



### Chapter 11

Rani had not been idle during Smith's absence. Goebbels was having her coach him in the mysteries of casting and reading nativities. It was only the appearance of knowledge that he was interested in. He felt that a command of what he called the mumbo-jumbo of astrology would inspire more confidence should he again have opportunity to raise Germany's horoscopes with Hitler. They had got as far as the Placidus Tables of the Houses. The doctor was becoming exasperated. 'You peddlars of this nonsense make it complex just to disguise the fact that it is the most base and ignorant of superstitions.'

'Would you have everyone able to read their own stars, *Herr Doktor?*', Rani asked. The Propaganda Minister gave a wolfish smile. 'Of course not, my dear. That would be one weapon less in my crusade for public enlightenment.' He stood behind her chair and placed his hands on her shoulders. 'And I like our little tutorials. I had almost forgotten how much I used to enjoy your company.'

The telephone rang. The call was from the bunker. Goebbels stood, receiver in hand, almost to attention. He listened attentively, said 'at once, my Fuehrer', and hung up. His next words were addressed to the air. 'In Berlin. In my Berlin. Now that the Fuehrer has decided he will not change his mind, even though that coward Bormann will try to make him.' He was looking through Rani, but his eyes were drawn to hers. Blacker than midnight. Deeper than the ocean. He was vaguely aware that he might have asked her a question, but he could not have said what it was. Her reply, if reply it was, struck him with the clarity of a chime: 'The Fuehrer would not listen to a contrary argument if his decision had been publicly announced.' Goebbels walked towards the door. Reaching it, he absently turned back to Rani. 'Tell the State Secretary to have all radio stations announce that there will soon be a broadcast of the highest importance.'

Goebbels' secretary had a note for Rani. 'I'm back', it read, 'if you can, meet me at our park bench at 11 pm.' When she arrived, Smith was already waiting. He rose to kiss her cheek but she was impatient to speak. 'I don't know if I've done the right thing'.

'Nor do I,' he replied, 'I think I've accidentally talked Hitler into staying in Berlin, but I've no way of letting London know.'

Rani looked relieved. 'I think you'll find that's been attended to.'



Before Smith could ask what she meant, a distant public address speaker crackled to life from the direction of the Potsdamer Platz. 'Heil Hitler. This is Radio Berlin. Stand by for an important announcement.' The few people in the street stopped and turned in the direction of the sound. Goebbels' voice, thin and feverish through the distortion, spoke to them. They listened as to an oracle.

'The Fuehrer is in Berlin. The Fuehrer will not leave Berlin. The Fuehrer will defend Berlin to the very last. Berlin and Prague are the inviolable twin pillars of the Reich and in Berlin the Fuehrer will remain to the end, as will I, his Gauleiter for the city.'

The speaker abruptly fell silent. There was no electricity to waste. Smith turned to Rani. 'Well, that's that. All we have to do now is figure out how to get out of here. Do you think that Goebbels will let you go?'

'I don't know, but if not we will need some other way. I have a cousin working in the armaments industry here. He might be able to help.'

From Bormann down, how to get out was the question at the forefront of most minds. Few seemed to have much enthusiasm for a Viking funeral. In the calm that followed his rage, Hitler had given senior members of his entourage permission to leave, but there was reluctance to be first. In part it was fear of exposing one's back to rivals, in part reluctance to desert even a sinking ship for fear of something worse. Even Speer had half-volunteered to stay after making his confession, but Hitler had been satisfied with this last testimony to his hold over the man. He had absolved and dismissed his architect with the air of a man preparing himself for a different kind of departure.

There was no further need for couriers and Smith was sent back to Strauss, who put him in the orderly room to deputize while, increasingly, he absented himself. The guarding arrangements, like everything else, were breaking down. Smith had to put two men on a charge for drinking on duty. While he was wrestling irritably with the paperwork, a gust of wind scattered the forms. 'Shut the bloody door', he ordered without looking up, grabbing what he could.

Gustav smiled. 'Is that any way to speak to a long-lost friend?'

Smith smiled back. 'So you did get lost?'

'Fraid so. I never did find Busse, but I came across 56th Panzer Corps. They were lost too. It was wonderful. We've spent the last two days fighting our way in. I feel like a new man. No political bullshit. No ambiguity. Just grey uniforms up against brown ones. Great souveniring



opportunities, too; I got a Tokarev pistol. I even came across the *Liebstandarte* Guard Regiment. They came in with us. I've asked to be posted.'

'What were they doing this far north?'

'The whole of Army Group Centre has been withdrawn from the Danube valley. They're covering Prague. I didn't believe it at first. Whoever heard of the Fuehrer authorizing a withdrawal?'

