten trains spread across twenty or more tracks, combining in multiple sets of points, until one track remained, running straight out across the railroad bridge to Canada. From where he was sitting, it wasn't more than a mile over the river to the welcome embrace of the British Empire. Once over the river, he could find whoever is in charge and tell them the whole story. Then, sleep; lots and lots of sleep. Probably in prison but, at least, it would be a Canadian prison.

Yeah, fuck that.

He started his machine rolling, bouncing every time the tire tried to roll itself off the rim. It only had to last a mile. The train yard rolled away on his left, there was a collection of railroad buildings coming up quickly and he was trying to figure how close he could get to the bridge before he had to walk.

He saw the spike first, then he saw the monocle. Then he saw the man.

Standing in front of the freight shed, using his height to tower over a railroader, using his aristocracy to assume a privilege he didn't have, using his arrogance to scream at the man, who didn't quite cower in front of the Prussian presence berating him.

Devon laughed out loud, pleased with himself beyond measure. Von Papen had obviously just gotten word of the delay on delivery of his guns – and his gas. The permanent delay. Now, Devon could ensure von Papen's delay, permanently, if possible.

Give the man his due: he had style. He was in a blue full-dress Prussian uniform, from high-top boots and spurs, to spiked helmet. Red collar and cuffs with silver epaulets set it off nicely. At least, he wasn't wearing a saber.

Devon wrestled the T through the front lot to come to a stop not five feet from the German and his current victim. He was out of the car and moving toward von Papen before it came to a full halt.

Von Papen's eyes went so wide, he dropped his monocle. “*Du!*” he shouted. “*Ja! MICH!*” The second word was punctuated by the sound of brass connecting with flesh.

Yet von Papen only went to his knees. Holy crap! That should have knocked down a mule. Devon wasn't sure whether the German was still conscious or not, but he hadn't gone down, so Devon kicked him – twice. The *pickelhaube* rolled into the dirt.

The railroader had begun to recover. “Hey! What are you do...” “Back away! Now! This son of a bitch is a prisoner of war! Got that?” Devon threw the helmet into the back of the Ford, grabbed the front of von Papen's tunic, and hit him one more time.

“Look, pal,” the American started in, “you can't do that! There's laws!” “Fuck 'em!” Devon was slowly dragging the German toward the car. “You gonna help me or you gonna try to stop me?”

“MIKE!” She was getting out of the big touring landau parked in front of the freight shed.

“MIKE!”

The railroad man looked from one to the other. “What’s going on, mister? Who is this guy? Who the hell are you?”

“Steickternott. Franck Steickternott. And, don’t bother calling the railroad cops. I’m already dead, chum! I’m a ghost. BOO!” Devon was still dragging the inert German toward the Ford. “And, this guy hasn’t got half of what he deserves, yet.”

Eva stopped a few feet away, her eyes and mouth three ‘O’s of astonishment at his appearance. “Mike, what happened to you? Oh, darling, what did they do to you?”

“Not enough to stop me. I guess even killing me isn’t enough for that.” He realized that he sounded hysterical, and probably looked worse. He looked to the railroader, who was standing with mouth open. “Grab hold, there, and help me load him up.”

“But, I ...”

“DO IT!” Yes, he was hysterical.

Together, they got the limp lump of German into the Ford.

“Thanks, buddy. If they ask, tell them I pulled a gun on you.”

“But you didn’t.” The man looked down and put his hands up. “Oh, right, you did.”

“Take off.” No urging was needed there. To Eva: “What are you doing here? What are you doing with *him*?”

“Don’t yell at me!”

“I’ll yell at whoever I want to yell at! Holy Christ, do you know what I’ve been through this past couple of days? What the fuck are you doing with him?” Hysteria was giving way to

mania. His head was exploding, again.

“I’m the liaison with McCall and the security squad. Dad told me to keep track of *him* and keep tabs on whatever he was doing. He’s waiting for a shipment of things, cannons or something, to get here.” Realization dawned on her. “Really? Cannons?”

