



Chapter 13

The Wannsee lay silent and empty. The trees that for long stretches extended to the water's edge hid its eastern shore in shadow. Eventually a fog began to gather and visibility fell to a few metres. With less need for caution, Smith and Rani were able to make better progress and a few hours effort brought them to the Schwanenwerder peninsula. After they had passed a number of boathouses Rani indicated that they should pull into the bank. Smith tied the raft and followed her up the wooded slope into a clearing. She stopped, and gave a little cry of surprise and disappointment. Before them was the bombed-out ruin of a substantial villa. She began walking along its entrance drive, which led to a small gate lodge. There was no light, although one was hardly to be expected at four in the morning. After a minute's unrewarded exercise with the knocker, Smith was looking for the easiest way to break in when a very definite female voice from within demanded that they identify themselves. Rani smiled with relief. 'It's me, Frau Pritzel. Rani, Rani Kalo. May we come in?'

The door was opened just far enough to see around. 'Bless me, it is! Come in! Come in!' The housekeeper was ample and elderly, but still a handsome woman. She was so delighted to see Rani that she ignored Smith, other than to remark how very dishevelled they both looked. She sat them at her kitchen table and began to prepare food. The table was bare except for a single sheet of typescript, much creased through folding and unfolding. She put in her pocket, embarrassed, when Rani casually looked at it. She would not even allow them to talk until she had made them coffee and cut large slabs of black bread and margarine. After his sixth slice it occurred to Smith that he and Rani between them had probably consumed the better part of the woman's weekly ration. He took out his own ration card and tore off a large number of coupons which he placed on the table, together with a few marks. Frau Pritzel looked hurt. 'The stamps are welcome, Rani,' she said, 'but no friend of yours pays at my table.' Smith blushed.

'I suppose you're going west', she said. 'I'd go too, but the last thing Frau Goebbels said to me was that the house here should be ready for them if Berlin became too impossible. She does not think it will come to that. She takes great comfort from Gruenberg's predictions, although she knows the doctor disapproves of such things'. Frau Pritzel drew the paper from her



pocket. 'I too believe that better times will come, but it seems hard to have to wait until August. Anyway, the house is gone, but I suppose they could still squeeze in here at a pinch.'

Smith looked at Rani. 'This is Dr. Goebbels' house?'

'Lord love you, yes', interposed Frau Pritzel. 'Although it's been quite a while since the doctor last brought the fraulein here.' It was Rani's turn to blush. 'I could do with a bath, if I may', she said, rising hastily to leave the kitchen.

'Oh lord, have I spoken out of turn?' Frau Pritzel asked, as she bustled after to heat the water.

Even before the war, Goebbels had enjoyed a formidable reputation as a ladies' man. Smith had heard many tales of his exploits with film stars, secretaries and others. When Frau Pritzel returned he remarked, as casually as he could, 'I seem to recall that the doctor also has a love nest, at Lanke.'

It had been a long time since Frau Pritzel had been able to gossip. Abstinence made her indiscreet. She leaned forward confidentially. 'Oh yes, that is his usual rendezvous, but not always. Sometimes foreign officials were received here and staff would come with him from Berlin. If Frau Goebbels was away, the doctor would combine business with pleasure. But it was all very proper, I assure you. The marital bed remained inviolate. All extra-curricular activity was here, in the gate house.'

Jealousy, Smith had been told by those in the know, was an all-consuming fire once it was allowed to take hold. He closed his mind to the questions ready to begin gnawing at it. 'Is there any transport around here?', he asked.

'No. I haven't even seen an army truck in the last two days.'

'Ferries? Barges?'

'No...except...' The housekeeper hesitated. 'The doctor's launch. It is still in the boathouse, but it hasn't been used in years.'

