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**The Hamburg-Amerika Plot**

by Jake Lynne

The third Operative No. 68 thriller

Fourteenth Draught

74,717 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*

## PROLOG

**January 3, 1915**

She was old. Her joints creaked. Her knees cracked at every flex. She hadn't had anyone give her a good going-over for ten years or more. In short, the old girl just didn't have what it takes any more. She no longer had 'it'.

But she was game. She could keep going long after any of her younger sisters would have given up.

Stockwell remembered a time up off Nantucket, when the old girl was heaving like a drunken sailor and anybody who cared to could see her time-polished bottom. But she'd stuck it out; yes, she had. She got him and the crew and the cargo into Boston and back to New York two days later.

This wasn't anything like that. Out of respect for her 35 years, the owners just had her running short-haul loads, Weehawken over to Brooklyn, Brooklyn up to the Black Tom Island

pier, Black Tom to one of the many piers on Manhattan, then back to Black Tom. It always ended up at Black Tom.

Orton's old cross-compound engine thudded away below in a rhythm so familiar that it seemed like it was part of Stockwell's own pulse. He'd been master of the S.S. Orton for eleven years and seen her through just about everything. Just like she'd seen him through.

He rang the telegraph, leaned over the speaking tube and said "Ahead one-third". The engineer replied "Ahead one-third", and the engine's thud slowed. There was a big bulk carrier coming out of the channel ahead, and he wanted to be sure he gave her a wide berth.

On the deck below the wheelhouse, he saw the newest member of Orton's crew, Willy Gourlain, coiling line. Willy was a bright lad, just eighteen, and seemed to be eager to learn. He'd have to ask the mate how the boy was doing.

A little thirty-foot steam launch was coming out of Erie Bay, sheering dangerously close to starboard, intent on getting where it was going. Captain Stockwell laid on the whistle and the little craft veered off, tooting saucily back at him in reply.

On the deck, Willy Gourlain wondered what the captain was sounding at, then he saw the white and blue launch chuff by, twenty feet to starboard. Idiot. Needs to learn about momentum, Willy thought. Probably somebody trying to impress a girl. Sure enough, looking down, he saw two pretty young women and two older men. Good luck, grand-dad. I hope they lift your wallets and leave you dangling. The two girls waved happily to Willy as they went past and he returned the compliment. It was too cold for joy rides around the harbor, anyway.

Willy really hoped to be able to get to sea, proper. These short-haul runs were fine to learn your trade, but the fun was at sea. Or, so he thought. He dreamed of places like London and

Istanbul and Bangkok, without ever really knowing where London, Istanbul, or Bangkok were, much less what they were like.

Still, these short runs in Orton would do until he got his papers and then he'd try to get in at one of the big shipping lines: Cunard, or United States Lines, or White Star. He might even try one of the German ones but it seemed like all of their ships were tied up in New Jersey, even the huge *Fatherland*, that the mate had told him was the biggest ship afloat. Boy, to get into a ship like that! That would be something to be able to tell his mother.

It was his mother he'd be telling in this dream because Willy didn't really have a girl, which made him sad and a little embarrassed. Here he was, a real sailor, working on a real ship, fully eighteen years old, and he didn't have even one girl-friend.

There'd been one girl, last year, who'd let him put his hand up under her skirts, but he really didn't know what he was feeling. Then she'd pushed him away and said he was a brute, but she let him kiss her before she went home.

Willy was confused.

He'd kept on working while he thought, knowing the captain was above, looking down (he missed the obvious religious symbolism of that), and that the mate was moving about, checking the cargo.

He luggered the two-hundred feet of one-inch line he'd coiled down the ladder to the cable-locker, stowed it, and began back up the ladder.

Smoke.

He was used to the smell of the coal smoke from the stack. That wasn't it. He was used to the smell of the oil stove in the galley. That wasn't it. He was used to the smells of the various

tobaccos that the crew smoked, sucked on and chewed. That wasn't it.

He thought he'd better go find the mate, but then thought that maybe he'd better find where it was coming from first. When a vessel is underway and smoke comes drifting past, chances are that it's coming from forward of you, so he made his way along the half-deck to the forecastle and opened the hatch there.

SMOKE!

It began to billow past him and he recoiled back away from it. Something was seriously wrong. He'd better find the mate.

Then, he found him, lying at the bottom of the ladder down to the cargo deck. He was engulfed in smoke and, for the first time, Willy saw flames coming up. Fire down below!

He ran back up the ladder and shouted at the top of his voice: "FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!" He stuck his head out of the hatchway and looked around but saw no one, so he shouted again. "FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!" By now, the smoke had begun to billow up the hatchway, so anyone topside would soon know.

He slid down the ladder using hands and soles of boots only and coughed his way to the cargo deck ladder. The mate still lay at the bottom of it.

Taking as big a breath of relatively clean air as he could, he slid down the cargo deck ladder as well and reached the mate. He tried to lift the man, but was outweighed by fifty pounds. He pulled his arms and tried to get him to his feet, but the man had passed out completely.

The smoke was thicker and Willy pulled his shirt up over his mouth and nose, which helped very little. It was nearly impossible to breathe and he was coughing hard, but he wasn't going to leave the mate there.

Above him, he heard footsteps and a voice. "Anybody down there?" and he shouted as best he could "Yes! Help! We need help!" "Hang on!" was the answer and feet started down.

A wave of heat pushed against him and Willy felt the hairs on the back of his neck shrivel. From the lowest cargo hold, flames were blasting up the companionway like a blow torch. He tried to lift the mate again, as the feet above reached the top of the ladder.

He looked over to the flames again and saw the bales that the light of the fire were illuminating. They were labeled 'DANGER HXC C7H5N3O6'. He didn't know what the letters meant, but the flame was searing his skin.

He never did learn what the letters meant, because, just then, the bow of the S.S. Orton blasted itself into a hundred thousand pieces right in Brooklyn harbor.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

**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 to the other side of the walk before 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 had lost his ship when he lost his sight, and now, perhaps, had lost his love, and was waiting out his days near the sea.

His gloved hand held a tin cup filled with bread crumbs that he was distributing among the pigeons and the other vermin on the pier. His aim was never too steady. 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 old 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 were never 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; Tuna three-thirty-two." 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 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, Devon said "You're between me and my boats."

The burly man never took his eyes off the harbor, which was quite a pretty vista, 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 the crumbs and turned.

"Now."

Devon shook the rest of the crumbs from his tin cup and slid it into his pocket. "Is there nobody there who could remind him that I don't work for him anymore?"

"You never turned in your badge. He says, technically, that makes you an employee." The big man waited.

"You're not going away, are you?" The two men looked at each other and slowly grinned. "Hey, McCall. How's your nose?"

"I can nearly breath through it again. You still owe me a beer." McCall, hands in pockets, put a foot up on the end of the bench Devon was sitting on.

Devon grinned. "I'm good for it."

McCall squinted narrowly at the seated man. "How are you doing these days?"

"I still whistle in a few places when the wind blows, but I'll live. Where's the old bastard

now?"

McCall inclined his head vaguely toward the city. "Up at Navy House. He's with your Admiral Kingsmill."

"My admiral?"

"Well, a Canadian admiral. I didn't know you had a navy."

"What do you think I was just counting? Three motor launches, two patrol boats and a converted private yacht. Don't see why we need an admiral for that bunch."

McCall pushed away from the bench and laughed aloud. "You gotta have admirals! Otherwise, who do the sailors salute?"

Devon rose to his feet. "And, speaking of which, I suppose we should go. Unless you want to get that beer, first?"

McCall drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. "I'm supposed to use these on you if you try anything like that. Unlike you, I give a damn about my job."

Devon shook his head and walked toward the road.

The Canadian Naval Service House (sorry, Royal Canadian Navy Headquarters) at Barrington and Upper Water Streets had a commanding view of the harbor, even if the CNS commanded little else. Canada had no navy of any kind four years before the war broke out. The Imperials were calling for Canadians to join the Royal Navy and see the world – at forty cents a day. The Canadian government wanted Canadians to stay home and patrol the harbors – at seventy cents a day. Or join the army and go to France; see all the glamour of the trenches at a dollar, seventeen a day. That was a damn good wage to a farm boy from the Prairies or a fisherman from PEI. There were a lot of new soldiers on their way overseas.

McCall's credentials got them through the first few layers of the headquarters. At each successive stop, the glances got narrower and the amount of gold braid on arms and shoulders got heavier. Most of the sub-lieutenants and lieutenants in these rooms had probably never been to sea in their lives, yet they were making decisions for those who were or would be. Devon had never been to sea, either, and his coat didn't have any ribbons or braid, but he'd probably had more actual naval combat experience than this whole headquarters building put together. Never mind that the only vessel he'd ever commanded had been a mere twenty feet long and had blown up. That he'd taken out an enemy torpedo boat with it (himself being the torpedo) hadn't got him any favors from the higher ups.

At last though, inspected and deemed fit, they were ushered into the inner sanctum, a plush room with a large fireplace (not lit), pictures of fighting sail fighting, a large map of the western Atlantic covering one wall, and two men. Edward Janus, his ex-employer, director (and owner) of the Janus Private Security Agency, was seated to the left of a desk and was, for once, not the central focus of the room. That exalted position was taken by a man who, with another forty pounds on him, could have been King George V, himself. Although his braid and ribbons may have weighed enough to make up the difference. The King, of course, had his own share of medals and braid.

The commander who had led them into the room announced Devon. "This is the man, Devon, Sir Charles." And, he withdrew.

Sir Charles looked Devon over. Devon looked Sir Charles over. Devon got the impression Sir Charles didn't approve of ragged, long-haired, unshaven, unbathed strangers. "So, what are you doing, sitting on my dock, counting my ships every day? Hmm?"

“I’m not sure any of them can actually be classed as ships, except maybe Grilse and Tuna.

The rest are boats. Oh, and Niobe, of course, nice big cruiser, but she’ll never sail again.”

The man’s eyes went wide with surprise. “How do you know that?”

Devon chuckled. “I’ve looked at her. I could poke holes in her waterline with my finger.

She’s, what?, twenty years old and she’d get blown out of the water by anything reasonably new.”

“That’s quite a summation from someone who’s never been to sea.” The rear admiral, if Devon read the sleeve-rings correctly, apparently didn’t like people criticizing his ships.

“You don’t have to go to sea to see the obvious, Admiral. And, you know that as well as I do.” A little flattery never hurt. “I’m counting your boats because I’m being paid to – but not by any hostile power, or even by a neutral power. Let’s leave it at that.”

The admiral didn’t want to leave it at that. “There are those who might decide to interpret that as espionage. We hang spies, you know – or shoot them! Who’s paying you?”

Devon took several seconds to smile slowly. He pointed at Janus, who’d sat quite silently up to now. “I don’t work for him any more, and I never worked for you.” The expression on the admiral’s face was an easily readable one. “Don’t bother calling that staffer back in to have me arrested. You want me outside, not enjoying His Majesty’s hospitality for the duration. Why don’t you tell me what you want me to do for you, and then I can tell you why I won’t do it.”

Janus spoke up for the first time. The man looked more drawn than he had when Devon saw him last, back in March. He had more gray hair and his face was more heavily lined. That he was sitting here, an American private spy hobnobbing with a Canadian admiral, meant that what they wanted was, at least, semi-official – another case of Janus dropping Devon into the cess-

pool to see what gets stirred up.

“And that, Admiral, is our Mr. Devon, in a nutshell. I said you wouldn’t like him.”

“To the contrary, Mr. Janus. He’s a breath of fresh air. I haven’t been told off so well in years.”

It was Janus’s turn to be surprised but he recovered. “So, Devon, this is Rear Admiral Sir Charles Kingsmill, commander-in-chief of the Royal Canadian Navy.”

“Hardly commander-in-chief. The GG insists that’s his prerogative, and His Excellency the Right Honorable the Duke of Connaught doesn’t much like the navy. I’m more the Director of Operations, perhaps. Mr. Devon, you look as though you’d been through the wars.”

Devon shrugged and looked around for a chair. “I’ve been through a few and, every time, I come out a little the worse for it.” There was a nice heavy chair over by the fireplace, so he walked over, grabbed it by the back and dragged it over the hardwood floor. He didn’t look, but he was sure he was leaving deep scratches in the hardwood. Back at the desk, he placed it opposite Janus and sat. McCall turned his face away and became interested in events outside the windows.

Kingsmill waited until the performance was over. “All comfy, now, are we? Perhaps, we can set about the business of winning this war.”

Devon shook his head, again. “You go right ahead, fellas. I’ve done ‘my bit’, as you Brits like to say.”

Janus laughed. “Actually, he was born not far from you, Devon. He’s a Canuck.”

Devon looked at the ribbons and braid, the full Royal Navy beard and thought about the man’s very RN accent. “You could have fooled me. You *did* fool me.”

Kingsmill waved a hand. "Now that we've established my *bona fides*, let's talk about you, Mr. Devon. What do you know about explosives?"

"Too damn much." He pulled off his woolen gloves for the first time, despite the room's heat. "You see these?" His hands were a hodge-podge of scars and still-healing skin, re-torn and re-injured every time he had gone back to work for Janus. "I doubt I'll ever play the violin, again."

There was a muffled snort from McCall near the windows.

"Very well," said the admiral. "You know more about it than I do. We're losing ships, Mr. Devon. In July alone, sixty-two British-flagged merchant or fishing vessels were sunk on the Atlantic. Along with at least as many neutral or friendly-flagged vessels and a half-dozen Royal Navy vessels. Some of that is due to mine fields in the Channel and North Sea. Some of that is due to fleet action. Some of that is due to individual enemy action."

"Armed cruisers?" Headlines had been full of them earlier in the year and in the fall of '14.

Kingsmill seemed pleased to be party to knowledge Devon wasn't. "Some, yes. There was a scare earlier in the war, but since the battle at the Falklands, most of that threat has been eliminated – sunk, bottled up, or sent back to Germany. My rust-bucket Niobe you love to disparage actually chased a German cruiser into port in the U.S., where she'll spend the rest of the war."

"Submarines, then. But the submarines don't have the range to get over here – at least, that's what the papers say."

Janus spoke up again. "The subs do have the range. They just haven't for fear of upsetting

the U. S. Unlike the Royal Navy who've been blockading our ports since the war began."

Kingsmill looked a trifle irked over that. "Or, perhaps, fear of Royal Navy blockade squadrons has kept the enemy away. A dozen battleships and twice as many cruisers would make short work of a few submarines."

There was another snort from the windows. McCall must have a cold coming on. It was true, however, that battleships and cruisers would be pretty useless against a sub. Like a crow trying to escape from a sparrow, they were too big and clumsy. It took small, fast, specially-equipped ships for that.

Kingsmill went on. "At any rate, for a good percentage of those losses, Mr. Devon, we have no known explanation. Ships burning; ships exploding; ships disappearing without trace."

"Somebody needs to do something about that." In his heart, Devon knew who that somebody was going to be. Looking at Janus, it was clear that Janus knew, as well.

"In February, Berlin announced unrestricted warfare on any vessels found in British waters. They sank fifty-five vessels up to April, twice that up to July: men o'war, merchantmen, even passenger ships. All without warning – contrary to all the rules of war."

Devon was still waiting for the other boot to hit him in the back of the head. "So, all that's a few thousand miles away. The surface raiders are no longer a threat here; they've been sunk – the subs, for whatever reason, are still on the far side of the ocean."

"It's the losses from unknown causes, Devon. We can fight surface raiders – we blew them out of the water in the South Atlantic. We can fight subs, and we're actually getting better at it. But we can't fight the unknown, Devon."

"You have my sympathy." He noticed that the 'Mr.' had already been dropped. He had

been relegated to subordinate status.

“In August, a U-boat (that’s what the Germans are calling their submarines) sank the passenger liner SS Arabic, with great loss. Then, two weeks ago, the RMS Vesperian, again with much loss. Among that, ironically, the body of a woman who’d died when the Lusitania was sunk in May – she was being sent home to her husband in Montreal.”

“I noticed you left the Lucy out. Respect for our American cousins, here?”

“I was coming back to the Lusitania, Devon.”

“Please hurry. I’ve got pigeons to feed.” This wasn’t going to be pleasant for him. No reason to make it pleasant for anyone.

“The Americans lost, I believe, one hundred twenty-eight souls that day. Canada lost one hundred seventy – numerically more; per capita, excruciatingly more. All of these U-boat sinkings have been accomplished through random chance – the hunter being in the right place, the victim in the wrong place, at the same moment. Twelve hundred lost on the Lusitania. Imagine the carnage should the hunters be able to decide when and where the explosions will hit the ships.”

“But they can’t. It’s up to the ... U-boats? ... to find the ships. They have to search the sea-lanes and trust their luck.”

Kingsmill rose and walked to the large map that covered one wall of the room. From the coast of Labrador and the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Canadian shipping lanes off Nova Scotia to the Grand Banks, and south along the American seaboard, it showed a vast area with dozens of ports that vessels sailed in to and out of. Kingsmill spread his hands over the northern portion of the map.

“We’re doing our best to close up the ports on this side of the border, with the little boats you’ve been sneering at – who are doing their bloody best. But, we’ve got a bigger problem.”

“Yes, you do.” Devon walked to the map and slapped it below the international boundary. “You’ve got munitions and steel and food and god knows what else coming out of fifty American ports and heading into the Atlantic. You’ve got dozens, hundreds of unarmed unescorted ships all ranging on their own across the Atlantic, and you’re losing a lot of them before they get to the other side.”

“Exactly. It’s not cruisers. It’s not submarines, *pace* Mr. Janus. It’s not a German fleet. When the Lusitania went down, Berlin published an interview with the captain of the U-20, who bragged of the effectiveness of his one torpedo shot. Yet, dozens of witnesses testified to a second explosion, about a minute after the first. The official British explanation was a second torpedo, but Berlin has only ever spoken of one torpedo. The Arabic and the Vesperian never had a U-boat sighting. It was just assumed that it was a submarine. But, we think it was something more devious and we think it starts in the dockyards of America.”

The boot hit Devon hard. It felt like a size thirteen and it had big hobnails in it.

“You’ve got me mixed up with someone else, Admiral. I used to do that. Now, I count boats.”

The Admiral shook his head. “Last fall there were rumors of sabotage on the Welland Canal. It never happened, and you took a holiday in Canada. Last winter, there were rumors of an out-and-out invasion of Canada, perhaps even using poison gas. It never happened, and you took another vacation in Canada. Now, there are fresh rumors, and I think it’s time your holiday ended, Devon.”

“Admiral, I ache too much every morning. Next time I lose bits of me, it’s likely to be something that doesn’t grow back. I’d hate to lose anything permanently. I’m much too fond of all my parts.”

“This is for King and Country, Devon.”

“Fuck the King! ’Cause I’ve done my part for this country – and *that* country, too – and a bunch more, besides. Get somebody else.”

“That’s treason, Devon.”

“Fuck the king’ is treason? The queen does it all the time.”

Janus cleared his throat and moved uncomfortably on his chair. There was a pause while all eyes went to him. It still took him some time to speak.

“She was there, Harry.” By god, the man’s voice was shaking!

Devon wasn’t sure what Janus meant by that. He simply stared.

“Eva … was on board when Lusitania was sunk. We believe she went down with the ship.”

Kingsmill, behind his desk, asked “Who’s Eva?”

Devon answered for Janus. “His daughter.”

Janus answered for Devon. “His … woman.”

“Good lord,” were the only words the admiral had.

Devon’s vision began to edge toward black; his ears roared like the sea. McCall grabbed him under the armpits and pulled him back into his chair. It took a full minute before Devon’s vision cleared, although his ears continued to roar and ring.

## CHAPTER TWO

**October 5, 1915**

Moving skids of grain sacks from dockside to a ship's hold is both incredibly dangerous and mind-bogglingly dull. The two elements put together make the job very hard. You must keep your wits about you at all times to avoid the four- and five-ton loads swinging from the cranes. And, yet, there are only so many times you can say "Okay, Tommy, take it up" before it gets old. This was his second week on the job and it was only Tuesday, but he ached – sitting and feeding pigeons for a few months doesn't keep you in peak physical condition. Aching joints and muscles can slow a guy down dangerously.

It also doesn't help when at least half of your attention has to be on what else is being loaded up and down the dockside, along with the grain going into the ship beside you. And, of course, no one else was supposed to know you were watching the other boats.

“Hey, Steickternott! You wanna get brained? Use yer eyes, ya numbnuts!” The dock master at Pier 45 didn’t have a lot of patience. Devon, on the other hand, hadn’t seen the stuffed pallet coming at his head.

Devon just waved a leather-gloved hand and ducked under the swinging freight. She was a Norwegian ship, the SS Salerno. This particular load was about six thousand tons, heading for Britain. That’s a lot of loaves of bread – if she made it through. The chances of her not making it through were the reason the insurance was so high.

They’d finish this load before midnight, and, afterward, a ... good night’s rest was in order.

But a little ship down on Pier 48 caught his attention.

The SS Kirk Oswald was French flagged despite her name. She wasn’t large, but the load going into her was small even by her standards. A half-dozen big crates that the crew handled most carefully. An uncrated load that was clearly a big electrical generator had gone in first.

The Kirk Oswald needed a visit, which meant a long night, and a hard day tomorrow. He’d had a lot of long nights, lately. Mostly thinking about the words “Eva was on board when Lusitania was sunk. We believe she went down with the ship.”

Janus’s voice had been thick with emotion. Devon had a vague memory of McCall’s hands pulling him into a chair. At last, he managed a single syllable. “Why?”, and Janus shrugged. “Agency business, of course. Important work I don’t care to discuss here.” His eyes flicked toward the Canadian admiral and back to Devon, who rose in such fury that McCall took his arms again.

“And you *let* her? Worse yet, you *sent* her? Why the hell didn’t you send McCain, Mrs.

Coulter – McCall, here!” He shook himself free of McCall’s hands. “Why the hell didn’t you send me!”

“She demanded that I let her go. Said she couldn’t stand it in New York another day.”

“God damn it! After everything that’s happened, you still don’t understand – there’s a fucking war!”

Kingsmill’s beard was actually quivering as he cleared his throat. “Now, now, gentlemen. There’s no need for that here. Whatever this is, it can be dealt with in due course.”

“It’s dealt with!” Devon shouted. “I’m done!” He stepped close to Janus and lowered his voice. “Next time I see you, run.” He headed for the door.

“Stop where you are!” It’s remarkable the amount of authority an admiral can put into his voice when he wants to. It must be a course they teach at admiral school. It even brought Devon to a stop, and that usually took some doing.

The door opened and a rating sporting a red and black armband and a side-arm strapped around his waist looked in.

Devon looked the rating over and decided there was no immediate threat there, so he slowly turned back to the room. “You got something to say, Sir Charles?”

The admiral waved the rating out of the room then looked over to Janus and nodded.. “What I have to say is that you really don’t have a choice, here, my man.”

“Not your man.” Devon, too, looked to Janus.

Janus was leaning back in his chair, with his thumbs hooked in his vest pockets. “Think carefully, Devon. New York police are still looking for the anarchist seen running from the German consulate last March when half of it blew up, leaving five bodies behind. They also want

to know who was responsible for the killings at the *Seithen Wohnhaus* on Hudson Street. And, state police are really interested in the guy who stole a train upstate and crashed it and its cargo of Army property into a swamp – they're still cleaning that up; it could take years before the area is safe. Shall I go on?"

"Yeah, well, I'm in Canada, now, so you Yankees can go suck eggs. And, Admiral, any part I had in any of those activities Janus just mentioned was for King and Country. You remember King and Country, Admiral? The guy whose picture right up there over the fireplace."

Kingsmill shook his head. "You'll find the King and the PM are more interested in keeping good relations with the U. S. than losing sleep over the fate of one drunken derelict, Devon. The PM's already indicated that the government wouldn't contest an extradition."

"They use the electric chair in New York, you know." Janus's smile was cold.

"Yeah, I know. They sat me down in it once – I'm still here." He tried, and failed, to pull himself together. "Haven't I done enough for you, Janus? Jesus, I've been burned, shot, blown up and beaten senseless for you. I've been nearly drowned and I still have holes in me that aren't supposed to be there. What more do you want from me? Why the hell do you keep coming after me?"

"Because you do the job, Devon. You do the complete job."

"Steickternott! Do your job!" The dock master was livid. Devon realized the load was swinging dangerously. "The hell's the matter with you? Stop daydreaming! Lay on that line!"

"Sorry, boss. Just counting my troubles." He picked up the end of the hoist line and got ready to lift.

"Yeah? Well, consider me your biggest trouble! Now, heave, if you want to keep this

job!"

Devon heaved. The load came under control. Another palette of grain for the hungry children of Belgium was lowered into the hold. It was somewhat amazing the amount of cargo a ship like this could hold. He seemed to recall that Columbus's Santa Maria displaced about 160 tons. This ship, not particularly large, could carry thirty-five times that in cargo alone.

Building a cargo in the hold of a ship was more art than science: it took experience and a sense of a load's balance to make it secure and safe. Devon had an instinctive sense of the latter and his experience grew with every crate loaded. He was getting good at it, already and was already being asked by the foreman to help with the dunnage down in the holds. He was getting to be a dockhand!

Four hours later, he was strolling along the waterfront, ostensibly heading home, but coincidentally passing the SS Kirk Oswald at Pier 48. She was an old, rusted tramp, not more than 3,000 tons, maybe 800 tons cargo capacity. If she put to sea in anything bigger than a gentle swell, she'd probably bust a rivet. So, why had her cargo, a dozen large crates and a frame with a large machine of some kind, needed a crew of more than ten dockhands and a half-dozen roustabouts to stuff her and dun her?

Was it what was in the crates that made her cargo so fragile, or was it some other aspect of the loading process? These were questions that needed answers.

"Hey! What you doing down there? What you looking at?"

He looked up – and not that far up, for she was not a big ship – and saw a middle-aged man in a sea-coat, a lined face sporting a month's sea-beard, standing at the quarter-rail. He wore a master's cap which gave him some authority to ask questions and, behind him, two heavy men

with folded arms and dark glares backed up that authority. In a moment, Devon was far drunker than he'd been in years.

“Is’iss za Rhinegold?”

“What’d you say?”

“Is’iss za Rhinegold? The ol’ Rhinegold? I sailed on her back in ’08; I’d know her anywhere! Is Cap’in Stebbin still the master? Good ol’ Cap’n Stebbin!” Captain Stebbin obviously wasn’t the master, because the ship’s master was talking to him now and, besides, Devon had just made good ol’ Cap’n Stebbin up.

“Good ol’ Rhinegold! She’s a great ship, isn’t she? An’ good ol’ Cap’n Stebbin. He’s a great cap’n! Iz-ee on board? C’n I talk to him?”

Devon started up the gang-plank and the master met him at the top. “This is not the Rhinegold. This is the Kirk Oswald. And Captain Stebbin is not the master; I am.”

“Oh! Well, where’s Cap’n Stebbin an’ who’re you? I swear zis’z the Rhinegold.” He pushed past the man and made his way midships. “Look! Right here! I carved my initials in the coaming on the forward hatch.” He stopped at the open hatch and dropped to his hands and knees, peering ostensibly at the wooden trim, but letting his gaze wander past to the crates in the electrically lighted hold below. He heard the master mutter “Get him off my ship,” but in German. “*Holt ihn von meinem Schiff.*” A set of heavy footsteps was the reply.

The tops of the crates and the entire frame holding the machine were visible. Devon saw proper customs stamps and labeling, in fact, nothing unusual. So why was his attention drawn to this ship?

At that point, the two men each grabbed him by an arm and half-dragged, half-marched

him back to the rail. The master confronted him at the gangplank. “Get off my ship, you drunken fool! Next time, you won’t be handled so nicely.” The men lifted him again and hauled him down to the dock, pushing him roughly along.

Devon waved a hand. “*Wiedersehen, Kapitan!*”

The captain snorted. “Idiot!” And, turned away.

Sometimes, you can learn a lot by being an idiot – but sometimes you’re just an idiot. If the cargo is properly under customs seal and if it’s properly accounted for, then he needed to be thinking in other directions for his answers. Or perhaps for his questions.

Why had the presence of so many longshoremen bringing the relatively small cargo into that ship made his nose start twitching?

Why had the master given orders in German and pronounced ‘idiot’ in the German way: ‘Ee-dee-oat’? Maybe he was innocently the German master of a French-flagged ship but, at this time in the war, the chances of that were slim and none. He’d have been forced out of the French *Marchande* by this time and, if he got back to Germany, he’d probably be skippering a *Kriegsmarine* patrol boat in the Baltic.

The uncrated skid was definitely a steam-powered electrical generator. Some of the crated cargo was long and thin: a radio mast? Along with other crates, it was all very interesting. Was somebody setting up an independent radio station somewhere? One with its own power generator and mast. If they were, who was operating it? The Imperial German Navy, perhaps?

Of course, he couldn’t go running off down the docks and clambering drunkenly aboard every ship that catches his eye. For one thing, there were hundreds of ships docking and leaving New York and the piers around New York every week. He’d go nuts trying to deal with that. And

probably lose his job, too.

He looked toward Hoboken, across the Hudson, and could just barely make out the shapes of the thirty or so German ships shut up in harbor in New Jersey, some interned under neutrality laws, some just too scared to try to make a trans-Atlantic dash in the face of the British cruiser patrols off the coast. There were others like them in every U.S. port on the Atlantic. Half the German merchant fleet seemed to be trapped on the U.S. Eastern seaboard.

He turned away from the docks and began to hoof it up Front Street to Water Street, Cherry Street, and on up to Clinton. He was walking because he was staying in rough territory this time around and couldn't afford to be seen taking taxis or street cars. He had to blend in to the surroundings and dockworkers didn't ride such fancy things as taxis or trams.

He toyed with finding a telephone and waking Janus to tell him about the SS Kirk Oswald. He'd like to drag Janus from sound slumber for once – god knows Janus had done it to him, often enough, and Devon didn't get much unbroken rest these days. Then he told himself to wait. He also toyed with the idea of stopping off at a saloon along the way and having a beer or three, then told himself to wait on that, as well.

Janus and Kingsmill had cornered him neatly: dodging bullets and murderers was a risk he was used to; getting strapped down to a chair and being fried was something he didn't care to face – again. In the end, he said yes, at which point, Janus passed McCall an envelope with a ridiculous amount of cash in it, along with Devon's birth certificate, which McCall passed to Devon. His battered suitcase, stuffed with all of his belongings, was produced as well, meaning they'd already emptied his room. Devon hadn't packed a suitcase in years: someone was always doing it for him. There was also a train ticket to New York, for later that evening and a

longshoreman's badge, in the name of Frank Steickternott, along with the foreman's name at Pier 45. What was truly surprising about all that is that Steickternott was dead – or he was, the last Devon had heard. And, if anyone should know, he ought to, because he was Steickternott. He'd been dead for months, now. Apparently, he was feeling better these days.

Janus spoke while McCall was passing the suitcase to him. "Think of this as a chance to meet up with old friends, Devon."

He was obviously expected to ask who, so he did.

"Franz von Papen is still running things – not from the consulate, which they still haven't finished repairing from your last visit, but from the whore house on West 15<sup>th</sup>." Life just got more interesting.

He'd last seen Franz von Papen goosestepping, or at any rate, quick-stepping his American border security escort back to New York, after Devon had failed to throw him off the railroad bridge at Niagara Falls. To be fair, von Papen had been trying to throw him off the same bridge. It was a safe bet, if von Papen was still in charge, the intrigue would run layers deep – to von Papen, it was all a chess game on a huge scale and he always thought several moves ahead. In truth, though, a chessboard had just sixty-four one-inch squares and thirty-two pieces; the game they were playing involved half a continent and millions of lives.

"Von P's at Number 123? How do you know that?"

"Number 91 is on it; we get a report every couple of days. Everybody who goes in and everybody who comes out."

His old nemesis, McCain. "Meaning he's never gone in. He's sitting and watching from down the street. Get a monkey to do it; they're cheaper and a lot more fun." He didn't know why

he disliked McCain, but he did. At the same time, he didn't know why McCain disliked him. But he did.

"Not everyone has your flair for the theatrical, Devon. Not everyone destroys everything in their path and quite a few things that aren't just for the fun of it. Some people do it the old fashioned way – quietly and carefully with brains, skill, and hard, slow work, and with no explosions."

"Fuck that; there's a war on. If something needs blowing up, I'll blow it up. Unless you'd like me to call you for permission, first. Tell you what, though, I'll try not to blow up the Statue of Liberty."

Janus had one more question. "Badge?" Devon reached into his vest to dig out his old Janus Agency identification. The two-faced god symbol with "Always vigilante" embossed on it still had a bit of a shine. The number 68 was still partly obscured behind the gouge left by a bullet. He'd become very fond of that gouge. Its presence was almost a magical charm: something horrible had already happened to a wearer of that badge. It couldn't possibly happen to Devon while he wore it.

He again headed for the door, but Kingsmill spoke up this time. "Hold up, a moment, if you will." Oh, very polite of him. "If it's not too much trouble, Devon, I still want to know why you're counting my ships when you could be quietly getting yourself drunk on a daily basis in any tavern in the city."

Well, he might as well; he wouldn't be counting Kingsmill's ships any more; he was on his way to New York to load ships. Besides, it'd be fun to throw a monkey wrench into the works, or in this case, an anchor. "I'm counting your boats to help out your biggest enemy in the

world, admiral.”

There was a three second pause during which Kingsmill’s face went from blank to puzzled to astonished to furious. Then Kingsmill said, “Oh, damn!”

“That’s right, Sir Charles. I’m counting them for Phipps-Hornby.” He glanced at his former and now, again, boss. “That’s the British admiral commanding the Western Atlantic, Janus. They’re both headquartered in Halifax, but the Royal Navy is spying on the Royal Canadian Navy. Isn’t that rich? They think you’re up to something, admiral. They think you might actually be trying to win the war. That sort of thing has to be stopped. Admiral Phipps-Hornby doesn’t like it; the Governor-General doesn’t like it; and, most of all, First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill doesn’t like it. They want you to stop this insolent colonial behavior. If anyone is going to win this war, it’s them. They want you to know who is in charge – and, whatever it is you’re doing, they want you to cut it out.” After all, colonials must be kept in their place. “Well, no more daily reports, so you might call up Fops-Horny and tell him he needs a new boat-counter. I’m heading for New York.”

In New York, walking along South Street, hands in pockets, head down, he was having a silent chuckle over the remembrance of the look on Kingsmill’s face, when a wrong echo found its way into his reverie. Footsteps coming back at him from the wrong direction. Or echoes coming from the wrong direction. He was surprised at himself that he was so sensitized to such a small warning.

Someone was following him. Whoever it was, they certainly worked fast: he’d only been in New York less than two weeks. Who could possibly have gotten word that he was back, tracked him down to where he was working, and set up a tail on him in that time? He ran through

the list in his head. It was short. Pinkerton's? Not yet. Janus Agency? Maybe, but he doubted it – why bother? Hell, he was working for Janus! New York police? That was a good laugh. Von Papen's thugs? Damn well could be.

If it was the first, he might get beaten up. If it was the second, he still might get beaten up. The third might strap him into an electric chair while a priest read the Bible. The fourth would put a bullet in his head at the next corner, without benefit of clergy. What an elegant selection of possibilities!

He stepped into the nearest saloon, found a table in the back corner, put his back against the wall and waited.

## CHAPTER THREE

**October 6, 1915**

He had time to finish a pint and start on a second, and even to begin a long-distance relationship with a reasonably good-looking working girl in the far corner (at least he assumed she was a working girl; he may have been wrong) before the door opened and a familiar face came in, accompanied by a familiar body.

Although that may have been the other way around. Body first, face second.

Voska – no. Mr. Voska – no. *Pan Voska*, he'd only met once. All Devon knew of him was he was that a Czech, he was strong as an ox, and just about as much of a talker. On top of all that, he worked for Walter A. Wisdom Films which, significantly, didn't make films but did serve as a cover for a network of agents, trying to dig up dirt on, throw monkey wrenches at, and, if need be, put an end to the same people Devon was trying to ... remove. The fact that this

network was set up and run by the British was on the plus side of the equation. The fact that it was apparently being run with the quiet approval of the Americans was just ... weird. That being the case, you'd think they'd get along swimmingly with Devon. After all, the enemy of my enemy is my friend, right? You'd think.

The first time they'd met hadn't gone well for Devon: Voska and his partner had sucker-punched him as he stepped through a door, dragged him into his own hotel room, and stood guard while Voska's boss tried to interrogate him. The experience had been mitigated a bit by a couple of good brass-knuckled punches Devon had got in on Voska's partner – what was his name, again? – Devon couldn't remember, but he still owed the big Czech at least two sucker-punches – one of them to the kidneys. Given the circumstances, maybe now was a chance to repay those very un-Marquis of Queensbury blows.

Then, of course was the size consideration. Voska was big. When he came through the door, conversation stopped while heads turned, then picked up again at a respectfully lower volume while heads turned back to where they'd been. It was that kind of place – rough enough that nobody stepped out of line; just keep your voice down and don't attract attention. A couple of stevedores at the bar knocked back their drinks and departed for safer climes. The working girl in the far corner had sized Voska up when he came in, but decided against it – the man wasn't someone you wanted on top of you if you had a choice.

The Czech crossed directly over to Devon's table and sat beside him, meaning he'd been watching from outside and knew where Devon was. Devon in turn, trying to be sophisticated and nonchalant, took in a good quarter of what remained of his beer, waited. He was in absolutely no hurry to get anywhere.

“He would speak to you.”

“Good for him. There’s a lot of people these days who would speak to me. Tell him I’m having a beer.” And he took another pull at his draft which was, he had to admit, good American beer, cold and fizzy.

“He would speak to you, now.”

“Still having a beer.” He raised his glass and his eyebrows toward the girl in the corner, who immediately perked up. “So tell me, *Pan Voska* – oh yeah, I looked up a few choice words in Czech for when we met again – tell me, you like working for a limey ponce like Wisdom – sorry – Wiseman? I mean, school tie, polished shoes, three-piece suits? How did somebody like you – and your partner what’s-his-name – end up working with somebody like him? He’s everything a tough guy like you must hate.”

“*Pan* Wiseman is a gr-reat man. He is –” And here Voska began to smile in anticipation of his own wit. “– a wise man.”

“Oh, that’s very good, Voska.” As a pun, it wasn’t too bad, actually. “Can’t be easy, making jokes in a second language. Can’t be easy for you, making jokes in any language. Calls for thought. Say, did you hear the one about the Canadian, the Czech and the poncie limey who walk into a bar?”

“You think a joke this is, dho you? I joke sometimes, but this is not a joke, now. Mister-r Wisdhom dhoes not wait.” Interesting accent, Czech: the ‘d’s were almost ‘th’ and the ‘r’s were curiously long. “Svoboda and I join Mister-r Wisdhom as soon as war begin. We are told we must join Prussian army but we will not – Czechs will be free of Germany! So we fight!”

Well, wasn’t that interesting? “I have more respect for you. Czechs will be free! So,

anyway, a Canadian, a Czech and a poncie limey walk into a bar, and the bartender looks them over and says ...”

“Mister-r Wisdhom says you will come or I br-ring-g you.”

“Oh, you’ve heard it before, have you? Yeah, it’s a good one. I laughed and laughed. Just like I’m laughing, right now, bub.”

“I am not laughing-g. Come now.”

“Hold your horses. I’m still drinking my beer.” He held his quarter-full glass up between them. “You want one? I’m buying.”

“No beer-r. Come.”

“Voska, I know you’re not stupid. You really want to start trouble in a place like this? Look around you. There’s five guys here can take you and me together, let alone separately, and I’ll bet you anything the bar-keep’s got a nice fat billy club back of the bar, all ready for people who start trouble.”

“Ther-re will be no tr-ouble. I will pick you up and bring you to *Pan* Wiseman.” The Czech cracked his knuckles.

“You’ll bring me, will you?” The girl in the corner had her eyes on Devon. She was getting up and showed every intention of coming over. He watched a few steps and decided she had a very nice sashay to her. Too bad he was going to have to disappoint her. Wouldn’t be the firs woman he’d disappointed. “Do you think you can do it, Voska?”

Voska smiled slowly. “*Ano*,” he said, which was a plain enough assertion in any language.

Devon smiled, whether it was at Voska’s comment or the girl’s approach was moot. The

girl took it as an invitation and increased her pace. He wished very much that he'd brought his Dreyse to work: despite the drawback of a loaded firearm concealed behind him as he worked, the black snout of a .32 at close range would have made things much simpler and probably less violent than the next few seconds were going to be.

And he was very certain that the next few seconds were going to get very violent because he was going to start it.

“Well, as soon as I finish this beer, I think we’ll find out whether one of us can take the other. I’m not even sure who I’m betting on.” And, if it turned out to be any like a fair fight, he honestly wouldn’t know who to bet on – which is why it wasn’t going to be a fair fight.

He carried the mug to his lips with his left hand, then swung it hard into Voska’s face. Surprisingly, it didn’t break, although he felt the man’s nose break, so he lifted it and brought it down flat on the Czech’s head. That time, it did break.

But that was also a mistake. Voska yelled and rose to his feet, blood beginning to drip from his nose, and grabbed Devon’s lapels, pulling him up. Devon grabbed a collar (Voska’s) with his right, a handful of balls (Voska’s, again) with his left and hoisted him into the air. Being picked up like that has got to be a whole new definition of hurt, but the only sound from the man was a roar of anger.

Devon certainly couldn’t hold Voska up for more than a second, so he didn’t even try. Instead, he slammed the man down on his back across the table which, unsurprisingly, broke like the beer mug.

By the time Voska hit the floor, on top of the broken table, Devon was already on his way out of the bar. The girl was standing in the middle of the floor, watching with wide eyes, so he

paused for a moment to give her a quick kiss and say "Sorry, honey. Maybe next time." He'd already pulled some bills from his pocket, so he tucked half a sawbuck into the girl's cleavage. Easiest ten-spot she'd made all week. The bar-keep, heavy-looking club in hand, was over the bar to stop the trouble. "I'm leaving, buddy! That ought to cover it!" He slammed a twenty on the end of the bar as he passed, just as the bar-keep slammed his club down an inch from little fingers. Never one to wear out his welcome, Devon was immediately yanking open the door and heading out into the street.

His mother's motto had always been 'Do as much damage as you can, as quickly as you can, and get the hell out as fast as you can'. Or something like that. 'Do unto others before they do unto you' is how she may have put it to him when he was still in short pants. At any rate, he was following that sage maxim, exiting the bar at high velocity, when the guy standing outside the door hit him with a hod of bricks. It had to be bricks, because no fist could make you see that many stars at once.

He was hauled to his feet by both arms and dragged down the sidewalk. Both arms meant someone else was holding one side of him while ... what was the name? ... held the other. A cop who happened to be passing by (which there wasn't) might have seen only two men helping a drunken buddy home, if he didn't notice that all three were bleeding: two from the nose and lips and one from broken skin on his knuckles. It was a dark street, though, so the flat-foot might not notice.