What had they said in London? Russians on the Elbe...make sure you end up west of the Elbe. Smith unrolled one of his maps. 'Look at north Germany. All the rivers run roughly north-south. Weser, Elbe, Oder - take your pick. All absolutely clear halt lines that can be agreed between forces wanting to avoid a collision. But look at south Germany; the Danube valley - an east-west highway. The best possible topography for a pile-up.'

'Thunder and lightning! That's clever. The Fuehrer hopes the Americans and Russians will start fighting each other. Coalition *kaput*. Frederick the Great and the Czarina all over again.'

Smith smiled. 'You remember.'

'Those afternoons with your dad at Sans Souci? How could I forget. But will it work?'

'I doubt it. Our propaganda has been talking up the Alpine Redoubt for over a month now. Patton's a glory hunter, but he's not a fool. He won't risk getting too far ahead of his support if he thinks that we have strong forces on both of his flanks, and whether he turns towards Prague or the Redoubt he'll then be moving obliquely to the Russian advance. By allowing the Alpine Redoubt story to get about, the Fuehrer has probably shot himself in the foot.'

The door opened again. Strauss came in, looking a little the worse for wear. He glanced at the map. 'Are we winning yet?' Then he frowned.

'Both of you now, back here. Why did you bother?'

'Orders, *Herr Sturmbannfuehrer*', suggested Gustav.

'Orders. Always orders. I'm only here now because of orders. Last orders, and then they threw us out.' Strauss was so taken with his witticism that he almost fell over. 'Ah, almost forgot, a message for you from *Brigadefuehrer* Walther.' He fumbled in a pocket and handed Smith a grubby piece of paper. 'Sorry, it seems to have got wet.'

The radiogram read, 'Your pass expires in a few days'.

'Make any sense to you?', Strauss asked.

'He is reminding me that my headquarters entry pass needs renewal.'



'Such consideration! Marvellous!', Strauss said to Gustav, 'No-one looks after me like that.'

Smith walked across to the Propaganda Ministry. From the foyer he telephoned Rani. 'We have been summoned from Berlin, Fraulein. Be ready to leave from the orderly room at a moment's notice.' To be summoned is one thing, he reflected, to leave is quite another. Rani would ask Goebbels' permission, but would he grant it? And why was the Himmler pass about to expire? Questions without answers had always refused to stop rattling around in his head, and these cost him a sleepless night. And another, and another, but nothing happened. Life in the garden and the bunker assumed a surreal regularity. If it were not for the shelling, which day by day lowered the tops of the surrounding buildings, it would have been like living among the ruins of Rome in medieval times, Smith thought. He spent every available minute committing the maps of north-west Germany to memory. First the rivers. Germany's arteries, his father called them, carrying the lifeblood of her heavy industry, and if you know where they are, you know where the higher ground lies between them. As for road and rail, the north German plain is so flat that if they are not following the rivers they will be taking the shortest distance between major centres of population or industry.

Smith was pleased to find that Gustav had recovered some of his old zest, even if it was prompted by something as trivial as a souvenir pistol. So large a topic of conversation did it become that in an unguarded moment Smith mentioned his Nagant. It was a grave error. 'Do you have any idea how scarce they are in Germany? What do you want for it? Name your price. I'm sending the Tokarev home to my collection. I'll get them to send back any German pistol you can think of. I've got them all.' In desperation Smith agreed, on condition that the topic was not to be mentioned again until the replacement arrived. 'Excellent. Leave it to me. I think I have something that will exactly suit the *Obersturmfuehrer*. A Sauer! Effective, discreet and readily concealed.'

The population of the garden quarter was growing. An amiable-looking youngish woman had arrived and joined Hitler in the *fuehrerbunker*. Goebbels and his family moved into the bunker next door. The number of visitors, however, declined day by day. It was hard to find a way in through a city in its death throes and, even after a stay of only a few hours, harder still to get out again. The barbarians were at the gate. The



Russians completed the encirclement of Berlin and linked up with the Americans at Torgau on the Elbe, south of the capital, dividing the Reich in two. There was no word from Rani. On the third day, however, no sooner was Smith seated at his desk when Gustav burst in. 'Have you heard? That scum Fegelein, the Reichsfuehrer's liaison officer with the Fuehrer, the swine who advised him to take our cuff bands, he's bolted. They're sending Hoener and his thugs after him.' That must be it, thought Smith. Walther thinks that this will erase Himmler's credit with Hitler, and my pass with it.

A few hours later Hoener and his squad brought a diminutive figure, dressed in civilian clothes, to the orderly room. 'You will keep the prisoner in close confinement until the Fuehrer decides what is to be done with him.' If Strauss took offence at being ordered about by a subordinate he did not show it. He had Smith put Fegelein in the small cell attached to the guard room and place a man on the door. When Smith came back to report, Strauss was pacing the orderly room. 'I don't know what things are coming to', he protested. 'Fegelein is not just the Reichsfuehrer's hand picked representative. Do you know who he's married to?' Smith had to say that he did not. 'Fraulein Braun's sister. The man is the Fuehrer's de facto brother-in-law. What chance do the rest of us have of getting out?' De facto and in-law? Here's a man with all bases covered, Smith thought. 'He didn't seem all that concerned', he offered. 'Perhaps he thinks the connection will protect him.' 'He's just a fool of an ex-jockey. His brains are in his pants. I wouldn't give anything for his chances.'