“They’re not coming. Ever. I threw them all into a swamp and buried them in the cold, cold ground.”

“Oh. So, I guess I’ll tell Dad. He won’t know what to say. What are you going to do with *him*? Isn’t he with the Embassy or something?”

He looked at the car, where von Papen slept the sleep of the angels, at the freight shed, where his new buddy must be on the phone, right now. “I’m taking him across the bridge where he can be dealt with properly. A firing squad, at least – although I might drop him over the railing halfway across. Are you coming?”

“Coming? Where?” She knew where.

“The other side of the bridge. You said ‘if the border was gone’. Half a mile from here and it will be. Are you coming?”

“No.”

“That’s kind of too bad ... because I ain’t coming back.”

He was swaying a little as he climbed into the Ford and set it in motion. Over his shoulder, he saw her turn away and climb back to the landau. She didn’t look back and he was sorry he had.

He bounced the machine along the gravel bed beside the track as far as Grove Ave., before the left front wheel collapsed in a shower of flying spokes. There was no going any farther

with it.

“God, I am sick of you!” he shouted and hit von Papen again because it felt good, which even he had to admit was a bit unfair. He pulled the unconscious man out of the car and slammed the spiked helmet onto the brush-cut head.

This was getting to be very annoying. How to get out of here and take Herr Picklehat with him? Could he drag him across the bridge to safety? A ten-foot drag put an end to that idea. He could make him walk – if he ever woke up. Or, he could load him onto the one-man railcar that was fast approaching, a tub-gutted rail-road cop sitting importantly in its single seat. Of all his possible courses of action, that rapidly became his favorite.

The rail dick brought the little jitney to a stop a dozen yards away, engine idling, sitting neatly on the one track that ran over the bridge. He climbed laboriously out of the machine, hiked his pants over his paunch and said “All right, mister, just what do you think you’re doing? This is railway property and I’m not going to ...”

Devon never did know what the man wasn’t going to ... because the cop stopped talking, mouth still open, when he saw the Dreyse pointed at him.

“Grab this guy and help me load him onto the jitney.”

With Devon’s gun leveled every step of the way, between them, they pulled/pushed/dragged the German over gravel, railroad ties and tracks to dump him face down on the rear of the cart. “Now, run away,” Devon ordered and the cop did. He didn’t think the railroad cop had ever closed his mouth.

Devon dropped onto the unpadded bench seat. He was starting to see flashes in front of his eyes. How did the damn thing work? Come on, he’d just crashed a great big locomotive. How

hard can it be to crash this little thing? All right, there was a handbrake in the center of the car, pulled all the way back. He released that and the car moved not at all. Another, smaller lever stuck up beside the handbrake. All right, squeeze the safety on it and push it forward. It went forward but the wrong forward – the car was facing the other way. He wanted to go back where it had come from. Pull it back to neutral and then back again to reverse. That was it. He'd back up all the way to Canada – which seemed appropriate, somehow.

He was in danger of becoming lightheaded, again.

A voice yelled from behind him, "Hey, what the hell are you doing? Get away from that!"

The car began to creep, oh, so slowly toward the bridge, just barely moving. Well, the engine was idling, of course. There had to be a throttle!

There wasn't – and the thing still crept forward at half-a-baby's-crawl. No pedals; no other levers. Just one piece of stiff wire coming out of the engine compartment.

Pull it out. The car moved faster. Pull it all the way out and the car picked up speed at a great rate, just as two railway workers reached the track behind him. The two were soon left behind, shaking fists and shouting unheard threats.

He stood up to check the way ahead. There was no stopping him, now! At the terrific rate of nearly fifteen miles an hour, the car lurched over the final set of switches and onto the bridge. The cursing railwaymen had given up their cursing. The Canadian side wasn't a half-mile away.

And then von Papen kicked his legs out from under him.