It was shaping up to be Devon's day to be dragged along between two men. Looking down between his feet, he realized that his nearly new boots were being scuffed and scraped by the dragging. That woke him up and he scrambled to get his feet under him again. To his

surprise, Devon found that Voska had hold of his left arm – how did the man manage that? That gentleman, who was bleeding but otherwise barely even limping from the rough handling he'd just received, and the other man – what was his name, again? Devon had gut-punched him twice the first time they met. Svoboda! That was it – moved him along at a rapid clip, to finally toss him in through the open back door of a landau.

“Well, aren’t you disgusting?” Walter Wisdom/William Wiseman began. His accent, even his tie, dripped public school, Cambridge and the dusty corridors at Whitehall. It really was a good disguise. Who would ever think that this dapper, manicured English gentleman was what he actually was: a dapper, manicured English gentleman? Anyone who met him on the streets of New York would take him for ... Devon hazarded a guess ... the head of British intelligence in America, maybe?

Wiseman smiled a very Old Etonian smile. “Take care where you drip blood, old thing. Not on my upholstery, please.” Devon looked around the interior of the landau. It was a very nice car, indeed. “How do you afford this on a civil servant’s salary, Willy?”

“Thrift, Devon, thrift. You look as though someone ran up one side of you and down the other. In track cleats.”

“You think I look bad? You should see the other guy.” Devon congratulated himself on his wit.

“I can see him. He doesn’t seem the worse for wear.” Svoboda had climbed in behind the wheel, while Voska sat beside him, head tipped back.

“Not *that* other guy; the other other guy.” How the hell was Voska not still rolling on the tavern floor, clutching his giblets? Devon knew *he* would be.

“Well, now that the pleasantries are over, what are you doing on my dock, snooping around where you oughtn’t to be?”

“Your dock? I’ve got a foreman who’ll disagree with you – and he can take both of these guys and use you to wipe up the blood as an afterthought. I’m nothing but respectful to him, which should tell you something. Don’t get cocky, cockney.”

Wiseman turned down his mouth in a smile – or maybe that was a sneer. “Very droll, but I’m certainly not a cockney. I don’t believe I’ve ever even heard Bow Bells in my life. Who set you up on Pier 45?”

“Whadda ya mean, set me up? Eh! I’m woiking dere! I got a damn good job and I ain’t walkin’ away from it fer you, bub.” He took time to reflect that he may be spending too much time in New York. The accent rolled too easily off his tongue.

“Listen, Devon, you are placing your nasal appendage where it’s not wanted.”

“Wait a minute.” He thought over the phrase. “You mean, sticking my nose where it don’t belong?”

“I believe that’s what I said. You’re upsetting a lot of plans, plans that have been carefully laid and nurtured since the day the war started. Laid by people who know what they’re doing.” Wiseman was huddled in the farthest corner of the landau, to avoid any blood that might get sprayed around.

“Bullcrap,” was Devon’s terse rejoinder. “The Krauts have been organizing since long before the war. They had plans and stockpiles while you limeys were sitting around, sipping tea, and pretending it would all go away. Meanwhile, we’re working hard.”

“We?”

“Me, and Janus, and the Canadian government, and the Canadian navy – we!”

“This is an Admiralty matter and has nothing to do with the Canadian navy or the Dominion police or the Canadian government or the Janus Agency – or even the Ameri ... whoever else may have brought you in. The Foreign Office and the Royal Navy will handle it all, thank you very much.”

“The same way you handled the SS Arabic? The same way you handled the Vesperian? The same way you handled the Lusitania, you bastard.”

“Your Dominion Police got wind of that Irish rebel’s presence and stuck their nose in. They called in your Janus friends and Janus, for reasons known only to God and Janus, sent his daughter.” Wiseman shook his head. “My word, the man can be ruthless, can’t he? And a bit of a fool.” Wiseman took a handkerchief from his pocket and passed it Devon. “Stop dripping on my upholstery.”

He’d been purposely dripping on the upholstery, hoping to create enough of a stain to require recovering, but the blood flow was drying up. He might have to get Svoboda to punch him again. The Czech would certainly be open to the idea.

“Listen, Wiseman, I’m on the docks because Admiral Kingsmill wants me there and I think Admiral Kingsmill should be the one to make decisions about what the Canadian navy should and shouldn’t be doing.” Devon took great satisfaction in ruining Wiseman’s silken nose-rag. There really was quite a bit of blood, after all. Still, it could be worse: he was pretty sure nothing was broken.

“When Admiral Kingsmill needs to take a decision regarding the duties of the Royal Canadian Navy, such as it is, the Governor General, after consulting with C-in-C Western

Atlantic, will tell him what that decision is. Kingsmill! Another bloody colonial stepped up well above his station. The man's lucky not to have been cashiered. Ran the King's newest battleship onto the rocks off Nova Scotia – in clear weather and in broad daylight! And, now he's in charge of a whole navy!"

"Well, it's really only a dozen boats and a couple of old cruisers." Devon tried to pass the handkerchief back, but Wiseman looked his disdain.

"I'm aware of the state of Canadian naval preparations. My point is, Devon, and I'll reiterate it for your slow colonial mind: 'stay the hell away from my docks'. In fact, stay the hell away from all docks. Why don't you go find a job in a coal mine; develop black lung disease like all men of your type? Can I make myself any clearer?" The man was so bloody English, Devon expected him to take out a snuff box.

"Keep talking like that and you're going to need this." Devon again offered Wiseman his bloodied nose-rag back.

"Drop it on the floor, old boy" so Devon dropped the incarnadined item onto the floor of the car and made sure to grind it into the carpet down there. Wiseman waited until he'd done but Devon jumped in before Wiseman could talk.

"Who do you think you are, giving orders around here? Okay, Willy, just so we're clear. I don't work for you. You don't pay me. Other people do pay me, so I work for them. Today, for instance, I loaded sixty tons of grain. That's work – that's good, old, honest work – and my hands and back can tell you about that. What I'm doing is helping feed people who need help getting fed. You got a problem with my work, talk to the people that pay me. I'll bet you know who they are better than me. As far as what you're doing – I don't see it making a spit worth of difference.

So, all I've got to say is 'go visit a taxidermist, Cambridge.'" He started to open the door of the landau, when he heard the double click of a pistol hammer being pulled back. Svoboda was holding a revolver across the back of the seat, aimed at Devon.

It wasn't the first time Devon had looked into a gun barrel. "If you're going to point that at somebody, cowboy, don't wait. Pull the trigger as soon as you level it, or somebody, and I'm not saying who, might take it away from you, shove it where it'll be most uncomfortable for you and pull the trigger six times."

Devon waited for the fight to start again, but Wiseman rubbed his hands together and shook his head, slowly.

"You really are a disgustingly filthy colonial, aren't you? Mouth like a slop bucket and no concept of personal hygiene." Wiseman had him there – he'd not had a bath in a few days. Blending in to the dockside culture calls for sacrifices. Wiseman nudged the bloodied handkerchief aside with his toe. "Now, whatever shall we do with you?"

Voska mumbled from the front, hand over his nose. "I have suggestion."

Devon laughed, "You're just mad because I hit you with a beer mug – twice – and lifted you by your balls. How are they, by the way?"

"Have had five dollar whores treat them worse than you, powderpuff."

Powderpuff! Nice.

Wiseman interrupted. "Devon, listen very carefully to me. If you continue this, if you interfere in the war effort, who's going to miss you if these two gentlemen take you out to Brooklyn and put a bullet through your head? Seriously, who?"

"I like to think there's one or two. You want to help the war effort? Curb your gorillas.

Get these clowns off the docks and let someone who can do the work do it. And, if I even see these guys' shadows again, I won't wait, Billy: I'll come looking for you. And that's not an idle promise, snotty. That's a fucking threat."

And, then he got out of the car and walked away, and nobody shot him between the shoulder blades. Or anywhere else, for that matter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**October 7, 1915**

He felt like a blind man in a dark room hunting for a black hat.

It was approaching three weeks that Devon had been working on Pier 45. In that time, his muscles had toned up, his hands had toughened up, and his patience was fed up. He was wasting time – his time, Janus’s time, and war time. Apart from the Kirk Oswald, and he had warned Janus that he thought the ship was carrying parts for a German radio station somewhere up the coast, and which had proudly steamed out of her berth two days after Devon’s visit, he’d found not a bent hairpin to suggest any out of place happenings. If there were shenanigans happening on the dock, surely he’d have wind of it by now.

He was starting to think that the black hat wasn’t even there.

Alone at night, he had plenty of time to stare at the ceiling and wonder why he was doing

whatever it was he was doing. He was living in a single room, again. At least, this had a reliable bathroom just down the hall. The halls only smelled faintly of urine and the mattress' odor was even fainter still. By the standards of some of his flops in the past year, this one was approaching luxury itself. And, it was reasonably priced, in keeping with a struggling dockhand living in a new town.

His bank account in Canada was still there, built around the gold he had hacked out of the rock in the Yukon and swollen with the remaining funds from the fat roll of cash he'd appropriated before he'd blown up Franz von Papen's cruiser, *Camäleon*, on Lake Erie. That boat was at the bottom of the lake, so no one was going to come looking for the roll, least of all von Papen. He also had the remains of the money Janus had paid him last year and this winter. In all, it was a tidy nest-egg – nearly as big as the one he'd had in Yonkers so many years ago, before the cops had confiscated it and the cottage he'd bought so he and Carrol Terry could play house. Come to think of it, they'd confiscated Carrol Terry, too, but, not being a fool, he hadn't put all his nest-eggs in the same nest. It was just ironic that, unemployed in Canada, he could afford much better digs than he could while being paid by two employers in New York.

Fall was wending its course toward winter. His birthday had come and gone, and he had celebrated with a bath, a glass of rye, and eight hours sleep. Alone. Other than ten hours a day of rough-and-tumble on the dockside, he was living like a monk. Which is to say, the only tumbles he was getting were at work – and all he got out them were bruises. Needless to say, a life like that can make for long nights, and grumpy mornings. He'd seen a few women over the last while but only from a distance. He was beginning to forget what they smelled like.

Not that he should be seeking female companionship. The last three women he'd been

involved with had all come to a very bad end. One had been shot just when freedom had been found; one had been shot when loyalties had been questioned; and the last had drowned in a useless way. Best if he stayed away from women – for their sake. And for the sake of unbroken dreams.

Hell, he wasn't even drinking any more – much. His celebratory glass of rye had been the only drink he'd allowed himself since his encounter with Voska in the pub – and that beer and a half had been the only ones he'd had since he began his new assignment. The last half beer had gone into Voska's face.

What should he do? Well, by far his best course of action would be to head back to Canada, find a nice quiet spot where Janus couldn't track him down, and live off his hard-gotten, in part ill-gotten, nest-egg. He was even thinking of quitting the docks to go out prowling on his own. He wasn't at all sure that he could find anything useful by prowling around, but it was considerably less back-breaking than what he was doing now – for the same result. Besides, what loyalty did he owe Janus, what loyalty did he owe Kingsmill – for that matter, what loyalty did he owe the King?

Precious little, in the long run. The only times he'd ever met with anything that said 'Royal', it was Mounties chasing him out of his own country. Janus simply used him for whatever purpose he had at that moment, and Kingsmill – heck, he barely knew the man.

So when the dockmaster suddenly shouted "Steickternott! Over here!", Devon was already convinced there were more useful ways to spend his days – and his nights. Nevertheless, he strolled over to the boss, who looked at him and strode into the cargo shed. After a minute behind his desk while paperwork got checked, the foreman handed a pinned set of sheets to him.

“We’ve got a second load on a small boat heading out at dawn; Norwegian-flagged ship, the Forth. Late cargo, so we’ve got to rush it. Take six guys and head to Pier 42. The dock-master there is Eno. He’s loading grain onto a French boat but, tied up opposite, you’ll find *that* boat.” He tapped the papers. “There’s a couple dozen big crates sitting on the apron there, break-bulk, and you need to load them up before end of shift. Can you do that, or are you going to stand and daydream?” The dock-master looked up from his papers to take in Devon’s answer.

Well, he was getting up in the world! Suddenly promoted to lead hand, out of the blue! “I can do it, boss. Any six guys or ...?”

The foreman leaned back and pushed the window behind him open. “Doherty! Giordano! Grab your twos and threes and follow Steickternott. He’s in charge.” And, the man swivelled his chair away from Devon and went back to his paperwork. Devon could take a hint, so he went to the apron, papers in hand, to meet his crew.

How to make friends: have your boss tell the old hands that the new guy is in charge; that’ll endear you to them. He might end up with a crate dropped on his head – it happened on the docks.

Okay, so if you’re in charge, Devon, take charge. Give some orders; make some noise. The six men gathered around Devon, surly and ready to make trouble if needed.

“Okay, we’re going down to Pier 42. We’ve got a load to get on before end of shift.”

“Is that the Hamburg-Amerika yard?” That was Doherty, a surly Irishman. Best kind. “No idea. What’s the difference?”

“Bunch of squareheads down there. Always throwing their weight around.” Giordano grunted his agreement. The other four were silent.

“Well, let’s make nice with them for a while. You can bitch about them after the shift. Come on.”

The group of seven strolled along South Street toward the Hamburg-Amerika pier, Devon making mental note of the flags and home ports of the ships moored at the piers between number 48 and number 42. All without being obvious, of course. The port of New York handled at least one ship from every maritime nation on Earth at least once a week. From the big sea-goers, Britain and France, Italy and such, it was more like thirty or forty. What came in was nearly everything; what went out *was* everything.

He noted with interest that, aside from Doherty and Giordano, the rest of the crew were German – and they were going to a German dock.

The French flagged boat was a big dry bulk ship, the Sainte Marguerite. She was loading with grain for the poor starving French. She had a full gang of about twenty swarming here and there, along with the ship’s own crew.

Across the quay, a little Norwegian ship, the Forth, was waiting. The pile of cargo at the end of the dock wasn’t big, but it would take time, as it all had to be separated, loaded, and then secured by hand. At the other end of the voyage, assuming she made it to the other end in a U-boat filled Atlantic, it would all have to be re-crated before being off-loaded. There had to be a better way – some way to make one container do the job.

Devon held up his sheaf of papers. “Yo! Eno!” God, he sounded like he was born in Queens. He needed to get out more. Out with a lady, maybe. Stop that!

A round little man with a big moustache and a tiny fringe of hair came out of the cargo shed and moved toward them. Devon met him halfway. He was pleasant enough, quite a home-

body, at a guess, who probably had a wife as round as he was and who'd be good with his round little kids. Too bad, from the look of him, he'd probably die at fifty-two.

Devon had no expectation of living such a long and useful life.

"Angelo sent us down from Pier 48. I guess we're supposed to take over loading the Forth over there."

"Yeah, yeah. Just get the dock clear." He looked at the crew. "You bring enough men with you?"

"We're hard workers, boss."

Eno looked over the papers, scribbled his signature on the time sheet, and handed it all back. "Go to it, then."

"I'll need a hustler."

"Can you handle one?"

"Sure. I used to drive trains." Well, he'd crashed the only one he'd ever driven, but why confuse Eno with unnecessary facts?

"Yeah, okay." Eno led him back into the cargo shed and lifted a starter crank from a peg. "Use the red one. Be careful not to ram it into anything or drop it in the water."

"We'll just drag the cargo from the apron. I'll use the boat's own tackle to lift it."

"Have fun," Eno said, before going back into his cubby.

The red hustler wasn't hard to figure out: just a small gas-powered tractor to haul the crates down the pier. He cranked it into life and two of his roustabouts chained the palettes to the tractor, so he could drag them, one at a time, the length of the pier. The hustler was closer to the two seat motor-cart that he and Franz von Papen had fought on while they were going over

Niagara Falls than it was to a steam train. Come to think of it, he'd crashed that, too, so he was two-for-two in crashing rail-road vehicles.

The other four crewmen were already at the Forth, ready to strap each load securely, and they were soon lifting the loads as fast as Devon could drag them into position.

The back-breaking part was moving each of the items into position in the hold and then dunning them until they were properly secured. The Forth's mate was super-cargo and directed where each was to go, making sure the cargo was balanced, but it was up to Devon and his crew to do the shifting and the dunnage. The new skin on Devon's hands, still toughening, soon began to protest, but he wasn't about to let anyone else know it. He wasn't sure whether it was sweat or blood that was trickling inside his gloves.

At length, with twenty minutes to go before the end of the shift, everything was positioned and strapped down to the super-cargo's satisfaction. He signed off on the work-sheet and the gang left the little ship, with just enough time to walk back to Pier 48 to sign out for the shift.

Devon stopped at the freight-shed to get the foreman's signature on the time-sheet. The little man made his scrawl and handed the papers back.

“Your name is Steickternott?”

“Yep.”

“You're German?”

“I'm American.” Okay ... where was this going?

“Sure, but you're German?”

“Yeah, I guess. I mean I can talk German and stuff. My mom could hardly speak a word

of American.” This was a lie, but the conversation had taken an interesting turn.

“Your folks from the old country or your grandparents?”

“My folks. I was two or three when we got here.” Why not? Nice to know old Frank Steickternott’s background. A few more weeks and it might turn out that Frank was related to the Kaiser himself. This Eno guy was too interested in Devon’s grandparents by half. Where was this going to lead?

“Do you know the *Deutscher Verein* on West 59<sup>th</sup>?” Hello? A German club? Better yet, a ‘German Unity’ club. Oom-pah bands and *boch* beer? The beer sounded good, but Devon hated oom-pah music. What sort of thing might be going on in a German Unity Club, especially these days? He was intrigued.

“No, I don’t think I do,” he said, trying to put the neighborhood into focus. South end of Central Park, north of Little Berlin.

Giordana yelled from the head of the dock. “Hey, Steickternott! Let’s get going!”

“Go on ahead! Tell Angelo to sign me out; I’ll be a few minutes!”

The two roustabouts headed back to Pier 45 and Devon turned back to Eno’s drooping moustache. “So what’s the *Deutscher Verein*?”

“Well, it’s a place for Germans to meet together and talk and have a drink or two.” So, similar to the infamous Number 123 where Devon had some adventures last winter, but more downtown. A better class of clientele perhaps. Better drinks? Better drugs? Better whores? Curiouser and curioser.

Devon put up his hands in protest. “Oh, I don’t know. I took the Pledge last year. I’m not supposed to be near the stuff.” That’s the way: fill in the background, add some color to the

story. The way he'd been living, he felt like he *had* taken the Pledge. A Trappist monk who was living the Pledge.

“Well, you don’t have to drink. Have coffee. Just sit and have a good smoke.”

“I don’t smoke.”

Eno looked pretty skeptical about that. “Well, there are other reasons to go. There are others attractions in the joint, if you know what I mean. *Die kleinen hübschen Mädchen! Ja?* You didn’t take a pledge against girls, did you?”

Eno laughed a round little laugh.

“Well, no. I’m not that bad.” Maybe he should, Devon thought. Or maybe he shouldn’t was a better way to put it. What had that gotten him in the past? Just some ex-girlfriends and some dead ex-girlfriends and some bullet holes – in him, which was his least favorite place for bullet-holes. “Is there really a pledge against women?”

“I don’t think so. Not very popular – unless you’re thinking of entering the priesthood. You going to become a psalm-sayer? You sure don’t look like one. But, you’re not married, are you, Steickternott?”

“Me? Hell, no. Who’d have me?”

“So, come down to the *Deutscher Verein*, have some coffee, meet a few girls and have some fun. Good? Good.” He handed Devon a card that he seemed to have a supply of in a drawer. “Come down, sometime. Always open.”

“You sound like you own the place.”

“Well, maybe I get a little bit of what the place brings in. Nothing wrong with that, is there? ‘*Wiedersehen!*’”

“Ja, ‘weidersehen.’” And, Devon ambled down to the dock level, musing on luck, fate and the funniness of being alive. He had been set up to spy on Germans. Eno the dock-master wanted him to go to the *Deutscher Verein*. Eno the dock-master was German. The pier was leased to the Hamburg-Amerika line. The Hamburg-Amerika line happened to be a German shipping line. Had Angelo, the dock-master at Pier 45, sent him on purpose, or was it all just coincidence? How many coincidences did it take to stretch to the breaking point? Devon didn’t like coincidence any more than he liked German oom-pah bands. Oddly enough, though, he really liked German food and German beer. Just as long as there was no German music involved. He’d never been there but he was sure Oktoberfest in Bavaria must be sheer hell.

Now, maybe – maybe, this place was nothing more than a social club for Germans. Maybe, it was just a place where Bavarians looking for a *hoch* and a *boch* and a *koch* could gather. Maybe, it was a safe haven where lonely men like him and attractive young Rhine maidens could discuss German history and philosophy and share their mutual interest in biology while tossing a few *pfennigs* into Eno’s pocket. Maybe.

And, maybe, the Kaiser would drop in while he was there and give him a great big Prussian medal.

He stepped into the cargo-shed at Pier 45 to drop off the paperwork and Angelo nodded his approval and dismissed him with a grunt. No offer of instant advancement to high-level management for his outstanding handling of his small crew. Disappointing.

Down the dock, across the apron, and onto South Street. As he did, he saw the familiar shadow of Svoboda, who’d been keeping his distance but was still tailing him around the city. It was starting to get annoying: he’d warned Wiseman about sending his ops out after him. He’d

also promised Wiseman that he'd come and settle it in person, if he did. No, not promised – threatened. It had been a direct and outright threat. The guy didn't quit easily, did he? Maybe the agenda for the evening might include tracking down Wiseman and wising him up. That would be fun.

Still, things change with time, so Devon stopped and motioned the Czech over. Svoboda thought he had been cleverly keeping out of sight, and it took four or five motions before he trusted Devon enough to join him on the same side of the street. The look on the man's face was interesting as he stopped in front of Devon.

“You know the *Deutscher Verein* on West 59<sup>th</sup>?” Svoboda was inclined to be sullen, at first, but eventually shook his head. “Well, neither do I but tell Wiseman that I'll be there later tonight. If I don't come out, tell him to let Janus know.”

“Why not yourself tell Mr. Janus? You for him work. You talk to him.” Big dumb Svoboda was still trying to wrap his head around Devon talking to him, let alone him talking back to Devon. This wasn't supposed to happen. The world happened one way and it shouldn't change, at least, not this fast. His buddy, Voska, whose nose Devon had broken a few weeks back, would have caught on at once.

“Cause if I never talk to that son of a bitch again, it would be just about perfect with me. I'm stuck with this for now, but if I had to deal with him in person ... never mind. Just pass it along your boss; Wiseman will want to know and will know what to do about it.” Devon turned for home. “Oh, and, until then, I'll be at my room, having a bath and doing whatever else comes up. In case you want to follow. I'm sure you can get a good view from the fire-escapes on the opposite side.”

Svoboda did want to. In fact, he followed him all the way home, still thinking he was keeping out of sight. Even while Devon was running a bath, he peered out the window to see a shadow in the shadows a few buildings down.

Walter A. Wisdom's undercover film-makers were certainly persistent. Maybe they were filming him right now.

He wondered briefly if he was about to be featured in a feature.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**October 7, 1915**

The early fall nights were beginning to get a little chilly. He pulled his collar up and put his hands into his pockets as he trudged along. The skin on his scarred hands was beginning to toughen up under the hard work on the dock, but he still kept them in his pockets whenever he could.

Like an over-protective mother, he thought grimly, keeping her babies safe from more harm. Given the number of times he'd been injured, he was sometimes amazed that none had been life-changing. So far, everything had grown back. There'd come a time when it didn't.

Overall, though, things might be falling into place. He had no proof, but he knew in his gut that he'd made the connection on the dock that Janus and Kingsmill had hoped – feared – believed was there. Somewhere, the docks would lead him further up the chain. Now, all he had

to do was to figure out what to do about it.

And figure out who he was going to do it to and, as an added bonus, do it for. And how to do it without anyone doing it to him, first.

His anger with Janus still boiled. It was useless, of course. Why, in the name of an ever-loving God, had Janus allowed Eva to travel into a war zone? The Lusitania was torpedoed practically within sight of the Irish coast. She was bang on course and bang on time. So was the bang that sunk her. Twelve hundred dead – his Eva among them. Useless!

Once he'd got over the shock in Kingsmill's office, he had no time for histrionics or tantrums or even for tears. He had only slow burning rage and he had plenty of that to go around for everybody involved.

It would be a long, long time before he forgave Janus for that. And, even longer before he forgot. And, forcing himself to be honest with himself, even longer before he forgave himself, because if he had known how to help her, what to say in that room on that horrible morning, she might not have gone.

He just hadn't known what to say. He'd never known what to say.

That hard-won knowledge left him with a need to sort out his own head. Was he working for Janus, still? The man paid him, but he had no loyalty there. Nor did Janus have any loyalty to him – the man had betrayed Devon twice.

Was he working for Kingsmill and his wash-tub navy? Kingsmill had zero chance of effective action, no matter what information Devon passed to him. Kingsmill had some pleasure yachts with popguns on them doing inshore patrols – opening and closing the submarine nets at Halifax, chasing ghosts in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Honestly, he was doing little more than

playing sailor. Devon would be pouring his work down a hole.

Did he work for the British – for Wiseman and his Czechs, and for the Admiral, Western Atlantic, up in Halifax? Screw that – he owed them nothing.

Devon decided he was working for one person – check that, for two people. He was working for himself, and he was working for Eva. Didn't she deserve that? And, when you stripped that down to the bare bones, it was the worst possible motive for anything. It simply added up to revenge.

So be it, then. If he could exact some kind of revenge on anyone responsible for Eva's death, he'd take it.

Two hours later, he knocked on the door at 112 West 59<sup>th</sup>. The neighborhood was rather a nice one, but number 112 itself let the rest of the street down. The door was unmarked, flat-painted, un-noteworthy in a windowless, gray-painted stone front. There was only a single step up, with no awning, porch, or canopy to make it fit in with the more impressive doorways of the buildings on either side. He knocked again and a voice behind him said "*Was wollen sie?*"

Why, whenever there was a voice behind him, was it bass and gravelly? Just once, he wanted to turn around and find a young and beautiful woman with a welcoming smile but, no, this was a large and singularly unbeautiful man, mostly because of his much broken nose, his cauliflower ears and his boxer's brow. As a doorman, he didn't exactly roll out the welcome mat, except maybe preparatory to hitting someone with it.

"*Eno sagt' mir, ich soll' vorbeischau'n.*" You know, Eno. Eno told him to drop by. He held out Eno the dock-master's card which the pug looked at dubiously.

"*Eno? Wer ist das?*" It was an effort for the man to push any words out of his punch-

damaged throat, so he compensated by not trying to push many out. And, he didn't know who Eno was.

Devon held up the card again and began again. "*Eno, von der Hamburg-Amerika Linie*," then realized the man couldn't read. "Little guy with a bald head and a big moustache. Eno."

"*Nein. Ich kenn' keinen Eno. Verpisst.*" And the guy gave him a push.

"Hey! Hands off, Quasimodo!" From the man's face, it was clear he'd never read any Victor Hugo. Pity. The unfortunate man would never grow to appreciate the nuance and subtlety of Hugo's prose.

"*Verpiss dich, kleiner Mann.*" He took his job as doorman seriously, didn't he? There must be tips involved.

"*Du, und wessen Armee, kleine Kugeln?*" And Devon spat in his hands and prepared to square up to the squarehead.

Now, it might have gotten quite out of hand at that point, because Devon was reasonably certain the heavyweight facing him did not have the tiny balls Devon accused him of having and would most likely take umbrage at Devon suggesting he had them. Devon wasn't sure why he would be angry: many men of diminutive testicular circumference had perfectly satisfactory sex lives. Probably. Devon wouldn't know.

At any rate, it was probably fortunate that the front door, for all of its unremarkable mundane appearance, opened magically at that moment and a voice behind him said, "What's going on out here?"

A young lady with a welcoming smile stepped out. Devon was quite sure she was a lady because, from her apparel, it was certain that she was no gentleman. Whether the smile was

welcoming was more a matter of opinion than anything.

“*Bruno ... hör auf zu streit'n. Was hat der Kapitän g'sagt?*” Yeah, what *had* the Kapitan said about starting fights?

Bruno backed away, looking very unhappy about it.

She was near enough five foot nothing as to make no difference. In her bare feet, that is, and she was. Her black hair was bobbed and pressed into pomaded curls on either side of her face. She was in a satin kimono that trailed on the floor behind her and which did not have the advantage of a belt, showing bare legs below satin and lace. She smoked a long cigarette in a longer cigarette holder and she blew smoke toward Devon as she looked him up and down.

“You’re not a member.” Devon wasn’t sure whether it was the scent of her personal perfume or the general scent of the whole house behind her that was marching toward him in battalion strength.

“Eno gave me a card and said to drop in.” He held it out to her. She, at least, could read. “Eno?” She blew more smoke toward him, which was beginning to annoy him. He wondered briefly whether she ever got a crick in her neck from looking up at everyone.

“At the Hamburg-Amerika dock. Eno – you know.” How could you forget Eno? “Oh, yes! Eno!” She clearly hadn’t a clue about poor Eno who seemed to be of the opinion that he was much more important than others considered him to be. “Well, then, you’d better come in. If that’s all right with you, Bruno?”

Bruno growled assent, looking and sounding more like a bear with a sore head than Devon had seen since he left the Yukon. The man retreated into the night, leaving the lady to lead Devon into the foyer, which was carpeted and more or less tastefully done up in rich green. In

comparison to Number 123 West 15th, this was a true step up.

It turned out that it was not his hostess, but the general perfume of the house he'd smelled earlier, a heady mix of musk, incense and flowers. Her perfume was more subtle, merely being in platoon strength.

His new friend paused after closing the door. "In future, if you want in, you knock," she said. "Like this." She knocked on the wall: long, short, short. Short, long, short, short.

"That's Morse code," said Devon, astutely.

"Yes. D - L." She did it again: long, short, short. Short, long, short, short. "D - L."  
"Deutschland."

"Jawohl, mein Herr. Kommen Sie. This way."

She beckoned him to follow and led the way down the hall and the silken kimono swayed very nicely with each step, considering she was in bare feet, not the usual high heels that make a woman sway in the way they are intended to do. Considering he'd been living like a monk since Christmas, the view was intriguing, even fascinating. Watching her sashay along, and being very aware that she was extremely aware that he was absolutely aware, was one of the things that makes a man happy to be alive.

And, he told himself, he had better start paying attention if he wanted to keep on being alive. Every door here, and there were lots of doors, almost certainly held a lethal secret and might hold sudden death.

The parlor she led him into was decorated with patriotic posters and pictures – patriotic if you were from Brandenburg. There was also a bar, an imperial flag suspended behind it, lots of chairs, and a few sofas. He recognized a portrait of Willy Withered Arm, sorry, the Kaiser, and a

few other spike-hatted aristocrats he didn't know. A few men lounged on the sofas with drinks and cigars; a few girls lounged on the men. The old safe house at Number 123 West 15<sup>th</sup> had a parlor that looked a lot like it, although it hadn't been decorated with women when he'd seen it – or German agents.

“You want a cigar or a cigarette?” she asked, looking up at him from an unnecessarily acute angle. Her angles were cute, too.

“I don't smoke.” Well, he didn't.

“You want a drink?”

“I don't drink.” Well, maybe he should give it up.

“So far, you're a disappointment – what's your name?”

“Just call me Sam.”

“Sam? Uncle Sam? My Uncle Sammy? So, if you don't drink and you don't smoke, Uncle Sammy, what temptations do you give in to?”

“I don't know. I've never given in to any to find out. What's your name?”

There was an amused moment before she answered “Vera.” Then she swept her arm around the room. “*Meine Herren, das ist mein Onkel Sam. Sam, hier ist Karl, und Otto, und ... Fritz.*” He doubted very much that any real names had just been bandied about. She turned her gaze back to Devon with another amused look. “I'm sure the girls will introduce themselves.” She turned to go, sweeping the kimono closed as she did with an efficiency that spoke of planning. Art takes practice.

“Are you leaving me with strangers, Vera, now that we're such good friends?”

“Oh, Sammy, you make friends so easily. Look how close you and Bruno nearly were, if I

hadn't come out. Have a seat, put your feet up, relax. Sophie, take his coat." And, she did leave.

So, Sophie took his coat, got him some coffee and he sat in one of the comfortable armchairs, where Sophie sat on him, and the four men stared at each other. It was good coffee, he had to admit.

The one Vera called Otto spoke up first. "Vere you verk, Sam?"

"At the docks."

Fritz looked up from his playmate. "You are a sailor, then?" He seemed happy to find another one.

"No, just a dock-hand." And Fritz grunted and turned his attention back to the red-head beside him.

Karl spoke up. "I v-worked on the docks. I don't any more. There is more important v-work to do." His accent was the lightest of the three, understated, but still there. It was becoming automatic with Devon: he heard a German accent, he got tense, shoulders and neck tightening almost immediately. Sophie noticed the tension and began to massage his neck muscles. That was pretty good, too, he had to admit.

"Well, I don't intend to stay there forever," he offered, conversationally. "Maybe I'd be interested in your line of work. What is it you're doing ... uhm, Karl, was it? What is it you do, Karl?" Sophie was becoming a little distracting – more distracting than he had counted on. He caught her hand and held it still.

Karl smiled. "I am v-winning the v-war." He turned his attention back to his friend, who was becoming insistent.

"Winning the war! That's impressive, Karl. Which side are you winning it for?" Sophie

was trying to slip her hand out of his grasp, but he held firmly.

Karl smiled again. "For the v-winners, of course."

Devon laughed. "Okay, but what are you doing for the winners? Maybe it's something I'd like to do."

Sophie was biting at his ear and her hand, which she'd pulled free of Devon's, was making itself free. The others were becoming familiar with each other, too. Karl was quite involved with his friend and not paying much attention to his conversation with Devon.

"Karl! What is it you do?"

"V-what is it I do?" Karl laughed, short and sharp. "I fill the chemicals. I place the copper. I screw the pieces – and two v-weeks later, PH-PH-MMMBBB! Somev-where the flames start. And the Fatherland is a little step closer to victory."

"That sounds like something I'd like to do. How do I get involved in that?"

"You?" Karl pulled his face from his partner and looked Devon up and down. "You don't have the brains. I have studied the *Naturwissenschaft und die Chemie* at the school. You ... you are a dock-hand."

"Yeah. That's right, Karl. I'm just a dumb dock-hand. I don't know nothing about explosives."

"Sure not," the German shot back, pulling his partner's bodice open. "I told you, I know the explosions and the chemicals that make the explosions." Karl had little interest left in the conversation and, by now, Devon had no interest in staying.

"Sophie, where's the toilet?"

"The toilet? Really? You want to leave, now?" She was very put out and, to be fair, she

had been trying her level best, which, again, was actually pretty good.

“Don’t want to. Have to.” Which wasn’t a lie.

He stood and spilled Sophie from his lap, catching her before she rolled to the floor. She looked surprised to find herself held in his arms – he guessed that most of her clientele would have just let her fall. He put her down gently, winked, picked up his coat, and pulled open the door.

As he expected, the woman who called herself Vera stood in the hallway. She’d either been watching (through the keyhole?) or listening (through the door?). Or both. Devon ran his mind over the long list of German devices he’d encountered in the last year and decided it was unlikely she had her ear to the door. The whole building was probably alive with listening devices and cameras. Well, they could have all the pictures of him they liked. He might even order prints.

Vera was smoking another long cigarette in her long cigarette holder, with a very mocking smile that managed to hit the wrong spot with him, so he grabbed her arm, grabbed the cigarette holder and threw it down the hall, where it hit a table and shattered into a half-dozen pieces. Vera opened her mouth to holler but shut it again when Sophie came into the hall, doing the hollering for her.

“Hey! I thought he was with me! I still get paid, don’t I?”

Devon turned a glare on her. “Go back in the room, Sophie.”

“Not until she says I still get paid!” Devon shrugged. He couldn’t argue with that. A girl’s got a right to live.

Vera, on the other hand, didn’t bother with politeness. She reached out and struck the girl

across the face. “*Geh zurück ins Zimmer, du dumme Schlampe!*”

Devon, not liking to see a working girl treated like that, twisted Vera back around to face him while Sophie put a hand to her face, grew very quiet and stepped back into the room, closing the door very softly. For five foot nothing, Vera seemed to get a lot of respect when she demanded it. Devon let go of her arm and she rubbed her wrist while the smile slowly returned to her face.

“That holder cost me four dollars, Sam. It was jade.”

“I’ll buy you another one.”

That slow amusement passed across her face again. “Okay, Sammy. Sure.” She gathered the bits of jade and dropped them in an ashtray on the table, picked up the cigarette from where it had dropped, took a final puff and stubbed it out.

He pulled her around to face him once more. “Are we done with games now? Eno didn’t send me here to get me laid and you didn’t set that little play up in the parlor for my amusement. Did I pass your test?”

Vera was quiet and actually fumbled in her reticule for her cigarette holder before she remembered it was now junk. Finally, she laughed quietly and folded the kimono across her body once again. Really, a simple belt would solve that problem.

“Sure, Sammy. You passed. You’re the kind of guy we want.” In answer to Devon’s small grimace, she reached up to touch his face. “No, I mean that. You really are.”

“Well, thank you, I guess.” The kind of guy they want for what? And where? And when? “The kind of guy you want for what?”

“Not yet, I think.” She stepped close, raised herself on tiptoe and bit his chin. Playfully

and her teeth scraped on beard. "I'm going to hold you to that promise, by the way. One jade cigarette holder. Ten inches, please."

"Ten inches? Those are hard to find."

"I could settle for eight." She smiled archly. "Are you good for eight, Sammy?" Devon shrugged. "You want to meet the Doctor? This way," she said once more and led him along the hallway again, stopping at the last door on the corridor. Hand on the knob, she turned to look at him.

"He is not a man to make light with. There is much power here, and there is more danger. Right now, you could go back to Sophie and she would give you a good time and be happy that you came back. If you step further, there is no going back." She grabbed his arm and spun him around, in her turn. "Sammy! Listen to me! It is worth your life. Decide now."

"Power doesn't interest me, and danger doesn't scare me – much. I want to get paid. Open the damn door." She shrugged and turned to open the door. As she did, Devon's right hand went behind his back under his coat. There was a small metallic click from behind Devon's back as she opened the door and they both stepped inside.

## CHAPTER SIX

**October 8, 1915**

“So, Sammy, do you want to be of service to your country?”

The accent was high German, very clipped and nasal. The man speaking with that accent was below middle height, what was left of his hair parted in the center, with a narrow, brush-like moustache that must scratch his wife something fierce, if he ever got close enough for that – not that Devon cared to think on it. He wore round, wire-rimmed glasses, a high round collar, and a very severe tie above a brown suit. Maybe a hundred and forty pounds with a roll of nickels in each pocket, he was seated at a big roll-top desk pushed against a wall . He had spun his chair around to face Devon, whose hand was still out of sight at his waist, on the butt of his Dreyse.

“I have said, do you want to be of service to your country?”

Vera had retreated to a far corner and seated herself in an armchair, kimono wrapped

tightly around her body, bare legs and feet drawn up in front of her. She lit up a cigarette, without benefit of holder.

“Hey, I’ll do anything to help out old Uncle Sam.”

The man moved his lips sideways in something that might have been a smile – in a scary sort of way. “You can help your Uncle Sam best by helping your true country – your fatherland, Steickternott.”

So, they’ve been in contact with Eno at the Hamburg-Amerika pier. More likely Eno telephoned them with the news that Devon might be coming to visit. That didn’t surprise him, of course, but it did tie up some loose ends.

Devon decided to play stupid. “Look, pal, I may not have been born here, but I eat apple pie and fly the flag on the Fourth of July, just like you. I’m American.” Well, North American, which still counted.

Again, the lips twitched in what the man thought was a smile. “Of course you are, but don’t you want to stop your new country from making a terrible, deadly mistake? One that will cost so many lives. They are edging every day closer to that mistake, but you can still help to stop it from happening.”

“How do I do that?”

The man picked up a glass ash-tray from the desk and carried it over to Vera, stopping on his return to look at Devon again. Vera put the ash-tray on an end-table and continued to smoke her long cigarette without caring where the ash landed.

“It is so simple: by doing everything in your power to persuade America to stay out of this war – or better, to persuade her to bring the wealth and might of America into the task of

destroying the British and French.”

“Wait a minute! You want America to fight England and France? Are you nuts? Where did you get an idea like that?”

“How does Germany threaten America? Not at all! How does France threaten America? They have colonies on America’s very doorstep – “

”What? Where?” He knew where; he wasn’t sure this German did.

“French Guiana, Guadalupe, Saint Pierre! Miquelon!”

“Never heard of any of them.”

“How does England threaten America?” Devon played dumb, again. “Do you know of the Bahamas islands – seven hundred islands full of Britishers, only fifty miles away. Canada! Millions of English just a single step away from America, across a border that has no defenses! What if they should come across that border and loot and kill and rape Americans!”

“I never thought about it like that!” Which was true: he’d never once thought about Canadians deciding to murder and rape their way across America.

“But, if America joins in this war with Germany, America will be protected by the greatest army in Europe! Use your head! America must join this war against the English!”

Devon started to laugh at that idea, then stopped when he realized it wasn’t so far fetched – the Cinderella Riot in the fall of ’14 had shown the strength of German support in America. Was there really enough power there to sway the States to joining the war on the German side?

The man sat, once again, and Devon released his grip on the pistol. This wasn’t going to be that kind of interview – at least, not yet.

“So, what do I do? Call up the White House and say ‘Hey, Mr. Wilson! Taxpayer, here.

I've been thinking about it and I think you ought to declare war on England – maybe on France, too, just for shits. Hey, and how about Russia while you're at it? And didn't Italy join in this summer? Let's attack them, too! You think he's going to listen to me? Is he going to say 'Thanks for calling, Frank. I was just wondering whether or not I should do it. Thanks for making up my mind!"

Vera laughed out loud at that, and the man sent a sideways glance at her. "We are not that naive, and neither are you, Mr. Steickternott. America thinks they can reap the benefits of staying out of the war, without any consequences. It will take direct action to change American minds, and you are in a unique position to take direct action – action that could save American lives."

"Well, I'm in favor of that, of course. Just one question, though."

"Ask away."

"What's in it for me?" Cut through the nonsense and let's get down to the treason, he thought.

The man twitched his mouth and mustache sideways, again. "You're a straight forward man, aren't you? What would you say to sixty dollars a week?"

"I'd say 'Hello, sixty dollars.'" Vera laughed again.

"With a bonus for each task you accomplish for us – plus you keep your job and whatever they're paying you now."

"It ain't sixty a week. What are these tasks?"

"Putting small objects in places that will help our cause."

"Bombs." Small objects – bombs can get pretty big.

"No, no, no! Nothing so crude."