The following day Fegelein was taken for interrogation. Strauss, who had delivered him to the bunker, returned distraught. 'It's worse than I thought', he told Smith. 'Reuters has announced that the Reichsfuehrer has been negotiating through the Swedish Red Cross. Can you believe it? Fegelein has admitted that he knew of meetings. That is enough for the Fuehrer. He now understands Steiner's treachery. There is even talk that an attempt was to be made on his life. The Reichsfuehrer is to be struck from the succession and Fegelein is to be shot. Right now. Get the men.'

So it was not Fegelein's escape attempt that had prompted Walther's warning. The leak about negotiations, if leak it was, had destroyed Himmler's influence in Berlin at a stroke and put at risk anyone associated with him, particularly if they were recent arrivals. There was



no possibility of Smith's cover holding up if the Praetorian guard itself was under suspicion. His only chance was to leave, immediately, but without a valid pass he had no authorization.

The impromptu parade formed up near the garden wall. Hoener's men emerged from the bunker half-dragging, half-carrying the ex-jockey, ex-*Gruppenfuehrer* and soon-to-be ex-brother in law. The little man was still protesting volubly that he knew nothing of a plot as the bandage was tied over his eyes. The words continued to pour from him in a torrent, as though he believed that no-one could fire unless he paused for breath. A rifle volley proved him wrong. Hoener stepped up to the still-moving body and put his pistol to the head. Smith was expecting the single shot of a *coup de grace*, but Hoener's gun erupted in a burst of automatic fire, reducing the head to pulp. 'Did you see that?', whispered Gustav. '1932 Mauser. I've just got one. Damn touchy though. Safety first'. Hoener strode down the line like an inspecting officer. He halted when he reached Smith. 'Deserters and traitors, traitors and deserters. Nothing to say in defence of this one, then? You had better watch out that I don't see the back of you.'

As soon as he was alone in the orderly room again, Smith tried to telephone the Propaganda Ministry. Unsteady hands made him misdial several times. When he reached the switchboard he was told that Rani's extension was out, but the operator offered to try to get a message through. 'Tell her that Dr. Goebbels wishes her to report to the *fuehrerbunker* orderly room immediately. The orderly room, is that clear?' An hour passed, and another. Smith was running out of the tasks, mostly invented, that he was using to keep the staff out of the orderly room, but it was empty when Gustav rushed through the door, highly agitated.

'Where's the Nagant', he demanded.

'We agreed that we wouldn't talk about it any more', Smith protested.

'No, please. This is important.'

'It's with my kit. I don't wear sidearms in the orderly room. Why?'

'They're doing loyalty checks. Searching everyone's gear. One of the ferrets just told me that they've found your revolver. They think you're an assassin or something.'

With all the self-control he could muster, Smith looked his friend in the face. 'Do you think I'm a Russian spy, Gustav?'

'Of course not, you're a British spy.'



Smith tried very hard to maintain his composure. 'What makes you say that?'

In spite of the urgency, it was plain that Gustav was quite pleased with himself. 'When you rolled up your sleeves to dig in the garden I saw that you don't have an SS tattoo. No more talk. You must go, there is very little time.'

'Then come with me.'

'You know I can't. I'm still holding on to my little fantasy. The Russians are about to storm our last barricade. I am standing beside the Fuehrer. He turns to me and says "It's down to you and me, Gustav. I'm sorry it didn't turn out better. Now let's kill some Bolsheviks", and we charge forward, together.'

'Only war movies end like that, Gustav.'

'I know.' He drew his pistol. 'Take this. You'll have to ...'

Behind his back, the door had swiftly and silently opened. Gustav momentarily looked puzzled and lifted his arm, as though a draught had chilled his neck. Without a word, he fell heavily to the floor. Rani stood in the open door. One hand was at her mouth; the other held a broad, flat blade, silver gleaming through crimson. Gustav slowly rolled over and looked at her. 'You must be his girl'. Blood bubbled on his lips with the words. Rani gasped and swallowed hard. She was about to be sick. 'Nice. You really mustn't worry about this...only hard...first time.' He slumped back and his head struck the floorboards. It was a final sort of sound.

Smith felt for a pulse but there was none. He looked vacantly at Rani and took the knife from her hand. 'I thought he was going to kill you', she said.

'No, he was my friend. Whatever else, he was my friend.' He shook himself. 'We have to get away from here. Are you alright?'

She nodded, he grabbed her hand, and they hurried into the darkness outside.