



Chapter 3

The black Mercedes staff car headed east along the river bank. Smith knew that he should be mentally filing away all that they passed, but his attention was fixed on the driver. Rani's face was more careworn as well as older than he remembered it, but dark fire still shone in her eyes and even in a bun her glossy black hair was as luxuriant as ever. Conscious of the cap badge and the Beretta in the back seat, he said nothing. The car came to a halt in a back lane off the Reeperbahn and they entered a tiny, bomb-damaged house.

An ill-favoured man answered the door, carefully drew the tattered curtains and lit a kerosene lamp. For the first time Smith could see his captors clearly. The man with the Beretta was a handsome young blond wearing the dark green overcoat of the SS. This was no surprise, but his collar tab sported three oak-leaves. The man's the equivalent of a major-general, thought Smith. What's going on here? Rani was dressed in the black uniform and white shirt of an SS *helferin* auxiliary. As for himself, now that he could see what they had made him put on over his wet and still extremely uncomfortable underwear ('Sorry, no towel. We didn't think that you'd be swimming from England'), he found that he was in the battle dress of an SS *Obersturmfuehrer*.

'Permit me to introduce myself', said the general. 'I am Brigadefuehrer Walther of Reich Security Central Office. This gentleman is Herr Wolf. Now, to business. Where have you left your radio?'

'I don't have one', Smith said, cautiously.

'How then are you to communicate?'

'Communicate with whom?'

'I see. We are still in RAF mode. Perhaps I can short-circuit matters by telling you why you are here. You are here because I summoned you. The reason I summoned you was to open up a direct channel of negotiation with the British Government. For months I have been using the Swedish Red Cross as intermediaries, but that has been like pushing string through a hole. Now, as Gruenberg would say, the time is near. Too damn near. So, how are you to communicate?'

Smith glanced at Rani, who avoided his eyes. It seemed that there would be little to lose by breaking cover, but it would sound so painfully amateurish. 'I was to place a coded advertisement in a national daily.' Walther threw up his hands. 'Good God. And this is the great British Secret Service, the admired model for our own. What planet are you



people living on? Advertisements? In a few days our 'newspapers' will be four-page emergency newssheets.' He thought for a few moments. 'Well, you are of no use to me, but if I hand you over to the Gestapo Kaltenbrunner may find out who you are and then where would I be?' Fingers drummed the holster on his belt but the pistol remained inside. 'You can cool your heels while I think about it.'

The cellar was a tiny underfloor cavity reached through a trapdoor in the kitchen. Unlike the rest of the house, the trap and its lock were in good condition. After vainly pushing from below Smith found a dry spot on the floor and cooled his heels. Time dragged. Smith tried to avoid looking at the luminous hands of his watch, in hopes of encouraging them to move faster. It was mid-morning before he again heard movement. Rani's voice was muffled and strangely remote through the trapdoor. 'Are you alright, Smithy? You can speak, I'm alone.'

'I'm fine. But what about you, and where's Zina?'

There was a brief silence and when the woman spoke there was an edge to her voice. 'You must not speak grandmother's name.'

'She's dead?'

'She went insane during an experiment to see how long a person could survive on seawater. I got out when Goebbel's people came to the camp looking for her. She had cast a strong horoscope for Hitler in the 1920s, and Goebbels wanted it done again. She was dead by then. I told them that I could do it, and they put me to work in the Propaganda Ministry.'

'So you became Gruenberg. But SS uniform...?'

She laughed bitterly. 'The Race and Settlement Office has made me an honorary Aryan. I'm legally the only Aryan gypsy in the Reich, when every one of us is more truly Aryan than any German. Walther picked me up when Goebbels sent a lot of Ministry workers to war industry.'

'How does Wolf fit in?'

'He is Himmler's personal astrologer. The *Reichsfuehrer* was losing faith in his predictions. Walther has had me restore it.'

'How much does Walther know?'

'Practically everything, except that you were Greenmount. So far as he is concerned, you are simply the British agent that he was able to trick London into sending him. Anyone would have done.'

'But *you* specifically called me. Why?'

The front door creaked. 'He's back', said Rani. 'Later.'

'There may be no later. Do you have a gun?'

'Better', she replied grimly, 'I have my father's knife.'



Walther had recovered his equanimity. 'It seems that I might be able to use you after all', he told Smith, 'but first we must understand each other'. He sat on the kitchen table. 'For two years I have been urging *Reichsfuehrer* Himmler to seek an accomodation with the Western allies. He umms and ahhs but I am sure that he would authorize it were it not for one thing - his loyalty to Hitler. I am equally sure that only Hitler's death or voluntary exit from the scene will release Himmler from that loyalty. You see my difficulty'.

'I was not sent here to assassinate Hitler, if that's what you're thinking', Smith said.

Walther laughed. 'My dear chap, that task was beyond the combined resources of the General Staff last year. I have no illusions on that score nor, I am sure, have your masters. No, I merely wish to know if and when the Fuehrer plays himself out of the game. And I suspect that your mission must be something similar, because for the life of me I can't think what else would be important enough for London to expose you to such a risk.'

'Unless I'm expendable.'

Walther laughed again. 'Then we do understand each other. Tomorrow Fraulein Kalo here must go to Berlin and I want you to escort her.'

Rani was surprised. Walther explained.

'This morning *Reichsminister* Goebbels telephoned to request two old horoscopes from the SS archives. The first is that of the German Republic, cast in 1918. The other is for the Third Reich, dated 1933. I am sure, Fraulein, that you will find these documents in need of reinterpretation. They should, I think, encourage those who read them to take heart, to believe that as long as Germany's leader refuses to abandon his capital the nation will survive. You will see that they do.'

He turned to Smith. 'The fraulein goes because Dr. Goebbels knows her and has confidence in her work. You go because she has the Z tattoo of the camps on her arm and might be arrested by some blue-eyed fanatic. I cannot trust any of my own staff with this. You are the lesser risk. Give me your identity discs.'

Smith reluctantly took them from around his neck. Walther held them to the light.

'J. Smith. How unoriginal.'

'It's my name.'

'How unoriginal of your parents, then.'

Smith momentarily felt a strong urge to hit him. Walther looked at him keenly.



'I have spared you the routine Gestapo softening-up because you need to be presentable, but I could change my mind. Remember that. Now listen carefully. Your German may be good but you know nothing of conditions here, and even less about the SS. Keep your mouth shut and let your papers speak for you as much as possible. As far as people in my office are concerned you are recently seconded to me from Waffen SS field intelligence. To outsiders who might ask you are an SS security officer doing his military service with a Waffen SS formation. Your papers will identify you as...' He looked at the discs. '... Johannes Schmidt, that will do. I'm sure it's as common in the Waffen SS as in the RAF. The more common, the more time it will take to check.' Walther looked at his watch. 'The fraulein has work to do, and so have I. In the meantime, we'll take you where you can tidy yourself up'. He scanned Smith's dishevelled appearance with distaste. 'You're a disgrace to your uniform.'