The man reached into a drawer and Devon's hand edged toward his waist again but, instead of a gun, it was a thin lead tube that was produced from the drawer. It was about an inch-and-a-half in diameter and about six inches long, sealed on each end. There were no wires, no timer; nothing but a join in the middle with small bits of copper visible at the join. It was held up for Devon's inspection.

"You see, nothing much more than a cigar tube."

"I don't smoke."

This time, the man laughed out loud, along with Vera.

"That's right," Vera chimed in. "He told me he didn't."

Another glare from the man, until Vera looked away and stubbed her cigarette – in the ashtray that had been provided for her. She had enough sense for that, at least.

"You don't want to try to smoke this," the man continued. "All you have to do is drop it in the hold of certain ships – we'll tell you which ones. You don't have to do anything to it at all. Just drop it somewhere, cover it up, and walk away."

Devon reached out and took the object. It wasn't a pipe bomb; the tubing wasn't thick enough to throw shrapnel, and it wasn't big enough to contain a significant amount of explosive. It wasn't a radio sender; there was no power source.

"And, if I'm caught?"

"What will you have done? Dropped a harmless little tube of metal. And that same harmless little tube of metal will be hundreds, even thousands of miles away before it is anything else."

"Harmless." Devon suddenly threw the tube back to the man, and noted with satisfaction

the look of alarm on the man's face as he caught it. "What does it become when it stops being harmless?"

"Nothing you need ever think about. Drop it and walk away." Devon doubted that it would be that easy.

"Sixty a week, huh? When do I get that?" Monetary bastard, wasn't he? He pointed to the tube. "And, when do I get some of those things?"

"When the time is right. They can only be ... distributed ... when the time is right, because once made, nothing can stop them from ... activating. They must be placed at the right time. In the meantime —" The man reached into a cubby hole in the big desk and took out an envelope, checked the contents, and threw it to Devon. "Your first week's pay." Janus wouldn't have counted it, at least, not in front of Devon. And Mrs. Coulter would have already verified the contents of any package she gave Janus. A rare time the adversary had shown any signs of sloppiness.

Devon checked the contents, as well. Sixty dollars. "Okay. How do I call you?"

The man shook his head. "You don't call me — not at anytime, not for anything. We will arrange all things, and we know how to contact you." He looked over to the lounging Vera, who was in the process of lighting another cigarette. "You! Take him upstairs and make him comfortable. Do it yourself."

Vera instantly unwrapped herself from the chair and crossed to Devon, kimono billowing open as she did. What he saw was very tempting, if he had been in a mood to be tempted.

"Come on, Uncle Sammy. The Doctor won't see you, now." She took his hand and led him from the room. Cloying as the general perfume in the air was, the hallway air was far easier

to breath than what was in that office. The stench may have been purely psychological but it was real, for all that.

The door closed and Devon said, "That was the doctor?" You have to listen for these little things.

"That's what we call him. I don't know if he is a doctor or not, or what kind of doctor but if he wants to be called Doctor, what's it matter?"

They were at the foot of the main staircase. There was no noise from anywhere in the building. He wondered when the party in the parlor had broken up or if it had or if it had simply moved upstairs. She kept hold of his hand and started up the stairway, stopping when she realized he wasn't following. She was on the second step, leaning over the rail to speak, meaning her face was almost even with his.

"What's the matter, Sammy? The Doctor told me to make you comfortable. The best place for that is upstairs – it's very comfortable."

"I don't think I'd better."

"Don't you like girls, Sammy? Or maybe you don't like me. You don't want to go upstairs with me?"

"Oh, I like you well enough and I would love to go upstairs with you, but, frankly, little Vera, you scare me. I'm not sure I'd survive you – I've got a bad ticker, you know." His ticker, when he thought of it, was actually running more than a little fast, at the moment. She laid a hand on his cheek and suddenly turned it to red-lacquered claws.

"Are you sure, Sammy? I've got some special tricks I know you'd like." He shook his head. "I could call one of the girls; Sophie, maybe? Hell, I could call all the girls, if you think

your ticker could stand it." She smiled knowingly. "Or I could be as gentle as if it was your first time, Sammy. Is it your first time?"

"You'd be surprised what my first time was, Vera." Not as surprised as he had been, though. "Another time, Vera, when I'm thoroughly rested and I've had a good breakfast." Damn, I'm becoming a hero, he thought, and took two tens out of the envelope. "Here you go: buy yourself a jade cigarette holder – a twelve-inch one."

She took the money and tucked it away and smiled a red-lipped smile. "I'll think of you every time I use it, Sammy." She came back down the stair and preceded him to the door.

"Hold on a second," he said, touching her arm.

"Change your mind?" she asked, looking up from mascara-ed eyes.

He couldn't help but smile. "Not tonight, Josephine. Just one question: how many joes like me come and go here?"

"Like you? Oh, there's nobody like you, Sammy. But, about two dozen guys go in and out around here. They come and go." She opened the door and called out. "Bruno! Bruno!" A shadow fell across the sidewalk. "He's leaving, Bruno. It's okay. Let him go." She waved to Devon as he reached the sidewalk, and closed the door.

"Looks like we're on the same side, now, eh, Bruno?" Devon tapped the man's chest. It didn't quite echo like a steel drum. Devon walked off into the night, leaving the big German boxer behind him. 'On the same side, now', his ass. The same side of what? He'd stick to what he knew.

Swinging along in stride, deciding whether to take a cab or a tram, wondering what Vera's 'special tricks' actually were, half regretful that he'd missed them, he assessed his

immediate situation. It was well past ten o'clock on an increasingly cold night. He hadn't eaten since early morning. He'd had far too few hours sleep in the past week. He was fifty blocks away from any place he could lay his head for the night. Svoboda was trying to be inconspicuous at the end of the block.

That was no surprise, although he wondered whether Svoboda ever slept. He also wondered where he would lay his money in a match-up between Bruno and Svoboda. It was a fight he'd pay to see.

More interesting was the figure at the other end of the block. He didn't know that one and it may mean there was somebody new who was interested in him.

As he neared the end of the block, he developed a stitch in his side, causing him to begin to limp, and put his hand against his ribs, inside his coat. The unknown shadower had faded into the shadows, a mere ten feet or so from where Devon would pass.

One step before he passed the shadow, a quick duck to his left let him cover the ten feet in three strides, the Dreyse out, pushed against the man's chin, backing him hard against the brick wall behind him. The man's surprise was complete, the shock on his face almost comical.

"It didn't go well for the last guy I pulled this gun on. So let's get it straight right now: I ask questions, you answer them. I don't like the answers, I pull the trigger. You understand me, nod once." The man nodded once. "Name."

There was the briefest of moments. "Seibe. Paul Seibe."

"Who do you work for, Paul Seibe?" The pistol didn't waver.

There was another hesitation, longer this time. Devon increased the pressure from the pistol barrel.

“NYPD. I’m a cop – I’m supposed to be watching that place.”

“What, the *Deutscher Verein*? ”

“Yeah. Who the hell are you?”

Devon dug in his pocket with his left hand and produced his Janus badge, held it up.

“Well, Jesus, let me go, will you?”

“As a sweet young girl once said to me: ‘I showed you mine. Now, let’s see yours’ – and be careful.”

The guy simply flipped his lapel and showed his New York Police badge. Devon let go at once.

“Did I blow it for you, Seibe?” Devon was putting away his pistol, while keeping a wary eye on the cop. For some obscure reason, they tended to take unkindly to getting roughed up and usually have little to no sense of humor about it. This one seemed to be more casual over the whole thing.

“All they’ve got is Bruno out front and he can’t see beyond his fingertips. That’s why he got beat up in the ring so much. Who’s the big guy coming up the street?”

“That’s Svoboda. He’s a Czech. He’s following me. He works for British Intelligence.”

“Holy ... !”

“It’s true.”

“Well, who do you work for?”

“You mean, who is Janus working for? That’s hard to say. Maybe for Canada ...”

“What!”

“Maybe for the Canadian navy ...”

“Canada’s got a navy?”

“And getting bigger every day. Or Janus might working be for himself.”

“Who do you think you’re working for?”

“Now, that was a sensible question. Well, let’s see. First it was the British admiralty.

Then it was the Canadian Navy. Then it was the Hamburg-Amerika Line. Then British Intelligence. Now, as of a few minutes ago, it’s the German Secret Service. So, take your pick.”

Seibe declined to pick, at least, not right away. “I don’t even know what that means. What were you doing in there?”

Devon laughed hard, eyeing Svoboda, who’d stopped a hundred yards away. “Well, believe it or not they offered me my pick of any girl in the place. More impressive, though, is what I chose, instead: I am Germany’s newest secret weapon. They signed me up as a saboteur.”

Seibe produced a pair of handcuffs and reached for Devon’s wrist. He got a very hard elbow in the nose for his trouble and Devon snagged his wrist in return. At that moment, Svoboda arrived and placed a hand on Devon’s shoulder. Devon twisted on his left foot, used Seibe’s arm for balance and put a heel *very* hard into the Czech’s scrotum. Two seconds later, the cop and the Bohemian were cuffed together, through a wrought-iron railing. Devon stepped back out of reach.

“Jesus, I’m a cop, you stupid idiot! You know how long you’re going inside for?” Seibe was trying to reach into his hip pocket – for a key, probably.

“Well, I’m not, and do you know why? Because I’m already inside, flatfoot. Down there – they want me, but they sure as hell don’t want you. So just take a deep breath and stick that on your nose.” Devon took the man’s handkerchief from his suit coat pocket and held it out.

“Svoboda, we’re even again. Don’t start anything else and just listen. I’m hired up there, I’ve already been paid. They’ll start passing me jobs real quick, now. So, anything I get, you guys get – NYPD and Wiseman, too – along with Janus, of course. Between the bunch of us, we should be able to wipe up this nasty little streak of shit and get back to whatever’s normal. That sound good?”

The cop considered and said “Yeah.” Devon didn’t expect any reply from Svoboda and didn’t receive one, either.

“All right.” Devon stood and looked up and down the street. “Neither of you need to follow me any more, so don’t. Seibe, tell your boss you’ve got someone inside working for you. Svoboda, tell your boss … well, just tell him he doesn’t need to follow me any more. Use any words you like.” He shook his head at the two handcuffed watchmen. “I suppose I should introduce you two before you dance. Seibe – Svoboda. Svoboda – Seibe. Pleasant dreams, gentlemen.” And he walked on down the street.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**October 12, 1915**

“Steickternott! Over here!” It was Angelo calling from the cargo-shed. Steickternott was surprised by the sudden summons but Devon wasn’t. He’d been waiting for something to happen for days, now.

Devon, along with four others, was lifting a net of break bulk and couldn’t just drop it and run. He tied off the line he was hauling on and motioned to another roustabout to take his place. That man was clearing chocks out of the next load and it took a minute until he was free. When he got there, Devon handed the man the bitter end of his line and wiped the sweat off his face as he headed up the dock to the apron. The cargo-shed was a bit of a break from the loading deck of the quay – it didn’t stink quite so much of garbage and dead fish.

It had been nearly four weeks since he began work on the dock and he was actually

enjoying himself now. It was nice having an extra sixty a week slid into his pay packet (from where he did not know but it was obvious that it was going through the company payroll – it was tallied as ‘extras’ on his pay-stub) but it was also good to have nothing to worry about except how to balance a load and what kind of dunnage you needed to secure it. It made him wonder how the simple people were enjoying their lives. Like many other jobs he’d tried, it was something that he wouldn’t mind doing for real, if it ever happened that he could settle down somewhere. That whole thing about world wars, international espionage and so on had actually begun to recede from his mind.

Until he got called into the cargo-shed.

Angelo was checking paperwork when he got there. At length, the Italian handed some sheets to a waiting docker and beckoned Devon into his private office. With the door shut, the noise level was only nearly deafening.

“You impressed Eno down at Pier 42.” He had to raise his voice a little to be heard over the engines and general din outside.

“What? When we went down to load that coaster?” He’d been waiting for it to come back around but he didn’t expect it to come directly from the dock-master on Pier 42. Was Angelo a dupe, a middle-man, or was he one of them? He was Italian, for god’s sake. Italy was one of the good guys. He couldn’t be one of ... them. Could he?

“He wants you back up there this afternoon to stuff another one. British boat this time.”

Angelo handed over the tare bill and the time-sheets and Devon looked them over.

“Okay, boss. How big a job?”

“Big one. Might change the war.” He was joking, of course. No one cargo, no matter what

it was or how big it was, changes a war.

Devon said, ‘Okay’ and started to leave, but Angelo stopped him.

“Hey, Steickternott! Don’t be so fast.” He reached into a drawer and took out a foot-square canvas bag. “These are for you. I’m told you’ll know what to do with them.” Devon started to peer into the pouch. “Hey! Not here, idiot! Just take ’em.”

He felt the contents through the canvas and knew what they were: a bunch of the tube devices he’d seen at the *Deutscher Verein* club. Devon was about to become a saboteur. When he thought about it, though, he’d been worse things: a pimp (technically); a convict (for real); a driver for a certain business man on the Bowery; a gun-toting revolutionary; a crazy man who fed pigeons and yelled at squirrels; a mad miner with a wolf’s head on a stick. So, now, he’d blow a few things up – or, at least, make them go PH-PH-MMMBBB!, as Karl, the sailor at the *Deutscher Verein*, had said.

Whatever that meant.

One thing it did mean was that dock-master Angelo was part of it. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be handing out bags of infernal devices. How deep into the workforce did it all go? Was the dockyard a hive of Prussian saboteurs? And, why was an Italian working with them?

He closed up the pouch and looked at Angelo. “Same guys?”

“Naw, it’s a bigger job. You’ll need four teams. Here’s the time-sheets.” Devon looked at names: all German. Of course.

“Okay, thanks.”

Angelo held out his hand. “Good luck, Steickternott,” and Devon, slowly and puzzled, shook the offered extremity.

You don't shake somebody's hand when you send them off to supervise cargo. You shake their hand when you send them off to blow something up. Or to maybe get blown up. Or imprisoned. Or shot. Or hung. Or electrocuted. You shake their hand when you don't expect them to come back. He was suddenly nervous about the canvas bag that was now his property.

Common sense said to drop it in the water and run like billy-be-damned, but common sense also said that he shouldn't be there in the first place.

Yet, here he was.

He gathered up his little crew and they made the journey down to Pier 42. Out of habit, he counted the flags and the home ports once again. British, French, Belgian, Norwegian, Bolivian, Mexican, American. No Germans, at all. The line of British cruisers one mile beyond the international limit kept them in Jersey, too scared to chance the run.

At the Hamburg-Amerika dock, one of the four Germans that made up his gang spoke up.

"I used to work the Hamburg-Amerika dock. Lots of heel-clicking and *jahwol-ing*. Half of them are navy, I think." He sniffed in the autumn chill and waited for Devon to get them rolling on the job.

"Our navy?" Devon asked and the guy looked at him like he had four eyes.

"Of course, our navy. The German Navy – *Kriegsmarine*."

Back on Pier 42, Devon knocked on the cargo-shed door and was surprised to see, not Eno, but Karl from his conversation in the lounge at the *Deutscher Verein*. He hadn't been idly boasting, then. He really was doing something that made a difference, it seems.

"Karl! Didn't expect to find you here."

"You are ... Sam, from the club. *Ja*." The man looked over some paperwork. "Eno is ...

sick, today.”

“That’s too bad.” He held up the canvas bag. “What do I do with these?”

“I’ve no idea v-what those are ...” He checked his loading sheet. “... Steickternott. Keep them out of sight, then just use your imagination, I guess. Like I said v-when we talked before, you could just drop small things into the cargo and v-walk av-way.”

“Just like that?”

“Just like that. I’ve no idea v-what they are. The boat might be two v-weeks at sea before anyone finds out v-what they are. Just looking at that bag, I’d bet six of these gimmicks v-will burn her to the v-waterline.”

“How do I arm them or set them off?”

“I do not know v-what they are.” Karl chuckled as he said it. “But, if they were mine, I’d say they’re already v-working. Nothing can stop them, not even taking them apart – if you did, a tiny little spill v-would set it off. Give me the time-sheets.” He didn’t even glance at them, just signed them and handed them back. “Not knowing v-what they are, I don’t know, but, perhaps, give one of those to each of your gang. They’ll know v-what to do v-with them.”

So, he did, quietly and out of sight, by the simple expedient of using the bag as a paper-weight. One device handed to each man as the time-sheets were distributed. The four lead-men didn’t show any surprise. They simply pocketed the tubes and turned back toward their crews, so he said “Hey! Let me know where you put those, so I can report back to whoever should know,” and they went about their business.

This wasn’t break-bulk, just a big pile of crates to be loaded using a hustler tractor and the dock-side crane. He didn’t ask what the crates contained, but he suspected air-craft parts. He

saw the shipping labels and they were almost certainly military supplies. That made them legitimate targets; if they were in a convoy, their chances of getting across were good. If they weren't, their chances were a lot worse.

The war was bringing about many odd circumstances and situations. Here he was, for instance, loading American contraband onto a British ship on a German dock in the heart of America – with a German crew. How could there be a problem with that?

Yeah, these guys were supposed to be German-Americans, but so was he.

Things were moving smoothly and quickly when the first of his gang came past and muttered, “Second tier, first crate, port-side, jammed between” and moved on. Devon just nodded and went on checking his tare-sheet, adding a small pencil mark to a diagram in his papers.

The load grew. The crew of the freighter lounged and watched, while the captain fretted and made suggestions on weight-shifting. He apparently didn't trust his first mate to super something as delicate as stowage. Devon did his best to accommodate the skipper's wishes and things got moved several times. To be fair, who would want an unbalanced or insecure load mid-Atlantic? Mid-hurricane season, at that.

It also meant keeping track of where the clandestine devices were ending up.

The next docker came past and said “Fourth tier, fourth crate, starboard side, underneath.” Devon didn't even look up. The map he was making was beginning to fill up with little ‘x’-s – but no ‘o’-s.

As the pile on the dock diminished and the hold filled, the other members of his gang reported success and, finally, the dockside was clear and the load secured.

Devon had two tubes left and he made one last check of the load. It was a real check, crawling up and down the build, squeezing in to tight spaces to yank on ties and battens. At last, he was satisfied, by which time the last two tubes had been placed. He climbed out of the hold, made a couple of final marks on his map, and mounted the stair to the bridge.

The captain carefully checked the tare-sheet and signed off on it, then looked with surprise at the envelope Devon had taken from inside his shirt and added to the official papers. It was addressed to the captain of the ship and was obviously old, as envelopes go, wrinkled and sweated on.

“What’s this, then? Looking for a position, are you? I’ve a full crew, even if you do have papers.”

“Do you know this badge, captain?” Devon was holding his Janus identification, good old bullet-scarred number 68, below the level of the bridge’s windows. The captain studied it for a few moments.

“Of course. Janus Agency. I’ve heard of it.”

“There are twelve incendiaries on board, stowed in the cargo.”

“What!” The captain started for the door, but Devon laid a hand on his arm.

“Not yet. Listen please.” When the man was calmer, Devon continued. “We’re tracking down the people who are organizing this. All we’ve got right here are muscle-bound idiots like me – catch them and you’ve caught less than nothing. The enemy would simply change tactics. Yes, I said ‘enemy’. There’s a conspiracy that goes much higher than this. We know that, but we don’t know where it starts. If you can keep calm and trust me, we can work our way back up the chain to the ringleaders.”

The captain was a long time deciding. Devon understood his dilemma very well. His first moral – and legal – duty was to the safety of his ship, his crew, and his cargo. If he failed at any of those, he could be cashiered, tried – even end up in prison. He looked at Devon, sizing up his sweating, unshaven face. He looked at the tare-sheet. He looked down toward the battened-down hatches. At last, however, he said “Very well. What do I do?”

“It’s simple. You steam on time. You get the hell out of here. I prepared the letter in that envelope weeks ago, with the details of what’s happening. Today, I added the exact position of all of the devices. As soon as you’re out of American waters, you can hunt them up and remove them.”

“I don’t have any experience with explosives,” the captain protested.

“Don’t worry. I do. Nothing will blow up – yet.” I don’t think, Devon added to himself. “It’s just six inch-and-a-half diameter tubes about six inches long. Kind of look like cigar tubes. Just pick them up and drop them overboard. No wires attached; no detonators in them. No tricks; no traps. They’re already armed and will combust when the time expires, but they won’t combust for maybe a week. So they’ll be far astern and at the bottom of the ocean when they do.”

“What, they’ll still combust at the bottom of the ocean?”

“Or on the way down, when the water pressure is enough to squeeze the tubes flat and set them off.”

“And what do I do after I’ve disposed of them?”

“Keep your course. Keep a close eye on your wireless operations. One week out, send a wireless message that you’ve got a fire in your cargo hold, but you’ve got it under control.”

“But, I won’t have a fire, will I? What good will that do?”

“There are people listening on this side of the Atlantic. They’ll think it worked. You continue safe and sound; they think they’re in the clear; and I get a chance to dig further into what’s going on at this end without any questions about my story.”

“Good lord, you’re a spy!” Trust his luck to get an Englishman whose sense of honor was honed on the playing fields of Eton – or some less reputable school. ‘Play up! And play the game!’ The captain’s sense of English fair play seemed to be affronted by the notion of a spy. He didn’t seem to understand that the old rules no longer applied in this war of flying machines and machine guns and gas.

“Well, yeah, I guess I’m a spy, but I’m on the right side, captain. I’m a Canadian. You know, a colonial.”

“Is that right? I suppose that explains it. Never had the advantages of a public school education.”

“I never had the advantages of an education, apart from what I taught myself. I’ve managed to stay alive.”

The Englishman seemed miffed that Devon was still alive. “The locations of these ... devices ... are in the envelope?”

“I wrote them down as my men reported them to me. They won’t be too hard to find; they’re just shoved into the places indicated.”

“Just pick them up and drop them overboard?”

“As simple as that.” He held up a hand. “But, don’t crush them or even think about opening them. It’ll get very bad, very fast if you do.”

“What do you mean, ‘bad’?”

“Raging, roaring fire that can’t be extinguished. Is that bad enough?”

“How do you know this?”

“The things I’ve taught myself about them tell me.”

Another long moment of decision for the captain. “Very well, I agree ...” He consulted his work-order. “... Steickternott? That doesn’t sound very Canadian.”

“I’ll let you in on a secret, captain. I’m not very Canadian.” He raised a hand in farewell  
“As soon as you cross the international limit, get rid of them. Then watch your wireless traffic.”

Down the gangway and onto the dock. His collection of workers was waiting for him on the apron.

One of them looked curiously from Devon to the bridge and back. “What were you two chin-wagging about? You looked pretty cozy.”

‘He’s worried about dunnage, doesn’t want things shifting. I reassured him that it would all settle itself nicely in a week or so.’ There were smirks from the gang. “Let’s get back.”

And Devon led the way back to Pier 45.

Angelo met him at the apron with an eyebrow raised. Devon nodded, then handed over the paperwork for signatures, all neatly tucked into the otherwise empty canvas bag. While the four gang-leads went to sign out, the Italian led Devon back to the cargo-shed and into his inner office.

“Easy?” Angelo asked.

“Dead easy. The boys placed one each; I did the last two. You’d have to have a hand-drawn map to find them. So, what happens? In a week, they suddenly blow up?”

“Nothing blows up. They burn – hot and hard. But in about three days, not a week.”

Devon hoped the captain took his advice and got rid of them as soon as he was in international waters. Angelo was taking a bottle and two glasses out of a drawer. "Here. Have one." And, he poured two whiskeys.

"Thanks, but I'm not drinking, these days." He'd like to, actually, the last few hours had been hard on his nerves but once you start a story ...

"Oh, yeah, the Doctor said that. Well, each to his own. I will, if you don't mind," Angelo said, and he knocked back both shots.

"Hey, Angelo, how'd you get together with these guys? I mean, you're Italian."

"I'm American." He was putting the bottle back in its place.

"So, America's neutral and Italy's fighting Germany. Why do it?"

Angelo looked at him with amusement. "Same reason you're here, I would imagine – money. The dock-captain came up to me, same as I did you: 'Hey, you want to make some extra cash?' It's worth it. They pay me and they pay me good. Speaking of which – " Angelo opened another drawer and Devon, caught by surprise, prepared to run and run hard, but all the man pulled out was a bundle of cash. He rose from his chair and tossed it to Devon. "There you go. That's your weekly plus a bonus. A damn good bonus, if you ask me."

Devon didn't even try to count it, just folded it and stuffed it into a pocket. "Thanks. See you around."

The other man sat back down in his chair and swivelled to the desk. "Sure, see you." Angelo had an odd look on his face and Devon decided it was best to vacate the premises as quickly as possible. But, as Devon opened the shed door, Angelo leaned back until the chair creaked and casually asked "Hey, you ever see anything of Roxie Vanilli any more?"

Devon stopped and closed the door again. “Roxie who?” He didn’t like where this was going – and where it was going was suddenly very dangerous. He hadn’t heard the name ‘Roxie Vannilli’ in ... well, not nearly enough years. The things that had happened in between had faded the man from memory but, in an instant, a chapter of his life that had been dead and closed for many years was suddenly alive and kicking – kicking hard.

“Oh, come on, don’t says you don’t remember Roxie! You gotta remember Roxie. You and him was pals. Last time I saw him, you two was drinking at Dan the Dude’s Café on West 28th Street.”

“Ain’t me, Angelo.” Without moving his eyes from Angelo’s, Devon searched for a possible weapon in the room. He’d come unarmed to work, as usual – weapons would just be in the way in hurly-burly of work on the dock.

“Oh, it was you. Sure, it was. But you weren’t you, back then. You weren’t Steickternott, back then – what, eight years ago? Naw, it wasn’t Steickternott. It was ... it was ...”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**October 13, 1915**

It was Tony. Tony Bonfuzzi. And, it was nine years and two lifetimes ago – in 1908.

Devon remembered it like it was yesterday, but it wasn't yesterday and his name wasn't Tony, anymore. He remembered the heat of the May sun, the smell of the leather seats, the taste of the beer – the smile on the pretty girl's face. He never knew her name.

There were other memories, too. The smell of burnt gunpowder, the taste of the smoke.

The tang of blood in the air.

He'd finally persuaded the boss that it was time for a new car. The old Cadillac was not going to last much longer; it was five years old; he had patched more bullet holes than he could count; the engine block had stopped a couple; and the radiator had seen some hard action, too.

Breaking down these days could mean a lot more than just inconvenience – it could mean swift

and unpleasant death. Zwerbach had replaced the aging and battered Cad with a big blue Franklin limousine that had so many modern conveniences Harry could barely keep up. It had a speed-o-meter that told how fast you were going, a foot pedal for the throttle and a clock on the dashboard. The Franklin was actually a year old, but it was one of the first all enclosed models, with windows all around, including the driver's compartment. There was even a heater available in the back compartment for cold days.

As he nosed up to the side of the curb outside the café on West 28<sup>th</sup>, he had the sense of an auspicious occasion. Today would be memorable. The rumor was that 'Kid Twist' Zwerbach and 'Cyclone' Lewis were about to conclude a deal to bring all of the old Five Points territories under Eastside control. Devon pulled on the handbrake and climbed out, to run around and open the door of the passenger compartment. He even pulled off his flat cap as he opened the door of the limo.

Devon held the door and waited. There was a time he had felt very important to be holding the door for two such very important passengers as were climbing down from the high rear seat. Each wore a black homburg, a red tie, a striped vest under a gray suit, a light-gray coat, and gray spats over their brogues. Each had a red carnation in a button-hole. It was obvious they were very important people and Devon felt important, too – at one time. Now, he wanted just out.

*"Va bene, Tony. Stai facendo un buon lavoro."* Zwerbach patted Devon's shoulder.

*"Grazie, Signore."* Devon smiled in response to the half-understood praise: Zwerbach liked the job he was doing. That was good – he could go on breathing for a while.

"You-a see, Vach? He-a starting to *parlare il linguaggio*, already."

"Sure, Mr. Zwerbach. I told you he was smart."

“*Gli dia un dollaro,*” ordered Zwerbach, and Vach Lewis handed Devon a silver dollar, to which Devon smiled more broadly. He pocketed the coin as he looked toward the door they had pulled up to.

Dan The Dude’s, the sign said. It was ... neutral. It wasn’t fancy; it wasn’t a dive. It wasn’t strictly a restaurant; it wasn’t strictly a bar. Mostly it wasn’t either Eastsider territory or Five Points territory. It was ... neutral. That’s why the place was used as a meet when serious discussions were needed, and serious discussions were needed.

War was brewing on the streets of the Lower East Side, and today’s talks could stop it.

Zwerbach looked toward the restaurant along with Devon, heaved a sigh and turned back to Tony. “Listen, a-Tony, Mr. Lewis and-a me, we go in-a for a meeting. You wait-a five-a minutes, then you come-a in; you sit-a by-a the door. You have-a one-a beer – one-a beer, eh?” Zwerbach waggled a warning finger, then poked the youngster playfully. “You’re-a too young-a for any more.” He smiled with affection. “You watch the door for us. Anybody come in you don’t-a like-a, you holler out-a! Don’t matter – you don’t-a like-a him, you holler. Okay?”

“Okay, Mr. Zwerbach. I’ll holler.”

“Good-a boy. You holler –” He was wagging the finger again. “Then you get-a the hell-a out. You hear-a me? You get-a out-a fast and get-a the car ready. When we come-a out, we got-a to be ready to go.”

“Okay, Mr. Zwerbach.”

“Vach, give-a him a dollar.” And, Devon became the proud possessor of another silver dollar.

Zwerbach and Lewis sauntered into Dan The Dude’s Café like a pair of Wall Street

businessmen walking into Delmonico's for a mid-week lunch. Despite the mid-May sun, the fur-collars that topped their coats were impressively heavy and the homburgs sitting on their heads were sun-catching black. They were big shots – the biggest on the Lower East Side – and they knew it, so everybody else should know it, too.

The front compartment of the Franklin, where the driver sat, was nearly as luxurious as the rear cabin. Windows could be raised to close off the traffic noise and stench; the front windscreen formed a full closure with the roof and the side doors; the seats were soft leather. It was a great place to lounge, letting the sun shine down on him while watching the time tick by on the dashboard clock. Even a dozen years since they were invented, not a lot of men in Mr. Zwerbach's lines of business had autos, but Mr. Zwerbach had been among the first. And what an auto it was – six cylinders, overhead valves, and it even had the clock Devon was staring at now.

If only life were as simple as this: lounging about, waiting for your boss. If only the boss wasn't in charge of gambling, prostitution, drug-running, robbery, even murder. If only you weren't caught between the police and the mobsters, trying to find a way out. If only a pretty girl would come strolling down the street and stop to admire the car ...

A pretty girl strolling down the street stopped to admire the car and Devon straightened himself up. She looked shyly up at him and he wondered how far he could get in four minutes. ““ziz yer cah?”” she said. In three words, Devon knew she'd been born and bred within a few blocks of where she was standing.

“Naw, not mine, but I'm the driver. I take care of it for Mr. Zwerbach. I make sure it runs perfect.”

She was running a hand over the leather. "Gee, I wish I could have a ride in it."

"Sorry, kid, I can't do it, today. The boss is counting on me. He counts on me a lot, you know."

She had climbed up onto the running board. "Kin I sit in it? I'd be ever so grateful just to sit in it for a while." She was leaning into the car, now.

"Sure, baby," Tony said. "Why not?"

She stepped back and he opened the door from inside. As she lifted her skirt to step in, pulling it up over her knee, Devon 'helped' her in by putting his hand on the back of her knee and his arm around her. She slid into the seat and his hands stayed where they were and she was smiling at him.

She looked around to see whether anyone was watching them and slid closer to him, moving his hand further up her thigh as a consequence. "Kin ya make it run?" She placed her hand strategically on him.

He shook his head. "Not without letting go of you, and I don't want to do that."

"Well, I'll still be here, silly." She closed her knees, trapping his hand and squeezing. "Don't cha think it'll be woith it? I do."

"Give us a kiss, first."

"Sure, Tony."

His head jerked back at the sound of his name and, just then, his eye fell on the clock. Then, he was out of the car, around the other side, pulling her down and onto the pavement again. "Sorry, doll, but the boss needs me right now. I gotta go. Some other time, maybe."

And, he slammed the car door and left her standing on the sidewalk. "You creep! If I

don't ever see you again, it'll be too soon!" A woman scorned is a thing to behold.

Five minutes on the dot and Devon stepped into the cool darkness of Dan The Dude's Café. His eyes took a few moments to adjust before he could see what was happening. Maybe forty or fifty people, male and female, were inside; one or two turned their heads to look at him as he came in, but most were busily going about their business.

He could see Lewis seated in a back booth and assumed Zwerbach was there, too. 'Cyclone' Lewis looked up at him and nodded his approval, then went back to his meeting. Devon didn't know what it was all about, but he could see that it was serious. There were no raised voices or shaking fists, but the murmuring was intense.

There was one empty chair near the door, at a small table where he saw a straw boater, a striped charcoal-colored suit, a blood red tie, already drinking whiskey. When Devon saw the owner of the outfit, he stopped cold and felt sweat break out on his forehead, then, with a breath to calm himself, went over and took the empty chair. He ignored the man; the man ignored him. This went on a for a full minute.

Without moving his lips, Roxie Vanilli said "The hell you doing here?" Devon should have known there would be other Eastside men already in the building. Zwerbach and Lewis weren't going to trust their safety to a twenty-year old who wouldn't even carry a gun. "The boss said to sit by the door. I'm sitting by the door. I sure as hell ain't walking away, now." Roxie Vanilli wasn't a man Devon was going to trust with his back turned – but then, Vanilli was hardly going to start something here – and Mr. Zwerbach's order was clear.

"Get lost, kid. I ain't gonna tell you twice." Vanilli could talk all he wanted, but Devon wasn't going to let anything happen while Zwerbach seemed so pleased with him. Vanilli

certainly knew he couldn't possibly take Devon *mano a mano*, but he wouldn't bother with that. He'd probably just shoot him in the back as soon as Devon turned it. For a man with a vanilla name, he loved causing trouble.

"You going to start something, Roxie? 'Cause, no matter how it turns out, I'm pretty sure Mr. Zwerbach wouldn't like it much – wouldn't like it at all, would he? After all, we're here to make peace, ain't we?" Devon caught the barkeep's eye, held up a finger, and leaned back to stretch out his legs. To anyone looking from the outside, the occupants of the table didn't know each other, weren't talking to each other, and, indeed, one was asleep.

When the barkeep came, Devon was in the midst of regretting his treatment of that very nice girl outside. He should have invited her in for a drink; she could have come in. This was a very progressive joint. It would have been a proud moment to walk in with a good-looking girl on his arm. There were plenty of women in the place, and not herded into a 'ladies and escorts' section, either. Maybe he could still find her and make it up to her. On the other hand, he was pretty sure she wasn't old enough to drink. And, how the hell had she known his name? He'd ordered a beer from the barkeep, but it hadn't arrived yet when the door opened again and a heavy-set man with a round face, slicked-down hair, and puffy lips came in. This guy did have a girl on his arm, young, pretty, leggy, clingy. Just the type he'd gotten used to seeing hanging on the arm of men like that one.

He had a vague impression of having seen her before, but just then his beer arrived, and he paid for it, and the barkeep put the foaming glass on the table. Dan The Dude's had good beer, certainly worth the seven cent price tag. He lifted the glass, enjoying the condensation on the outside and the generous head of foam. It was a hot day in NYC. He was about to raise the glass

to his lips when he realized what he'd just seen.

The newcomer was standing, facing Devon, his back to Mr. Zwerbach's booth, his hand inside his jacket. Vanilli wasn't even looking toward the guy. Devon was half-way to his feet, the beer spilling recklessly as he rose.

The heavy beer glass sailed across the room to strike the round-faced man full in his round face – just as that man, beginning to turn toward Zwerbach's booth, was pulling a revolver free from his inside pocket.

“Pioggi! Louis Pioggi!” Devon hollered, picking up his chair and running for the man, who had staggered back from the impact of the hurled glassware but kept hold of his revolver. Pioggi was wiping beer from his eyes and blood from his nose, and hadn't seen Devon yet. In two steps, he would, and Devon still had four steps to go.

Pioggi's girl was screaming, now, and Devon risked a quick glimpse to see Max Zwerbach rising from his seat and Vach Lewis lifting a revolver toward someone else in the booth. Devon assumed Vanilli was on his way to aid his bosses. Everyone else in the room was turning, rising, or ducking, all at the same time.

It all happened very fast after that. Shots pounded the air; two men alone at the bar and two sitting with women in side booths were rising and leveling revolvers toward Zwerbach and Lewis. Damn! It was a setup – they'd been lured here to be gunned down. Well, Devon decided he'd take at least one with him.

Pioggi ('Louie The Lump' was his street name) was leveling his gun at Devon, who threw the chair. More women were screaming; more shots pounded in his ears. Men's voices were shouting in a babble. Louie The Lump must have pulled the trigger because Devon felt a streak

of fire across his ribs, as he crashed into the man, hoping to take him down and use his boots on him. Pioggi was too strong for that and he put a fist full into Devon's face. Stars were exploding in his head, and he knew the Italian would fire again. More shots were cracking and he could smell burnt powder. Pioggi's snarling face went blank and he fell forward onto Devon's chest. Pioggi's girl, eyes and mouth wide, still screaming, was standing behind him with the remains of another, or maybe the same, beer glass in her hand. Devon felt blood from Pioggi's face smear onto his own before the man slid to the floor.

'Still alive!' was his first thought, and then his next thought was that he had just one second to take steps to stay that way. At the front door, he could see Vanilli with a pistol leveled in his direction, then there were more shots from elsewhere in the bar and chips flew from the woodwork around Vanilli who, straw-boater hat and all, disappeared to the sidewalk. Devon took another fast glance toward the rear booth, where 'Cyclone' Lewis had fallen into his seat, head thrown back, mouth open, his chest a mess of flowing blood that blended into the blood-red of his silken tie. 'Kid Twist' Zwerbach was nowhere to be seen, but the other men in the booth and two others from the bar were standing with smoking revolvers in their hands, looking down to the floor where Zwerbach had been sitting. There was no help coming from there – and nothing more he could do there. The two pistol men from the booths were starting to look toward Devon.

All of that took a second and then he did what Mr. Zwerbach had told him to do.

He got the hell out.

At the front door, a dozen people who had been innocently sitting in the café were jammed up, trying to squeeze through the same three feet of doorway at the same time. He pushed his way through, using elbows and fists as required, yanking bodies behind him on the

premise that nobody was shooting at them in particular, but they sure as hell would soon be shooting at him. Once out the door, he elbowed his way through a crowd, some running out of the café, some heading toward it to see what the excitement was. At the Franklin, he ran around to the driver's side, flipped the ignition switch on, pulled down the spark advance and added some throttle. Running to the front of the auto, he cranked the engine frantically, pulling on the choke cable, and finally, with a couple of backfires, the engine sputtered to life. Apart from customers still pushing to get out of Dan The Dude's, no one had come from the restaurant yet, at least, not with the intent of killing Devon and that was all he cared about. Vanilli was not in evidence, having the good sense to hightail as fast and as far as his legs would carry him, Devon decided. Bad luck to him, Devon thought. He hoped he fell down and scraped his chin.

He looked for his girlfriend, too, but she was nowhere to be seen. Just as well, as she would have slowed him down. It was a good thing he hadn't taken up her invitation to fool around, or he might have still been in the car when it all happened. Then he stopped at the realization that the timing was just too damn coincidental: she had likely been sent just for that purpose. What better way to distract the young guy who drove the limo for your enemy than to send a pretty and willing female along at the right time? Damn, he was stupid sometimes!

Vaulting into the driver's seat, he released the handbrake, adjusted the spark and throttle, eased the Franklin into first gear, and started to roll forward, just as the passenger side door was pulled open and a frantic figure landed in the car beside him.

Sprawled half in and half out of the car, in white silk, lace and beads, with feathers in her hair, she lay on her back on the floor and looked upward into his face. It was the girl who'd come into the café with Louie The Lump. The girl who had maybe saved his life, if she was really the

one who clobbered Louie with the beer glass.

“Well, don’t just sit there, Tony. Drive! Drive!” She pulled her feet and skirts into the machine, rolled herself, feet in the air and garters flashing, onto the seat, and slammed the door, as he dropped the clutch lever and yanked the auto, full throttle, into traffic. Around them, there were yells and shaken fists from cartmen he had cut off. Behind him, there was pandemonium as the gunsmoke cleared and the dead were counted. They drove for a lot of hours, well out of the city, and didn’t stop until much later that night.

It hadn’t stopped for Devon even today. It had been a long hard road between there and here. He sometimes forgot just how long and hard it had been, but then at two in the morning, he’d remember. Thousands of miles back and forth across a continent and three countries. In and out of prison. And a lot of hurt and dead people lay behind him.

Angelo, the dock-master, was staring at him, waiting for recognition to dawn, but none came. At last, Devon shook his head.

“Most of the people who were there that day are dead. I’m barely alive myself. Who the hell are you?”

Angelo smiled. “I’m hurt, Tony. Don’t you know? Angie The Bear. I was one of the Five Points Boys shooting at you that day.”

“How would I know that? And how do you remember me? There was lots of bullets flying around.”

Angelo’s smile turned to a laugh. “You and Roxie Vanilli were the only Eastside soldiers who got out of there alive. I knew Roxie, but I didn’t know you. Mr. Kelly told me who you were. I was impressed, we all were, taking on Louie The Lump with a beer mug and a chair.”

Devon's laugh lacked any humor. "I didn't see that Pioggi had a gun until it was too late."

Devon was still looking for a weapon of some kind out of the corners of his eyes. There weren't a lot of candidates, if clipboards and a hole punch were eliminated. "He had me dead to rights, and I wouldn't be standing here if Carrol Terry hadn't walloped him hard. Hell of a girl, Carrol was."

"That's who the skirt was! Yeah, I remember Carrol, now. 'Was'? You're saying she's dead?" Devon just shrugged. "Too bad. Pioggi's in Sing Sing on a Sullivan charge. Vanilli's doing twenty-five upstate for murder. I heard they fried you back in '08, and now you show up here. That's a little hard to swallow."

"Just looking for some work, Angelo, nothing else. Are we going to have trouble?"

Angelo slowly shook his head. "Seven years – and more, I guess. The Five Points Boys, the Eastside Gang? All gone – nothing but dust. Zwerbach's dead; Lewis is dead; Paul Kelly is dead. They're all dead or in prison – all of them maybe 'cept you and me. Let's let 'em lie."

"Yeah. Okay, that's fine with me." Devon had selected a wood-and-steel jack bar that was propped up against the back wall of the office as his weapon, but he'd have to get past Angelo first to use it. "So, what now? Am I fired or what?"

Angelo leaned back in his chair. "All right, Steickternott. We're going to change around your shift. Don't come in usual time tomorrow. Have a good rest but be here at eight tomorrow night. I'll show you something else that will shake your world. It might even shake the English, too. *Caio, Tony. Fino a domani.*"

What was this? He wasn't going to have to fight his way out? He'd worked himself for a good knock-down, drag-out with Angelo. Instead, he was going to walk home.