He went down hard across the seat and nearly had the wind knocked out of him. Von Papen sat up and tried to get his feet under him, but it was clear that he wasn't in much better shape than Devon.

Devon swung his leg in an arc that connected to the side of von Papen's head and the man flopped hard onto his face. It was a kind of slow-motion fight that might be funny, if they weren't trying to murder each other.

The two struggled to their feet, each trying to find firm footing on the juddering, swaying deck of the little car. It wasn't intended for this kind of thing and rocked from side to side with each step and swing.

Von Papen swayed slightly off-balance and Devon swung hard for his jaw, but the German stepped inside the swing and planted a right into stomach muscle. Air went out with a grunt, but Devon got an arm wrapped around von Papen's throat and began to squeeze, getting a fist on the nose for his trouble that sent stars spinning in front of his eyes. Von Papen slipped out of the choke and turned to the attack. The jitney rocked more wildly than ever, throwing them both off balance. Devon managed to ward off a couple of wild swings and, when the German stepped in, lifted a foot into Prussian groin which, he discovered, is much the same as any other groin.

It only partly connected, but it stopped von Papen's charge and put Devon in a perfect position to end the fight for good. The car rocked again and he could hear the wheels squeal as they lifted. He unleashed a roundhouse left guaranteed to stop a bull if it connected. As his fist began its swing, Devon felt the little car jump.

They were making about twenty miles per hour when Devon's fist connected with von Papen's face, just as the car left the track, sending the *Kapitan* backwards off the tiny platform. The car's front wheels hit the ties and Devon was thrown forward a good dozen feet, landing with a crunch, followed by the sound of the car flipping over and coming to a rest within inches

of Devon's legs. The engine billowed blue smoke before choking itself out in short order.

Devon's head was pounding in complaint, flashing lights were happening inside his skull, and he was sure he'd pass out. The only thought that crossed his mind was 'God damn it! Twice in one day!'

There was a lot of silence on the bridge. Upstream, Devon could hear the Falls roaring, but he couldn't see them because his head refused to move in coordination with his feet. No matter how he tried, he was simply kicking his feet in the air, while his head remained flat on the deck of the bridge.

Other feet were approaching, though, and he twisted to see boots and puttees double-timing it over the bridge: two privates from the Canadian side, rifles at the high port. An officer followed, a good distance back. Devon twisted the other way and saw that von Papen was struggling to rise while men in U. S. Customs uniforms were running toward him. It would make for an interesting foot-race, if Devon could work up interest in anything other than his head.

The two soldiers reached him first and skidded to a stop. He shouted, or as close as his pounding head would allow, at them.

"Keep going! Get him! That Prussian over there! Get him! There's a war on, you know! Don't let him get away!"

The two soldiers looked at each other, shrugged, and continued at the double toward von Papen. As they did, the two Americans arrived beside the fallen German, who was starting to pick himself out of the rubble.. One American held up an imperious hand.

"Back it up, you two! This is the American side of the line. We're in charge over here!"

The soldiers stopped, unsure of what to do. At the side of the bridge, a three-foot by one-

foot sign marked the border, with arrows north to Canada and south to the United States. Sure enough, von Papen was clearly south of the line, while Devon was north of it.

The Canadian officer, breathing heavily, finally arrived on the scene.

“Burgoyne! Jones!”

The privates looked back to him. “Leftenant Davies, sir?”

“As you were! Back over here.” The soldiers returned to their side of the line and the officer pointed to Devon. “See to that man,” before he stepped to, but not over the border line. Still breathing heavily, he said “I’m terribly sorry, gentlemen. Young lads, you know. No international incident, I hope.”

“Well, the whole thing’s a real mess, ain’t it?” said the American who’d spoken before.

“It’ll take some time to sort out, I’m sure.” The Canadian bent down and picked up von Papen’s regimental headdress from where it lay at his feet. “This probably belongs to that man, there.” He tossed it lightly across the line to the Customs men and turned back to Devon.