"*Caio, Angelo. A domani.*" How disappointing.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

**October 23, 1915**

He was stomping along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, being generally miserable and not exactly open to human contact. Angelo had changed his shift assignment, so now he was working from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. each day so, truth be told, he really didn't have time for human contact. This was a good thing because, as he stomped, the scowl on his face pretty much precluded making any new friends from the passers-by on the sidewalk. He'd had a rotten week and was damned if anybody was going to interfere with his enjoyment of its thorough rottenness.

He knew he should be reporting in person to Janus every day, or at least every few days, but he was damned if he was going to breath the same air as that man. Let them stew. He called in once a week to let them know he was on the job and where to send his money, but the information he passed along was slim. Unsurprisingly, because the information he actually

possessed was also slim: a name here, a ship there, a date. Would it win the war? No. Would it maybe save some lives. Maybe. Not substantial but that was the best he had to offer. What more could he do?

That first night shift, unclear of what was about to happen, he stood nervously on the dock and waited for something important to occur. Men gathered on the pier – none that he knew – until a full gang had arrived, but apparently, he was not going to be part of their efforts. After he'd been introduced to the shift gang and they'd all been admonished to remember that Devon was hard at work with them all night, Angelo took him aside and they had made their way north along the waterfront to a small private dock that lay a good half mile from Pier 42. It was just a little jetty with a closed boat house, barely big enough to hold a launch, and, sure enough, inside was only a fifteen foot rowboat, painted dead black. And two men, both, curiously enough, German; both, curiously enough, dressed in dead black.

Angelo reached into a locker at the back of the boat-house, handed him a black rain slicker and, without a word, Devon put it on. It was a decent enough fit, although Devon really didn't need the extra layer just then. The Italian pointed toward the boat. "Get in. Go with them. Keep your mouth shut." 'Them' was the pair dressed in black, who had stowed their gear in the boat and were waiting for him.

Devon didn't move. "Where am I going? And, am I coming back?" He was certain the other two, knowing what it was they were going to be doing that night, had come heavily armed but he had only brought brass knuckles with him, knowing that a gun would be a problem when the heavy work started dockside. Now, he was wishing he'd brought everything from an arquebus to a howitzer. And, maybe a longbow, too.

Angelo looked from Devon to the two other men, then back. He broke out in laughter. “Sure, you’re coming back – this time at least.” He slapped Devon’s shoulder as if that were a joke. “You’ll find out where you’re going soon enough – when you’re on your way there.. Can you row a boat?” Devon shrugged. How hard can it be? “Take the middle seat. I’ll see you after you’re done here. Come back to Pier 42.” He stepped back through the boat-house door and Devon heard his footsteps, fading away along the jetty. That left Devon with two men who were probably bombers and almost certainly the kind of dock-side toughs nobody wants to meet in a dark alley – or in a dark boat-house. And certainly not alone in a small boat in New York Harbor on a moonless midnight.

The two Germans grunted at him and he stepped down into the middle of the boat. The one in the bows stood and pushed the little craft away from the boat-house and into the river. Seeing that neither of the others made a move to touch the oars and that he was closest to the tholes, Devon freed the oars from their hooks and dropped them between the pins. A few seconds later, he had the boat underway. It had been a long time since he rowed a boat but, like a bicycle, it was something you never forgot. Devon didn’t know because he’d never ridden a bicycle. It’s all knees and back, anyway, and dock work built up exactly the muscles he needed. His hands, so fragile for so long, had toughened up once again by lifting and moving cargo.

“Hey!” was the first actual word from the German in the bow. “Go norss. Stay away from ze ships in ze docks but out of ze channel.” The man accompanied his gutteral mispronunciations with hand gestures, only a few of which Devon could see as he rowed. Still, he rowed and seemed to satisfy the other two.

Keeping out of the shipping channel but away from the ships in their slipways was easier

said than done as the current kept pulling him to the center of the river but twenty minutes of slow and steady rowing, against the current, brought them, as far as Devon could tell, up in the vicinity of Pier 70. He'd tried to keep a more or less current map of ships in the harbor in his brain but he couldn't recall what ship was tied up at Pier 70.

The one in the stern suddenly said "Vait!" and Devon laid on his oars. He needed it; it had been a long pull. There was an extended silence as they slowly drifted back downstream. Then, "Ja, gut. Here." And, the man pointed to the stern of a ship they were drifting past. Devon pulled again and the boat eased in under the stern of a freighter, with a French *tricoloeur* flapping lazily from the jack.

The ship was empty and riding high, so that the top of her rudder and propellor were out of the water. The smell of rotting seaweed, fish, and bunker oil was strong. Above them, the lazy clang of a bell sounded as the ship swayed. As pleasant and romantic a picture as any maritime artist would care to depict – but it wasn't.

The stern man leaned toward Devon to whisper "Put ze boat up against ze rudder", which was a foolish thing to do. The mass of rudder and prop would smash their little craft (and them) to pulp if either rudder or propeller moved, and, in Devon's mind's eye, either of them could and might, at any time.

Muttering a string of heartfelt words that may have been prayers but weren't, Devon slid the boat silently under the stern of the ship. They glided along until the stern man took hold of the rudder and held fast, bringing the boat to a halt. Dead fish floated past, along with assorted garbage. That was another thing: somebody might dump refuse overboard at any time.

Unpleasant, of course, but dangerous if that refuse included anything heavy enough to punch

through the bottom of their boat.

The bow man reached into the shadows of the scuppers and held up a package. Or rather three separate interconnected packages. Devon, who had seen a few, knew what it was. Very plainly, it was a bomb. The particular design was new to him, though, and he wondered what interesting variation had been created by this bunch.

A pair of the boxes were laid against the rudder post and clamped with one on either side. Between them, another box supported a rocker arm, which flopped side to side with each roll of the ship. With the rocker arm clamped to the rudder post, every time the rudder turned in either direction, the arm would flop and, Devon guessed, a clockwork mechanism inside the box would advance. Any heavy swell might also rock the rocker, so the method was necessarily imprecise but, given an average voyage and depending on how it was set, it would go off hours or days or weeks after the ship left harbor.

What it achieved once it went off was equally imprecise. Depending on the kind of explosive in the main boxes, it could blow off the rudder, damage or destroy the screws, maybe even blow the stern completely off the ship. The interesting thing was that the light attachment of the device meant it would almost certainly blow itself off the rudder post, to disappear beneath the waves, nobody the wiser as to what caused the boom.

The bow man clamped it to the rudder post below the water line so, when the ship was loaded, it would be several feet down in the water, out of sight but far from harmless, silently clicking over its clockwork each time the helmsman changed or corrected his course. Naturally, it was assumed the ship would sail relatively quickly, which meant the saboteurs had to have some access to shipping schedules, which were supposed to be secret.

The bow man completed his task and nodded to the stern man, who ordered “Row!” and pushed off. The boat glided silently away from the ship and, without being told, Devon set course southward and back to the private dock. Once clear of the ship, there was nothing to connect them with the device; nothing to come back to them; and nothing further to be done. Even their fingerprints would be scoured by the action of the ship’s movement and the salt waves. The ship was already a victim, simply waiting the moment of explosion.

Devon pulled on the oars and admired the dastardly and ingenious brains of Von Papen’s crew in New York (and it had to be a crew, not just one or two men). It was little short of genius, really. For ships carrying cargo that couldn’t be burned using the kind of cigar bombs Devon had placed the day before, this ... ‘rudder’ bomb would do the job even better. If any of the crew survived the blast and the sinking, it would appear for all the world that a U-boat had done the deed. No one would even suspect a bomb placed while the ship was safely in the neutrality of the harbor in New York. If the ship and her crew didn’t survive, well, too bad. It would simply be another vessel of the many that disappeared in the Atlantic.

“In here!” said the bow man, and Devon pulled into the boat house, easing the little boat in with silent oars and no bumps. Really, rowing is a pleasant pastime, if it doesn’t involve death and destruction.

And that was it, really. The two Germans tied the boat off, Devon placed the oars back in their racks, the Germans waited outside the boathouse for Devon to join them, locked the door and departed without a word, leaving Devon to go back to Pier 42.

Of course, the next day, Devon was on to Paul Seibe and NYPD. With difficulty, he persuaded Seibe not to start rounding up everyone on the entire dock, but to do as Devon had

done and simply warn the ship's captain of the danger. A word to the wise is a rudder saved, or a snitch in time saves ships, or something like that.

He also dropped a word to Walter A. Wisdom Films, a plain English message left with a phone answering girl, which may have confused her. "Tell Wiseman that von Papen is bombing on the docks. Number 68 called." What she made of that message, and whether it was ever delivered, he could only guess.

And he'd not gotten any closer since. No new assignments, no new meetings with saboteurs. He made four late night boat trips and led crews to three loading jobs where cigar bombs were placed, but still had no idea where the bombs were being made. He hadn't figured out how Angelo had become mixed up with German saboteurs, although given the man's past with the Black Hand (and his own past, too, if he was truthful), it wasn't a big stretch of the imagination.

But, all of that explained why he was in such a foul mood as he stomped up 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He knew there was no good reason that he shouldn't go right to Janus's office and lay the whole thing out – no good reason other than he would never forgive the man for letting Eva depart on that doomed ship. But, being brutally honest with himself, which he hated doing, he knew he would contact Janus before the end of the day. Or maybe tomorrow.

So, now, he was just stomping around looking for a good reason not to call Janus.

Ahead, the signs of a commotion were growing, including chanting, whistles, drums and horns. It was the middle of October. There was no official excuse for a parade today. He realized there were also a lot of voices: shouting voices – angry voices – females voices, mostly. Parades didn't usually involve shouting. The babble grew louder and closer. Then closer and louder.

The last time Devon had let himself get involved in a political demonstration, the German singing *bunds* had marched through Little Berlin to show their support for Germany in the war. There had been roughly a thousand of them, chanting '*Weltmacht oder Nedergang*' – 'Make the world or destroy it'. That kind of commitment to chaos had scared him deeply – and scared New York City. When police arrived and heads began to be smashed, the singing societies brought out their hidden arms and retaliated. It had gone on all night. They had left a half dozen dead, lord alone knows how many hurt, and a bunch of burned buildings.

This demonstration, and it was coming on fast, sounded as big but, maybe, not so violent. At least, there were no plumes of smoke rising behind the marchers – yet. He wondered if the Hun were marching again. Or the Irish. But no, it wasn't April, so it couldn't be the Irish. If it was the German *bunds*, though, it was time to clear the streets.

The give-away was the color: pure white, instead of white, red and black. He placed the cause, now. It wasn't Germans, although some of the wearers of white might be.

It was Suffragettes. Bloody Suffragettes. He was thinking factually rather than politically – when Suffragettes marched, heads often got split open.

They were taking up the whole of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, all four lanes and a good part of each sidewalk. The banners were flying; the drums were beating; the chanting was raucous. The people on the sidewalks were stopping to watch, some to comment, some of them to comment very loudly. As they grew closer, the thickening crowd seemed to be split between support and antagonism. Among the crowd, a growing number of police officers were beginning to appear.

There would be split heads before the parade passed by.

Devon wasn't sure how he felt about women's suffrage. To be honest, he hadn't thought

about it very much at all. When you've spent much of your life running, shooting and being shot at, you don't tend to think about lofty ideals, either your own or those of others. Sure, it was good to have lofty ideals, but survival was its own lofty ideal. Time spent thinking about lofty ideals might be better spent checking behind you to see who was following. If he had to choose, he'd probably say 'more power to you, ladies – have fun.' He knew that wouldn't win him any friends on either side of the argument, but, hey, it wasn't his fight, was it? He was just a Canadian.

What he didn't want now was involvement in anybody else's fights. His own fights were frequent enough and vicious enough to satisfy anybody. So, as the chanting approached, he stepped back from the crowd, found an alley and retreated into it, leaning against a wall in the shadows and waiting for it all to pass. If he had a book and a hip flask, he'd have been perfectly content. As it was, he was still perfectly content to just rummage around in his mind and find out what was there.

Except, as the head of the parade drew even with him, some idiot tried to drive an auto up through the center of it. Women in their whites, with their banners and their sashes, began to scatter and scream. If there was one lofty ideal Devon had, it was that women are far more valuable than idiots like him. Women can have babies – idiots like him are just there for the fun part. So, don't endanger women. He started to get mad.

The car's klaxon began to sound and the engine began to speed up. In the same instant, bricks appeared in the air, lofting over the protesters to smash the windshield of the car, which came to a sudden halt, the driver shielding his face and trying to staunch blood from the dozen cuts on his face. Who threw the bricks and where loose bricks miraculously appeared from would have been hard to say, because marchers, crowd and police were now muddled together in a giant

pushing match. Nightsticks began to rise above the crowd, along with placards, which, when bereft of their cardboard slogans, became five foot long weapons. The cops, with their eighteen inch batons, were seriously outranged.

A dozen raging suffragettes converged on the car and pulled the driver out. Helpless on the ground, the man received a couple of dozen bruises to add to his facial cuts. Serve him right for driving into the crowd, if you asked Devon.

A half-dozen men, maybe passers-by, maybe professional trouble-makers, maybe Pinkertons, or maybe plain-clothes cops, pulled the women off the driver, not at all gently. Two dozen women pounced on the men and the placard poles again became clubs, rising and falling with military precision. This was something they'd practiced, he decided. Did they expect this kind of violence to happen? Did they train for it? Did they go out of their way to provoke it?

Police whistles shrilled, boots pounded over pavement, and a fresh phalanx of blue coats joined the fray. The yelling and shrieking increased, and the car was suddenly on its side and burning. How did that happen? He hadn't seen anyone tip it, but it certainly got tipped. And the gasoline must have leaked out – somehow. He wasn't sure whether that was really possible in such a gentle tip-over, but he couldn't rule it out, at any rate.

Damn it, Devon lamented, how do they find me? How? I can't even take a walk. All he wanted was a nice angry stomp around town. And, now this. If they weren't careful, they'd make him take sides.

Of course, he could have walked away. He should have walked away. He had every intention of walking away. But somehow ...

He elbowed into the crowd, pulled a cop from a woman, then a woman from a cop. He

threw a blanket from the back seat of the upturned car onto the spreading ring of the gasoline fire and managed to smother it. A suffragette took exception to that and tried to beat him with her placard. As the two-by-two batten began to leave welts, Devon suddenly found that he was completely in favor of women's suffrage. If she wanted to be equal, he'd treat her as an equal, so he hit her with a short left jab to the nose (very much pulled) that put her on her keister, legs in the air, shocked that a man would dare to do that to her. He doubted the nose was broken.

Another woman took exception to his treatment of the first and began to march toward him, but changed her mind when he waggled a warning finger at her.

From the corner of his eye, he saw two cops pick up a white-clad suffragette and haul her, kicking and screaming, toward the waiting police wagon.

Funny that: the cops seemed to be ready with wagons and men the very instant violence struck. How did they know that violence would strike in that block and not some other?

Ducking a flying placard and another cop's baton, he reached the two would-be apprehenders. He tapped the first on the shoulder and put him down with a well-aimed sucker punch (brass-assisted), then the second, trying to keep hold of the wild-cat he suddenly had a lone grip on, tried to swing his baton at Devon, which wasn't going to end well – in an instant, he was on the ground beside his buddy, grabbing parts that his wife would have to soak in Epsom salts for a week if she was ever going to find a use for them again.

Then came the hard part but he finally got the white-clad woman, still kicking and biting, over his shoulder and roared his way through the crowd – just that: simply yelling like a madman. No one seemed especially willing to get involved in that particular fight.

Back at his alley, he dropped the biting and scratching demon to her feet, and pushed her

up against a brick wall. She screamed louder than ever, so he pinned her hands over her head with one hand, and covered her mouth with his free hand, managing to avoid most of her ensuing bites.

“Hey!” he said, urgently. “Hey! Stop it! Mena! It’s me!”

Mena Edwards stopped screaming when she heard her name and he took his hand from her mouth, tried to massage the pain of her bites from it. She calmed down enough to look at his face and the snarl slowly changed to puzzlement, to surprise, to delight.

“Jack!” Her hands slipped out of his grip and circled his neck as she pulled his head down to her for a long kiss.

Gosh, it was good to be back among friends.

## CHAPTER TEN

**October 23, 1915**

She finally broke the kiss and let go of him. She looked deeply into his eyes, searching them, a welcoming smile on her lips. It was like they were lost lovers, reunited after many years. Her next words, however, were a bit of a surprise.

“You idiot!” She hit his chest with her fist. “Those two cops were just doing their job! They weren’t doing anybody any harm! I was so close! What did you want to go and beat them up for?”

“To stop them arresting you, of course! And, by the way, you’re welcome!” Really, is ‘thank you’ that hard? Two little words, nothing special between friends, like they were. Why, they’d known each other for – two hours, eight months ago.

“Stupid!” She punctuated each sentence by hitting his chest – surprisingly hard, too. You

wouldn't think a little girl had that much punch in her. "They were supposed to arrest me! I wanted to be arrested! That was the whole point of the whole thing! What the hell did you think I was doing there? Getting a little exercise? We marched twenty blocks hoping for something to happen to spark the violence, and it finally, finally!, did – and you, you idiot man, you ruined it for me!"

He was gobsmacked. "Ruined it for *you!*!"

"Don't you understand anything?" she shouted. She stopped her rant to kiss him again, every bit as long and deep as the first, then went straight back to hitting his chest. He really wished she would stop.

The hitting, not the kissing.

"Apparently I do not understand anything!" as soon as his mouth was free. Devon's visions of how this chance meeting with an old almost-girlfriend might proceed were being shattered. He had thoughts of a romantic, candle-lit dinner, soft music, a leisurely stroll in the moonlight – perhaps even a late night drink at her place. Not his place – that was just not conducive to romance. And, he deserved romance. After all, he had rescued her from danger and public humiliation and shame. He had literally carried her from the flame and blood of hand-to-hand combat to safety. Surely that counted for something.

She threw her hands into the air in exasperation. "What's the point of us holding a peaceful march? Sing a song and hold up a banner and bang a drum! What does that get you? One half a column on the fifth page: 'Ladies marched peacefully in support of Women's Suffrage, then had tea afterward.' What does that accomplish? They might as well put it on the Society Page." She gave his chest a final thump. "Don't you see that peaceful protest gets you

nothing, nowhere!"

Devon had experience of non-peaceful protest with the Cinderella Riot of the year before – six dead from that night, including a friend. Burning buildings in Little Berlin; hiding in the loft of a theatre. A fun time for all.

"Peaceful protest lets people know you exist. It gets your cause known. It gains respect."

He hesitated, watching her tight-lipped scowl. "Doesn't it?"

"It gains nothing. 'Oh, isn't that nice? The little ladies are having a march. Just humor them; they'll go away.' You men have been saying that for sixty years, now. How many women's votes have been cast in that time? None! That's how many. And how much closer are we to voting? You know the answer to that. None, that's how much. 'Oh, it's just the little woman and her causes.' You have to let them know there will be consequences if we are ignored."

She dropped down onto the lid of a garbage can that was against the wall and sat with her chin on her hands, elbows on her knees. Somebody ought to take a picture of that, he thought: 'Suffragette regroups for the fight.'

Devon opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again when he realized he had nothing to say. In all the years he'd been running from cops, he had never once intentionally antagonized one with the idea of purposefully getting arrested. He'd punched quite a few cops; kicked a couple; and even taken a shot at one, once – although that guy had been his friend and the bullet hadn't come within a half mile of him – but never actually *tried* to get arrested. He decided that he knew nothing about politics. Which was ironic in a way because, every hour of every day, he was immersed in politics, on a grand scale.

She suddenly roused herself from her reverie and got back on her high horse. "But, if

there's a riot ... ! If things get smashed; if police officers get broken noses; if somebody (and I'm not saying who) overturns a car, opens up the gas tank, uses a siphon hose to spill the fuel, and lights the car on fire; if respectable ladies are thrown into paddy wagons and hauled off, well, that goes to page one – with photographs! And you, you idiot! Don't you get it? I was one of the first ones they arrested! I was going to get my picture on page one of the New York Times! Me! Mena Edwards, face pressed against the bars on the paddy wagon door, raising my fist, shouting 'Give me the Vote or give me Death!' And when they realize it's the Eastman Girl doing that – the Eastman Girl! The *actual* picture of respectability! – what do you think that will do for the movement? And, what do you think it will do for my career? I'll be getting calls from every Suffrage chapter in America to come and speak – for money!" She took one more swipe at his chest. "And you, you brute, you ruined it!"

And, there it was. Follow the money, every time. Even surer than *cherchez-ing la femme*. Devon shook his head, defeated on all fronts. Pretty Mena Edwards as The Eastman Girl, up on a billboard or in a magazine, may be the actual picture of respectability, but he knew the wild, Bohemian, sometimes-nude model who posed for The Eastman Girl, too well. She was delightful; she was smart; she was charming; she was quick; but church-lady moral? No. She liked her fun far too much for that, and her background would be sure to come out. He had always glibly said he didn't understand women. Now, he was beginning to understand just how much he didn't understand women. And, how much he would never understand them. It was like they were a whole different sex.

"I'm so sorry," he said, contritely. "I wasn't thinking. Shall I carry you back out there and find a cop for you to punch? I can lend you my brass knuckles. You knock 'em down and I'll

stomp on 'em."

"Too late," she moaned.

He surveyed the street and realized that she was quite right. The riot had passed as quickly as it had come. The drums and horns had gone home. The banners, for the most part, were furled and stored. The un-arrested Suffragettes were probably on their way to tea, celebrating their victory. The car was still on its side, but the fire was out. Apart from broken placards and a few bricks, the street was remarkably empty for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue; even the residents of the street were staying home, rather than risk more violence. The paddy wagons had carried their loads of white-clad women back to the precincts to suffer fame, fortune and incarceration. Devon wondered how many had managed to get themselves arrested and photographed for the newspapers.

"I'm sorry, Mena. I'll make it up to you, I promise: I'll get you arrested and hauled away in a paddy wagon for something, you know, to make amends."

She looked up and smiled. "Aw, that's so sweet." Rising, she gave him a quick kiss. "But it'll have to wait for next time. It was just so perfect, this time! I was right at the front and got arrested first. How am I going to make sure I get arrested first?" She saw Devon massaging the bite marks on the palm of his hand. "Oh, Jack, did I hurt you? I'm sorry." She took his hand and looked at it. "Oh, that's terrible. Momma kiss it better." And she did – and it did feel better.

He cleared his throat. "I have to tell you, Miss Edwards, in case you planned to carry on the 'Momma' bit, I have no familial feelings toward you, at all." In fact, even when he had been carrying her to safety, the few times he'd been forced to re-arrange her weight by grabbing her derriere had brought back memories of a delightful afternoon's photography where he'd skillfully

gained information for his investigation while she had skillfully lost clothes. Unfortunately, he had no photographic record of that day. Much as he regretted it, through some odd circumstance, all the shots he'd taken had somehow been exposed to daylight before they were developed. It was strange how that happened.

He still had his memories, though. It was clear that she had her memories, too.

Mena looked up, her eyes bright with mischief. He backed up a couple of steps, but she closed the gap, moved very close to him, body pressed tightly, and presented her face within kissing distance. "No familial feelings, at all, huh? Are you having any *familiar* feelings toward me, Jackie?" And Devon suddenly was. And her face became an exercise in mock surprise. "Oh! Yes, you are!" With an impish grin.

"Let's go somewhere and talk about it," he said, as casually as he could. "Does that sound all right?"

She smiled brightly. "Okay, Jack!" And then, before he could follow, she stepped out into the street, raised one hand, put two fingers of the other hand into her mouth and whistled as piercing a note as any of the dock hands down on Pier 42 could manage. She followed that with a shout of "Taxi!" that brought the first passing cab to a tire-squealing halt. Before the cab stopped, she had opened the back door.

"Jackie! Hurry up!"

Devon, looking at her in the middle of the street, hand raised, hauling down the cab, thought that sort of thing might get women the vote faster than riots and front page photos. If only there were a photographer around to snap that pic, it'd cause another riot, he thought.

Unfortunately, the photogs had all gone home.

She was already in the cab when Devon caught up to her. He looked at her in semi-darkness of the back seat and was about to ask the cabby to recommend a restaurant, somewhere cozy, perhaps, when she leaned over the seat to tell the driver "West 86<sup>th</sup> and Broadway". Then she sat back and smiled at Devon, reached out to take his hand. "Still at the same old place. Do you remember it?"

"Sure. Hotel Bretton Hall. Apartment 804."

"Well, I made an impression on you, didn't I? Or was it Marie who made the impression?"

He had learned better than to fall into that trap more than a decade ago. With one elbow on the back of the seat, hand propping up his head, he looked deeply and openly into her eyes and said "Marie who?"

She smiled a slow smile. "You could have had her for the asking that night, you know."

It was his turn for the slow smile and a shake of his head. "A gentleman does not. The lady was not herself." His one meeting with Marie had been very useful, despite the girl being hopelessly drunk at the time – the book he stole from her had led to arrests, trials, convictions – even expulsions. "Does Marie still room with you?"

"Ah, Marie! Silly girl decided to go to California to – what's that place? – Hollywood! – to be in movies. Like she couldn't be in movies in New York. What's so special about Hollywood?"

"Well, she was certainly pretty enough. She might make good."

A moment, then she said: "So, no. Marie does not live with me anymore. I have a lonely, dark apartment, these days."

Mena suddenly shrank back into the corner of the cab with a shyness that was quite unlike her. "What about me, Jack? Am I pretty enough?"

"Mena, my love, you've got something that Marie will never have."

She smiled at that. "What? What have I got?"

Devon struggled. "I don't know what it is. I don't know what to call it. But whatever it is, you've got it. Maybe that's it: you've got 'it', sweetheart."

There was another pause, and then she said, very quietly, "You could have had me for the asking, too, you know."

Her arm was also on the seat back and he stretched his fingers out to touch hers. "Like I said, a gentleman does not. In that instance, it was not the lady, but the gentleman who was not himself."

She still hung back in the corner. "And what about you, Jack? What have you got?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Marie's got looks. I've got 'it', whatever 'it' is. What have you got?"

He held his palm up toward her. "A bruised hand, at the moment."

She shook his arm impatiently. "Stop that! Last time, you didn't stay because ..."

And the twig snapped. "Because I had a wife – sort of."

She nodded slowly. "And, do you still have a wife – sort of?"

It surprised Devon how hard it was for him to say it. It was months ago. Much ... much! ... had happened since. He should be able to say it.

At last, it came out, clipped and flat, and he couldn't look at her while the words sounded.

"She's dead."

The silence stretched out for a block before Mena could whisper “Oh, Jack!” and slide her arms around him to bury her face in his chest.

When she lifted her face and kissed him, he realized that her cheeks were wet with tears – and, after a few moments, he realized that not all the tears were hers.

It was funny. He’d not shed one tear when his father died. Not one when his mother died. He tried to think of others he had lost: young Francesca, even younger Frona. No tears for Francesca – he’d been far too busy. Tears for Frona, but he had been out of his mind at the time. None since he came back to the world.

Eva – all those nights alone he’d had so far this fall; all that time that he’d had to sit, or lie, and stare into darkness – all the chances he’d had to drink himself to the bottom of a bottle and try to climb back out of it – not one tear had fallen; not even a hint of one tear falling had happened ... until he was in the arms of another woman. He didn’t know what that showed: whether he cared more or less. He’d think about that later.

It wasn’t a long ride to West 86<sup>th</sup> and Broadway, and they reluctantly broke apart when cab pulled up to the Hotel Bretton Hall. They each wiped their cheeks and smiled shyly to one another. What the cabbie must have thought of their silent, blocks long embrace in the back seat, well, Devon decided he didn’t give a damn, and if the man had so much as snickered, he’d have beaten him senseless. But, surprisingly, the hack was a pro, who’d seen it all before – seen it without commenting on it. Seen it without seeing it. Devon just paid the man and turned to Mena as she waited at the curb.

Without a word, she reached a hand out to him and led him inside. She didn’t even bother trying to hide Devon from the night clerk as they crossed the lobby, just tugged him by the hand

to the elevator. The clerk watched them go and went back to his newspaper. The elevator arrived and they stepped in. Eight silent floors later, they stepped into the hallway and on into apartment eight-oh-four.

She was suddenly shy again when they closed the door. "Take off your coat, Jack," she said, and he did as she did the same. She hung them side by side in the closet. Her white Suffragette 'uniform' was far more conservative than the kind of short, flouncy wardrobe Mena usually wore, but, when she removed the blue sash, and looked at him again, for some reason he thought of it as wedding white.

Devon couldn't explain the sudden shyness that normally saucy Mena was displaying. Could she be frightened? Of him? Of herself?

For that matter, could he be frightened because, at that moment, he was more nervous than he'd been when he was carrying a one-ounce vial of nitro-glycerin across the tram tracks of New York.

"Do you want a drink?" she asked at length.

"No." He started to explain that he was trying to stay on the wagon until he finished his current job but decided it didn't matter. Yes, he wanted a drink but, no, he wasn't going to let himself have one!

"Do you want something to eat?"

He was actually extremely hungry. "No."

Five seconds passed and she said "Excuse me for a minute" and went into the bathroom. There were noises from inside.

Devon loosened his tie, rubbed at the bruises she'd left on his hand, stood at the fireplace,

looking down and thinking of nothing in particular. It was pleasant to stand for a few moments and allow himself that luxury. Except ...

... at the back of his mind, he knew that he had to go talk to Janus. He forced himself to admit that lives were more important than his anger, which was an odd paradox because Janus had certainly demonstrated the depths of his care for life when he sent his daughter into a war zone to be torpedoed and sunk along with twelve hundred others. Okay, stop there. That wasn't going to help.

The Lusitania had gone down from a single torpedo from a single German submarine. It was like the thing was lying in wait for them – would know exactly where they were going to be. How could that happen? Unless they were forewarned of where and when the ships would arrive; not necessarily the exact moment, but within a few miles and a few hours. Was that possible? Was there some way of sending a message that could reach the far side of the Atlantic?

Well, he knew of one: wireless radio. But radio only worked by line-of-sight. The curve of the earth would stop it. Macaroni or whatever the guy's name was had used high masts on either side.

Well, if he could, why couldn't the Germans? He'd have to do some thinking about that. A trip to the library seemed to be in order. If he could figure out ...

Behind him, the bathroom door opened and, in the mirror over the mantel, he saw Mena come out of the room. When he turned, she was standing in the hallway, dressed as she had been at the end of their photo session, and no longer shy. In fact, with her model's instinct, she posed where the light best picked out her features.

He walked over to her, placed his hands on either side of her face and kissed her, while

she put her hands on his forearms and stood on tiptoe to be kissed. When he finished, she slid her hands to his face.

“Do you want to try taking some more pictures?” she said with her old mischievous smile. “I’ve got a box Kodak, somewhere. It was a gift from the Eastman Girl work. Let’s make use of it.”

He put his right arm around her shoulders and stooped to put his left behind her knees. He straightened, lifting her.

“To hell with the pictures,” and walked toward the bedroom he’d *not* been in the night he was here last.

Mena reached out to turn off the hall light as they passed.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

**October 23, 1915**

He had an hour to get to the docks for his shift and he had been waiting half an hour for Janus to show up. In five minutes, Janus could shove it.

That afternoon had been a glorious four hours with Mena, a glorious four hours that went by in a flash, and he realized that, too soon, he would have to leave. They'd just finished a third bout of what her ex-roommate liked to call 'tangletoes' and were just beginning to be aware of the world, again. She lay panting on top of him, then slowly rolled off onto her back, still panting. He reached out to her and they lay with twined fingers for a while, panting almost in unison.

When he'd caught his breath, he turned to look at her. What he saw was something he thought he'd be content to see for a long time: someone smart, adventuresome, funny, creative,

did he mention adventuresome?, and pleasing to look at.

“Do you want to go to Canada?” he asked.

She wiped her sweating face with the edge of the sheet. Her hair, longer than it had been, but still much shorter than most, was plastered to her face. “Do I what?”

“Do you want to go to Canada?”

“Sorry, say that again.”

“Do you want to go to Canada?”

“Canada?”

He was still looking straight at her. “Canada. You know, big place, north of here. Has polar bears.”

“I know Canada. Why?”

“I’m thinking of going there.”

“And you want me to come with you?” She, at least, wasn’t laughing.

“I do.” That sounded final.

She turned to face him. “For how long?”

“I don’t know. Forever.”

She stroked his face and smiled at him. “Oh, Jack. Pack up and go to another country? Are you serious?”

He shrugged as best you can while lying on your side. “I think so. Maybe.” The thought hadn’t crossed his mind until thirty seconds before.

“What would you do in Canada?”

“Sit at the side of the harbor, feed pigeons, and count boats. There’s a shortage of people

to do that in Canada.”

She looked hard at him but still couldn’t tell whether he was serious or not. “Count boats?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“And what would I be doing while you counted boats?”

He smiled. “Sitting at home, pining for me, and waiting eagerly for my return.” Surely that was an exciting enough life to lead, wasn’t it?

“With potatoes boiling on the stove, diapers hanging on the line, and fourteen babies bawling in the nursery?”

“Maybe not fourteen.”

“Yeah. Don’t think so, Jack.” She put her legs over the side of the bed and rose, stripping the sheet and wrapping herself with it.

“Why not? Think of the fun we’d have.” The last time he’d counted boats for a living it hadn’t been fun so much as ... slow death. Still, with Mena to share it ...

“I’ve got other things to do, Jack. It’s not like I’m just sitting here waiting for you to come along, you know. I just signed a contract with the United States Lines as the new Waving Girl – for nearly as much as that non-existent Lily Cream soap contract you got me to take my clothes off for, last winter.”

“I got you to take your clothes off?” That wasn’t the way he remembered it, but there was no longer a photographic record of the event.

She ignored him. “And, all I have to do for this one is stand with a fan blowing on me, with all my clothes on, and wave. That sounds better than nursing fourteen babies and waiting for

you to come home.” She was at the bathroom and turned to strike a pose and wave before closing the door. She didn’t have her clothes on, though, just a sheet.

He lay on his back and stared at the ceiling. He knew he had to get up, to do things, to make a difference, but he didn’t want to. Getting up meant making decisions and he didn’t want to do that. It was much easier to keep on doing this, which was to say, exactly nothing. He closed his eyes and nearly fell asleep, only to be roused by her climbing on top and straddling him, once again.

“Now, what –” she said, moving slowly “– could we do in Canada that we can’t do here?”

“Not a thing. Not a damn thing.” He was surprising himself – four in one afternoon! And she smiled with a far away look on her face. “It’s just that there’s things I have to do here that I won’t have to do up there,” he said. “Things that I really don’t want to do.” She opened her eyes and looked down at him and he said, probably to himself, “And not as many people that I’ll have to kill.” That put her off her stride, but only for a few moments.

So, it was four and a half hours with Mena. Then a quick cab across town and uptown, then sitting in the Holy of Holies, waiting.

Janus came out of the elevator onto the seventh floor with a scowl that would send a bear back to its den. He stopped and directed the scowl at Devon, then growled his way to his office. In fact, Devon had once seen a grizzly come out of its winter den and it looked just like that.

Once the door was open and the light was on, Devon followed at a leisurely pace. If Janus could keep him waiting, the compliment could be vice-versa. Or the insult could be vice-versa, whichever was correct.

Most of the downstairs staff had gone for the night, although the seventh floor was still a

busy place. Mrs. Coulter, Janus's ever-present vanguard, had sat, stone-faced, in her chair until Janus arrived, then abruptly got up and left without a word to either of them. There was a new elevator boy and Devon wondered where Otis had gone. He'd liked that boy. So had Eva, so Janus had probably fired him as soon as she had ... gone. Poor Otis.

He reached the door marked Number 14 and stopped. The office, unlike several of the offices on the 'sacred' seventh floor, was dark. He reached a hand toward the knob, but stopped himself. He'd leave that mystery unsolved. It wasn't a big mystery, just a painful one: she wasn't in there.

"Devon!" Janus's voice rattled the glass and, having accomplished his mission of annoying the boss, Devon strolled into the inner sanctum, the office of the Janus Agency's director.

As usual, Janus occupied his big desk in the center, under the picture window. Not as usual, for the first time, there was a comfortable chair placed in front of the desk, evidently for extra special visitors. Like Devon. That was sarcasm, of course, as Devon usually got a straight-backed wooden chair and, occasionally, a bucket of cold water over him.

"Sit." There always had to be a prefatory period of monosyllables.

Devon sat and made himself comfortable in the big comfy chair. It really was a nice one, with wide wings and overstuffed arms.

"Where the hell have you been?" Well, the monosyllables were over early, this time. The scowl hadn't changed.

"About ten blocks away, for the most part. Cross town, once in a while. Hanging out with German spies on several occasions. Planting bombs a dozen or so times. Abetting a riot and

assaulting police just this afternoon.”

“Start with the riot. We’ll get to the bombs and the spies later.” The man’s scowl lifted to Devon’s face.

So, starting with the suffragettes, he told the story of the last four weeks. In detail.

Leaving out only the particulars of the preceding afternoon from the rescue of Mena Edwards on.

“Wait a minute! This ... Wiseman ... Wisdom, whatever his name is. There’s English agents working in New York? You’re sure about this?”

Devon shook his head. How could a man in Janus’s position be so naive? “Did you think there wouldn’t be? It’s obvious, isn’t it? America is neutral; much as you want to, you can’t chase German agents to ground and deal with them the way you’d like to. At most, you can try them and deport them. So, Wilson makes a deal with Wiseman, who hunts them down – and deals with them. Everybody’s happy all around – except the Germans. Shall I go on?”

Two minutes later, Janus held up his hand, again. “So, how many cops have you beaten up, in total?”

“This year? Counting the riot today, an even half-dozen, I’d say.” Devon stopped to reflect. “Yeah, that’s about right.”

Janus growled his own peculiar growl, ran his hands over his face and pushed his hair back. “Why do I keep using you? The law isn’t even a suggestion to you, is it? It’s something somebody wrote down to pass the time; something for others to worry about. You think it’s a free-for-all out there!”

Devon leaned back and wished he smoked: now would have been a good time to light up. “From where I am, it is. Do you want the whole job done or do you want someone who’ll give

you a neatly typed report? You'll need someone else for that 'cause I can't type."

"Yeah, we know that. I still want to bill you for the damage, but Eva ..." The man stopped for a second. "... Eva wouldn't let me."

"Damn right – unlawful confinement deserves to be punished." They'd ticked him off, locking him in, so he'd done as much damage to the place as he could while he broke out.

"Getting back to your job: it's not to go on one man vendettas against people you don't like. It's to tell me what's going on at the docks." Janus had a point, there.

"Okay, the docks. There are at least seven men connected with the Hamburg-Amerika Line who are also connected with placing bombs in or on vessels leaving New York harbor. Well, bombs and incendiaries. I don't know where the devices are made but it has to be close because the incendiaries have constantly active detonators: as soon as they are built, they're counting down. They're going to go up, wherever they are, more or less at the time that's built into them."

Janus swivelled his chair half-way around and back. "But you're stopping them? You're informing the captains."

Devon shook his head vehemently and wished he could swivel his chair, too. "No! I've caught a handful, maybe twenty ships, the ones I'm involved with – that's it. How many others are going out? There's only one way to stop them for good."

"Find out who's making the things and where and – dealing with them."

Devon applauded. "Now, you've got it!" He finished clapping and leaned forward. "And, that's why I told Wiseman and not you."

Devon started to rise and Janus stopped him. "Wait! Hanging out with spies? I take it

that's not just the men on the docks."

"Oh, yeah." He sat back down, again. "Remember Number 123 West 15<sup>th</sup>?"

Janus squinted while he thought. "Whore house being run by the German Embassy. Lady friend of yours running it."

"Sort of. Now add the *Deutscher Verein* at 112 West 59<sup>th</sup> to the list. Same idea, fewer explosives – I think. I haven't been able to inspect the basement or the attic there. More sea officers, merchant and naval, than at number 123. I'm fairly sure blackmail is the purpose here. But you'd have to get people who can be blackmailed, first. Most can't." He thought for a moment. "And the girls aren't as nice, either."

That wasn't quite true. Sophie was a sweet girl, emphasis on girl, and little Vera was a nice bundle, but her super-modern fashions scared Devon. He was, basically, an old-fashioned boy – who carried five illegal weapons. That kind of old-fashioned.

"How's the liquor?" asked Janus, in a question that would have been a joke – except Janus never joked.

"Never tried it," Devon replied. "I'm on the wagon until this is over." He stared at Janus for a few seconds. "I'm done." And, he rose and walked to the door.

"Wait," ordered Janus, and Devon heard a drawer open, turned quickly to see Janus holding a pistol. Devon didn't reach for his own – it would have been too late.

Janus held up the gray-black piece. "Know what this is?" Devon shook his head. "It's a Smith & Wesson Model 1913, .35 caliber." Janus placed it on the desk. "Have a look at it."

Devon picked it up. It was awkwardly small, reasonably well balanced, fairly light. It also had an awkward looking design, with a large, very square, sharp shouldered thumb shelf above a

pretty square grip. The thumb shelf might help balance it, but still, it was ... awkward.

Janus produced a filled magazine and placed it down on the desk, so Devon loaded it.

Seven shot, same as his Dreyse '07.

“What kind of cartridge is that?” It was neither a .32 nor a .38. What the hell was a .35?

“Proprietary Smith & Wesson. American made, front to back.” Janus seemed proud of that. “We’re making it our standard weapon. All agents will be issued with one. It’ll get rid of the hodge-podge you people are using now.”

“Proprietary ammunition, huh? Meaning it’s hard to find. Mine uses standard .32 caliber APC – even .32 Luger loads at a pinch.” Devon worked the slide, putting a bullet in the chamber. Even for someone as strong as he was, the slide was hard to work. “Racks like a bitch, doesn’t it?” he said, then put four rounds into the center of the wooden carving mounted on the side wall of the office. Before the last shell had hit the carpet, he’d dropped the Smith & Wesson and had his .32 caliber Dreyse in his hand. Four shots later, the carving was in shattered pieces on the floor.

“That .35 cartridge seems a little underpowered, doesn’t it?” He put away the Dreyse and dropped the magazine from the S&W, racked it empty “The thumb shelf will cut your hand eventually and, one day, you’ll try to rack it in a hurry and miss – but you can bet the guy you want to shoot at won’t miss.” He slid the mag, the pistol and the bullet back to Janus. “You keep it for me. If I ever need to tickle somebody, I’ll ask for it back. Goodbye.” And he walked away.

“Devon!” He took his time turning back – there was only one topic they hadn’t discussed.

“Aren’t you going to ask?”

Devon shook his head, slowly. “You’ll tell me when you decide to.” He waited three

seconds, then reached for the door.

“She wasn’t delivering papers.”

“Of course not. And she wasn’t on the Lusitania, either. I checked the passenger manifest.