“Well, look at that!” the second Customs man laughed, catching the *pickelhaube*. He turned back to speak to von Papen. “Going to a fancy dress ball, are you, pal?”

“This is the uniform of the First Regiment of Uhlans of the Guard!” It would have been more effective if he wasn’t covered, in nearly equal amounts, with coal dust, coal oil, and blood.

“That a fact? I like the hat. Come on, let’s go. The Kaiser wants to see you.”

The two Customs men seized von Papen, who pushed them aside furiously. “Take your hands off me! I am *Kapitan Franz Joseph Hermann Michael Maria von Papen, Erbsälzer zu Werl und Neuwerk*. I am military attaché with His Imperial German Majesty’s Embassy to the United States. I have diplomatic immunity!” Reaching into his tunic, he produced an all-black

passport with the German eagle and the word ‘*Diplomatisch*’ on the outside.

“Oh, brother!” moaned the first American. “My achin’ back!”

On the other side of the border, Devon grabbed the aged Canadian subaltern who was now holding his shoulders. “Shoot him!” The soldier looked down in horror. “Shoot him! Take my gun and shoot him – or you’re just going to have to do it later!” Devon was pushing the Dreyse into the officer’s hands.

“I admonish you to put that away while you’re on this side of the line. It’s a crime to own that over here.”

“It’s a crime to own it over there but that’s never stopped me. Shoot him!”

Von Papen slapped dirt from his uniform and smiled that arrogant self-satisfied smile at Devon from a dozen feet away. “He cannot shoot me. I am on the American side; you are on the Canadian side. If he shot me, it would cause an international incident – and we don’t want that, do we?” The German settled his coat on his shoulders and turned to the border guards. “Take me to your headquarters. I wish to contact the German Embassy in Washington.” He looked back at his still prostrate enemy. “You will never do it, Devon. You are too slow and too stupid. *Auf wiedersehen*, Devon.” He pointed to each of the Customs guards. “*Du und du! Macht schnell! Im Gleichschritt! Marsch! Links – links – links, zwo, drei, vier!*”

With his honor guard of Customs guards, von Papen marched back to the United States.

“You should have done it,” Devon breathed. “You should have plugged him between the eyes. When we hear from him again, there’ll be nothing but trouble following.”

The lieutenant summoned the two young soldiers to lift the raving man he had inherited charge of.

“That’s all right, Yank. We’ll get you back across the border and you can chase him to your heart’s content.”

Devon pulled his eyes up to focus on the grey-haired officer. “What did you just call me?”

“Well … nothing, I think. Uh … Yank?”

“That was it. If I didn’t feel like a herd of baboons was dancing on my eyeballs, I’d punch your lights out.” He pulled his birth certificate out of his inside pocket. “Read it and weep, chum. My name’s Mike, no, I mean, Johnny, no, it’s Steickternott. Damn it! Devon, my name’s Devon, and I’m a Canadian, whether you want me or not.” He thought he should say something else. “Sorry.”

And, with that, he closed his eyes and slept.

EPILOG

September 28, 1915

If anyone cared to take notice, they'd see that the old 'bo by the pier was not nearly as old as he looked. The long hair was deceptive; the beard was wild, but still black; the old coat, while beaten up and patched, was clean. Despite it being only late September, he wore woollen gloves. He also wore dark glasses, despite the grayness of the day. Most times, he seemed wrapped up in his thoughts, barely noticing anyone around him.

He looked harmless enough, nevertheless the mothers, in an abundance of caution, tugged their children down the other side of the walk as they passed, just in case. It was completely unnecessary because, when it came to their screaming crying children, he just didn't give a rat's ass. He had other things on his mind.

He had been there, every day, for more than a month, beginning early in the morning and

staying until the light began to fade. Patrolling cops had become used to him and even greeted him occasionally with 'How are you today, gramps?', even though it was clear, if they had bothered to look, that the man was not likely to be anyone's grandfather. It was all a question of adding up the clues, which very few people did.

Day after day, he sat, face toward the harbor, catching the morning sun but not bothering to turn to follow the sun during the day. It was as though he were waiting for someone, or something. Speculation among the few who cared to speculate about such things was that he was an old sailor who lost his ship when he lost his sight, perhaps now had lost his love, and was waiting out his days near the sea.

He had a tin cup filled with bread crumbs that he was distributing among the pigeons and the other vermin on the pier. It was more than slightly possible that he was drunk.

A well-meaning passer-by stopped to drop a silver half-dollar into his cup and walked away feeling self-satisfied over helping the poor blind man. They received the heavy coin in the back of the head at stinging velocity a second later. Turning quickly, they saw the old blind man distributing crumbs and decided that a bird must have pecked the back of their head. They never were sure of why the old blind man was laughing.

A close observer, and there were none, might have noticed the old blind man mumbling to himself. That would have sent the mothers scurrying had they heard it. It was nonsense, of course, as those sort of unfortunate crazed people tend to mumble, perhaps because they have no one else to mumble to.

"Grilse, nine-oh-one," he said repeatedly, followed by "Lady Evelyn ten-forty-two; Lilly and Lillian, two-twenty-five; Alva And May three-fifteen." Perhaps he was a long time horse-

racing punter and was reliving his past.

No one cared, or bothered, to interrupt his litany until a burly figure in a black coat, fedora and high collar stepped in front of him, facing the harbor. The old blind man stopped his mumbling and waited. After three minutes, he said "You're between me and my boats."

The burly man never took his eyes off the harbor, which was quite pretty, but busy with wartime traffic.

"He wants to see you."

He received a shower of breadcrumbs over his fedora and collar, prompting the pigeons to hurry to the feast. The man shook off the scavengers and turned.

"Now."

OPERATIVE NO. 68

WILL RETURN IN

'THE HAMBURG-AMERIKA PLOT'

HISTORICAL NOTES

This book is a fiction, but it has a considerable basis in historical fact.

Gas across the Niagara: Did the German military plan a gas attack on Canada in early 1915, months before the infamous attacks of April, 1915 at Ypres? We know they certainly planned more conventional attacks in a half-dozen places with the intention of occupying Canada, as outlined in this book. It was claimed they had access to multiple batteries of artillery. The conspirators also had a close connection to the ... Deerbrook Explosives Works ... where considerable development of advanced weapon types took place during the war, of such variety that, after the war, DXW was renamed Deerbrook Chemical Works. So, adding two and two to make six also makes for an interesting story.

'boes: Even up to the 1960s, it was usual to refer to 'gentlemen of the road' as 'hoboes', a term that has fallen solidly into the realm of pejorative in our more enlightened world today. The

truth of that term, however, is that ‘hobo’ was the roadmen’s own contraction of ‘homeless brother’, an inclusive, welcoming term for others whom misfortune had left *in extremis*. It has always seemed to me that ‘homeless brother’ is a far better term than any others we use today.

Dobies: Devon makes reference to ‘leathernecks and dobies’. The term ‘leatherneck’ to refer to U.S. Marines is well-known; the term ‘dories’ to refer to U.S. soldiers less so. From 1913 to 1917, the U. S. was engaged in a hot little border war with Mexico, initiated when Mexico’s 1912 revolution boiled over into Texas. American soldiers marching in the desert conditions found themselves (and their equipment) constantly covered with adobe dust and began to refer to themselves as ‘dories’. A couple of years later, when a million of them marched in the mud of France, ‘dorie’ became ‘doughboy’, which stuck until WWII, when ‘G. I.’, meaning “Government Issue”, took over. That Devon knows the term indicates that he may have been one of those ‘dories’ or, at least, he had been involved in events south of the Rio Grande prior to coming to New York.