Why the hell lie about it?”

“She was onboard. She just wasn’t on the passenger list.” How did that work?

Devon closed the door softly and walked back to his chair, standing with his hands on the back of it, pressing hard. “What the fuck does that mean? Was she a stowaway?”

Janus put his elbows on the table and lowered his head between his hands, talking down to the desk. “Eva was absolutely on the Lusitania, but she wasn’t there as a stowaway or anything. We knew she was there. The captain knew she was there. The British government knew she was there because she was there at the request, and expense, of the British government. She was under an assumed name.”

“What the hell?”

“She was assigned to surveil a man named Séan O’Connell. You ever hear of him?”

Devon shook his head. “Not surprised. He’s a very low-profile but middling dangerous kind of fellow. He was one von Papen was paying to cause trouble. He was here to rouse Irish resentment against England in America – hard to say how successful he was, but he was going back across the Atlantic to help raise Ireland in rebellion against the English. Just might do it, too, ’cause he didn’t go down on the Lusitania.”

“Our friend von Papen gets around, doesn’t he? What do you mean, she was assigned to surveil him? She was following him? To Britain?”

Janus rubbed his head again, then smoothed his hair back. He straightened up and sat

back in his chair, gripping the arms. It was his own daughter's death he was talking about but Devon had never seen him so agitated.

"The British Embassy contacted us to find an American woman to infiltrate O'Connell's organization over here, because there'd be no suspicion of her if she was American. Eva found a girl, but she backed out at the last minute. Eva wasn't following him." It took Janus a while to say the next sentence. "She was sharing a cabin with him." Devon took a few seconds to take that in, while Janus continued to talk. "... but she was on board under her false name – the British had arranged it with their Customs people."

There was no word for what Devon was feeling just then. The magnitude of what Janus had just said was like a gut-punch. He sagged against the chair-back and held himself up by sheer willpower.

It took ten breaths before he could trust his feet under him and turn toward the door again.

"It was her choice, Devon!" Janus shouted. "Her choice!"

Devon turned again. "And it was your choice to send her, you cold-hearted son of a bitch!  
Your choice!"

Janus lowered his right hand toward his ubiquitous right hand drawer. Devon's hand went behind his back, to his belt. The drawer came open – the Dreyse came out – and Janus lifted a bottle of whiskey to the desk, followed by two glasses. Devon simply gaped.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me!"

Janus poured two shots and slid one across the desk. He lifted his. "I know you're not drinking, right now, but – to her." Devon didn't move, nor did he lower the Dreyse. "Please."

It was as much shock at Janus saying please as shock at the offer of a drink. For the third

time, Devon crossed the floor, lifted the glass and knocked it back. Janus drank his a little slower. Devon slammed the glass down, hoping it would shatter, but it didn't.

On the way out, he said "Go fuck yourself" and slammed the door behind. The glass rattled but didn't shatter. Shit.

In the hall, heads had appeared in every lighted office on the seventh floor, trying to determine why and from where the shots and the shouting had come. And the slamming.

As Devon stepped into the elevator, he turned to them and said, "Rats."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

**October 24, 1915**

“What are you doing down there?”

The three men in the boat looked at each other and Devon shouted back up. “I’m takin’ a piss! What are you doin’ up there?”

A circle of light spread on the water behind him, searching back and forth, but the two conspirators and the one confidential operative knew they were tucked too far under the ship’s stern to be found that way. The rowboat had bumped against the rudder because of an unexpected wave.

“Come out where I can see you!” The accent might have been Swedish – or French – or maybe Cornwall. Devon couldn’t decide. The man in the bow removed the last clamp on the rudder bomb they’d been installing and the whole device slid, carefully, back into the bow of

Devon's little craft, ready for next time.

“Sure, sure! Give me a minute to tuck it away – takes time, you know. That's why the wife fainted on our wedding night.”

Devon gestured to the two Germans, crouched down in the rowboat's bow and stern, and they each pulled a black canvas cover over themselves. Devon pushed off from the ship's rudder and backed oars from under the ship's stern.

“Who are you?” the voice from above challenged. Devon made a deliberately bad turn with the oars, crabbing one as he swung around to look up. The flashlight beam hit him full in the face and made him flinch from its brightness.

“Just a guy who had a couple too many and decided your ship needed christening. God bless her and all who piss on her!”

By now, he heard several sets of footsteps on the ship's steel deck; he was attracting a crowd. This was the biggest ship they'd clamped a device on and it was long way up to her fantail. Devon trusted they wouldn't be able to see down very far, and he began to row away from the ship.

“Clear away from this vessel!”

“That's just what I'm doing, pal!” He continued to pull.

A second voice from above joined the conversation. “Belay that! You in the boat! Come around to the entry-way on our port-side. Do it now.” That was probably the captain, or at least, the mate.

Instead, Devon began to sing a song he hadn't understood when he first heard it seventeen years before in the Yukon, but which he had since come to realize was a true masterpiece with

many nuanced levels of interpretation. While he was doing that, he was pulling away from the ship as quickly as he could.

‘When a man grows old, and his balls grow cold,  
And the tip of his ...’

A rifle cracked from the deck of the ship above him and a spout of water jumped just a foot from the end of his starboard oar. He jerked to port and redoubled his efforts.

‘When it bends in the middle like a one string fiddle,  
He can tell you a tale or two.’

Another shot, but he had no idea where that one went. From beneath the bow canvas, he heard a muffled “*Scheisse!*” and the other man poked his head out from under the stern canvas. Devon swung a foot at him.

“Just stay down!” Devon whispered. “No need for us all to get perforated.”

But there were no more shots nor any sign of pursuit. Five minutes later, the two Germans crawled out from under their canvas and Devon pulled round the southern tip of Manhattan, left Battery Park behind and proceeded west and north. Another twenty minutes and they were pulling into the boat-house on the private pier.

With great care, they off-loaded the unused bomb. Devon had discovered their mechanism through artful display of casual curiosity: two waterproof boxes with forty pounds of TNT each, four sticks of dynamite to set off the TNT and a clockwork mechanism actuated by rudder movement that fired two bullets into the dynamite sticks to set them off. It was the first time they’d returned with one still in the boat.

“You did a good job back there,” said the bow man, who seemed to have slightly more

authority than the stern man. "Pretending to be drunk was a good idea."

"What makes you think I was pretending?" Devon laughed at his own joke and the other two laughed with him.

The second man said "What was the song you sang? I do not know it."

"Really!" Devon was astonished. "It's the national anthem of Canada. It's called The Ballad of Yukon Nell, and they sing it at every igloo christening."

The man just shook his head and walked away.

"Wait a minute!" Devon called. "What do we do with the – the thing? We can't just leave it!"

"Not our job. Not your job. Go back to the dock, now." And the Germans walked off into the dark.

Well, hell. What was he supposed to do now? Leave a bomb behind him that would blow up a dozen buildings if it went off? Go tell the police and have them raid the place? That would destroy everything he'd been working toward since September. Try to disarm it, when he knew nothing about it, other than what he'd figured out by handling several and asking dumb questions? The second of those choices would result in things blowing up figuratively, and the first and third, things would blow up literally. Including him, in all likelihood.

Or go get Mena and head for Canada, after all? There were almost certainly some boats that needed counting up there.

He gingerly lifted the contraption from the boat and carried it along the dock. The rocker arm clicked twice while he did, and he realized he'd better not do that too often. He steadied the arm and placed the device on the dock.

If he could get the cover off the detonator box, maybe he could disarm it. It was solidly built and screwed down tightly. For once, the tools he carried were of no help; he was trying to break into something, rightly enough, but it had no lock to be picked. He could shoot it off, but that would be worse than doing nothing. Drown it? He was pretty sure it was waterproof and, besides, bullets, dynamite and TNT still go off underwater.

He was so involved that he failed to notice the footsteps on the dock until the boat-house door opened. By then, it was too late. His options were to face it down or to jump in the water and swim. It was too damn cold to swim.

“It’s about damn time you got here! I thought I was going to have to disarm this myself! And, I doubt that would have gone well.” He carried the bomb, all three massive parts of it, up to the first man in line and dropped it into his arms.

“‘Was red’st du da?’” Okay, that ruled out New York police. Was every German sailor stranded in New York part of this?

“‘Dies’s verdammt’ Ding?’” He slapped a hand on the bomb, making the three new arrivals jump as one – interesting that they all knew what it was. “‘Soll ich dafür zuständig sein?’” He certainly didn’t want to be responsible for it, but he wondered whether they thought he was.

“‘Nein, nein!’” was the answer.

“‘So, wer ist dafür verantwortlich?’” If he’s not in charge, who is? Just keep firing question at them and they’ll never catch up. He hoped.

The one at the back of the trio pushed his way forward. “‘Ich bin. Wer bist du?’”

Devon drew himself up. “‘Ich bin der Idiot der damit zurückgelassen wurde!’”

That broke the ice. The others were quite happy to let him classify himself as an idiot.

The idiot left in charge of the bomb.

*“Warum ist das nicht auf dem englischen Schiff?”*

That was a good moment to shift to shift this conversation to English. “It’s not attached to the *Englischen Schiff* because the *Englischen Schiff* saw us and challenged us and *shot at us!* I’m surprised there aren’t harbor boats out scouring the weeds already.” There might be, come to think of it. He really didn’t know.

The third man took a bolt from his pocket and put it through a hole in the rocker arm on the trigger and hand-tightened a nut on the other side. “It is safe now. Why wasn’t I told?”

“I don’t know. I thought I should do something with that before it blows up half the dockyard. Should I complain to the Doctor?” Devon affected an air of innocent hurt. It looked good on him, he thought. He still didn’t know who the Doctor was but, obviously, these men did.

*“Nein! No. We take it across the harbor to the schiff.”*

“That’s good. Let’s go.” He started to climb into the row boat.

*“Idiot! Willst du nach New Jersey rudern? We take the motor launch.”* Ah! Well, that’s better than rowing *nach New Jersey*.

The third man led the small group out of the boat house, the second and third man nursing the bomb with care, carefully locking the boat house up behind him and stepping across to the boat house at the next dock.

Inside, revealed by electric light, was a beautiful mahogany motor launch – a thirty-footer perhaps, maybe thirty-two, a six-cylinder engine and generous room under the fore-deck for storage of any number of bombs. They handed down the bomb they had while the first man started up the engine, which burbled and purred beautifully.

“You see? Better? Yes, better.” And, it certainly was.

The four fit more than comfortably into the launch which, under the guidance of the third man, was soon on its way to New Jersey.

“So, idiot!” he called, over the roar of the engine. “Which ship over there is, you think, the one we go to?”

“I really don’t know. Which one?”

The man was enjoying his little bit of power. “Come, you guess. Which one makes sense?”

Devon looked over the row of ships they were approaching. All, he noticed, were German flagged. He picked at random.

“To stay unsuspected, I’d say the small one at the end.” He pointed.

“*Die Neptun! Er denkt, der Kleine ist der Eine!*” Devon reflected that ‘He thinks the little one is the one’ rhymes in German, while the three squareheads had a laugh at his expense.

“*Es ist das da!*”

And, the German’s finger pointed to a massive ship in the middle of the row.

“*Die Friederich Der Grosser!*” The German thumped his chest. “*Mein Schiff!*”

Devon looked over the freighter. “Yep, yours is the biggest, all right.”

They nosed in slowly and tied up to the ship’s entry port. The third man motioned Devon to follow the second and third – and the bomb – up the ladder. The last time Devon had climbed onto a boat with Germans, there had been a lot of blowing up and it hadn’t gone well for any of them. This one was much larger, and there would be far more Germans. On the other hand, he was fairly certain there were far more explosives on board, so it evened out.

The deck was dark, of course, but light came from the aft superstructure, along with the noise of hammers and drilling equipment. I wonder what's happening there, Devon thought, then looked at the bomb the two men were carrying. He knew what was happening there. They were manufacturing them wholesale.

The third man and the watch officer had a conversation and the four of them were conducted aft and down two levels to the stern cabins. Each compartment was alive with light and noise and at least two or three sailors in each, hard at work making ... something.

How many German ships were stuck in harbor? Sixty? Seventy? And every sailor and every officer who crewed those ships, even though they were merchant sailors employed by private companies, were officially part of the *Kaiserliche Marine*, as much Imperial Navy as someone serving on a battleship. What orders were they under?

They stopped at last and the deck officer knocked on a bulkhead.

“*Herein!*” came from within and the deck officer indicated they should enter.

It was the Doctor – the same guy Devon had met at the *Deutscher Verein*, seated beside a table at the end of the cabin, in all his steel-rimmed glasses, center-parted hair glory. There were two others in the compartment, a man standing on the other side of the table and a woman sitting in the farthest, unlit corner of the compartment.

The two carrying the bomb marched to the table and laid the device on it. The Doctor looked bleakly at the bomb, then at the four arrivals.

“*War'm hast du mir das g'bracht?*”

The third man spoke up. “*Dieser Mann ...*” he said, pointing at Devon. “... *hat es nicht am Englischer Schiff b'festigt.*”

Attention shifted to Devon, now. “*Ist das richtig?*”

Devon shrugged. “Well, we tried. When we started getting shot at, we thought it best to leave. We thought perhaps it wouldn’t be wise for this thing to get in the way of any stray bullets. Were we wrong?”

The Doctor squinted at Devon through his circular bottle ends. “Oh, you are Sam. Vera’s ‘Uncle Sam’. I remember you.”

“Well, I remember you, too.” Devon smiled and the Doctor smiled back. Neither of them saw any warmth in the other’s smile.

The other man bent over the device and unscrewed the top of the trigger section. Once it was open, he peered into its depths, grunted.

The Doctor said “*Es ist gut?*”

“*Ja, ja. Alles ’st in ordern.*” The man reached in and carefully made a couple of adjustments, holding back one part while winding another, then put the top back on the box, making sure the toggle arm was still secured.

“*Du, du, und du!*” the Doctor ordered. “*Bring das in den Laden und geh zurück zur Arbeit.*” The three snapped to attention, the two picked up the bomb, and they all marched out of the cabin, presumably to do just what the Doctor ordered: take the bomb back to storage and go back to work.

That left Devon, the Doctor, the bomb expert and the woman. The Doctor cleaned his glasses and put them back on.

“Why did you stay behind with the bomb?”

“Because, if it had gone off, it would have killed a lot of people – and that wouldn’t look

good for Germany, or for the Kaiser, now, would it? I thought that seemed like a good enough reason."

The Doctor smiled and nodded. "It was a good enough reason. Little Vera was right about you: she said you are smart. What was the name again?"

"Steickternott. Sam Steickternott. Little Vera is a great judge of character, among her other special skills. What was your name again, *Herr Doktor*?"

"You may call me Doctor." He smiled again, with all the warmth of a snowman's smile.

"All right. What's next, Doctor?"

"We determine what to do with you, Sam."

"What to do with me?" Talk like that made Devon uncomfortable. He'd prefer that no one did anything with him.

"We find a way to give you more to do. More responsibilities. You are too smart to be moving crates on a dock, Sam."

"Well, shucks." The odd thing is, he liked moving crates on a dock – in fact, he liked doing almost anything except what he seemed to be forced into doing, time after time. Things like figuring a way to shoot this goggle-wearing bastard and still get off the ship alive.

"I think we need to introduce you to the Captain."

Oh, fine. Doctors, Captains. Doesn't anybody have a name, anymore? Even a first name would do. Devon tried to keep his excitement under control. "I've met a lot of captains, in my time, Doktor. One more won't make any difference."

The Doktor and the bomb expert both smiled widely. "This one will," said the Doctor. "He is a great man. He will lead the Kaiser's forces in North America to victory!"

This was suddenly very interesting and, if the Captain was who he thought it was, the one thing Devon had better not do is meet him.

“I’m all eagerness to meet the Captain. The question is, will he be all eagerness to meet me? When can we do this?”

“We shall set up a time for that. The Captain is elsewhere at the moment.” Blowing something up?

“Maxie!” The woman in the far corner spoke up and the two Germans turned to her. “Do I need to be here? I’m tired and I’m bored.”

Devon knew the voice from somewhere, somewhen.

The bomb expert assured her that “We’re almost finished here, my dear Countess.”

Even better. Doctors, Captains, and Countesses. He’d known a countess, once.

The woman rose elegantly and glided forward. The light fell upon her face for the first time and Devon tried hard to keep his face straight. She held a hand out to him.

“Mr. ... Steickternott?” She smiled. “Shall I call you Sam?”

Devon bowed over her hand and said “Please do.”

Lalia Florence Jenkins was a survivor; somehow, she’d survived her way from being an out-of-work actress married to a conspirator husband, to running a ‘hospitality house’ downtown for German sailors, to being on board a bomb-building spy-ship. She’d been a Baroness last time he’d seen her. She’d come up in the world since: she was back to being a Countess, now.

“Since my friends are too boorish to introduce us, Sam, allow me.” She shook his hand, while saying “I am the Countess de Beckendorff, but you may call me Moura. This is *Herr Doktor Walter Scheele* of Hoboken, who makes these wonderful inventions you men have been

discussing.”

Doctor Scheele objected. “Moura! No need for names!”

“Oh, nonsense, Vally. Sammy is our friend. And this is my friend, Max Breitung, who provides the part that goes bang! Isn’t that right, Maxella?”

“That was not needed, Moura.” Maxella was not amused.

“Now, Maxie, do you need Sammy any more, or may I allow him to escort me off the ship?” She smiled sweetly while doing so. Devon wondered whether she was still addicted to absinthe.

The Doctor cleared his throat. “We must decide what we are going to do with ... *Herr Steickternott*. Some appropriate reward.”

“And, do you need him here for that? Surely, you can discuss it better without him here, isn’t that right, Maxella?” Maybe, although he’d like to know what ... reward was coming.

Breitung threw up his hands and the Countess slid her arm through Devon’s. “Come along, Sammy. You may put me in a cab.”

And, she smoothly led the way to the top deck, into the fresh air, and off the ship.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**October 24, 1915**

They reached the end of the pier before either said anything. Devon looked up and down Shore Road for any sign of transport. The street was quite cab-less.

“So, Lal. Do we walk?” he asked and she looked affronted.

“Countesses do not walk.” She stepped into the street, into the path of a passing produce truck, and raised her arm. The driver, understandably surprised, brought the truck to a gear-grinding, down-shifting, braking, sliding halt, all in equal proportions.

“Lady, what the hell do you think you’re doing? Are you nuts? I could have killed you!”

The guy was part angry and part scared. Devon didn’t blame him. He was pretty much the same, with maybe a little more to the scared side.

The woman hadn’t even flinched when the eight-ton truck bore down on her.

When the wheels stopped turning, five feet from her, she immediately climbed into the seat beside the driver and beckoned Devon to join them.

“I am the Countess de Beckendorff. This is my friend, Captain Herr Baron von Steickternott. You will take us at once to Washington Street, where we may acquire a taxi-cab. The Baron will compensate you appropriately.”

“I will?”

“*Natürlich.*”

Not for the first time, Devon had to admire her acting ability. For all the trucker knew, she really was a Russian countess. She sounded like one, whatever they sounded like. She certainly looked the part. That she spoke German, not Russian, was no impediment: he didn’t speak either. Devon leaned across.

“*Bitte. Es geht um Leben und Tod.*” He looked to Lal. “*Auf Englisch, Leben und Tod:* Life and ... ?”

“Life and death.” She looked to the driver. “It is of life and death, sir. Life and death.”

The man was baffled beyond words but he was an American and, like most Americans, he was awed by royalty and quite anxious to rub elbows with them, which is what he thought a countess must be – and the other guy was a baron! He wasn’t sure what a baron was, either, but it sounded impressive. Devon had always thought America’s obsession with royalty was guilt over that whole Boston Tea Party/1776 thing.

“Sure, why not? Okay, lady. I mean, countess.” He set the truck in motion and turned left off of Shore, heading further into town. “Is he really a Baron?”

“Of course. He is one of my oldest and dearest friends.” Devon’s opinion of himself went

up. "And I am a countess, which far outranks a mere baron." Devon's opinion of himself dropped.

The driver was a chatterer. "You know, I knew a guy once who said he was the great-great-grandson of Napoleon. What do you think of that?"

"Bonaparte was a mere upstart Corsican adventurer, not worthy to breathe the same air as the Beckenberg family. The Beckenbergs are the ones who put Ivan Vasiliyevitch on the throne of Moscow. We ignored Bonaparte when he declared himself emperor and we destroyed his foolish dreams in war. I spit upon Napoleon." And she did, although it was not a short Corsican but the floor of the truck that was the actual target. She leaned over and whispered in Devon's ear, "That's from *The Honor of the Family*. I played that for six months in '08."

The driver had nothing more to say until he came to a stop at Washington Street. Devon climbed down and Lal put her hand out to be assisted – even though she'd needed no such help to climb up. As she reached the ground, she ordered "Give him ten dollars, Samuel" and Devon blurted out "Ten bucks! I mean, *Zehn Dollar!*"

"Yes. As I said." And Devon handed a ten-spot up. The driver's protests against such a generous fee were feeble at best and barely lasted one sentence.

Alone on the curb, the one-time actress raised her parasol, even though it was darkest night, smiled and turned New Jersey in a heart-beat. "So, you gonna to get me a hack, Frankie, or do I gotta do that myself, as well?"

Cabs were in abundance on Washington Street and they were soon ensconced. "17 Cortlandt, and put your foot down, Mac," was her next order, then she sat back, rolled her parasol and looked Devon up and down with a bold stare. She suddenly laughed and smacked his

chest playfully.

“Gee, it’s good to see you, Frank! You pop up at the oddest times. And in the oddest places. And with the oddest names – Sammy? Really? What the heck were you doing there? Are you doing what I think you’re doing?”

“Yeah.”

She looked at him sadly. “You know, they’ll kill you one day. Sooner or later. And, with this bunch, probably sooner than later.” She was very serious. “Just sayin’.”

“They can try. They’ve been trying. I’m still here. I survive, Lal, when there’s no good reason that I should. Just like you.”

“Is that what I’ve been doing? Survivin’?” She seemed to have fallen into a deep tristesse. ‘Yeah, maybe that’s the word.’

“How come I find you on board a German ship where you’ve got no business being, Lal? How come you’re with that bomb sniffer?”

For the first time in their acquaintance, she laughed out loud. “That’s what he is! A sniffer! The Doctor dreams them up; Maxie designs them and sniffs out the stuff to make them go boom; the sailors on the Freddie The Great build them. Guys like you put them to use.”

To be fair, Devon thought, there aren’t a lot of guys like me. But to get back to the subject: her.

“Where’s von Louden?”

“That louse! Doing fifteen to twenty upstate.” Her husband was facing charges last he saw her.

“So he really was a bigamist?” It wasn’t funny, he knew, so why was he laughing? And,

poor Lal. Her life had been a crazy up and down since they'd met. She wasn't even legitimately married. If she really had been married to von Louden, she'd legitimately be a Countess. Demoted to just Miss Lalia Florence Jensen, at least, she'd worked her way back up. She'd been a mere Baroness when she ran the whore house at Number 123.

"He was a quadragamist, near as I can figure. I wasn't the first – I wasn't even the last! I was just the one in the middle. That damn Baroness in Austria was the first." She began laughing, too. "And none of us have got anything left out of it. That son of a bitch stole the best years of my life!"

"Did he really?"

"No." She stopped laughing, so he did, as well. "But he stole a lot of money from a lot of women. And the stupid bitches showed up to defend him! They actually picketed the court room! All of them! Knowing that he had bilked each of them in turn, each of them still thought that she was the one and only."

"So, did you join the protest?"

"Hell, no. I testified against him. Well, not actually me, but the Baroness Anna Ludmilla Herlickza did. She came all the way from Austria, at great risk to herself, in view of the war."

"And nobody questioned it?" How had she pulled that off?

"Of course not. A Baroness is above question. That's why I chose her character to run the house at Number 123." She laughed aloud. "Oh, Lord! I was magnificent, Frank. I really was."

He waited until she'd finished laughing. "That doesn't explain how you got from being a countess married to a bigamist to a baroness in a whorehouse and back to being a countess on board the Frederick The Great. There's a lot of story missing."

“Number 123 isn’t a whorehouse. Not really. Well, not entirely. But it is a dangerous place, Frank. Not just because of the dynamite in the basement: it’s mostly the men in the rooms: dangerous men. Dangerous, physically; dangerous, mentally. And the worst of them all is von Papen, because he truly believes they will win the war and shape the world! First chance I had, I grabbed it and got the hell out. I ran as far as I could afford to run, which wasn’t far, dropped the Baroness and became the Countess, again. Then, I met Max Breiten and he wanted me, so ...”

She shrugged.

“You left one bunch of saboteurs and you just happened to meet another? In New York? How likely is that?” That must have hit too close to home, because she stopped to stare at him before answering.

“You ask too many questions, Frank.” She put a gloved hand on his face. “We could make love all night, if you like –” Devon had no words for that offer. “– but Max will be home soon. Let’s go and drink and laugh, okay?”

Devon watched her eyes and mouth. “No, you didn’t just happen on Breiten. That coincidence is too big to swallow. You got steered that way. Somebody steered you. Who recruited you, Lal?”

Before she could answer, the cab pulled up to the curb at what Devon guessed was Cortlandt Street and she slid out of the car. He pulled a fin out of his pocket and dropped it beside the cabbie. “It’s only a buck and a quarter, mister.”

“Keep the change,” and he was out of the car, too, following her up the sidewalk. She had her hand on the doorknob at number 17 when he caught up to her, caught her hand, and stopped the door from opening.

He held her wrist while he thought. "Here's the possibilities: the Janus Agency, but no; they didn't know about the Frederick The Great. British Intelligence, maybe. William Wiseman's got his claws out everywhere. Who else? NYPD? What are they doing in Hoboken? Or is it the Bureau of Investigation? That makes more sense."

"You're not thinking hard enough, Frank." She turned the knob and the door opened. "Shall I invite you in? Will you behave yourself, or will you insult me?" The tone of her voice said she'd be insulted if he didn't insult her.

He let go of her hand and shook his head. "Lal, when have I ever not behaved myself? I even covered you up that night I broke into your apartment and you were sleeping naked – and I never touched you."

"I may never forgive you for that. I trust you never forgive yourself." She sighed. "Alright, cowardy custard. Come in."

It was a very modern home, with lots of windows and open space. Devon wondered how much von Papen was paying Breiten, that he could afford a place like this.

She saw his appraising gaze. "Maxie has patents on a number of inventions that bring in quite a bit of money – mostly war-related things."

"Of course."

She dropped her wrap in the vestibule and walked away from it; Devon picked it up and laid it over a chair, following her into the house. At the parlor or whatever she called it, she stopped in the doorway, turned with one hand raised in the air, and snapped the lights on, leaving her silhouetted in the sudden light. It was as dramatic an effect as a fading actress could wish for. Devon applauded.

“Are you finished? Or maybe you’d like to recite some Shakespeare? Lady Macbeth, maybe?”

She smiled and changed pose, scrubbing at the back of her hand. “Out, damned spot! out, I say!” She suddenly looked up, listening. “One: two: why, then, ’tis time to do’t.” She shrank into herself and threw her arm across her face. “Hell is murky!” She looked up fiercely, anger in her eyes. “Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard?” Now, she suddenly dropped to her knees, scrubbing at her hand, nearly in tears. “Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?” She paused for dramatic effect, then slowly raised her eyes to look at him, and rose elegantly. Even in the parlor doorway, it was a good performance. Again, he applauded. She smiled and dropped him a small curtsey.

“Macbeth’s always a favorite – it’s short and there are no dull parts. You played Lady Macbeth, did you?”

“No. Oh, but I want to!” She was suddenly the Countess, again. “Make me a drink, Frank. After such a performance, I feel I must have one.”

“Okay. Where?”

She gestured toward a cabinet in the corner, which he opened to find liquor bottles and glasses. It was overwhelming in its variety – liquors from many countries clinked together in a gurgling harmony of international entente.

“What do you want?” He desperately wanted a whiskey, would have settled for rum, but decided he wouldn’t indulge in either.

“V-what do I v-want? V-wodka, of course, dawlink!”

That was easy: glass, vodka – there was no ice. He handed her the drink, which she raised

in silent salute and threw it back in true Russian fashion.

And promptly collapsed on an armchair, choking on the powerful spirit. He pulled the cork from the vodka bottle and sniffed. No, it was what it seemed to be: vodka. Was it poisoned somehow?

At last, she gasped out: "Oh, Frank! That was vodka! You gave me vodka!" She was still coughing.

He looked at the drinks cabinet and back to her. "Of course, I did. That's what you asked for!"

Still choking, she said "In *The Honor of the Family*, we did a hundred and four performances, and every time I asked for vodka, they gave me water." She took a deep breath. "I'll never do that again."

He pulled her out of the chair, took her in his arms and made her focus on him. "This is not a play, Lal. This is not made-up nonsense. You don't get to do it again tomorrow afternoon, if something goes wrong tonight. This is nations – empires! – trying to crush each other out of existence. These people are killers. There are dozens, maybe hundreds dead from their bombs already. They want to kill thousands – tens of thousands. This is the same war they're fighting in France – only it's happening right here. I don't want you hurt. Get out, while you can. Right now. Grab your things and run. I'll help you."

He was furious with her for getting involved again. He was furious with himself for caring whether she got involved again. He was furious with Janus for making him care whether she got involved again – for dragging him back in and giving him reason to hate nations again, when he had been quite happy just hating Janus.

“It’s not that easy, Frank.” She released herself and stepped away from him. “I can’t just run.”

“Do you need money? I can arrange money for you.” Enough to get her out of reach of Max Breiten, at least.

She laughed at that. “I am a Countess, Frank. I don’t need money. There is always someone who will supply that.” Coming back to him, she touched his cheek. “Even if they’re not all as nice about it as you.”

“Is it Max Breiten?” He couldn’t see it, but there was no accounting for taste, even for a taste for Max Breiten. “Are you in love with him?”

She laughed aloud. “In love with Maxie? Little Maxella?” She drooped a limp pinkie finger and dangled it in the air. “It’s not that. And, it’s not money. It’s what else he’s got that keeps me here.”

“Something beyond a ...” He drooped a limp pinkie. “Do tell.” He was intrigued. Did the man have a leather room in the back? Was his pleasure whips and such things?

She took his hand and led him to a closed door in the back of the house. “This is his ‘workshop’. He mixes things here – what things, I don’t know. One day, it will go boom and take him and probably me, too.”

She opened the door and switched on the light.

The room was a powder keg – almost literally. Barrels of powders; glass jars of liquids – some unlabelled; crates marked ‘Dynamite’; and other crates marked ‘TNT’. There were boxes of rifle cartridges and cans of black powder. Breiten was a mad bomber, indeed. How had he managed to accumulate all this without being noticed? Or being blown up?

After a first glance, Devon caught his breath and stepped back. He took Lal's shoulders and whispered in her ear "Do you know what's in here?"

She shrugged. "Explosives."

He placed an urgent hand over her mouth. "Shh!" He continued to whisper. "Explosives, yes, but do you know what kind?" Or what kinds, because there were several in there. She shrugged, not making any sounds. "Does he have nitroglycerin?" She shrugged again. "All right. We have to take care of this. Very quietly, step back up the hall to where the carpet ends then *very* quietly, take off your shoes. Do not walk on the hardwood with your heels on. Better yet, don't walk on the hardwood. I'm going to find out what's in here. If I shout 'Run', get out of the building as fast as you can." Like that would do any good. There was enough high explosive in that room to level the block. He slipped off his shoes, waited until she had reached the carpet, and crept into the room.

He hated that, in the last year, he'd been forced to become something of an expert on high explosives and their care and handling. He blamed Janus for that, too. Then, he laughed at himself. He could just add that to the list of grudges he was holding against his boss – for all the good it did him.

Without disturbing anything, he searched shelves and piles. There was no refrigeration unit such as anyone with any sense would keep nitroglycerin in. There were several jars filled with acids and several things that he wasn't sure about, but none of them were the oily, clear liquid he was so afraid of.

At last, he assured himself they wouldn't go skyward for sneezing. Don't anybody light the gas in the stove, but bowling in the living room would be fine.

Or should be fine. For the unknown ingredients in the room, he'd have to trust Breiten's good sense – if he had any. And, he still wouldn't recommend any flamenco dancing on the hardwood floors.

"All right, Lal. You can come back, now. The most volatile thing is some picric acid, and that's not going to blow up on its own. Lal?"

He looked toward the door as not one but two figures appeared from down the hall. Mouth covered, eyes wide with fright, and a revolver to her temple, the Countess was being held hostage.

Max Breiten was the man holding her – and the gun.

Worse yet, Devon realized his shoes were still out in the hallway.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

**October 24, 1915**

“Do you really want to do this, Breiten?”

“I am the one with the gun.” Despite all the explosives in the room, Devon doubted that Breiten had ever fired a gun in his life.

“And, if you fire that toward me, Max – and miss – what are you going to hit in this room? There are ‘way too many things in here that don’t like being shot.” Devon was standing in front of about one hundred pounds of TNT, for instance. And, when the TNT went, so would the rest.

Not to mention that he really didn’t care to be shot, himself.

“Why don’t we all go into the parlor and have a drink?”

“Ha!” Breiten shouted, twitching both the arm he was muffling Lal with and the one he was holding the gun with. Lal shrieked a muffled protest from behind his palm. Devon stifled a shriek because the man could easily squeeze that trigger, twitching like that. “First,” Breiten yelled, “you take my woman! Now, you want my liquor!”

Did he just — ? So, this has nothing to do with — ? Devon nearly breathed a sigh of relief, held back only by the several hundred pounds of explosives around him. The man was simply jealous.

“Breiten, I’m not taking your woman.”

“Ha! You are so tall and so good looking; you take any woman you wish. *Nun, nicht meine!*” If ever there was a case of insecurity, here it was. What was that Austrian quack’s name who opened up people’s brains and examined them? Frood? Friend? Fiedn? He couldn’t remember but Breiten ought to visit him.

“Listen, Breiten – Max – *Herr* Breiten, there’s no question of anything like that between Lal and me. None at all. Why, the thought never crossed my mind.” Lal’s eyes changed from frightened to angry. “Lal and I have been friends for – I don’t know how long – seems like forever. She’s just like a big sister to me. Why, I could never think of sleeping with her!” Her eyes were fixed on him and told him that, if they lived through this, he would pay for those words. He tried to keep his eyes fixed on Breiten, watching for more twitches.

“Why are you here drinking with her?” He was beginning to wave the revolver around, finding new potential targets every second or so.

“Max, don’t fling that around. We’ll all go up with a boom, along with the neighbors. And, the neighbors wouldn’t be happy about it.” The three of them would have no time to be

happy or unhappy about it.

Breiten stopped and pointed the gun straight at Devon. "Don't tell me what to do!"

You can only reason with some people for so long. "Lal! Who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him!"

Breiten, surprised by the quote, stared at Devon, then began to bring the revolver back to Lal's temple. Lal, surprised by the quote, suddenly dropped to her knees, slipping out of Breiten's grasp, and covered her head.

Devon, not surprised, crossed the floor, slipping a little in his sock feet, before Breiten could react to either Lal or him. Devon put his head into Breiten's mid-riff, oof-ing the air from the man's lungs, then brought his head up under Breiten's chin, clomping his jaws shut and knocking him back against the wall. From there, it simply took a grip on two fingers and a firm twist to take away the revolver.

Breiten sagged against the wall, nursing his fingers, trying to get his breath, and whimpering slightly as he did. Lal was crouched on the floor, still covering her head. Devon was gauging the size of the goose-egg he'd have on his.

While he slipped back into his shoes, Devon watched Breiten whimper then decided an abrupt change would do them all good. "All right, who needs a drink? Lal, vodka?"

He helped her to her feet and led her back down the hall to the parlor. Breiten would either follow or not, when he recovered. If he didn't follow, he might blow them all up but that was the chance Devon would have to take. As they went, he stripped the cylinder from the revolver and the bullets from the cylinder – all went into his pocket.

In the parlor, as he was searching out drinks, Lal came up behind him, reached around

and placed a hand where Devon couldn't help but notice. He paused with a glass in one hand and vodka in the other.

"Big sister!" she whispered. "I'll give you big sister." She squeezed – gently but very definitely firmly.

"Lal," he said patiently, "If you don't take your hand away, I'm going to spill the drinks."

"Do you think of me as a big sister?"

"Of course not, but I can't let him know!"

"I don't believe you!" She was still squeezing.

"From the first moment I saw you, naked, in an absinthe-induced coma on your sofa, you have been the one woman in the world I have wanted more than any other. Only Max's presence is stopping me from taking you right now, on the carpet, with wild animal passion."

"No," she said, letting go. "It's too late; you can't sweet talk me." And she took the drink from him and walked across the room to sit.

Devon took a moment to count appendages. All present and correct.

Breiten entered sheepishly from the hallway and Devon offered him a glass. "I took you for a cognac man, Max. Is that all right?" Breiten took the glass without a word and sat in the center of the sofa.

Devon, with a whiskey that he opened his mouth to drink and then put down, untasted, on a side table, shook his head at Breiten. "Max, nothing ever got solved with a gun. Nothing. It just won't work."

From her corner, behind her drink, Lal offered "Gettysburg" and Devon replied "Shut up." He looked seriously at the German, who was sitting like a little lost boy. "Now, what was

that all about?"

Max sulked. "She is going to leave me one day. I am not the big man; I am not the exciting man."

Devon and Lal spoke together. "No, that's not true!" Then Devon decided to let Lal take over. After all, she was the actress.

"Maxella, Maxella! You are all the excitement I need." She rose and went behind Breiten, putting an arm around his neck and, with her other hand, stroked his balding head. "You are so exciting to me, Maxella. And such a big man! Oh, Maxie, so big!" Lal locked eyes with Devon, curled her lip, and shook her head slightly.

Breiten was starting to come out of his fugue. "Do you really think so, Moura? Really?" "Of course, I do but, Max, you go into that room and leave me all by myself. I get so lonely. That's why I showed Frank the room. Frank understands these things; he has used them many times in the past. So, I thought that he could tell me what you do there, and I could understand it."

"Frank? Who is Frank that you have let see in the room!"

"Frank is ..." Devon saw her trying to recall his name from the ship.

"Frank is me, Max," he chimed in. "Sammy is just a name I use sometimes, until I know what I'm getting in to. Just in case – you understand, Max."

"Well, I understand. Moura, you shouldn't have done that. It is secret, what I do in there. Secret!"

Devon spoke up. "For the Kaiser! For the Fatherland!"

And Breiten ... brightened. "Of course. *Für den Kaiser und fürs Vaterland!*" He held his

drink aloft to salute.

And Devon leaped to his feet and stood at attention and shouted “*Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!* *Hoch!*” Some is good; more is better; too much is usually just enough.

Breiten joined him on his feet for the last two hochs.

“You mix the explosives in there,” he said, sitting again. “Then you take it to the Freddie The Great to be put into the bombs. Is that it?”

“*Ja, ja! Du bist richtig.* But there is more, too.” He suddenly rose and went back down the hallway. Lal went back to her drink. Devon reached for his again but left it untouched. He smiled at her.

“Such a big man! Oh, so big!”

“A little white lie that I’m sure all women tell a man at some time. When was the last time a woman told you that *little* lie, Frank?” She smiled archly and waited.

“That’s not a question to discuss with your big sister.” And she flicked fingertips dipped in vodka in his direction.

Breiten returned, with a long sheet of paper, and perched himself in the center of the sofa, once more. Who sits in the center of a sofa?

“You came to be with me, Moura, just at the time we started building the bombs.”

Devon interrupted. “The bombs? I thought the things I was planting were incendiaries.”

“There are incendiaries; there are bombs; there are many sorts of devices.” He dismissed thinking about Devon and turned to Lal. “I wanted you to know what I am doing is important. I wanted you to see that what I do is changing the world.” He paused for a pathetic heartbeat. “I wanted you to be proud of me.”

Her "I am proud of you" went unheeded.

"This," he said, holding up the page. "This is a list of all the ships that we have put the bombs -- and the incendiaries -- on so far. You see what I have done? Every device with the explosives I have made. Every ship and the date it sailed. Oh, so many ships. And, oh, so many bombs. Now, you can be proud of me!"

He held up the list and it was all Devon could do to stay in his seat and pretend to be casual. In contrast, Lal jumped up, clapped her hands, and flung herself into Breiten's lap, reaching for the paper and exclaiming, "Oh, how clever of you! And, how wonderful! Maxie, you are a wonderful man!" She kissed his cheek and squirmed in his lap. The look on Breiten's face was ... let us say, a study.

And, she took the sheet, still in his lap, and began to read.

"April 29, Cressington, 6 six cigar bombs. May 2, Kirk Oswald, 6 cigar bombs. May 8, Bankdale, two bombs in cargo. May 13, Samland, 6 cigar bombs. May 21, Anglo-Saxon, rudder bomb. June 2, Strathway, 4 cigar bombs. July 4, Minnehaha, rudder bomb. July 13, Touraine, rudder bomb. July 14, Lord Downshire, 8 cigar bombs. July 20, Knutford, 4 cigar bombs. July 24, Craigside, 5 cigar bombs. July 27, the liner Arabic, rudder bomb. Aug. 9, Asuncion de Larrinaga, 8 cigar bombs. Aug. 13, Williston, 4 bombs in cargo. Aug. 27, Dixie; 4 bombs, went off while loading."

She stopped reading to look at Devon, who had no expression on his face. She had to force herself to smile.

"Oh, Max! What a list! What wonderful work you are doing!" And she kissed him. Devon had to look away at that. He had always known she was a great actress, but to kiss

that man's lips after reading his list of murders ... ! Devon had kept a silent count: fifteen vessels that Breiten had recorded since the end of April alone, not counting September or October. And the man kept a list, like a trophy.

With a crew of twenty on each of those, that's three hundred lives at risk – and the Arabic was a passenger liner! How many of them dead? How many widows, orphans, mothers without children?

It's war, the bastards would say – but Devon didn't make war on women and children. Then he thought of the Zeithens, mother and daughter, dead, at least in part, because of what he'd done or not done, and one or two others over the years, and he had to eat his own silent words. Nothing is ever clean or fair, is it?

And that name: the Arabic. He knew of her. She was one of the ships that Kingsmill had listed as being sunk by a submarine. Yet, Breiten says they put bombs on her. Who was right? Were some bomb sinkings being mistaken for submarine attacks that never happened? Berlin is never going to correct the mistake.

The osculating couple broke off and Breiten, completely satisfied with himself once again, looked to Devon. "You see, Frank. When you are an important man, you inspire love." He started to kiss Lal once again, but she turned it into an embrace.

Breiten spoke up, again. "And, there is one missing from that list. The most important one of all!"

Devon asked "Really? What one is that, Max?", trying to keep innocence in his voice, while Lal added "Oh, tell me, Maxie!"

But Max was enjoying his moment and wanted to tease it out a little. After all, how many

such moments did someone like Breiten get? He swirled his cognac and tasted it before speaking.

“I will give you a hint. Back in April. Lots of news.”

Apparently, Lal didn’t pay much attention to the news. “Back in April? Did something important happen back in April?”

Devon’s gut tightened and his hands gripped the arms of the chair. Back in April ... Lal continued her gushing.

“Oh, tell me, Maxie! Tell me!”

Breiten looked across at Devon. “Frank knows, don’t you, Frank?”

“Well, tell *me!*” Lal pouted.

Finally, Maxella couldn’t hold back any longer. “The Lusitania, of course! We put eight bombs on her. Eight!”

“We?” came the low and ominous sound from Devon’s side of the room. Devon was sunk low in his chair and was gripping the arms.

“Well,” Breiten admitted. “I didn’t put them on, personally. It was the Doctor’s idea – and it was the Doctor who put them on board, himself! He is a brave man and deserves the Iron Cross. He took a day trip to visit the great ship where she was docked. With him, he took eight bombs – eight incendiaries, Sammy – think of it! – eight cylinders buried deep in the cargo, below the waterline! ”

“The Lusitania was sunk by a torpedo from a submarine. The newspapers all said it; the British confirmed it.”

“That’s what everyone thinks, but there were two explosions. Berlin admits to only one torpedo. We know where on board the bombs were. They were set hard against the hull. If they

went off, it would have seemed like a torpedo. I mixed the explosives – I know what they would do.”

Devon stood and walked silently across the room to the pair on the sofa. He took a gun out of his pocket and pointed it at Breiten’s forehead. He pulled the trigger.

The hammer clicked harmlessly on nothing – the cylinder and cartridges were still in Devon’s pocket.

It had all happened too quickly for Breiten to see that he was in no danger, so the man was white-faced and shaking. Devon smiled and handed Breiten his revolver and the empty cylinder.

“Scared you, did I?” He held up one of the bullets. “I’ll keep the bullets, for now, Max. We don’t want any accidents tonight, do we?” He held out one hand to his ‘sister’. “Lal, will you see me out?”

She took Devon’s hand, rose from Max’s lap and said “You’d better put that list back, Max. Don’t want to lose it.”

She and Devon went to the front door, while Max went into the back room. At the door, Devon pulled her to him, grabbed her arms and shook her.

“You have got to get out of here. Come with me, right now. We’ll get your things later. Let’s go.”

She pulled away. “Oh, Frank, I can’t leave.”

“Sure you can. Walk out the door.”

“Frank … I’m not here because I want to be.”

“Why, then?”

“Seibe. Paul Seibe.”

He stared at her. “NYPD.”

The relief on her face was clear. “You do know, then! Get hold of Paul. Tell him what you learned.”

“How are you hooked up with NYPD?” Of course, he knew how.

“Seibe has … photographs taken at Number 123. And other things. They stopped me in the street, arrested me. They took me in and held me, then they laid out all the evidence. They laid out all the charges they could bring, and gave me an option – and now I’m here.” She lifted her chin defiantly as if daring him to comment. When he didn’t, she asked “What are you going to do?”

Devon looked down the hallway, where Max had not yet returned.

“There was something very important to me on the Lusitania. I’m going to go kill the man who took it away from me.”

Her eyes grew big. “Not Max!”

He continued to stare down the hallway. “I’ll let Maxie live, for now. I’m sure Seibe can come up with some charges that will work.”

“Then, who?” she asked, then she understood. “The Doctor.”

He took his eyes off the hallway and looked down at her. He didn’t say anything, so she went on.

“How will you find the Doctor?”

He smiled. “That’s the easy part, my love. I have a secret weapon.”

“A secret weapon?”

“Yes. I know a librarian.” If Irene hadn’t got married and left the Main Branch – but no, she’d still be waiting for him. He was sure she’d wait for him forever. That was very unfair for Irene but worked out well for him.

He started to leave, but Lal grabbed him and pulled him back.

“Frankie, look at me.” When he did, she came up close and put her arms around his neck. “Don’t die.” She looked at him again, then kissed him, long, hard and thoroughly. “And, I ain’t your sister, brother!”

Then, she pushed him out the door.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

**October 25, 1915**

Irene was a little more pleased with his appearance than last time, when she'd helped him research explosives and train schedules. He had pretty much been at rock-bottom, then. Now, he was ... let's say, skimming the surface, dog-paddling with his nose above water, and only partially algae-covered.

Irene was his ace-in-the-hole, his own private research department. She'd taken Devon on as a pet project, last year, helping him look up poisons, sabotage, munitions factories and train schedules – and how to photograph nude women. Stepping into the Public Library Main Branch as soon as the doors opened in the morning, he had gone immediately to the desk and asked to see her, causing no end of craning necks and side-ways glances among the staff (and not just the female staff, either). He could imagine the rumors flying around the card catalog: 'Irene has a

gentleman friend!"

He had only two bits of information to give her: a name, Doctor Walter Scheele, and a city, Hoboken. "It can't be done!" Irene protested. "A name and a city! How can I find someone with just a name and a city?"

Devon took her hand and looked sadly at her. "Well, I suppose not. It was a long shot, anyway. However, it was a good chance to see you, again, Irene. I don't get in here often enough." And, he winked at her.

That really wasn't fair of him. He had never actually said it, but somehow, Irene had gotten the impression that he was some sort of secret agent, moving about the city in the underworld, fighting criminals and preventing crime. He was, by far, the most exciting thing that had ever happened to her in her thirty-six years of life. And, now he had winked at her.

"Wait," she said. "He's probably not in the telephone book, but if he owns his home, he's on the tax rolls – and, if he rents, he might be on the renter roll."

"What's that, sweetheart?" He really wasn't giving her a chance, at all.

"Landlords are required to list all lessees occupying their rental properties. For houses, most do; for tenements, none do. But ..." She began to look thoughtful.

They were well back in the stacks, out of sight, so he spun her around, patted her fundament, and said, "Go get him, tiger!" She looked shocked, then pleased, and went to get him.

It took her almost two hours, and, in the meantime, he amused himself by refreshing his memory on the properties of as many of the substances he'd seen last night in Breiten's workshop as he could remember. He decided that the cigar bombs weren't really bombs, but incendiary devices: with picric acid in one side of the tube and sulphuric acid in the other,

separated by the copper sheet as he'd seen. The acid ate the copper away at a rate worked out by the maker – Breiten – until the two acids mixed and they burst into hot, nearly impossible to extinguish flame; hot enough to set nearly any cargo on fire. By varying the thickness of the copper, it could be set to combust when the ship was well out to sea – and the flame would be hot enough to melt any trace of the device itself.

The other thing he found, by reading back issues of The Shipping News, was that there were nearly 50 German-flagged vessels shut up in New York and New Jersey alone. A couple were naval vessels interned under neutrality laws, but most were freighters or passenger ships that didn't dare try to run the British Royal Navy cruiser patrols. Their crews sat idling in the harbor, finding work where they could. How many were being paid by von Papen to build bombs? Or to plant bombs?

When she came back, Irene looked as though she'd been in the front rank of a suffrage march. Her hair had come loose in places, with strands hanging down over her face, which in turn was flushed and damp, her waister was untucked half-way around. Devon was touched by her devotion to her duty – and, perhaps, to him.

She waved a slip of paper as she came to him, obviously triumphant. He met her with a wide grin.

“Was it a hard battle, general?”

“It was. The stacks are high and deep and the ladder none too steady. I fell twice.”

He put a hand on her cheek. “Oh, I’m sorry, Irene. You didn’t have to go through that!”

But, he'd take the address, anyway.

She blushed slightly when he touched her and handed him the slip of paper. “Of course, I

did. It's the librarian's code, Mr. Steickternott. 'The requested information must be retrieved.'"

He tucked the paper into a pocket. "Thank you, Irene. You're a true life-saver." He squeezed her hand and turned to go, but she wouldn't let him.

"Mr. Steickternott!" She paused and blushed again. "Frank. Was that really you in the papers last fall? All of that about ... shooting ... and ..."

"And murder? I've never murdered anyone, Irene. Never. I've shot a few people, and had more than a few shoot at me. But never murder." He turned to go again, but still she held his hand.

"And they said you were dead, but you're not. Are you a dangerous man, Frank Steickternott?" Her breath was coming in short gasps and he wasn't sure where this was going.

"I'm dangerous to some people – very dangerous."

"People like me?" She was still searching his face.

"Never. I'll never harm a librarian." He smiled and winked again. She caught her breath and pushed another slip of paper into his hand.

"This ... is where I live. Could you ... ?" She stopped and he tried to back away, shaking his head, but she followed him, coming close. He put his hands on her shoulders and kept himself at a distance.

"Oh, Irene, you've got me wrong! Sweetheart, you don't want me. I'm not a hero or anything like that. I'm a bad man." He was suddenly scared honest. "I'm a very bad man."

She caught her breath again. "I know. Could you ... tonight?" The flush in her cheeks was burning hot.

It was his turn to catch his breath. "Tonight – I'm going to be busy. With this." He held

up the first slip of paper. "With a man so bad, he kills children – women – librarians." She was going to say something. "Irene! I may not even be alive in a few hours."

He did leave then, and wondered how Irene the Fair would fare. It's easy to find bad men, he thought, just look under any rock. The other kind aren't so easy to uncover.

An hour later, he stepped off the Barclay Street Ferry onto Newark Street, in Hoboken, turned north and stepped on out past the North German Lloyd piers. He counted them as he went past and wondered in which one the next set of bombs to destroy the next ship was being made.

They called the Hoboken dock-front The Barbary Coast and, between boozers, brothels and boarding houses, it was far rougher than the Manhattan water-front on the other side of the Hudson. Street lights were few and alleys were many. The bars were bright and noisy; the whore-houses were dark and alluring. He had no intention of leaving the straight and narrow for either, not today, at least, so, when two men stepped from an alley between a bar and an – he didn't know what it was – he immediately brought the Dreyse out into the open.

Whether they were stupid or confident, the sight of the pistol didn't seem to deter them, so he sidestepped to his right, half-turned, put two bullets into the dirt in front of the two men, turned to his left and put two into the dirt in front of the two men behind him – who thought he didn't know they were there – and continued walking sideways, pistol leveled at the two in front until the four men decided to let him pass, and faded back into the alley. He swapped the Dreyse's magazine for a full one from his pocket and kept going.

All of that in broad daylight, with thousands of people around, not one of whom took any notice except to look toward the source of the sudden loud noise, then look away again. He made a mental note to take the Christopher Street ferry back to the safety of Manhattan.

Ten minutes walk from the Barbary Coast, the New Jersey Agricultural Chemical Company was in a two storey, clapboarded building at 12<sup>th</sup> and Clinton Streets. Whitewashed recently, it was a respectable enough building, with a small picket fence out front, two windows and a door on the first floor, four windows along the Clinton Street side. Upstairs boasted three windows on the front, four on the side. Attached to the back of it, the building on 13<sup>th</sup> Street was a mirror image. He assumed Scheele lived upstairs. Despite it being the middle of the business day, there were no lights on downstairs.

He walked past twice, trying to size up the establishment, then walked six blocks beyond it and returned on the other side of the street. The fact that he saw nothing unusual didn't mean there wasn't something unusual there to see. It just meant that whoever set it up knew what they were doing.

Eventually, there was nothing else for it but the direct approach. He crossed the street, walked up to the front door and knocked loudly. And waited. After a reasonable time, he knocked again. And waited.

Then, he removed some tools from his pocket, slid three of them, one at a time, into the door lock, felt carefully for less than a minute, and walked into the house. There was a sharp tinkle above his head – a shop bell on the door, which he reached up quickly to stifle. He waited but no challenge came from shop or apartment.

He carefully put the tools away, the second set he'd had to acquire in two years. His prison tutor, many years ago, had taught him well and it was a rare lock that defeated him. Like riding a bicycle, you never forget how. One day, he'd have to get a bicycle and try it.

He held the bell once again to close the door and stood quietly in the hall. The shop was

to his right, ahead, stairs led up. He took those, staying as much as he could to the wall side, where there were fewer creaks and squeaks.

Simply put, there was nobody home, which, he had to admit, was a bit anti-climactic. He couldn't fight with anybody, he couldn't shoot anybody. He couldn't even have a drink with anybody – not that he was drinking, these days, he reminded himself, sternly.

All he found were documents. It was an amazing phenomenon that all of these Germans seemed fanatical about keeping records of everything they did. Even when they should know that the activities they were documenting could send them to prison for years; even when they should know that some of the things they were doing could earn them a hangman's noose; even so, they insisted on writing down every detail. Spread out on the kitchen table, they made fascinating reading.

Like this one: "Daytrip to Cunard Line dock in Manhattan. Tram each way: 50¢; ferry each way: 25¢; cost of dinner on return: 75¢; cost of 8 cigar incendiary devices @ \$12.50 ea. \$100.00." It was actually in German, of course.

And, a little later: "Cost of newspaper announcing sinking of Lusitania 5¢." And there was a clipping. Fastidious, thorough, obsessive, murdering bastard.

Devon wanted to add one more item to the ledger: "Cost of one .32 caliber bullet: gratis." There were drawings and technical blueprints for various things from 'standard' pipe bombs to incendiaries to special high explosive aerial bombs that could take apart a fortress. Page after page of intricate designs and calculations. Devon had to admit, the man was a genius ... in a Jack The Ripper kind of way.

The bell tinkled. And, the place had no back entrance that he had seen.

But, then, he hadn't come to look around and do some light reading, had he? He actually had entered with other plans in his head.

He took the Dreyse from behind him, made sure there was a bullet in the chamber, flipped the safety off. In the kitchen, he carefully moved a chair out from the table, sat, pointed the pistol to cover the doorway – and waited.

*"B'weg dich, Dummkopf. Lass mich vorbei!"* It was a woman's voice – or something resembling a woman's voice, if that voice had been rough-grated, mixed with steel shavings, and shaken in a tumbler full of stones. It seemed she needed more room on the stairs. A picture of her began to grow in Devon's head.

*"Tut mir leid, Liebes."* That was a man's voice, a very soft and careful man's voice.

*"Du bist immer im Weg, Idiot."* Heavy feet began to mount the stair.

*"Ja, Schatz, ja. Tut mir leid."* Lighter footsteps began to climb after.

Life in the Scheele household must be pleasant. No wonder the man built bombs.

*"Nicht schubsen!"* She was also very slow up the stairs, it seemed. He wondered which part of her anatomy hubby was pushing. *"Und lass die Taschen nicht fallen!"* Devon was beginning to feel sorry for the guy.

*"Ich habe fünf Taschen, Schatz. Kannst du nur einen tragen?"* Devon knew the answer to that one. So what if he had five bags to carry? It didn't matter how many bags he was carrying. Her carry a bag? That's what husbands are for.

*"Dafür sind Männer da,"* she growled. Told you, he thought.

They had reached the top of the stair now. They'd be coming down the hall any second.

*"Liebling, die Eier fallen."* The poor guy was in trouble; if he dropped those eggs, there'd

be hell to pay.

“*Den halten Sie sie.*” Just don’t drop them; problem solved.

She came from the hallway and stepped into the kitchen. Devon’s mental picture of her had been pretty accurate, except that she used to have blond hair, now mostly gray. She saw Devon, screamed, and turned to run, slamming her considerable bulk into the minimal bulk of Doctor Walter Scheele.

The eggs got dropped.

And *Frau Scheele* (Devon assumed it was her; he couldn’t think of a single reason the Doctor would put up her with otherwise) – *Frau Scheele* actually slapped the man ...

... who said “I’m sorry, cupcake. Please forgive me. I’ll clean it up”, only in German, of course. “*Tut mir leid, Schnucki. Bitte verzeihen Sie mir. Ich mache es sauber.*”

Then the *frau* turned her attention to Devon. “*Was machst du in meinem Haus! Gehraus! Gehraus!*” And, despite the fact that Devon was holding a pistol on them both, she began to advance across the room toward him, actually pushing her sleeves up her arms as she came.

A bullet in the ceiling stopped that, and another in the wall of the hallway stopped Scheele from running. Devon kicked a kitchen chair over against the cupboard.

“Sit, Brünnhilde.” The woman wasn’t used to be ordered about. “*Setzen sie! Schnell!*” She sat. He pointed the pistol at Scheele. “You over there, *Herr Doktor*. Hands on that counter-top.”

Scheele, hands on the counter and his back to Devon, seemed even smaller than before.

“V-what do you v-want here?” ventured *Frau Scheele*.

“From you, nothing,” Devon said. “From your baby-butchering husband, two ears, a tail,

and a pound of flesh.”

She turned to hubby. “*Was meint er dam’t, ein Pfund Fleisch? Wir hab’n Steak fur essen.*” Steak? Maybe he’d stay for supper.

For probably the first time in twenty years of married life, Scheele shouted at her, “*Halt’s Maul!*” and, surprisingly, she shut her gob. Scheele spoke over his shoulder to Devon. “You cannot shoot me, copper. I know my rights in this country. Also, I have diplomatic immunity! You cannot touch me!”

“You’ve got diplomatic immunity like I’ve got three balls, Wally. And, I know your rights in this country like I know my own, which they are. No cop is going to violate them. No cop is going to kick your nuts up into your mouth. No cop is going to shoot you between your pissy little eyes.” He counted to three. “But, here’s the thing, Wally. I’m not a cop And I *am* going to shoot you between your pissy little eyes.”

Wally’s pissy little eyes got a lot bigger and his wife began again. “*Was sagt er, liebling? Was?*” Nice. Suddenly Scheele is ‘darling’ to his devoted wife. Women!

Scheele suddenly twigged. “You are Sammy, from the ship! The dockhand.”

“That’s right.”

“Why are you here, Sammy? What has gone wrong?

Devon slammed the New York Times clipping on the counter. “Read that, *arschloch.*”

The man cleaned his glasses and picked up the clipping. “Lusitania sunk by a submarine, probably one thousand, two hundred and sixty dead; twice torpedoed off Irish coast; sinks in fifteen minutes; Captain Turner saved, Frohman and Vanderbilt missing; Washington believes that a grave crisis is at hand.” He put the clipping down and looked at Devon.

“Well?” Devon asked, the pistol not wavering.

“*Schatze?*” began Scheele’s wife, but he shushed her with a gesture.

“*Das ist der Krieg, junger Mann. Menschen sterben im der Krieg,*” the German said quietly.

“Men die in war – women and children aren’t supposed to, you murdering bastard.”

Devon tapped the clipping. “My wife was on board that ship. They never found her body.”

“What has this to do with me?” He was actually sneering. Stupid little Hun.

“Another sneering little Kraut like you told me a secret – that you put bombs on the Lucy with your own little hands. Well?”

The sneer faded, then came back. “Twice torpedoed, it says. I fired no torpedoes.”

“The German papers say the captain claims to have fired one torpedo. Just one.” The sneer faded a little. “So, where did the second explosion come from?”

Scheele shook his head. “You have put devices on many ships this month. How many will die because of that?”

“That’s different.”

“You do not know the people you kill; I do not know the people I kill.” He dusted his hands together. “What’s done is done.”

“You did put bombs on the Lusitania?”

“There were munitions on board that ship. That made it a military target. How is that different from what you have done?” The sneer was back.

“The difference, *Herr Doktor*, is that I reported every bomb to the captains of every ship or to the police. Every one. I never murdered anybody.” He tapped the clipping again. “My wife was on board that ship.”

“Sorry.” Scheele smiled, a little too smugly for safety. “You reported all the bombs? What was the first ship you loaded at the Hamburg-Amerika dock?”

Devon had to think back. Why was he wasting time? Why didn’t he just shoot the bastard? “She was .. the Forth. Little Norwegian freighter.”

“And, the crew you supervised to load that cargo left a half dozen bombs behind. We always make sure no one knows about the first ones.” Scheele smiled again, a nasty little curl of the upper lip. “Murderer.”

Devon hurled the kitchen table to one side, where it crashed against the sink, papers and other documents whirling through the air. Scheele’s wife screamed, while he was at Scheele’s throat in a second, left hand curled around the man’s windpipe, pistol pushed against his cheek.

*Frau* Scheele screamed again and tried to pull Devon’s hand off her husband’s throat, so he hit her with a backhand that knocked her backward over her own chair. She went quiet and his hand went back to the Doctor’s throat.

He had to force his hands to be still. His left was close to cutting off Scheele’s breathing, his right was shaking so that the pistol would not stay on target.

He forced himself to take three deep breaths to pull himself under control. The pistol was pushed firmly against Scheele’s brow, between his eyes. The man’s glasses hung, twisted, from their wire frames, one lens shattered. Devon began to squeeze the trigger.

From the floor where Scheele’s wife had fallen came one whispered word: “*Mörder*”.

Three heartbeats passed with not a movement in the kitchen.

Then, Devon shifted his grip on the Dreyse and hit Scheele three times across the side of the head, letting the man fall to the floor beside his wife.

Then, he walked down the stairs, past the tinkling bell, and out into the street.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**October 26, 1915**

“You bloody, self-serving arrogant – asshole!” You could tell that Sir William Wiseman was upset, when he began resorting to Americanisms.

Janus wasn’t far behind. “What in god’s name made you think you had the right to start interfering in investigations? Can you do anything right!”

Paul Seibe sat a little separated from the other two and merely said “You did make it a little difficult, you know.”

Devon stretched out in the comfortable chair he had selected for himself and crossed his legs. “I can always go back to counting ships in Halifax harbor, you know.”

“Oh, no, you can’t!” said Wiseman. “If you try to cross that border, I’ll see to it you’re charged with a dozen offences!”

“Such as?”

“Vagrancy, vandalism, cruelty to animals, littering, affixing a postage stamp upside down. Barratry.”

“Barratry? Which one did you have in mind: negligence while in command of a sea-going vessel, or frivolous litigation?”

“Both, if necessary.”

Janus took over, again. “You assaulted a woman!”

“Tell me you haven’t,” Devon said. “And, besides, she assaulted me, first.” Sort of.

“You pistol-whipped a long-time American-resident business owner!”

“Who is blowing up vessels on the high-seas!”

Seibe spoke up. “But, we can’t prove that because you walked out of the building and left the evidence on the floor, for them to dispose of at liberty.”

That stopped Devon. “All right. Yes, I did that.” He thought for a moment. “But, you know what? That’s not a crime.”

Janus finished up. “Well, it ought to be!”

“Look, can we talk about the Mad Bomb Sniffer of Cortlandt Street? I called NYPD. Where did you leave Maxie Breiten?”

“Dangling on the precipice of a long prison term,” Seibe offered. “Nearly five hundred pounds of explosives and incendiary chemicals in the back room there. We’re still thinking up charges.”

“Did you find the list of vessels he was keeping?” If you wanted proof, there it was, and Max Breiten would be only too happy to turn on the others, Devon was sure.

“We didn’t find it. Not hide nor hair. But there was fresh ash in the fireplace.”

Figures, he thought. As soon as he saw the cops pull up, he must have stuffed it in the fire. It would only be Maxie’s word against others, now, and that wouldn’t count for much.

“And Lal? The Baroness?”

There was a pause before Seibe answered. “She’s disappeared. Don’t know where she is.”

That didn’t ring true. He was covering something.

Meanwhile, the conversation lagged. They all seemed to have run out of steam, so Devon thought it would be a good time to fuel the fire a little. “Turns out the dock-crew I had the first time I supervised a load left cigar bombs aboard the S.S. Forth.”

Wiseman nodded. “The Forth, yes. They were found when she docked in France. For some reason, none of them ignited. That was the first hint we had of the methods they’re using. But I’ll add that to the list of charges. Shall we run over your various misdemeanors, Devon?”

Devon was in no mood to sit still while these three gave him a sit-down dressing-down, so he stood up. When NYPD and Wiseman had discovered how he had barged in on their (separate) investigations into Breiten and Scheele and kicked over the cream, they had demanded Janus call him in and rake him over the coals. He had no intention of being raked.

With audacity that surprised even himself, he crossed into the sacred territory behind Janus’s desk to take in the view over 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. The day was dull, the clouds were low, and the temperature outside was much colder than it was even in Janus’s office.

“The question is,” he said, bringing the meeting back to the whole point of what he was doing, “where is the money for all of this coming from? From Germany, obviously – ultimately – but who is distributing it, now?”

There was no immediate answer from the others. Hating a gap in the conversation, Devon continued.

“I’m willing to believe that it’s still von Papen, despite the, as Sir William would say, ‘drubbing’ I gave him last time.” He was still waiting for someone to contribute to the conversation.

Janus had nothing to contribute but he wasn’t happy with Devon occupying the sacred space behind the desk. “Are you ready to re-join the meeting?”

Still looking out the window, Devon responded with “Is there a point to this meeting other than roasting me over a slow fire? Because, I promise you, no matter how slow the fire, you’ll find I’m very gristly.”

Seibe picked up on Devon’s last idea. “Are the Germans dumb enough to leave someone who’s been exposed in charge? Wouldn’t they move the responsibility around?”

“If you knew von Papen, like I know von Papen … you wouldn’t ask. When Franz gets put in charge of something, he stays in charge. The question is, how to prove it?”

Wiseman threw in his two farthings. “I could have someone on him tomorrow. A few days’ surveillance and we’d soon know.”

“Svoboda, perhaps? Has he learned to disguise his size thirteens? The man’s as clumsy as a cart-horse, and just about as inconspicuous.”

“Voska, then. Voska gets things done.”

“If we needed broken heads, then we’d be just as well off sending Devon in,” said Janus.

“So, don’t send me in,” Devon said. “But I know where von Papen will be and I know someone who’s already inside there. Let me find out how interested she’d be.”

Together, the other three men said “She!”

Such old-fashioned men, they were. They just didn’t understand the modern struggle for women’s equality the way Devon did.

She was thrilled to see him, leaping into his arms as soon as the door was opened to cover his mouth and chin with kisses. It was nice to know he’d left a good impression.

She was in a bathrobe and she stepped back, slammed the door shut, pulled the robe open to free her legs, jumped up to wrap herself around him, and ordered “Bedroom!”, but he stayed where he was.

After a few moments, she stopped her kisses and looked him in the eye. “Bedroom?”

He sighed. “Oh, I want to. Believe me, I want to, but not right now, love. Got something serious to ask you.”

“Sofa,” she said, and Devon carried her there, where he deposited her as gently as he could, while she unwound herself. She pulled him down beside her and put her legs over his, contenting herself with one more kiss before she settled back to listen. Her toenails, her fingernails, her lips were scarlet; her cheeks and her knees were rose; her eyelids were blue.

“Before you start, Frank,” she said, “I ain’t going to Canada with you.”

He smiled. “Not asking you to go anywhere with me. I want to ask you to go somewhere *for* me.” If a conversation starts out like that, it can’t be good.

At that moment, the second bedroom door opened and a female stepped through, squealed, and stepped back in. It was obviously her turn in the bath, because Devon caught a glimpse of a bare behind as she scuttled back into her room.

“Man in the house, Martha!”

From the bedroom came "So, I noticed. Did you get a good look, bub?"

"Nothing but some bottom, ma'am. And, it was very nice."

The voice on the other side of the door wasn't displeased. "Thank you." She may have giggled.

Martha came out of the bedroom again, this time in a robe, and padded down the hall to the bathroom.

"Over here, please!" said Mena and pulled his head back to her. "What were you going to say?"

He tried to look into her eyes while he spoke. "I have something special to ask of you, and I don't know if I should. And, I don't know if we'll still be friends after I ask." Somehow that meant more than he thought it would.

"Why wouldn't we be friends? Say! Are you going to ask me for money?"

"Oh, if it was just that simple." He looked down at her and wished he had taken up her first offer. "Kiss me like it's the last time, because – after I ask you this – it may be the last time."

So, she did and it was a thorough job. They were both a little breathless after. Finally, he forced himself.

"I'm going to ask you to go back to Number 123 for me."

She sat frozen for a long while, then pulled her legs from over his, closed her robe, went over to a side-table to get a cigarette, lit it and took three or four deep drags before she stubbed it out and came back. She sat beside him once again, but didn't throw her legs over his. With one elbow on the back of the sofa, she leaned her head into the crook of it to look sideways up at him.

"I'll bet you've got a good reason for asking." He nodded. "Gonna tell me?" He had no

immediate answer. “Cause I sure as hell ain’t going back in there for no good reason. You know how hard it is for a girl to get out of a place like that? Marie got out – she got out to California, to Hollywood and she wrote me to say she’s actually in a picture. Not a big part, but a real picture. And, I got out by ... well, I don’t wanna say how, but I got out. If I go back, maybe I won’t be able to, ever again.”

Devon was furious with himself that he had asked. What the hell kind of job did he have that he had to ask a girl to prostitute herself for it? What the hell kind of man was he that would ever think to ask it?

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I shouldn’t have asked. You’ve got nothing to do with what I’m doing. Nor should you.” He looked into her eyes. “I’m sorry.”

Another long set of awkward moments passed in silence, then: “Hey! I didn’t say no, did I? What could go wrong?”

He shook his head, still looking into her eyes. “I’m saying no. I should never have asked. You’re too important to me for that.”

Her eyes filled with tears and she brushed them aside – smearing her freshly applied mascara. She took his chin in her hand. “One question. After I pulled you out of the basement, the day you and that pig Mox were going to kill each other, Mox disappeared a couple of days later. Then somebody said he fell out of a window.”

“He did.”

He felt a small tremble go through her. “Whose window?” was her quiet question and it took him some time before he decided he could answer it.

“Mine.”

She trembled again, and he wondered what Mox had done to her. He put his arms around her and held her, until she finally lifted her head to him.

“All right. I’ll go back.”

A firm voice behind Devon broke in on their little moment. “No, she won’t! I’m not going to let her!” Martha had skipped her bath to listen, and now came into the living room from the hallway.

“Martha!” said Mena, but the other woman cut her off.

“Once you get out of a place like that, you don’t go back into a place like that, Mena – and anybody who’s a friend wouldn’t let you.” She stared at Devon until he dropped his eyes.

“Anybody who’s a man wouldn’t ask you!”

“You’re right. I shouldn’t have.”

“Why do you want her to go back? Why should she step back into that little piece of hell?”

“I can’t tell you that. It’s not something I can divulge.”

Martha snorted her derision. “Were you going to tell Mena?”

“If she decided she was going to do it, of course. But only if she decided to.”

“So, if she says she’ll do it, you’ll divulge your big secret?”

“Of course.”

Martha threw her unused bath towel into her bedroom and crossed back to them, sitting in a chair and leaning forward, elbows on knees.

“Good. Tell me, because I’ll do it. I’m already in there.”

Mena was shivering again. “Martha, you don’t understand. Jack’s not ...” She looked at Devon with apology in her eyes. “... Jack’s a killer, Martha. People die around him. People die

because of him. I'm sorry, Jack, but it's true." He supposed that he should argue about it, but he couldn't really disagree with her.

"Yes, it is." He looked at Martha. "People die."

"People die all the time, kids. What are you looking for?"

"Information on Franz von Papen."

"Oh, god, the riding crop boy. I'll give you information on him any day."

"No, not that kind." This was the plunge. "I need to know whether the money still comes through him and from where."

Martha was clearly puzzled. "What money?"

Mena crossed to Martha's chair and sat in it beside her, putting her arms around the older woman. "Honey, Franz – and Paul Koenig – he's out of jail again, Jack – and the others, too, but Franz and Paul are at the top – they're bombers and killers and ... and god knows what ... for Germany." When did Mena sort all that out?

Still puzzled, Martha asked "Germany?"

"In the war, Martha."

"You mean the war over in ... in wherever it is?"

"In France, yes," Devon confirmed.

"Wait, I thought it was in Europe."

"France is in Europe. And von Papen and Koenig and a lot of others are trying to bring it over here. They've succeeded, in some ways. There's bombings, there's killings."

Martha was starting to catch on. "Wait a minute! What do you mean? Bombings and killings? They're doing all that here, in America?"

“And, in Canada.”

“Whatever.” She looked skeptically at Devon. “Why doesn’t somebody stop it?” Mena looked her in the eye until she twigged and looked to Devon again. “I suppose that’s your job.”

Devon was suddenly weary. “Yes, it is.”

“What, just you?”

“No, there’s a limey and two Czechs, too.”

“Well, that makes all the difference! What do you do? Kill them one by one?”

“Surprisingly, that’s very nearly the method. And, von Papen is the man I want next. I need to know if he’s still the money man.”

Martha gave Mena a hug, then rose. “That shouldn’t be hard. He’s living at Number 123, now, you know. He’s still mad as hell that you quit coming around, Mena. But, I do my best to keep him happy. The son of a bitch.”

She went into her bedroom and closed the door. After a minute, Mena came over to Devon and curled into his arm, knees pulled up onto his lap, looking small and frail. After five minutes, Martha emerged, dressed and made up. It was a startling transformation, from scrubbed matron to femme fatale in five minutes.

“Come, help me into my coat, Jack,” she ordered, and he gently moved Mena as he rose to assist the older woman. The coat was silver fox with dangling fox heads, worth far more than a girl working at the five-and-dime might afford. Worth more like what a madam at a whorehouse might afford.

As he draped the furs over her shoulders, she leaned back and whispered into his ear, “Don’t you hurt that kid, Mister Killer.” And Devon shook his head.

“I’ll be back in the morning with what I can find,” Martha said. “Are you going to still be here?”

Devon didn’t know how to answer that question, but, from the living room came “Yes, he is.” Martha left with a final glance at Devon, and he went back into the living room.

Mena was curled on the sofa and she lifted her arms to Devon, who picked her up and carried her to her bedroom, laid her down, pulled a cover over her, kissed her forehead and left, turning out the light.

He turned out the rest of the lights in the apartment, stretched out on the sofa, and slept.

A long time later, he dreamed that hands were undoing buttons and woke, to find that Mena was awake as well.

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

**November 5, 1915**

The two NYPD plainclothesmen were watching for von Papen. They were well concealed behind a second storey window opposite Number 123 and were confident that no one could see them. Being members of New York's finest, they had all of the latest equipment that the budget of the New York Police Department could afford: a pair of binoculars, a new-fangled noteboard on a stiff metal backing you could clip pages to, a variable focus camera with an extra long lens for taking photos from far away. All in all, they were well-equipped examples of the latest in police surveillance methods.

The two men in brown suits, wearing homburgs, were watching the two NYPD plainclothesmen who were watching for von Papen. They were in a second storey apartment two buildings away, from where they could see both the NYPD men and the front door at Number

123. They had what seemed to be naval night binoculars, very powerful instruments that could bring any subject very close, at the expense of rendering it upside down. They, too, had an expensive looking camera with a long objective lens. They, too, were confident no one could see them. They, too, were well-equipped examples of the latest in surveillance methods used by undercover operatives of the clandestine services.

Devon was in a third storey apartment on the other side and could observe both the NYPD plainclothesmen and the men in the brown suits who were all watching for von Papen, as well as the front door at Number 123. It was not his apartment, but no one was at home right now. And, he didn't particularly care who saw him. He had an old battered pair of binoculars that may have been from the Civil War and which he had bought last year at the Orchard Street Junk Market for fifty cents. He had a very expensive, brand-new, trick camera that had never had a single click on its shutter, yet, but it wasn't for watching people from far away. It had other uses, which he never thought to use it for, but did conjure up salacious ideas when he let his imagination roam freely. Especially when he had Mena as a willing participant.

Oh, and he was a more-or-less well-equipped example of the best surveillance methods that a few bucks and urgent necessity could arrive at.

At the far end of the block, which neither of the other sets of watchers could see, a tall, erect figure turned the corner. Even from most of a block away, Devon could almost hear the man's heels click as he marched down the sidewalk. Any more military and the fellow would be goose-stepping. Devon was always a little annoyed to see that the beating he had delivered upon von Papen last year had not seemed to affect the man. The beating von Papen had delivered upon Devon still ached in many places. He lifted the telephone ear-piece from the candlestick and

rattled the hook for the operator. He had chosen that apartment specifically because they had a telephone. The apartment on its right was unoccupied but had no phone; the one on its left had a family of Hungarians very much occupying it. The family occupying the apartment he'd chosen to occupy himself were out for the morning.

He said "Baldwin 6-8" and waited, while the tall man marched leisurely down the street, if such a thing is possible. He seemed to be enjoying the crisp late fall air, the bastard. Why wasn't he hiding in a dark, dank cellar somewhere, cowering in fear?

Devon didn't think Franz von Papen had ever cowered in his life. He was far too high-born for that – he had people to cower for him.

When the man was three buildings away, Devon said "He's coming in the door" into the phone. A moment later, he said, "Martha, for god's sake, don't do anything risky. You matter more." And, he hung up the ear-piece.

The telephone went back to its original position, the antimacassar on the back of the chair he'd used got straightened, the glass he'd had water from had been dried and was put back into the cupboard. He didn't smoke, so there were no forgotten cigarette butts or tell-tale lingering smoke to give him away. A last look around and he left the apartment. As he closed the door, a man and woman, with a small baby, crested the stairway and stopped at the sight of him.

"Hey!" began the man, but Devon flashed his Janus badge.

"It's all right, folks. Nothing to worry about. City vermin inspector. I don't know how you folks lasted that long, but you were absolutely right to call us. What a mess! But, you'll be pleased to know the rats are almost gone. There aren't more than ten or so left. Don't let the baby crawl around in the poison. Good morning." He tipped his hat, brushed past them and went down the

stairs.

He wasn't sure whether New York city had official vermin inspectors or not but he suspected there would be an apartment available in the building at the beginning of the month.

The back door to the building was not nearly as clean or nice as the front, but it took him well out of sight of the four people who were patiently sitting in their roosts watching for him, now that von Papen was inside. Well, not for him, specifically, but at least for any familiar face they could capture with their fancy cameras. The photos they got of von Papen would surely come out crisp and clear with that kind of hardware.

Too bad, it wouldn't do them any good. There was nothing wrong with going into that house. It was what people did once they were inside, behind closed doors and drawn curtains.

Two blocks over, two blocks down, one block back, and he was at the back of Number 123. The alley had the same, or a very similar, collection of broken furniture, crushed crates and boxes, banged-up garbage cans and rotting refuse he had grown used to. He was well familiar with the unpainted back door, in fact, he had some affection for it, having used it to good advantage for escape before now.

This time, it let him in, because Martha had left it open for him. Past the open garbage cans in the back porch. Two cooks were busy in the kitchen, so he said "Afternoon" when they raised surprised eyebrows toward him.

Three flights up, with the building's three inhabited floors below him, he was in the garret office that 'the Baroness' had used before moving on last year and becoming a countess, and which Mena Edwards' new roommate, Martha Held, now used because, somehow, Martha was the new 'Baroness'. It was a small world, when you think about it. A small world that grew

smaller every day.

The entire garret was a clutter. Boxes, crates, furniture were tossed at random. There was no unused flat space, so he cleared some papers off a table and made one. Who would know he had moved them, with all the clutter lying around? With care, he opened the case he had brought with him.

The man at the photography shop assured him it was the very best setup he could find for photographing documents. An adjustable frame supported the camera, pointing it down exactly parallel to the frame below; electric lights on all sides of the frame illuminated the document to be photographed. The trick to this camera was an extra 90° bend to the focal plate, letting you adjust the camera without craning down from on top. A special extra long film roll fit into the side, presupposing a lot of documents to be photographed. It had cost a lot – and this time around, Janus wasn't footing the bill. He missed that first camera, even though not one exposure he'd made with it had ever been developed. This one wasn't nearly as good at photographing nude women as the one Janus had paid for, at least, not in its current configuration – not that his intention had been to photograph nude women with the first camera. It just sort of worked out that way.

He settled down to wait. It could be hours; it might be overnight; she might not get her hands on any documents at all. Martha had the dangerous part of this job and he hated to ask her to do it but somebody had to.

Von Papen carried that damn briefcase everywhere he went, held on to it like it was his child. Assuming it was not just dirty underwear in there, it had to contain papers of importance. Or something of importance. The best chance of getting into it was while he was sleeping – say,

after having sex.

Hence, Devon in the attic and Martha downstairs doing ... Devon preferred not to think about it.

The shadows grew; the garret plunged into darkness; street lamps took over outside the window. On the first floor, the party seemed to have started, with music and loud voices penetrating up into his eyrie. The party hadn't yet made its way to the second or third floors, but he knew that was only a matter of time. He was getting hungry and realized he had not thought to bring either food or drink with him. Some surveillance expert he was!

Just as his eyelids started to droop, he heard steps on the stair. Wide awake, he pushed back into the shadows of the far corner, his pistol in his hand. Had Martha been caught trying to separated von Papen from his briefcase? Was she lying dead in a bedroom below? Whose footsteps were coming up the stair?

When the door opened, the briefcase appeared first. Martha held it ahead of her and came in next. He stepped forward, tucking the pistol away. "Did you have much trouble? It took quite a while."

"I thought he'd never go to sleep." She held out the case to him. "He wore me out before I wore him out." In answer to Devon's eyebrow, she said "That's not all that unusual, if you must know. Franz is a ... forceful man." Devon took the case from her, carefully, as if it contained precious things.

It might.

Without a word, Devon placed the case on a table and turned on the table lamp beside it. As he suspected, it was a very ordinary three pin padlock that took him less than the usual time to

open. The lock was domestic, the case was domestic; it was all very domestic. The thought crossed his mind that Von Papen, for all of his scheming and planning and *Hoch der Kaiser-ing*, was not really very clever. Unfortunately, he had clever people around him. And that made his every scheme and plot dangerous as hell.

Opened, he carefully separated the sheets without removing them. They had to be kept in strict order. The briefcase turned out to be stuffed with papers in fine Germanic blackletter font – it would take days to decipher them. He had no intention of doing it now; today's job was to photograph everything as quickly and carefully as possible. Martha, on the other side of the camera frame, was smiling bravely but was nothing like as confident as she was trying to pretend. She was breathing fast and shallow, scared of the wrath of von Papen.

Down at the bottom of the case, under all the papers, was a thing that Devon had never seen before. Wrapped in red velvet, shining and bright, was a new Model P08 pistol. A Luger, the pride of the German army. That was nothing in itself; Devon had seen lots of those. In terms of utilitarian value, he'd rather have his (stolen) Dreyse 1903.

No, what made this one special was its color.

This one was yellow – or, rather, gold.

Von Papen must have money to burn – which, if you took a minute to think about it, he did, in a way. The German government probably paid for it but nobody in the German finance department would even notice it, if it was mentioned at all. It was a token of how much von Papen thought of himself. All great warriors had special weapons: Arthur and Excalibur; Charlemagne and Joyeuse; Roland and Durendal; Macbeth and Feargh. Here was another example: Von Papen and the Golden Gun.

It went back into the bottom of the case, carefully re-wrapped.

“We are going to take these out of the case one by one. All of the papers have to go back into the case *exactly* as they came out, in the same order, in the same place, the same way up as they originally were, without a single new wrinkle in them. Can you do that for me?” She nodded and took a deep breath. He nodded back at her. “It won’t take too long.”