The Model T Ford: You may wonder how Devon knows the complicated operation of every vehicle he jumps into. The simple reason is that, at that time, one of every two vehicles on the road in North America was a Model T Ford. A total of 15 million were made. The Volkswagen Beetle eventually surpassed it in numbers, but the ‘T’ was the original ‘People’s Car’. Even the ‘C’ cab truck Devon steals was simply a ‘T’ with a truck body on it. Apart from the steering wheel, no modern driver would recognize any of the controls: hand-crank starting only until 1915; the foot brake was on the right; reverse gear was the pedal in the middle; there was no foot throttle ever offered, even as an option; gear shifting required a combination of the left-most foot pedal and the hand brake; there was no heater! And, no parking assist, lane-change

warning system, or Bluetooth connectivity, either. When the Dodge Brothers announced their brand in 1914, someone asked, “What about all the people who already own a Model T?” The reply was “Just think how many of them are going to want to buy a car!”

Franz Joseph Hermann Michael Maria von Papen, *Erbsälzer zu Werl und Neuwerk*:

If von Papen’s name seems familiar, it’s because he was chancellor of the last gasp of the Weimar Republic in 1932, and vice-chancellor of the Third Reich, under Adolf Hitler, in 1933. In 1914, he was an army captain and military attaché to the German Embassy in Washington, meaning he was one of three spymasters for Germany in the U. S. His first set of schemes (and he had many) was to disrupt the flow of war materiel from Canada and the U. S. with the use of bombings and other sabotage. The *pièce de resistance* of that scheme was to have been the blowing of the locks of the Welland Canal, flooding the Niagara Peninsula and disrupting trade for years, not to mention probably killing thousands. He was expelled from the U. S. in 1915 and, by 1916, was actually under U. S. indictment for his attempts to wage war on Canada from U. S. soil. That indictment remained open until he became German chancellor. As German ambassador to Austria in 1938, he laid the foundation for the German takeover, the *Anschluss*. After WWII, he was a defendant at the Nuremburg Trials, described by the prosecution as the man who ‘held the stirrup while Hitler vaulted into the saddle’. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, but his sentence was commuted in 1948. He spent the rest of his life trying to restore his name and regain a political career. He died in 1969.

Mena Edwards was, indeed, the Eastman Girl (aka, the Kodak Girl). She became involved in happenings at Number 123 West 15th Street in 1915, but managed to get out as soon as she could. **Marie Wells** was, for a while, her room-mate before going to Hollywood where she

had a film career that lasted until the 1930s. In 1921, when the American government finally held a reckoning for the German activities during the war, Mena (by then, Mena Reise) very bravely came forward to testify, very frankly, to many of the events I've described. Von Papen, pre-echoing a certain orange-toned U.S. president ninety years later, denied knowing her and offered some very lame excuses. Although married and settled down by the time the trials came along in the 1920s, Mena was a pretty wild girl in her younger years.

The Janus Agency: Nope. Sorry. Pure fiction – but the Pinkerton Agency did, and does, exist. While today, they are mostly active in corporate, industrial and private security around the world, in the 19th and early 20th century, they conducted active espionage for both the U. S. and Canadian governments. The unblinking Pinkerton eye symbol gave us the term ‘private eye’, and Dashiell Hammett, author of **The Maltese Falcon**, was one of their agents in the 1920s. The Pinkerton Agency and its actions should not be conflated with the Janus Agency and its actions in this story.

OPERATIVE NO. 68: Yes, Operative No. 68 existed. His reports are recorded in both official Canadian and unofficial American records. In fact, many of the people named in connection with his activities in this story existed, as well. You'd be surprised which ones are real and which are fictional. It is almost certain that their real characters and personalities had little to do with their representations in this story. We have no idea of who Operative No. 68 was, what his name was, or what he was like – except that it seems he was a fast talker, a faster thinker, and that he was fond of strong drink and women. Possibly in that order.

We don't know much about Operative No. 68, but we do know that he will return.