He didn’t bother to read the papers, that would be far too time consuming and tedious. He just pulled them, one by one, from the briefcase and placed them under the camera. With the floodlights switched on, he took two snaps of each page, handed the page to Martha, and moved on to the next one. There were a hundred exposures on each roll of film; there were about two hundred pages in the case. That worked out nicely.

The process was stultifying, slow and repetitive, and he had to keep reminding himself to stay awake and not get sloppy – because one slip would certainly tip off von Papen whose eagle eye missed very little. And, probably let him know where the slip happened. If he caught on, Martha’s life was very much in the balance – even forfeit. And, then von Papen would get to use his Golden Gun.

“One hundred,” he said, putting down the page to change the film roll for the second time. He caught Martha’s hand as she reached for the page and gave it a little shake. She smiled at him, but he could see the tension behind the smile. The longer this business took, the greater their chance of being discovered. By the sound of the noise coming up the lower stair, the place was full tonight. That meant thirty or forty of them. At his best, Devon didn’t think he could take out more than fifteen, if it came to a fight.

At about page one hundred twenty-five, a voice called up the stair. “*Marta!*”

She froze and came near to panic in an instant. Devon gripped her hand and locked eyes with her. The panic faded.

“*Marta!*” It was definitely von Papen’s voice.

“*Ja, ja! Was ist?*”

“*Was meinst du, ‘was ist’? Wo ist es?*” Where is what?

Had he missed the briefcase already? She’d left him sleeping, or so she thought. Would he have woken up and immediately reached for it? He might have, at that. Reached for it and not found it where he put it.

Von Papen’s state of mind depended largely on what kind of job Martha had done earlier. Devon trusted that she’d done a thorough job.

“*Wo ist was, mein Schatz?*” She walked to the head of the stairs, leaned out into the staircase, and called down, as calmly as Monday morning.

“*Du weisst was ich meine. Wo ist mein Abendessen?*”

He wanted his supper! The bastard was hungry, for god’s sake. Martha had done a thorough job, after all. Devon had a few things he’d like to put on the menu, starting with the heel of his boot and ending with a .32 caliber bullet. Unfortunately, for the scheme to work, he’d have to forgo the pleasure for tonight.

“*Ich dachte du schlafst!*” Well, he wasn’t sleeping, was he? She put a little tease into her voice. “*Nächst’s Mal geb’ ich mir mehr Müh’.*” And Franzie grunted from below. How much better could she do, next time, Devon wondered. “*Ich hole dir das Abendessen selbst, Franzie.*” She’d have to go down to make his supper herself, and she reached around the doorway to place her hand on the wall, where a light switch would be, had there been a light switch, which there

wasn't. Looking at Devon, she moved her hand down as Devon switched off the floodlights. The garret was dark except for the table lamp in the corner.

"*Was willst du zum Abendessen, du armer hungriger Mann?*" Poor hungry man, my eye, Devon thought. She went down the stairs and out of sight. In a few moments, he heard two pairs of feet descending below. He hoped von Papen choked on his *Schweinshaxe* or whatever it was she prepared for him.

It took slightly longer than he liked and he was on his own, now, handling the papers. He had to be careful to be sure the papers were replaced exactly but he was finished in twenty-five minutes. How long does it take to eat a German supper? The sausage alone must take at least half an hour.

It took another fifteen minutes to close and re-lock von Papen's case and to pack up the camera equipment. He did like photography, he thought. He definitely should consider it as a job, when he got too old to sneak around whore-houses and chase saboteurs and spies.

He was at the bottom of the garret stairway, at the top of the stair to the second floor, when he heard a voice from the first floor, well below. He was pretty sure he knew who it was, but he wasn't taking any chances. He looked for a hidey-hole.

"*Nein, nein! Verdauen Sie Ihr Essen. Ich hole es für dich.*" She was coming up to find 'it'. Devon knew what 'it' was, but would 'he' come with her?

Footsteps came slowly up the carpeted stair, and he shrank back into the first door-way he could. The doorknob touched his hand so he turned it and stepped inside the room. It was dark, and he kept the door open a small crack to watch the stair.

Behind him, someone snored. A deep, moist, reverberant snore.

He turned slowly, hand on his pistol. The light from the doorway fell partly across the bed and he saw ... the hairiest back he'd ever witnessed, big shoulders and arms, covered with nautical tattoos. Lying on his stomach, the sailor was sleeping soundly.

Beside him, wide awake, a petite blond was watching Devon with a puzzled look. She certainly wasn't afraid – having just finished with the sailor, there was probably nothing Devon could do that would scare her. Devon laid a finger on his lips and she nodded, smiling, then pointed to the snoring sailor and rolled her eyes. Devon laughed with her, silently.

By now, Martha had reached the top of the stair and, crossing the hallway, called up the stairway to the garret.

“Jack? Jack!” It was half whisper, half strangled shout.

Devon winked at the blond, who pouted a little kiss to him, and he went back out into the hallway, closing the door softly. She saw him as he stepped into the light.

“He wants it now! Are you finished? What were you doing in there?” Then, relief as he held the briefcase out. “It’s all good? You put it all back in the right order?”

He chuckled at her anxiety. “This isn’t my first burglary, worrywart. It isn’t even my first today.” She took the briefcase and started down the stairs, but he caught her hand. “You’re a hero, Martha Held.” And, he kissed the hand he was holding. “Nothing to worry about from here. Just another normal day at Number 123.”

She grimaced and went down the stair. In ten seconds, he heard a door open, a couple of male voices calling out and the door closing. Number 123 was a well insulated place.

There was light traffic on the second floor, below him, and various noises coming from a few rooms on both floors. After five minutes of listening, he made his way down, moving as if he

had every right to be there, opened the front door and walked out onto the street. It was nice to breath cool air. He stopped to think of Martha, still inside, and how frightened she must be. He also knew there was nothing he could do about it.

Stopping under the first street lamp, he looked up to the apartment window where the NYPD dicks were hiding and then down the street to where Wiseman's wise men were, lifted his photography case to display it to them, raised a circled hand to his lips to indicate 'drink' and pointed to the bar at the end of the block.

He'd decided it was time to allow himself a drink.

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

**December 23, 1915**

The beginning of December was the time it all hit the fan.

The New York Evening Standard shouted it to the world:

**GERMAN AGENT REVEALS WHOLE PLOT TO SINK SHIPS!**

**EMBASSY KNEW OF HIM!**

The New York Sun was a little less bombastic:

**SEIZE 4 MORE GERMANS; HOLD 8 IN BOMB PLOT!**

**SEEK MAN WHO GOT \$20,000 FROM VON PAPEN!**

The New York Times, of course, remained calm:

**RECALL CAPTAIN VON PAPEN:**

**U.S. OFFICIAL REQUEST TO GERMANY**

Back at the beginning of November, over a shot of very nice whiskey and a tall glass of beer, Devon had laid out his plan to the four men he'd invited for a drink, none of whom really wanted to be there, but none of whom refused a drink. All four rolls of film were going to Janus's offices to be developed. Three sets of prints would be made: one for the Brits; one for the Yanks; and one for the files of the guy who was actually paying him. The negatives would be locked away for safe keeping. It seemed fair to Devon. Only when that had been agreed to would anybody get anything.

The cops had made noises about arrest and obstruction of justice. Devon held his whiskey and a lit match over the bag with the film in it.

The Brits had only asked when they'd get the prints.

The Janus Agency, being represented solely by Devon, had no objections to the plan.

So, NYPD got their copies – and panicked when they looked at them. Von Papen wasn't just making mud pies in America. In quick succession, they called in the Bureau of Investigation, the Treasury Department AND the Secret Service, the Navy Department, the War Department, and everyone except the dog catcher. Collectively wagging their wise heads, they all decided to do ... nothing.

When the Brits passed their copies to their boss, Sir William Wiseman showed what he was. He mailed copies out to the newspapers. Not everything, of course, but enough to make von Papen a household name. Sometimes, Walter A. Wisdom did show some; after all, he was a Wiseman.

So a furor erupted, they arrested a few people, seized hundreds of pounds of explosives and found completed bombs. Basically, in light of it all, something had to be done, and a bunch of

heads began to roll – not literally, although Devon would have been fine with that.

Even Martha had her day in the papers, when they hauled her in for questioning. She batted her eyelashes, wrung her hands and declared she knew nothing about what the evil men were doing. How could she? She was only a woman trying to run a legitimate business. She had no idea people were doing the things they were doing when they rented rooms from her.

It was all very noisy and outraged but Devon knew it wouldn't make the least bit of difference until the embassy and the consulates were shut down and people thrown out of the country. As it was, they were running around stomping on gophers: no matter how fast they might stomp, another one would pop up somewhere else. The Post even ran a cartoon on that very idea, with Uncle Sam trying to stomp on German plots rising out of the Capitol Building's lawn. It was very amusing, Devon thought. Some of the plotters rising from the ground even had spiked helmets, which would make stomping on them a painful process – which it absolutely was.

Devon had sent Irene a lovely bunch of roses – sent them to the main desk of Main Branch, where they'd do the most good. He expected she'd be engaged shortly.

He thought about all this while looking out the window of a very nice hotel room, with a big comfortable bed, a nice deep tub and, because he was determined to really try to keep to his temperance vow this time, no bar. He'd looked at his finances and decided that he could afford a little luxury – and he'd looked at his scars and bruises and decided that he deserved a little.

His temperance didn't extend beyond reasonable limits – celibacy was not part of it. He and Mena had spent memorable moments over the past few weeks, in her narrow comfortable bed, in his big comfortable bed, and even in the nice deep tub of that very nice hotel room. But, alas, she was on tour now, flitting from place to place at the expense of the United States shipping

lines, waving for photographers in all kinds of exotic and picturesque places across America. The Waving Girl might become even more popular than the Eastman Girl.

He'd slept past nine that morning in his big comfortable bed; had a nice breakfast brought up to his room, had a soothing soak in his nice deep tub, wished Mena were there with him, then had a little nap before getting dressed for what remained of the day. He was looking out the window, wondering whether to have a nap after lunch or another nap before lunch in preparation for his nap after lunch, when someone knocked.

No one was supposed to be knocking on his door. He resented someone knocking on his door. He'd moved all the way to Weehawken to ensure that no one would be knocking on his door. Anybody who was knocking on his door was either up to no good or disturbing his peace, both of which were capitol offences, in his opinion.

He also had his gun safely locked in his suitcase. He stared at the door, wishing there was some way to look through a door and tell who was on the other side of it. But, there wasn't.

He stood well to one side of the door and called "Who is it?" He flinched a little in anticipation of bullets, but the only thing that came through the door was a voice.

"It's Otis, Mr. Devon."

The hell?

"Otis who?" He shrank back a little further.

"Otis from the Janus Agency. You remember, the elevator?"

The hell?

He yanked the door open as quickly as he could and leaped into the opening, ready to fight.

But, it was just Otis. Young Otis, who'd had a crush on Eva, who'd had a wispy fringe of chin hair, whose voice had cracked at every sentence.

He was four inches taller, six inches broader, had a genuine pencil mustache and a voice that was nearly full baritone.

“Good to see you, Mr. Devon. How are you?” The young man held out his hand and Devon automatically shook it, while looking up and down the hallway. It was empty of both residents and assassins.

“Good, Otis. Good. Come in.” And he grabbed the young man by the arm and pulled him into the room, slamming the door closed, again.

Otis looked over the room with confidence, turned to Devon and waited.

“What are you … ?” He breathed deeply to collect himself. “What are you doing here, Otis?”

Otis grinned and it was still the same old cheeky grin he'd had. “The old man sent me to find you. It wasn't easy. You hide good, Mr. Devon.”

“You weren't on the elevator when I was in last. I didn't know what had happened to you. What are you doing now?” And Otis retrieved a badge from his pocket and held it up.

Janus Agency, Always Vigilante, Operative Number 238. It was new. It was shiny. And, there was no bullet gouge across the face of it. What in god's name was Janus doing, making a kid a full time operative?

“You're too damn young, Otis. Quit. Get the hell out. Go find a nice girl and have babies. Have lots of them. Name the first girl after me.”

“Come on, Mr. Devon. I'm not as young as you think. I'll be twenty in January.”

Twenty in January. “Oh, forgive me. I thought you were still a kid. Why’d the old man send you?”

The grin again. “He figured I’d be about the only one you wouldn’t shoot first and talk at later.”

“He figured that, did he? Well, he’s not nearly as smart as he thinks he is.” Devon’s grudge against Janus kept getting deeper.

“It’s working so far –” A sudden doubt appeared on Otis’s face. “ – isn’t it?”

“What does he want?” It was always something.

“I’m supposed to give you this.” And Otis pulled an envelope from his inner pocket. “It’s sealed.”

Devon could see that. It just said “Devon” on the front. Inside was one sentence: ‘Where’s Martha Held?’

He looked at the young agent. “Oh, crap. You know what’s in this?” And, Otis shook his head.

Figured. Janus never gave anything away. “Nothing but trouble. That’s what’s in this.” He handed the note to Otis.

“Is that a noun or a verb?”

“What?”

“Held. Is it ‘where is *Martha* held’ or are we looking for someone named ‘*Martha Held*’?”

Devon had to stare for a moment. “It’s a noun and a verb. Her name is Martha Held, and she’s a friend of mine. And Janus wants to know where she is. And there’s no ‘we’ here. I’m looking for her. Me.”

Otis shook his head. "Sorry, Mr. Devon. Mr. Janus said I was supposed to go with you. He wants to know what you're doing. I'll just tag along."

Devon yanked Otis's coat open and pulled the S&W 1913 he knew he'd find from under the young agent's arm, flipping the retainer strap out of the way first. He turned it over, saw what he expected, racked the slide halfway to look into the chamber and threw the useless thing back to the young man.

"Rule number one: be ready for action at a second's notice! What the fuck are you going to do with that, idiot! Maybe you can beat 'em to death with it, before they shoot you."

Not only was the retainer strap on the holster done up, not only was there no round in the chamber, there wasn't even a magazine in the weapon!

"You are not coming with me. In fact, you shouldn't be let out alone! Who taught you to use that? Mrs. Coulter? I take that back. I wouldn't go up against her on her worst day. Go home."

"I have to follow orders, Mr. Devon."

"You came through that door, not knowing who was on the other side, with your firearm unloaded and still locked into the holster?" Devon didn't know why he was so angry. "You're a danger to yourself and to everybody around you!"

"Well, I knew it was you!" Otis said. "And, anyway, I've got a magazine right here." He patted his pockets until he located the object and slid it into the pistol's grip. "See? Ready to go."

"For all you knew, there could have been six German agents on this side of that door."

"Six Ger ... what? What do you mean, German agents?" The youngster looked around the room. "But, it was just you, Mr. Devon!"

"Then I might have shot you! Because I didn't know who you were, or because I'm sick of

Janus chasing after me, or just because I don't like people knocking on my door!" The last was closest to the truth.

Otis was aghast. "I'm sorry. I guess I just didn't think."

Devon allowed himself one last blast. "Do you know what not thinking gets you? It gets you dead, you idiot! Or, worse yet, it gets *me* dead! And I wouldn't take kindly to that! I'd never speak to you again."

As he was ranting, he knelt in front of his big comfortable bed and drew his suitcase from under it. Unlocking it, he pulled his Dreyse, three magazines and a handful of additional cartridges from it.

Otis gaped. "Hey! You yelled at *me* for not having my gun ready and yours was under the bed the whole time?"

"I yelled at you for being young and stupid. You can't be both or you'll never get to be like me. I'm old and I'll be stupid if I want to. Let's go." At the door, he stopped Otis again. "Mag in; one in the chamber; locked."

Otis sheepishly took his S&W from its holster, racked the slide, slid the safety to 'Lock' and put it back out of sight. He left the restraining loop off without being told. The boy was learning.

Where is Martha Held? Janus didn't give a damn, so it must be somebody else wanting to find her. The Americans were through with her (and the dear girl hadn't said a word about Devon's part in this, bless her). So, the Brits wanted her. So, the Germans had her.

Or she was hiding from them all.

Or she'd buggered off to Florida, changed her name and was lying under the sun all day

and under a millionaire all night. He hoped that was the explanation.

Outside, Devon began to look for a cab, while Otis went to the curb and started to climb into a brand-new Ford.

“Wait a minute! Is that a company car?”

“No, it’s mine.” He was obviously pleased as punch with the auto. “I’ve been saving up from my wages for the past three years. I figured I couldn’t be a very good agent if I didn’t even have my own car.”

Devon looked with wonder at the lad. He’d been meaning to get an auto for himself, had often said that he really needed one, but, one thing and another, you know ... he elbowed Otis aside and took over the wheel.

Good heavens! It even had an electric start. Kids are spoiled rotten these days. Why, when he was Otis’s age, he had to hand-crank every car he ever stole.

Something was bothering him. “Say, if I was so hard to find, how *did* you find me?”

Otis looked shamefaced down to the floor. “It wasn’t anything smart or fancy like you’d come up with, Mr. Devon. You’d have put it together with your brain – found all the clues and figured it out.”

“Yeah, of course.” Hero worship? Never meet your heroes, son. “So, how did you find me?”

“I just called all the hotels in Manhattan and asked if you were there. Then Brooklyn, then Queens, then Jersey City, then ...”

Devon stopped him there. “Yeah. Okay. Good job.” And, set the car in motion.

They rolled off the Port Imperial ferry at West 39<sup>th</sup> street. Luckily, they didn’t have to go

cross-town, but Hotel Bretton Hall was forty-five blocks north, so it took nearly an hour through traffic. Parking a block away was actually a good thing, because he was able to look over the situation as he approached.

All seemed normal. Emilio, the day clerk, only said “Hey, Mr. Devon” as he went past, with Otis in tow. Apartment 804 was quiet and locked.

Otis was confused, then surprised, then envious when Devon produced his lock-picks and went to work. It took him less than a minute before the click of the lock told him it was open. He really must tell Mena to change her lock; the existing one wouldn’t keep out a middling-sober private detective.

He re-packed his tools and, hand on the knob, drew the Dreyse from behind him and flipped the selector on the German-made weapon to “*Feuer*”. A glare at Otis made him draw his weapon, too – almost certainly the first time he’d done so outside the gun range. Otis licked his lips, flicked the safety off. The pair stood ready, weapons drawn, nerves on edge. Devon opened the door.

And found nothing in particular.

Both bedrooms were undisturbed, Mena’s more scattered than Martha’s but that was the usual state. They did a quick circuit of each, with Otis stopping suddenly in front of the dressing table mirror in Mena’s. He took down one of a half-dozen snapshots that Mena had tucked into her vanity mirror and looked at it with round eyes and mouth. It was a working photograph of her, not one of Devon’s, but in the same vein as ones he’d taken. Devon grabbed it from Otis’s fingers.

“Hey! That’s my girlfriend! Out!” and he pushed his protégé out of the room, then put the photo back with a sigh. Six more weeks, she’d be on that tour.

The living room was a bust. The bathroom yielded nothing except a few pairs of silk stockings on a rack. Devon pushed Otis from the room again. “Go check the kitchen” while he went to look through the hall closet. He found what he expected to find there – or, rather, didn’t find what he didn’t expect to find. Martha’s expensive silver fox was nowhere to be seen.

“Mr. Devon! In here, please!”

What did the boy find in the kitchen? A pair of stockings? A pair of bloomers? God forbid it was a – what did they call those new things? – a brassiere. The boy would drop dead from a conniption fit.

Instead, he was pointing to a folded piece of paper. The curious thing was that it was stuck to the ice box with some of the new adhesive cellulose tape he’d seen advertised. Very up to date of whoever had put it there.

It was labeled, like the note from Janus, simply ‘Devon’.

He stopped his hand just before he touched the note. Did he need to preserve any fingerprints that might be on it? He was certain there would be no match in any police department’s files for any fingerprints that were there, so screw it. He simply yanked it off the door of the ice-box, pulling off some the finish and a few slivers of wood with it.

Unfolded, it read “You are slow, Mr. Devon. Very slow. Have you slowed down since our last meeting? Perhaps I’ll be waiting at the next spot. Perhaps she will be there. Perhaps I will kill you both. Or perhaps I will carry it on a while longer. There are voyages to make. Can you find me first? It’s as easy as 1-2-3, but, as I told you onboard *Das Kamäleon*, Devon: You are too slow and too stupid. *Auf wiedersehen, Jack.*”

Devon began to chuckle but there was no humor in the laughter. “Oh-h-h! I’m going to kill

him. I don't care who's watching. I'm going to kill him. I don't care if he's on his knees and begging: I'm going to kill him – slow!"

"Who are you going to kill slowly, Mr. Devon?"

Devon passed the note to Otis. "The tall, mustached, goose-stepping, sausage-sucking, *Hoch Der Kaiser*-ing son of a bitch who wrote that note. He's laughing at me – and he's hurting Martha to do it. Well, let me find him; we'll see who laughs last. I'm going to stuff my gun up his ass and pull the trigger seven times."

On the way out of the Hotel Bretton Hall, Emilio didn't even have time for "Good evening, Mr. Devon" before Devon and Otis had crossed the lobby and slammed their way through the doors.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

**December 23, 1915**

One block from Number 123, West 57<sup>th</sup>, Devon took Otis by the collar and pulled him around face to face.

“Listen to me. This place we’re going to is no kindergarten. I can’t babysit you; I’ll be too busy looking out for myself. This place has some very nasty people inside, people who can, and will burn, destroy, and kill whenever they think they need to. People who have done exactly that. This place gives orders to a thousand men who are doing everything they can to wreck your country. Are you listening? Do you understand what I’m telling you?”

Otis nodded his head, vigorously, then changed it to a shake.

“Why the hell did Janus think it was a good idea to have you tag along on this? I want you to go down that street there. Go to the alley halfway down the block. The street numbers are

painted on the backs of all the buildings. Go up the alley until you are behind this building marked one-twenty-three. Number 123, right?"

Otis nodded again.

"You are to wait there and any man who comes running out of the back door, shoot him first and only afterward ask who he is. Whoever he is, he will be armed and dangerous. Don't give him a chance to shoot you. Even that little pop-gun Janus gave you will do. If you shoot first, you don't *get* shot first – and that's the name of the game. Except it's no game!"

"Are we allowed to shoot first, Mr. Devon?"

"Hell, no! We just need to be gone before any cops show up."

Otis was clearly scared. "What are you going to do, Mr. Devon?"

"I'm going to go in and see what I can stir up. If she's in there, I'll find her. It's my expectation that there'll be lots of shouting; probably some punching and kicking; maybe a few shots. With luck, I won't be the one who gets shot. One way or another, though, I'll find her. Just don't let anybody out the back door. Now, go."

It was simple enough, really. Kick in the front door. Beat the crap out of anybody who objects to having the front door kicked in. Beat the crap out of whoever else he needs to beat the crap out of to find Martha or to find some clue as to where she is. Don't get the crap beaten out of himself. Don't get shot. Did he miss anything on that list?

Oh, yeah. Get out alive.

He wondered whether the basement at Number 123 was filled with explosives again. That would make it fun.

He walked twice past the front door but saw no activity. On the third pass, he suddenly

turned left, bounded up the step and hit the door hard with his whole weight.

Damn, that was one solid door.

He kicked it twice to no avail. It didn't even shake.

He pulled the Dreyse and held it against the lock. Just as he was about to pull the trigger, a thought, fiendish in its simplicity, diabolical in its cunning, occurred to him. 'Turn the knob.' And he did – and it did – and the door opened.

Slow and stupid. Maybe von Papen was right.

He expected a flurry of shots as he stepped inside, but there was no sound at all.

Both of the parlors were empty. Or, at least, unoccupied.

There was no sound from the back of the house. Was it empty? Had everyone vanished?

Up the stair to the second floor and each of the six rooms lay in darkness.

The third floor was the same.

Not only had all the Germans gone, but all of the girls as well. He wondered where they would end up – nowhere good, he was sure.

Up the stair to Martha's garret and it, too, was dark. The papers and other clutter were gone.

Down to the first floor again and still no sound from the back of the house.

That left only the basement, and he'd certainly had exciting times there before.

With the door left open, there was enough light to see to the bottom of the stair. From long experience, he knew where the light switch was, and found it by feel alone, as the light from the stairway was gone by the time he'd shuffled deeper into the basement, hand on the wall for guidance.

He grabbed the switch and turned it.

Blinding glare from the single, bare high-wattage light made him blink and shield his eyes from the absolutely expected sight to be seen.

The cellar that had once been filled with explosives and weapons and drawings and plans had been cleaned out. Not a crate of rifles; not a stand of bayonets; not a box of dynamite; not a workbench, a tool or a drawing was left. There was nothing left but a single page of newspaper taped against the stonework.

Cello-taped, as the note at Mena's had been.

In the bottom right of the page was a one-inch by one column ad.

*Sind Sie ein echter Deutscher?*

*Liebst du das Vaterland?*

*Schließen Sie sich Freunden an*

*Die Deutscher Verein*

**West 59<sup>th</sup> Street**

Was he a true German? Within reason. Did he love the Fatherland? Well, technically, it was his mother's land, so that made it his Grandfatherland. Did he want to find friends at the German Unity Club on West 59<sup>th</sup> Street? Hell, yeah. He was pretty sure there would be several friends there.

Just let him get his hands on them.

He went through the basement to the rear, through what was the cold storage area, which was so empty that not a single pickle remained. Even the refrigeration unit had been taken out. Damn, they had looked like good pickles. Throwing regret behind him, he ran up the stairs, into

the kitchen and out the back door.

A gunshot banged from across the alley and the bullet whined off the brickwork and down the alley.

He ducked back inside and shouted "You idiot! Not me!"

"Well, I didn't know it was you! You should have said something!"

The lad was right. He should have. It was a damn good thing Otis couldn't shoot worth a damn. He probably closed his eyes as he pulled the trigger.

"I'm coming back out. Try not to shoot me."

"Come ahead, then."

Back in the car, Otis driving, the youngster started to giggle.

"What?"

"You were right."

"Right about what?" He was mad at Otis, mad at von Papen but, mostly, mad at himself.

"Any man who came out of that back door was armed and dangerous."

"Otis – shut up."

Thirty blocks back uptown landed them at the German Unity Club at 112 West 59<sup>th</sup>. The same unmarked, flat-painted door, the same windowless, gray-painted stone front. He knew the secret this time, strode promptly up the single step, and knocked.

Long, short, short. Short, long, short, short.

And, like last time amid the fall leaves, the voice behind him said "*Was wollen sie?*" amid the snow and slush.

Evidently, the *Deutscher Verein* was not abandoned. And, it still had a doorman who hid in the shadows. Devon stayed where he was, but turned his head to look.

Just once, a beautiful blond, lord! Just once! But, no.

Time had not increased Bruno's attractions. He was still the plug-ugliest ex-pug Devon had ever encountered. As well as being one of the meanest-looking thugs in Devon's experience – and that was becoming a long and varied one.

Long, short, short. Short, long, short, short. A little more urgently this time. D, bloody L, damn it!

Bruno stepped further out of the shadow. “*Ich habe dich gefragt: was du hier willst?*” That was the longest sentence he'd heard from Bruno.

Long, short, short. Short, long, short, short!

“*Ich will nur in den Verein, Bruno. Ich suche jemandem.*”

Bruno shook his head on a neck that barely turned. “They are not here.”

“Oh, good, Bruno! You speak English.”

Long, short, short. Short, long, short, short!

Bruno reached the step and swung.

The target of that roundhouse was Devon's head and, if it had connected with its target, there would have been a soft popping sound – but Devon's head was not in the place it had been. Instead, he danced under Bruno's swing, put a hard left into the German's short ribs as he passed behind, and reached into his coat pocket with his right.

The jab to the ribs didn't even register with Bruno. Instead, he swung backhand at Devon, who ducked again, took a moment to recover and drove a hard right straight into Bruno's nose.

Backed up, as it was, with all the strength of Devon's dock-hardened two-hundred-plus pounds – and the brass knuckles he had slipped onto his right hand – that should have been the end of the fight. Instead, the man simply stepped back, felt his nose, and lifted his hands again.

Bruno's nose had been broken so many times, there was very little bone left to break.

Devon didn't waste any more time. He ducked down again and put his shoulder into his opponent's waist, circling with his arms, and picked up the man's near three hundred pounds, using momentum to drive backward out into the street, where he dropped him and stepped back quickly.

The move took Bruno by surprise and he took a moment before he raised his arms again and stepped forward –

– just as Otis's Model T screeched to a nicely timed halt six inches beyond the place where Bruno had been standing.

Bruno lay on his back four feet away. Devon checked his pulse: rock steady and far smoother than Devon's own at that moment. Bruno was down: out but not hurt to any significant degree.

The bumper of the Ford was badly dented.

“What took you so long?”

Otis stuck his head out the side and looked around the windshield. “You didn't get him into the street! Was I supposed to drive up onto the step?”

Devon got his racing heart under control. “Never mind. Take the long way around and come back a block down. Lights out when you do.” And, ever the optimist, Devon strode to the doorway again and knocked.

Long, short, short. Short, long, short, short.

This time, it opened at once, and Devon had *deja vu* all over again. Same kimono, belted this time, same pomaded bobbed hair, same cupid's bow lips.

The cigarette she smoked was in a twelve-inch long jade holder and she blew smoke toward Devon as she looked him up and down.

"Hi, Sammy. Welcome back." And she took his hand and led him inside.

He let himself be led. "Expecting me, were you, Vera?"

She shrugged. "We always expect whatever happens. Did you hurt Bruno too badly?"

Devon couldn't help but laugh. "He'll be sore when he wakes up, but he will wake up. He hurt the car more than himself, and it was brand new."

"Got insurance?"

"Are you kidding? You're not going ask if Bruno hurt me?"

"He never laid a finger on you, Sammy. Same as everybody in the place: nobody ever lays a finger on you. Not even me."

"I see you got yourself a new cigarette holder. Twelve-inches. Very nice."

She smiled at him. "I think of you every time I use it, Sammy." And she placed the end to her lips and drew in a lung-full of smoke. The smile got wider.

This could go on all day and Devon really had other things to do – like find Martha.

"So what's the agenda, Vera?"

She moved a step closer. "Any agenda you want, Sammy. We could have a drink and talk for a while, or we could go upstairs and spend the rest of the day wearing each other out. Does that sound like fun?"

It was his turn to smile. "I never did find out what those specialties you mentioned were."

She took the cigarette from the end of the holder before looking up at him. "You want to find out? I'd be very happy to show you." She stubbed the butt in an ashtray and smiled at him again. "It would be my absolute pleasure – and yours, too."

"Or I could quit playing games with you all day, and go meet up with von P – and kick the crap out of him."

Vera stopped, surprised and looked up at him from her five-foot nothing vantage point. "Oh, Franzie's not here, Sam. You should have figured that out by now. He's elsewhere, getting ready to do other things."

He'd had enough. He grabbed her under her arms, lifted her high and slammed her against the wall, easily holding her three feet above the floor. Even though the panic was evident in her eyes, she didn't make a sound.

"Why the hell am I here? Does he want to play cat-and-mouse all over Manhattan? Because the longer he keeps this up, the deeper the beating I'm going to place on him. Now, what am I doing here?"

She actually managed a giggle, feet dangling three feet in the air, suspended by her armpits.

"It's a riddle, Sam. And you have to figure it out for yourself. Now put me down."

"I'll put you over my knee and paddle you," he said, but he put her down.

She smoothed out her wrinkled kimono and said "You guessed one of my specialties! We can talk about the paddling later, but here we are now for the riddle."

They were at the end of the cross-hall in the middle of the building. One door lay to his

right, the other to his left.

“Now, I didn’t think this up, Franz did. He’s very good at this sort of thing. He plays a lot of games.” She pointed out the obvious layout to him. “You see, here are two doors. One over here; one over there. You get to choose which way to play the game. Behind one door is the lady, and behind the other ...”

“... is the tiger? I’ve read it, and it ends without anyone being any the wiser about which is the right door.” She shrugged eloquently. “How about we don’t play any games? How about you just tell me where Martha is?”

She backed up, shaking her head. “Because I don’t know. All I know is ‘two doors: the lady or the tiger.’”

He looked at each door in turn then, as she stepped back another step, he took two fast steps, grabbed her around the waist and carried her toward the doors. She twisted in his arm and tried to stab him in the eye with her cigarette holder. He slapped it out of her hand and it spun against the wall, shattering. “And I’m not buying you another one” he quipped, not a very good quip, but he did have one arm full of fighting female and his Dreyse in the other hand.

“What say you go in first and tell me what’s inside, Vera?” He thought that would get a reaction, and it did.

Vera screamed, so he stepped out of the way of the right hand door, twisted the knob and tossed the woman through.

“No! No!” she screamed and a fury of shots rang out from inside the room, some blasting holes in the door, accompanied by a muffled scream from the room behind him. There was a short pause and the sound of a falling body in the first room.

“*Verfickter Scheißdreck! Es ist die Nutte!*” A voice from in the room.

Devon kicked the door open, stepped into the doorway, and fired four times. Two more bodies fell.

“See, I knew it wasn’t a tiger, because tigers don’t grow around here. Sorry, Vera. You should have told me.”

He closed the door and waited for the house to erupt in confusion from the gunfire, but it remained still. Was there nobody else here? Five minutes passed and no sound. No doubt – the place was empty.

Everything that had been left here was simply a trap for him. How fucking monstrous was that? Could the man get worse?

That, of course, left the other room. The scream that had accompanied the gunfire indicated that this was, indeed, the room of the lady – but which lady? And, what were her circumstances?

He tried the knob and it turned. He pushed the door open without exposing himself and waited.

Finally, he had no option but to go in, which he did, Dreyse first.

No sound.

There had to be a light switch. There was.

The room’s sole occupant was a young woman, tied to the bed, in the clothing imagination might ascribe to such a situation. Aside from the fact that she was too frightened to scream, any sound she made would be muffled by the gag on her mouth.

It wasn’t Martha Held. That would have been too simple. No, von Papen planned to drag

this out with a dozen or more stages and, even then, there was no guarantee ...

Wait, he knew that girl. He'd spent some pleasant moments with her a while back. Her name was ...

... Sophie, his eager friend from his first visit to the *Deutscher Verein*. Sophie, yes ...

... and she had been crudely and cruelly tattooed.

Von Papen could, and just did, get worse.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

**December 23, 1915**

The girl tried to scream again from behind the gag as Devon approached and he realized he was still holding the pistol at the ready. Not the most conducive attitude to trust. He started to put it away, then took a moment to change magazines first. Weapon safely stowed, he approached the frightened young woman.

“Hello, Sophie. It’s me. Uhhh – Sam! Do you remember me? Sammy? Uncle Sam?” He reached out to remove the gag and she pulled her head back with a whimper. “Not going to hurt you, honey. I’m just taking the gag off you.” He did and she screamed for real, so he put it back on. “Sophie! I’m not going to hurt you. I’m trying to help you. Stop screaming. We don’t have time for it.”

This time, when he un gagged her, she was quiet, so he untied her hands (the ropes she was tied with were cutting into her wrists and ankles and cutting off her circulation). As soon as the bonds on her wrists fell free, she at once started to hit him.

Who said being a white knight was easy?

He backed away and let her see that his intentions were not evil – or, at least, less evil than the last bunch of men she'd dealt with.

The ones who'd done the brutal tattoo job on her chest. Christ, that looked painful.

Her chest was a mass of red marks where the tattooing had been done, along with blood still seeping from the fresh wounds. Whoever had done this had meant to inflict pain and had gone out of their way to do it.

He tried to keep his eyes up on her eyes, but the wounds from the tattooing demanded notice.

“I remember you,” she said, at last. “You were with Vera – and Vera hit me! And she never paid me, neither!” She covered her chest with both arms, which must have hurt too much because she pulled her arms away again. “If you don’t want to hurt me, just go away! Just leave me alone!”

“Sophie, think. Did I hit you? When you saw me with Vera: did I hurt you?”

She was naturally surly. “No.”

“No, I didn’t. I don’t hurt girls like you – if I can help it.”

“I want to talk to Vera. Where is she?”

“You don’t want to talk to Vera, believe me.” He was looking at her chest closely in, he hoped, a purely professional way.

“Where is she?”

“She’s across the hall. She’s dead. Somebody shot her.”

Sophie began to scream again.

“Well, it wasn’t me!”

Sophie stopped screaming.

“I shot the men who shot her.”

It took a moment for Sophie to digest that, and then the screaming continued. And continued.

He backed away again. “Undo your feet yourself, then. I’m not getting kicked. Just stop screaming! Please.”

The screaming stopped. From a safe distance, the fresh tattoos on the girl’s torso were holding his attention. “Who did all this to you, Sophie?”

“Franz, the bastard. It hurts.” She was having trouble with the knots, so he gently moved her hands and did it for her. While he did, she drew a blanket around her shoulders and covered herself. Ankle bindings removed, he massaged blood flow and warmth back into them. She didn’t kick him.

As soon as he felt warmth begin to return to her feet, he patted them and looked up at her. “Sophie, do you have clothes here?” She lifted her eyes to indicate the second floor. “Do you have a place you can go? A place where get away from here? Are there people who will help you? Family?”

She shook her head and fresh tears started down her cheeks. He took a card from behind the badge in his wallet.

“All right. Look at me, Sophie. You get dressed and call this number. Tell them Operative Number 68 said to help you get set up. Tell them he said to take it out of his salary if they want to. Remember ‘Operative No. 68’. What it says right here.” He tapped the words on the card and wondered whether the girl could read. He ran a finger over the bullet mark on his badge. “If you forget Operative No. 68, just tell them my badge has a bullet mark on it. They’ll know. They’re good people, Sophie, and they’ll come get you and take you to some place safe where you can start over.” And, if they didn’t, he thought, he’d be throwing chairs, desks and people out the seventh floor windows at the Janus building.

“They put tattoos on me! Didn’t they?” She was just realizing her predicament. “Can somebody get them off me?”

“I’m sorry, honey. I don’t think anyone can. They’re going to be there. That’s what von Papen wanted. He likes to hurt people.”

The tears poured down in earnest. “I know!” she wailed.

At a loss for something actually helpful to do, he patted her shoulder. “The marks will heal and you’ll forget about all this. We’re going to find you a place where you never have to think about it again.” He lifted her chin and dried her tears with the edge of the blanket. “And, now, sweetheart, I’m going to ask you a very important question.” He put a finger under her chin and lifted her tearful face. “Sophie – honey – can I look at your chest?”

The girl’s expression went from shock to disbelief to resignation, before she threw off the blanket and held her arms wide.

In the end, Sophie was in no shape to help herself, so he made the call, even though it took an extra five minutes when he should be chasing after von Papen. Mrs. Coulter was outraged

when he described what had been done to the girl and said she'd come down herself. He left Sophie, dressed and wrapped in a blanket, in the front parlor with a drink, even though he was sure she wasn't old enough to have one.

"It's a riddle, Otis. And I doubt we've got much longer to figure it out," he said, as his seat hit the front seat of Otis's Ford.

"What's a riddle? Why did it take so long? Why was there shooting? What did you do?"

"Fought a tiger, rescued a damsel, had a quick drink. Oh, and there's three dead people in there, so maybe you should drive." Devon looked up and down the street. "Where's Bruno?"

"Got up and wandered away a few minutes after you went in. I wondered if I'd have to run him down again. I guess his job was done."

He'd copied down the tattoos that started at Sophie's collarbone, trickled down through her cleavage and finished on her rib cage.

**Dutchmen call them dikes**

**America**

**says a**

**w**

**e**

**i**

**r**

**A viking**

**Dutch is noor**

**And now come find her here**

Devon promised von Papen an extra bullet for the pain he'd put Sophie through for that message. He stared at the words, but they held no logic for him.

"Where are we going, Mr. Devon?" Otis had been driving aimlessly.

"I don't know. Pull over." And now he was staring at the paper while the engine idled.

He read the words aloud. "Dutchmen call them dikes – America says a weir – A viking Dutch is noor – And now come find her here."

"Dutchmen," said Otis. "Netherlanders, Hollanders ... tulip-eaters." He looked at Devon. "Sorry. Just letting thoughts flow."

"Flow less. Think more. 'America says a weir,'" Devon continued.

"Well, a weir is the control top of a dam – and a dike is a dam. So ..."

"... a dam," Devon picked up. "We're looking for a dam. A Dutch dam?"

"Are there any dams left from back when New York was still Dutch?"

Devon puffed his cheeks and shook his head. "Couldn't be; that's three hundred years ago. They pretty much cleared away any references to New ..."

Together, they said "... Amster-DAM." And Otis continued with "Rotterdam, Potsdam ..."

"It's a ship." Devon was sure. The picture grew in his mind, clear as day.

"It is?"

"The damn Germans are fleeing the country. How else can they get away except via ship?"

Otis just grunted. Devon let his thoughts flow.

"Dutchmen: Hollanders, Holland. America says a weir: just plain old America. A viking Dutch is noor: okay, you got me there; I have no idea. And now come find her here."

"I don't get it," was all Otis had to contribute. "What makes that a ship?"

“You haven’t spent the fall working on the docks, my boy! I spent a lot of hours working a quarter-mile from where she is: I could look up and see her or her sisters moored every day. At the end of 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Hoboken. The Holland-America line. Whatever ship is moored there now, Martha will be on. Hoboken, Otis, and don’t spare the horses!”

It takes the best part of an hour to get from midtown Manhattan to Hoboken, no matter how hard you try. You can’t rush a ferry. And, while Devon fumed, the ship might be sailing at any moment. He passed the time by topping up the magazines for the Dreyse. He had a full twenty-one rounds ready for when he met von Papen.

When the Ford pulled up in front of the H-A Line buildings, Devon was out and running before the car stopped.

“I’ll find a place to park!” called Otis and Devon roared back, “Leave the fucking car and run!”

The single funnel and top deck of whatever ship was docked towered over the terminal building, and Devon could see that her fires were stoked: black smoke rose from the stack. Her whistle sounded a long warning blast as he watched. She, and Martha, and von Papen were getting ready to leave.

The departure board at the entrance to the hall announced the imminent sailing of the Holland-Amerika T. S. S. Noordam. “A viking Dutch is noor.” He still didn’t know quite what that meant, but that was the connection – Noor Dam.

One line still to solve: “And, now, come find her here.” All they had to do was sort through the crowd and find Martha Held.

There were upwards of a thousand people on the dock and in the building, people of every

size, shape, and color. There were probably another fifteen hundred on the ship, itself. Add another two hundred employees shuffling cargo around the dock and onto the ship. Add the fact that nobody was standing still but milling about like ants. Now, all he had to do was find one woman in the bunch – before the Noordam sailed – in fifteen minutes.

Otis caught up with him and stood, waiting for orders. Bright boy, Otis, but needs some self-motivation. Well, that'll come with time – provided he's given the time by people like von Papen. "Go to the bow and work your way back here to the gangway. Look for Franz von Papen or Martha Held."

"I don't know what they look like."

"Oh for ... ! She's forty-ish, good-looking, a few extra pounds on her, dark hair, and probably wearing a silver fox coat, the kind with the dangling fox-heads, the ones that hold each other by the mouth."

Otis gazed around at the crowd on the dock. "Oh, a forty-ish woman with a few extra pounds on her. Shouldn't be hard to find in this crowd." Devon could sense there was some sarcasm in the young man's voice.

"All right, then, Franz von Papen. Tall, thin, light-haired, big-mustached, monocled Kraut. Looks like every Prussian bastard you ever saw on stage or in a moving picture. You'll be able to tell it's him because you'll want to kick his teeth down his throat the second you see him; at least, I do. Now, run!"

Otis went one way, Devon the other, trying to watch both the ship and the dockside crowd at the same time, realizing he probably wouldn't succeed at either.

The gangway mid-ships was guarded by a two-ringed officer with a checklist and a couple

of sailors. Devon marched boldly up and began to climb the gangway.

“I’m sorry, sir, but no one on board except passengers. Are you a passenger, sir?”

“No, but I have to go on board. There’s someone I have to see.”

“I’m sorry. Ten minutes before sailing, sir. No visitors on board.”

At that moment, the ship sounded another warning blast.

And, as it did, he saw von Papen on the boat deck, twenty feet above him.

“I have to see Captain Von Papen. That’s him there. He’s with the German Embassy. It’s very important. Embassy business.” Devon was trying to keep his eyes on the Kapitan as he passed in and out of sight among the crowd up there. He was sure the man was von Papen, but there was no sign of Martha.

“Captain von Papen? The one in the papers? Where?” At least the fellow kept up with the news.

“That’s him on the boat deck.” He figured it was the boat deck because it had boats on it.

Devon started up the gangway again, but the officer blocked him. This time, the two sailors moved closer, at the ready.

“I’m sorry,” repeated the lieutenant. “No one on board after ten minutes. All ashore and so on, you know.”

Von Papen disappeared into the bowels of the ship.

“All right. Perhaps I can get a message to him. It’s very important. What cabin is Captain von Papen in?”

That seemed acceptable. “Is that under V for von or P for Papen?” The officer checked his list. “Here he is. Von Papen. C deck, 140 S. What’s the message, sir?”

“Never mind. Not important, after all.” A very exasperated Dutchman shook his head and turned away – if he was Dutch. He spoke very good English.

Devon walked away, moving toward the bow, looking for Otis, who seemed to have disappeared, as well. He was probably looking for a parking spot for his Ford. Devon continued to search the decks for any sign of Martha, but knew it was hopeless.

A hand tapped his shoulder. “I’ve got a boat.” Otis was looking pleased as punch with himself.

“What the hell did you say?”

Otis talked, but the final five minute warning blast drowned out his words completely. Looking up and down the length of the ship, everybody already seemed to be where they belonged.

“I’ve got a boat!” he repeated when the echoes had died away.

The ship’s crew and the roustabouts were hauling the gangway from its position, and he saw the dockhands casting off all but the bow and stern lines. The T.S.S. Noordam was nearly ready to sail, he was stranded on the quayside – and von Papen would get away. The bastard would get away – with Martha! What he was going to do with Martha, Devon didn’t care to guess, given what he’d done to little Sophie.

And how she’d been smuggled aboard was another question – drugged and brought on as a medical case? Drugged and stuffed in a traveling trunk? Brought up the gangway with a gun in her ribs? One way or another, Devon knew she was on board.

Along the side of the ship, in ten foot high letters, ‘T.S.S. Noordam – Holland’ was painted, in case of U-boats looking through periscopes at them, and the boarding ladders for the

ships boats were left dangling from the upper works as a precaution against the necessity of needing to get off the ship in a hurry, as if anyone was going to climb down (or up – and Devon didn't know why he thought of that) a forty foot ladder with the ship on the open sea. Ridiculous idea.

“So?” asked Otis. He seemed very pleased that he'd got a boat.

“So, what?” was Devon's devastatingly witty rejoinder. What did Otis mean, a boat? What kind of a boat? How fast of a boat? Why did he want to know that?

“What's your plan, boss? I know you must have a great one. How do we stop him?”

Devon looked at the youngster with astonishment. “What is the plan? The ship is leaving in four minutes. She weighs twenty-four thousand tons or so and can travel at something like twenty knots. The boat we'd be in weighs maybe half a ton and can *maybe* do twenty knots. Once the Noordam clears the channels and is out in international waters, there isn't a boat in the whole Hudson basin that can catch her. We'd have to follow her out in what amounts to an open dinghy, catch her, jump up to one of those lifeboat ladders, climb forty feet up into the air with ocean waves around us, evade detection by the crew, find von Papen (and probably several of his thugs, as well), locate Martha, outfight von Papen and his thugs, free her, make our way to the outer deck, again avoiding the crew, climb down the forty-foot ladders into a little dinghy, and make our way back to civilization.” He paused for a breath and looked at Otis's eager face. “Now, do you see any possible problems with that plan?”

“Sound like a good plan to me, boss. When do we start?”

The kid was unbelievable.

“How does that sound like a good plan? How does that sound like any kind of plan? Never

mind getting on board and finding Martha – climb down a forty-foot ladder, in the dark, on the open sea, into a dinghy? There's no way we could do it, and even if we could, Martha couldn't. Not to mention climbing *up* the damned ladder in the first place. We'd end up breathing Atlantic, no matter how hard we tried."

He really hated it when his brain started working. It took three deep breaths before he finalized the plan.

"So, we don't climb down the ladder into a dinghy. We send the dinghy home when we climb up and, later, when we're ready, we jump straight into the ocean and a tug or a smack or a canoe, for all I care, will be out there waiting to pick us up. You already got the speedboat, now we just need the tug. Let's go."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

**December 23, 1915**

Devon was clinging to the end of the boarding ladder, feet dragging through the wave-crests, and cursing himself for being a white knight. If you stopped to think about it, black knights have all the fun.

The speedboat below him rose on the swell and brought Otis closer, trying to find room to jump up himself. The man at the wheel of the boat was, understandably, reluctant to get right up against the side of the ship, leaving the pair of them a three foot gap to jump before reaching the ladder.

Devon hauled his feet onto the bottom rung of the ladder, kept his eyes fixed on the steel plates in front of him, and began to climb. His feet were soaked and he was worried his wet shoes would slip on the wet rungs. He sensed that two waves had passed under him when he felt sudden

weight below him and knew that Otis had made the jump. Vaguely, below, he heard the sound of the speedboat's engine roaring away into the dark. No one would have heard it on board the Noordam. It had cost a fair amount of change to persuade the owner to pilot for them. Chancing a look downward, he saw Otis clinging to the rungs and looking sick. Poor Otis. Maybe not a white knight, but looking a little like a green knight.

My god, that boy was brave.

The leap from speedboat to ladder had been about three feet, over cold, dark water. The bottom of the ladder was about five feet at its maximum from the water, with suction from the ship's screws ready to pull anyone that missed his grip under the hull. Otis had to time the leap to put the speedboat at its highest and the ship at its lowest, something with maybe a quarter of a second margin.

Devon had made the same leap, but he discounted that – that was stupidity, not bravery.

Clinging to the slippery wooden rungs of the ladder, Devon made the mistake of looking up to find the top of the ship. Forty feet is not far: about seven times the height of a man. You can walk it in a few seconds. Climbing it, on the outside of a vast ship, in the dark, with a December sea wind whipping past, with the frigid Atlantic Ocean all around, is a whole other matter. A wave of vertigo hit him and he had to stop to control it.

Up another rung, breath deeply, up another rung.

By the time he'd reached the top, he didn't think he could lift himself one more step. He rolled over the rail onto the boat deck, gasped twice, then reached down to help Otis cover the last few feet. Lying on the wooden deck, soaked from the ocean spray, it took a minute for them to catch their breath and calm their shaking limbs but, eventually, Devon pulled Otis to his feet and

they both looked over the rail, down the sheer side of the ship. It was nothing but blackness below, the bottom of the ladder they'd just climbed disappearing into the gloom and only the sound of waves against the ship to be heard above the thump of the ship's engines.

That had been the easy part.

"C deck; cabin 140 S."

"What does that mean?" Otis asked.

Devon pointed to the row of lifeboats hanging from their davits along the upper deck. "We're on the boat deck." He pointed down. "A deck; B deck; C deck. First one in the hull proper – first line of port-holes. She's got one more cabin deck below that, D deck."

"How do you know that?"

"I looked at her, Otis. Didn't you? Now, then, 'One forty S'; 'S' for starboard side. Let's go hunting."

From the music they heard and the light they could see, there was life, still, in the dining room and the saloon aft, but they weren't going anywhere near those. Devon led Otis to the front of the deckhouse and down three ladders to C deck. The passageways were nearly deserted, with most of the passengers already asleep after a long and exciting day. They passed a steward with a tray, who didn't seem to notice their wet condition but simply continued down the passage to the hatchway: a late snack for someone on D deck, perhaps. The food smelled darn good and Devon remembered he hadn't even had lunch yet. Maybe they could duck into the dining hall and have a bite. Charge it cabin 140 S on C deck. That'd teach 'em.

It was simply a matter of strolling, trying to look as though they had not just climbed up the side of a ship, trying not to drip seawater in obvious puddles on the deck. As it was, they were

leaving a double trail of wet footprints behind as they hunted along the passageway to cabin 140 S.

Which was a double cabin mid-ships. Being in the middle of the vessel, it was one of the most stable and, consequently, one of the most desired and probably one of the most expensive. Trust von Papen to spend government money like water; you had to admire the man's sheer nerve. Devon listened at the door but heard nothing. He drew his pistol, held it up for Otis to see, flicking the safety off. Otis did the same, with a little less assurance.

"We don't shoot. We get Martha and we get out. Got that?"

Otis nodded and swallowed. Devon looked grimly at him, put his shoulder against the door and prepared to heave.

A tray clattered loudly to the deck behind them where a surprised steward had dropped it, and a voice shouted "Hey!" As Devon turned, the steward, seeing two armed men at a cabin door, leaving the mess on the metal plates of the deck, turned and ran for the ladder at the end of the passageway. Otis straightened his arm to level his pistol but Devon grabbed it and pushed it down before bullets could fly.

"Rule number two," he said. "Don't shoot the civilians." Obviously, Otis still had a little experience to gain.

Turning back to the door, Devon once again put his shoulder against it and heaved. Nothing. He backed off and hit it with his full weight. It shivered but held. Another hit, another shiver. This was wasting time but he didn't want to risk a broken collarbone just on the door. This time, Otis stepped back and added the force of his foot to the heave. The door crashed open and Devon was inside, surveying the room quickly, while Otis followed.

Apart from Martha, trussed up and gagged on the bed, there was no one in the room. Eyes wide with fright to start with, she recognized Devon and her expression changed to relief, then fear again as a door to the other half of the double cabin slid open with a thud and a bruiser not quite as big as Bruno came charging through the opening. He apparently objected to having his evening nap disrupted.

Devon had no time to react as the man's fist drove straight toward his jaw. Instead, he just went limp and let the fist turn his head and throw him backward. He staggered back a half-step and came up against the wall of the stateroom but, most importantly, managed to stay on his feet. His limpness had dissipated much of the force but the impact was enough to send stars shooting in front of his eyes and his teeth into his lower lip. Devon felt a gush of blood in his mouth. The blow also had a hardness to it that was not flesh. The bastard was using brass knuckles!

That wasn't fair.

He let the force of the other man's blow rock him backward, then recoiled like a spring, driving his own brass knuckled left fist into his opponent's cheekbone. That one did connect. Devon felt bone grate under the brass and the German (Devon assumed) stumbled back against the doorway. The skin on the man's cheek had opened and blood began to trickle. From the corner of his eye, Devon saw Otis's leveled arm and, once again, pushed the gun aside.

"No shooting! That's not the plan! Get Martha out!" And he waded back into the battle with the German as the man was shaking his head to clear it.

Outside the cabin, the ship's whistle was sounding, the chug of the engines had stopped and Devon felt the ship's headlong speed drop off. The steward had reached the captain on the bridge. A glance showed him that Martha was gone and Devon heard Otis leaving the cabin and

the German yell (in German, so he must be one) before an un-brass knuckled left took him in the pit of his stomach. It was hard to tell the difference between the flesh fist and the brass-assisted one.

Devon felt the air go out of him in a whoosh, and he dropped to his knees. No air was coming in and his vision narrowed to a small, sparkly patch in front. The German took the opportunity to kick him in the ribs, while Devon tried to scramble back. Another kick, and Devon was afraid there were now some broken ribs. He fell onto his back.

This was not going according to plan.

The German planted his left foot beside Devon, preparing to drive his right foot into Devon's crotch, so he pressed the muzzle of the Dreyse against the man's knee and squeezed the trigger. Plans change, he told himself.

The tough was on the ground, holding his shattered knee, shrieking in pain, as Devon dragged himself to his feet, holding his bruised ribs. He spat a mouthful of blood at the German, thought about kicking him in the nuts, but decided time was more important than satisfaction.

Running down the passageway, heads began to pop out of cabins, mostly men in undershirts and suspenders, mustaches in various stages of bristling outrage. He waved his pistol at them, shouting "Get out of the way". Heads popped back into cabins and doors were slammed, except one exceptionally brave or exceptionally foolhardy soul, who tried to interfere. Devon waived the Dreyse and then left-crossed him while the man's attention was on the gun. At the end of the passageway, he took the steps of the forward ladder two at a time, despite ribs protesting, and reached B deck.

"Mr. Devon!" Otis called from thirty feet along the deck, and he saw that his protégé had

decided it was better to jump off from there, twenty feet lower than the boat deck. Good thinking, he decided, his boy is growing up. Then he saw Martha huddled against the rail, still tied and gagged.

“For god’s sake, untie her, idiot!”

“I can’t; the knots are too tight.” Otis was scanning the darkness below, looking for the boat that was supposed to intercept them.

Devon put his brass knuckles in one pocket, his pistol in another, and took his pocket knife from a third. He cut the gag first, then worked at freeing hands. Feet could be last: if they had to jump, she needed arms to swim, not necessarily feet.

As soon as her arms were free, Martha threw them around him and tried to kiss him – right on his cut lip.

“Ow! That hurts. No time for that.” He was cutting at her ankle bonds “What did von Papen want with you? Why’d he bring you on board?”

“He figured out that I helped you with the briefcase and he wanted to get some kind of revenge. But, mostly, to kill you. He wants you dead and he thought this was his last chance to get at you. He left clues and figured that would drive you crazy enough to chase him.” She was still clinging to him. “And it did.” She kissed his cut lip, again. “Thank you!”

“What? He thought I’d be crazy enough to chase him out to sea in an open boat and climb aboard an ocean liner that was under way? That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard of! Who would be crazy enough to do that?”

Martha gave him a strange look. “How did you get on board?”

“That was the easy part. It’s simple. We’re pirates.” And, he realized, under international

law, they were. He was suddenly pleased about that: it was close enough to barratry for Wiseman to charge him. He kept working on the ropes. “How did he get you on board, love?”

She had to think about it. “I don’t know. I was tied up at the club, for more than a day. A couple of men came in to where I was and put a cloth over my mouth – and then I was on a ship.” As he thought, chloroform, repeated as necessary – ‘Oh, yes, the lady is dying and wants to get home for one last time. Yes, she’s under sedation. No, it’s not contagious.’ Bastards.

Her feet came free.

“What happened to Klaus?” she asked, rubbing her ankles. Devon assumed his erstwhile dancing partner was Klaus.

“I shot him.” Martha’s eyes grew round. “Just in the knee. We’re nice pirates. We shoot to main, not kill.”

Otis, still scanning the ocean, said “I thought shooting was not in the plan.”

“Plans change. That’s Rule Three. Learn that and you’ll live longer.”

There was a considerable outcry below. They must have found the bleeding Klaus in the cabin. Footsteps on metal ladders were soon heard, along with voices in several languages urging people to stay in their cabins – or so Devon assumed the message to be. Pirates on the ship? Yeah, he’d stay in his cabin.

At the far end of the promenade, he saw two figures, one burly and square, the other tall, slim and familiar.

“All right, it’s time to be gone. You two, over the side. Martha, I’m sorry but you’ve got to jump.” A horrible thought occurred to him. “Can you swim?”

“Yes,” was her answer, but Otis said “I can’t.”

And yet he'd followed Devon across the gap and up the ladder. "Too late to think about that, now."

Overhead, under the decking above, nets were filled with life jackets. He slashed at the cords until a couple of the jackets fell and he passed one to each of the others. The pair at the end of the promenade were looking toward them.

"I still can't see the boat," Otis said and Devon said, heartily, "Oh, it's there, never worry!" He was doing enough worrying for the three of them.

"My skirts!" said Martha, tying on her cork-filled jacket. "They'll weigh me down." Devon's knife sliced the material six inches above her knees, and he ripped the rest away. She giggled at the sight. "That's barely a skirt, anymore," she said.

"It's a miniature skirt," he said, keeping an eye on the two approaching them while helping Martha, whose feet were still numb, hobble to the rail. "Maybe you'll start a fashion. No time. Over you go."

Otis climbed onto the rail and stood looking down. Devon saw him gulp and take deep breaths and he wasn't sure whether the young man's courage had failed him or whether he was praying, so he patted him encouragingly on the back and pushed him over. Before he heard the splash, he picked Martha up and set her on the rail. She swung her legs over, kissed him again and jumped.

And, now, he turned to face von Papen and whatever thug he still had left, but a voice behind him, in Dutch tones that were full of authority, shouted "Hands up and turn around! You're under arrest!"

He wondered whether they still hung pirates from the yard-arm. He wondered whether

they still had yard-arms. Von Papen and his friend were backing away, now, apparently content to let whoever was standing behind him handle the situation. The lawful authority.

There was no sound from the water below.

A look over his shoulder and, sure enough, the captain (well, four rings on his arms, at least) and two sailors were behind him. Each of the sailors had an old Colt revolver.

He started to lift his hands as he turned and fired the Dreyse from waist height. The bullet struck the revolver in the right hand of the sailor on the left and it flew from his grasp, to land with a clatter somewhere in the darkness. By that time, Devon had the second sailor in his sights. The captain, foolishly, was unarmed.

The two sailors seemed awestruck by Devon's marksmanship. So was Devon: he wasn't trying to show off his skill. He'd simply intended to bounce a bullet off the deck, well wide of the sailors, to give him time to jump.

"Throw that pistol overboard!" Devon ordered the second sailor, but the man simply stood there. "You heard me! Throw that pistol overboard!" Damn it, how do you say "throw that pistol overboard" in Dutch?

"*Gooi het pistool over boord,*" said the captain, and the gun made a nice arc before it went over the rail.

"Why the hell didn't he understand it when I said it?"

"He understood what you said. He was waiting for an order." The captain was waiting, as well.

"Really? How do you say 'good man' in Dutch?"

"*Goed man.*"

*“Goed man,”* Devon told the sailor.

The ship had come to a dead stop and was starting to rock a little, but the seas were pretty calm. Without headway, the wind had dropped and the noise had lessened. Devon nodded over his shoulder.

“What are those two behind me doing?” With his hands full of captain and sailors, it was hard to spare a glance backward.

“They are waiting at the companionway. What are you doing on my ship? International law is very hard on piracy.”

“It’s very hard on aiding and abetting kidnaping and murder, which is what you were doing and what you are doing, right now. In fact, I think that would be piracy, too, wouldn’t it? Or barratry, at the very least. I’ll leave the legal details to the judges. The tall one behind me is a criminal: he kidnaps women; he tortures women; he blows up ships; he blows up bridges; he tries to blow up canals. He hires killers. He tried to kill me. He tried to invade a whole country – oh, yeah, and he’s killed a lot of people in doing all that. And that’s just off the top of my head. On top of that, I just don’t like him.”

“He is a respected captain in the Imperial German Navy, and, no, I don’t like him, either, but he is a passenger on my ship. He is legally under my protection. On top of which, the things of which you accuse him happened, I assume, in the United States. This is international water. You may not realize it but American law does not apply here. I ask nicely for the last time: please, get off my ship.”

The captain seemed to be eternally patient with him, while the two sailors kept glancing down the promenade.

“Well, if it’s international water, you won’t mind my shooting that bastard in the face and then jumping off your ship.”

The captain smiled. “I am happy to oblige. You are welcome to jump overboard anytime.

Devon smiled back. “The shooting part, first. Thank you for stopping the ship, by the way. My friend thanks you and the lady that bastard behind me there kidnaped thanks you. They’d thank you themselves but they’re treading water, right now, waiting for a taxi – or a boat, whichever comes first.”

Again the captain smiled. “I am happy they have transport. But, now, you must surrender your gun.”

And, from behind, a hand fell on Devon’s shoulder.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

**December 23, 1915**

It really wasn't fair.

The hand on his shoulder belonged to a young sailor who thought he was pretty tough because he'd been in a bar fight or two. The unfair part was that Devon had spent the last fifteen years fighting for his life in bars, on streets, in back alleys, on frozen wastelands, in dark basements, on aeroplane wings, in prison, and on battlefields.

It was no contest.

Grabbing the sailor's thumb, Devon turned and twisted, fired twice into the teak of the deck in front of the two sailors and the captain, turned again, fired two more into the deck in front of the other sailors who had snuck up behind him and, as they ducked, straightened to fire a long shot down the promenade toward von Papen. He felt bone snap as the sailor's thumb broke.

He leapt over the sailors who had snuck up on him while they still cringed and ran the length of the promenade, to duck into the hatch where von Papen and friend had disappeared a few seconds before.

He pulled the hatch shut and dogged it, or a couple of the dogs, anyway, then started down, changing magazines as he went. He cursed himself for his stupidity: he'd used up the first magazine, seven shots, before the real fight had even started.

At C deck, a bullet splatted against the bulkhead beside him as he stupidly stuck his head into the hatchway without testing it first. Arm only back into the hatchway, he fired two back blindly, just to slow up whoever was there. Footsteps pounded on the deck above, heading in which direction he couldn't make out.

Von Papen was at the other end of the deck, holding a pistol that seemed to shine oddly in the light of the passageway, then he disappeared toward the port side. The sailors were starting to come down the ladder, so Devon fired two that flattened themselves on the bulkhead in front of them, sending them back up in haste, then he ran down the ladder to D deck and headed into the passageway. Another bullet 'zumm'ed past his ear, and he fired down the passage, then again up the companionway as he got to it.

He heard more footsteps high above, ringing on a ladder and decided von Papen had headed for the boat deck, perhaps even the bridge above that. Much good it may do him. He went up after him.

At A deck, a freight train came out of nowhere, turned him completely around, and sent him backward on his shoulders down the ladder. He hit the plating at B deck and lay stunned for a few moments, trying to get his breath back for the second time that night, before he realized the

freight train was coming down the ladder toward him two steps at a time. He was a half second away from another bloody beating, he still had the Dreyse in his hand, so he shot him – just a little bit, enough to avoid the beating. To be honest, he had no idea where his shot was going to go. The man crumpled to the deck, holding his shattered humerus. Neither of them found anything the least bit humorous about it.

Devon dragged himself to his feet once more. When the man he'd just shot tried to stop him, he got kicked in the face for his trouble, kicked again just on principle, then Devon was on his way up to the boat deck.

Two sailors were on the upper deck, put there to stop Devon, so he lifted the pistol and shouted "You really want to do this? *Gehen sie weg!*" That was German but must have been close enough to the Dutch, because the men went away without delay. Devon didn't blame them; he must look like some raving blood-dripping madman by now. They weren't being paid anything like enough to face down a raving, blood-dripping madman.

Another bullet ricocheted past him, and Devon thought that von Papen really needed to get out of the office more and get some practice. He thought it while he half-dove, half-limped into shelter behind the ship's one funnel which, as the ship was at a standstill, was belching coal smoke straight up, to rain coal dust straight down. He fired the remaining bullet in the second magazine at von Papen's silhouette, who tried to flit across to the port side, but thought better of it when Devon's bullet passed in front of his face to hit a ventilator.

Devon decided he needed some practice time, himself. He had a pretty abysmal target score tonight.

Ducking in between a lifeboat and its davit and trying to make himself as small as

possible, he slid a new magazine into the Dreyse. Von Papen, forty feet away, tucked himself behind a ventilator. It was just the two of them. The ship's crew had backed off, not wanting to get in the way of the bullets, and both of von Papen's thugs were down for the count. Von Papen was waving that odd pistol he'd fired earlier, trying to get a bead on him. Devon preferred to play the long game.

Of course, Devon thought, looking at von Papen's pistol gleam yellowish in the night. He'd seen that pistol before; had even held it. It had been in von Papen's briefcase. "Is that thing real gold?"

He could hear von Papen gloat, even from behind the ventilator. "Yes, it is. My golden gun! Quite magnificent, don't you think?" They were each trying to get a glimpse of the other through the smoke, the fog and the night.

Devon could only laugh out loud, voicing his contempt. "I think it's stupid! You'll burn out the barrel, the rifling and the chamber in a dozen shots. And the frame would be too soft to survive the recoil. You'll have a useless lump of misshapen metal in five minutes. Did you actually pay for that?"

"It's only plated in gold, you fool! It works perfectly well." And von Papen fired to prove it, knocking paint off the davit beside Devon's head and sending the ricochet howling into the dark. Devon ducked as low as he could, clutching his ribs where the bolts had connected, fired twice in the direction of the ventilator, and ran to the ladder on the port side.

"And I didn't pay for it!" von Papen yelled. "It was presented to me in appreciation of my genius!" He heard von Papen following him, so, when he reached A deck, he turned quickly and fired upward three times. The German returned the compliment.

Down the length of A deck, stepping into the cross passage at the end. Waiting. He heard von Papen's steps coming fast, then popped out of the passage and fired twice. Ahead of him, the promenade was empty. More footsteps, running toward the stern, and he realized the feet, running hard, were on the boat deck, over head. Von Papen was trying to get to the stern ladder and outsmart him.

He couldn't have that. No Oktober-festing, strudel-sucking, oom-pahing, leder-hosing German was smarter than he was.

He hoped.

He plunged back into the cross passage and through the hatch onto the port side of B deck. He knew where von Papen was going to appear and ran a dozen steps forward to give himself space, turning and leveling his pistol just as von Papen crashed onto the deck behind him and stumbled into the middle of the promenade. Devon steadied his shaking hand. Thirty feet away, *Herr Kapitan Franz Joseph Hermann Michael Maria von Papen, Erbsälzer zu Werl und Neuwerk* looked down the promenade and saw his death.

Devon had the German cold. There was no way he could miss at this distance. There was no way von Papen could bring his ridiculous gold-plated Luger to bear in time. In a quarter of a second, Devon's mind sang a little song of victory. At long last, the chase was over. Bye-bye, Franzie.

The Dreyse's striker fell with a futile click on an empty chamber.

He wasn't sure who was more surprised, he or von Papen. The look on *Herr Kapitan's* face certainly matched his own. He turned and ran down the deck. A second later, bullets from von Papen's gilded pistol began bouncing off deck, railings and brightwork. As a marksman, the

man was no better than Otis.

And, tonight, neither was he.

Ducking around the forward end of the deckhouse, Devon pulled the magazine from the Dreyse and reached for another before he realized: all three of his mags were empty. He'd fired twenty-one shots, most of them at von Papen, and missed every time.

It was time to leave.

He tucked the pistol securely away and ran for the starboard railing of the ship. Never mind that he was forty feet up. Never mind that the Atlantic was frigid and certain death. Never mind that he didn't have the advantage of a life belt such as Otis and Martha had. Just screw your courage to the sticking place, as a famous Scottish lady had once said, and go.

He got a hand on a post and one foot on a rail, hoisted himself and pushed off, just as one final shot from the Golden Gun lit the night and shattered the silence.

He fell and fell, some of it in air, some in water. At last, he stopped falling and began kicking his way toward the surface. The breath had, for the third time that night, been knocked out of him by the impact with the Atlantic and he fought the urge to pull in air that wasn't there. Pain in his side made it very hard to use his right arm to pull himself up. Hitting the water after a forty foot fall meant he wasn't going to be taking an interest in girls for a few days, either.

After an infinity, his head broke the surface and he was able to pull cold air into his lungs. Then the pain in his side hit again, doubling him up and he dropped beneath the surface for the second time, gulping in brine.

It was a curious coincidence that, twice in just one year, Devon was drowning – drowning because of Franz von Papen. You would think, after a while, that sort of thing would get

monotonous, but it absolutely doesn't. Each successive time remains every bit as interesting as the first.

Last time, his hands had been burned and were barely usable. This time, he found he could only use his left arm to claw to the surface. That made it very difficult to reach his goal, just a few feet above, and he was beginning to wonder whether he'd be around to find out how the story ends.

It was getting harder to claw at the water with each stroke, each kick, and the sea water was a blaze of icy fire on his body and lungs. The thought occurred to him that he should take a rest for a while and try to pull himself up later. Yes, all he needed was a little rest and he'd be ready to go. It seemed more and more like a good idea.

One final kick and drag before he took a rest.

His head was in air! Breathing desperately, splashing helplessly, beginning to sink once again.

A splash beside his head made him open his eyes and something grabbed his collar. He began to be pulled through the water, backwards, at astonishing speed. Then he felt hands under his shoulders and he was rising out of the water as if by magic.

Otis floated into his vision, soaking wet himself, looking down. How was Otis floating in the air like that? He shouldn't do that – he could fall. He stared at the apparition and slowly came to realize that Otis wasn't floating in the air: he, himself, was laying on his back on a deck. The deck of a tug-boat. The very dirty deck of a very dirty tug-boat.

“Is he breathing? Mr. Devon, are you breathing?”

Devon tried to wave a hand but his stomach twisted and he rolled onto his side, retching as

a quarter of the Atlantic Ocean made its way up out of his lungs and stomach. In truth, that may have been an exaggeration, but it *felt* like it.

Having done that, he flopped on to his back once more and realized that something was not right in his mid-section. He put his hand down there and figured out the reason. It wasn't anything unique, but it seemed quite important to him, at the moment. He'd been shot.

"I've been shot," he croaked. "I've been shot with a freaking golden gun! How stupid is that? I'm slow – and I'm stupid! And I let the bastard get away. He got away!" He pounded the deck with his fists, then tried to drag himself to his feet, but his feet wouldn't cooperate.

Otis had gone to the stern to collapse, but Martha was on her knees beside him, her miniature dress dripping, her hair hanging in salty ringlets, lifting his head into her lap. "Thank you, Jack, thank you!" She kissed his forehead, then his cheeks, then his mouth. "Thank you." She kissed his mouth again. The second time, she hit the place where his teeth had cut his inner lip and he yelled.

"Stop thanking me! Please!" He pushed her away. "It hurts; it hurts a lot." He tried to spit the blood out of his mouth but only dribbled.

While he was dribbling, she saw blood on the side of his shirt and quickly tore away the material to show the hole left by von Papen's Luger. Two holes, actually, front and back, each slowly leaking crimson.

He'd been shot.

"Have you been shot? Oh, my god, you've been shot!" And she wrapped her arms around him and pulled his head into her breast, rocking him back and forth. He tried desperately to free himself, but no longer had the strength. She was squeezing his side where the goon's boots had

pummeled him.

“Will you stop that? Seriously, Martha! Let go!” His voice was muffled by proximity to bosom.

She loosened her grip and he pushed himself clear, dragging in salt air.

“Jack, I’m so grateful ...”

“Can you be grateful somewhere else, please? I hurt, Martha. I hurt a lot.”

“Where does it hurt?”

He pointed them out. “Here.” The gunshot wounds. “Here.” The bruised ribs on the other side. “Here.” His rapidly swelling lips. “Here.” His bruised solar plexus. “Here.” His nearly clobbered groin.

“There! Is it bad?”

“I’ve had worse.” He put his hand over the wound on his side and pulled it back bloody.

“But I can’t remember when.” She started to hold him close again. “Please, no more gratitude!”

“But, I *am* grateful, Jack.”

Devon pointed a shaking finger toward Otis, lying back on the taffrail, getting his breath. “Why not be grateful to him? He rescued you, too, you know – a little bit. Not as much as me, but a little bit.”

Martha was doubtful. “He looks pretty young. I mean, he looks pretty, but he looks young. Who is he and how old is he?”

“His name is Otis and he’s old enough.”

“Old enough for what?”

“Old enough that it’s time he learned what he should know better than. Go be grateful over

there."

So, she did and she was, and Otis was a very surprised boy but, somehow, he soon got over it. Devon tried to sit up and didn't. He held his hand to his side and wondered what the medical facilities on this tug were like.

The mate came down onto the deck and looked at the kissing couple in the shadows. "Well, ain't that a sight? Never seen that on this old tub before." He looked closely at Devon, his eyes getting wider. "Have you been shot?"

"Yes! I've been shot! You should see the other guy." Devon figured he'd live if he could keep making jokes. Maybe better ones than that, though.

"I did. He looked fine. He was waving down at you as the ship got underway."

"Shut up."

Another pair of boots took their place beside the mate's. Nicely polished boots, with crisply-creased blue woolen pants above them and a nice coat and a greying head above that.

Devon lay back and closed his eyes. "I suppose you want receipts for everything?"

Janus was not happy. He ticked off offenses on his fingers. "Renting a speedboat; chartering a tug; running them both out into international waters? No need for a receipt for that. That's just petty cash."

"Oh, good." Devon held his ribs, covering the bullet wound with his palm. "I've a feeling my hospital bills won't come out of petty cash."

"As if we're paying those. Nobody told you to go off and commit piracy in the sea lanes, and have gun battles all over the ship with respected diplomatic figures, and shoot a dozen men, and seduce women into indecent exposure, and ..."

“Finished?” Devon was getting too tired to listen. “And it was two men. Two. Plus two back in New York. And one woman, but I didn’t shoot her. Did you find the girl?” Janus nodded. “You want my badge?”

Janus thought hard. “No, keep it. We may need somebody later to do stupid things badly in the name of rescuing civilization.”

Devon groaned and tried to sit, but he failed again. There was more blood than he cared to think about. “I do stupid things, but I never do them badly. You’ve got other guys for that. Am I going to be arrested for all this when we dock? Because I really don’t want to spend more time in Sing Sing.”

Janus looked around him, at the retreating lights of the passenger liner, at the distant shoreline and the glow of the lights of New York City. Somewhere in there was Lady Liberty.

“As far as I can see, it all happened in international waters on a Dutch ship. The U.S. has no jurisdiction. I wouldn’t go to Holland for a while, though. They’ll sentence you to life with your finger in a dike.”

Devon pointed at Otis, whom Martha had apparently finished thanking, for now at least. They were both lying back in the stern with sea-water draggled clothing. Martha’s miniature skirt was attracting the crew’s attention, who were all finding excuses to work on the stern deck. “He’s good, Janus. He’s bright. He’s brave as hell. And, he’ll do anything you ask him to.”

Janus looked across at the young man. “I know.”

“So, don’t kill him.”

“Not unless I need to.”

A brief silence, then “He got away.”

Janus nodded. "He was always going to. He's a diplomat. He's immune."

And Janus walked away.

The mate spoke up, again. "Look, we picked you bunch up outside the three-mile limit. By rights, you're supposed to go to customs first, but you need a doctor, pal. You should go straight to a hospital. You're all Americans, are you?"

"They are." Devon waved vaguely to the pair in the stern.

"Well, you can tell she is! She's fast and fancy. What about you? "

Devon dug out his badge wallet and opened it to show his soggy Canadian birth certificate, sitting beside his bullet-scarred Janus badge.

"I'm none of that, chum. I'm slow and plain – plain and slow and Canadian. We're like that."

## EPILOG

**January 23, 1916**

Bright sun streamed through the windows, although it was winter outside.

It was a nice suite of rooms and larger than most, but you'd be hard-pressed to find activity in most of the apartment. Not in the living room or the little study. In the bedroom, nothing stirred, although the disarray of the bedclothes on the big comfortable bed and the pillows on the floor indicated that some activity had happened there not too long before.

The kitchenette was still, except for an occasional drip from the faucet. Two champagne glasses and two empty bottles were stuck in an ice bucket in which the ice had long since melted.

It was only from the bathroom that any sounds came. An occasional splash and sploosh of water, the squeak of skin on enamel.

If you opened the door (and, really, you had no business doing so), you'd find the nice

deep tub was doubly occupied, along with a copious amount of steamy hot water and a generous frosting of bubbles.

There was no conversation. Not even any movement, really, other than a shift of a body or an arm or leg. Everything, and everyone, was drowsing in the afternoon sun.

The phone rang. Nothing moved, so it rang again. Phones tend to do that.

At last, a female arm, replete with bubbles, dripped over the side of the tub and reached for the ringing candlestick sitting on the floor beside it.

A man's hand reached out and covered hers. "Don't answer it."

"I have to."

"Don't answer it."

"It might be about the new Waving Girl sessions. I said they could call here. I have to answer it."

"Nothing good will come of it."

"I have to answer it."

"On your head be it."

He let go of her and she picked up the phone, put receiver to ear and horn to mouth.

"Hello?" She listened for a moment. "Uhm – he's not available. This is his ... secretary."

The man with the secretary moved his arms inside the tub and the woman gasped briefly. "His private secretary." She listened again. "Who may I say is calling?" She listened. "One moment."

She pressed the mouth-piece to her soapy chest and spoke over her shoulder.

"He wants to talk to you."

"I'm busy." He moved his arms again and she gasped again.

Into the mouth-piece, a trifle breathlessly. "I really don't want to call him away from what he's doing, just now." Another lengthy pause.

She put both the receiver and stick into her right hand and passed them over her shoulder to him.

"Now."

**OPERATIVE NO. 68**  
**WILL RETURN IN**  
**'THE BOY-ED DECEPTION'**

## HISTORICAL NOTES

**KINGSMILL:** Charles Edward, Rear Admiral. Born Guelph, Ontario in 1855; died in Portland, Ontario, 1935. He was appointed as the first Admiral of the Canadian Naval Service in 1909. Tall, thin, with a King George V beard, he was very much a Royal Navy officer. He saw service in Somaliland and the Sudan, then, on a ceremonial visit, he managed to run the brand-new battleship Dominion aground in clear weather off the Canadian coast. He was reprimanded and effectively demoted, being given command of an older battleship as punishment. He retired and then was brought back by Canada to form the Canadian Naval Service, which became the Royal Canadian Navy in 1911.

**ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY:** Just four years before this story, the RCN did not exist. Although arguments and consideration had been kicked around as a political football for decades, it was not until 1910 that the Canadian Naval Service was formally created. In 1911, the CNS was

officially renamed the Royal Canadian Navy. Throughout the war, the RCN struggled to find and equip vessels to carry out their duties: Britain couldn't give, sell or lend any; Canada wasn't in a position to build her own (although Vickers Manufacturing in Montreal actually built some 40 submarines for the Royal Navy). Instead, they made do with trawlers, motor vessels and private yachts. It wasn't until late in the war that Canada began to acquire purpose-built warships that could take the fight to the submarines.

**HMCS NIOBE** and **RAINBOW**: when the CNS was formed, Canada was given two elderly Royal Navy cruisers, Niobe being the first and Rainbow, the second. Niobe was assigned to the Atlantic coast, Rainbow to the Pacific. In 1914, Niobe, serving with the RN 4<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, actually chased the German merchant raider SS Prinz Eitel Friedrich into Newport News, Virginia, where the German ship was interned for the rest of the war. Both Niobe and Rainbow were too aged for much duty and, after initial service in 1914 and 1915, were relegated to depot ship status. Niobe was seriously damaged in the terrible Halifax Explosion of 1917 and fourteen of her crew were killed, including a seven-man boarding party sent to the SS Mont Blanc (the ship that exploded) to try to scuttle her. She never sailed again and was scrapped in 1920. Rainbow had an adventurous early part of the war, chasing the German Pacific fleet (thankfully, never catching them, as she was no match), then patrolling the Pacific coast, capturing two German-owned schooners and bringing them home as prizes. She was turned into a depot ship in 1917 and sold for scrap in 1920. October 21 (the day Niobe arrived in Canada) is still marked as Niobe Day in the Royal Canadian Navy.

**CHURCHILL**, Winston Randolph (1874-1965): as the British First Lord of the Admiralty, he was insistent that the Canadian navy not try to expand, due to pressure on the RN to

fill their existing roles, leaving no time to baby along a nascent RCN. While based on reasonable foundations, Churchill's insistence that Canada simply send men and money to aid Britain actually hampered the war effort on the Western Atlantic, forcing RN ships to do blockade, escort, and patrol duty, and crippled the RCN's development for some time. Instead of coming out of the First World War with a strong and autonomous naval presence, as was the case with the Canadian Army and Air Force, it was not until the middle of the Second World War that the RCN could really be thought of as such.

**PRINCE ARTHUR, DUKE OF CONNAUGHT AND STRATHEARN (1850-1942):**

The seventh child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, he was the Canadian Governor General at the start of World War One, replacing Earl Grey of tea and Grey Cup fame. At the age of 20, he was part of the Canadian force that defeated an attempted Fenian invasion at the Battle of Eccles Hill in 1870, and, that same year, was made a full chief of the Grand River Six Nations. He was, naturally, very pro-British and, as a serving British army officer (in fact, a field marshal!), thought of himself as the hands-on leader of the Canadian forces. His interference between the Canadian government and Imperial forces in Canada could be said to have hampered Canada's war effort. He was replaced as GG in 1916 by Victor Cavendish, the Duke of Devonshire.

**PHIPPS-HORNBY RN:** The RN admiral in charge of the Western Atlantic station, which was responsible for everything naval that happened from Halifax to Jamaica, had a deep distrust of colonial government and a loathing for colonial naval officers. He worked only through the GG, bypassing the Canadian government and the RCN. As a consequence, Canada had almost no say in the planning and execution of their own naval defense.

**HERR KAPITAN FRANZ JOSEPH HERMANN MICHAEL MARIA VON**

**PAPEN, Erbsälzer zu Werl und Neuwerk:** He features prominently in the first three books of this series, as he did in the real life versions of these stories. Ringleader of German bombing, sabotage and even military invasion efforts against Canada and the U.S. in 1914 and 1915, he spent more than \$116,000,000, was responsible for sinking more than 80 ships and the destruction of thousands of tons of goods and war materiel. His greatest triumph, although it happened after his departure, will be outlined in the fifth book of this series, The Kingsland Konspiracy. He was expelled from the U.S. in late December, 1915, escaping on his own terms just a few days ahead of being arrested and expelled by force. By 1945, he had been German chancellor and vice-chancellor, helped Hitler to power, laid the groundwork for the German *Anschluss* of Austria, and had become a war criminal who was convicted in the Nuremburg Trials. And, yes, he did have a ‘golden gun’, which recently auctioned for \$69,000 U.S.

**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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they conducted active espionage and counter-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. 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.

By the way, back then, ‘operative’ was pronounced with a long ‘a’, as in ‘operator’. See the 1941 movie of **The Maltese Falcon**.

We don’t know much about Operative No. 68, but we do know that he will return.