The sun was rising, chasing the fog from the water as Smith walked back to the water's edge. The boathouse was locked but a window was easily forced. The morning light caressed a blanket of dust, and beneath it was the pallor of thirsty teak and the verdigris of neglected brasswork. The launch was a substantial pleasure boat, sitting in a cradle that had been winched up the ways. Smith found the keys in a box on the wall. The instrumentation danced into life as he unlocked the ignition, but he dared



not take the risk of trying to start the engine in daylight. The needle of the fuel gauge hovered just above empty. Even if it could be started, the launch would not be going far. 'Pity, that', he thought. By the time he got back to the house Frau Pritzel had put Rani to bed and was cleaning her clothes. 'Give me those', she said, pointing to Smith's uniform. 'I'm afraid there's only enough hot water left for a shave.'

'A cold bath is fine, thanks. I went to a Prussian boarding school.'

Immersion refreshed and revived him, and when he returned to the kitchen the housekeeper was already busy making his uniform presentable again.

'That's very kind of you.'

'You are taking my Rani to safety, are you not?'

'Both of us, or neither. That is my intention.'

'Then by helping you I am helping her.'

She showed him to a tiny upstairs room with a narrow bed. He was all but asleep as his head hit the pillow. 'Fraulein Kalo is across the corridor', she said, 'I'll wake you at dusk.'

The cry that woke Smith peeled its way through layers of sleep. He was totally disoriented. It was dark, he struck his head on a sloping rafter as he tried to rise, and he could not find the pistol under his pillow. He staggered out his door and fell through Rani's. She was sitting bolt upright in bed, arms across her chest, hands clutching her shoulders. Perspiration gleamed on her forehead and upper lip. She stared ahead, oblivious of him.

'For god's sake, what is it?'

Rani came back. 'The sixth dream.' She reached out a hand, desperation in her voice. 'We're out of time.'

Smith silently cursed himself for deciding earlier not to ask. He tried to reassure her. 'Six in a row doesn't necessarily mean that the seventh will come the next time you sleep.'

Her eyes implored him. 'But it might. It has never gone this far before. Remember what you promised.'

It was as Smith as suspected. 'You were taking me to Neuengamme.'

She nodded. 'But it's too far.'

She was right and Smith knew it, but one problem at time. 'There's a boat.' Hope flooded back into her face. 'Where?'

'Here, but you must understand that it's a very long shot.' He told her that if they could follow the Havel into the Elbe, the Elbe would take them to



Neuengamme. 'It's at least 250 kilometres, crawling with Germans and Russians.'

'But not with Americans! You say that you think the Elbe has been agreed as the line between the Americans and the Russians. If you are right, won't the Elbe be no-man's land, with both of them careful about shooting at anything?'

It was a good point, and one that had escaped Smith. He refrained from mentioning that the Havel was probably still being contested between the Germans and the Russians, and they would still be shooting at everything.

After another visit to Frau Pritzel's meagre larder, and after Smith had been sent to the boathouse, Rani tried to persuade the old housekeeper to go with them. 'Gruenberg is a false prophet. Believe me, I know.'

'He could not be worse than the Fuehrer.'

How could one argue with that. 'I suppose not', said Rani.

'Then I will take my chances here. Give me a kiss.'

'It would be better if no-one knew we'd been here.'

'Of course. The doctor always resents others taking his place, even when it is he who ends the affair. Your young man seems to care a lot for you. I know that I am an old gossip, but trust me with this.'

They kissed, and Rani ran down to the boathouse.

It was not difficult for the two of them to winch the launch down the ways once Smith had greased the wheels of the cradle. The boathouse doors made an appalling noise as they opened, but all was then quiet until Smith tried the engine. The marine diesel coughed hard enough to be heard in Berlin, but quickly settled into its noisy, busy rhythm. Smith engaged the shaft and had the immense satisfaction of feeling the craft surge under him as he opened the throttle. Conscious of the lack of fuel, he quickly throttled back, but not before establishing that the boat was capable of about ten knots. Schwanenwerder was already fading into the darkness behind them when Smith thought he heard the engine miss, and then again. Rani, who was standing at the stern, had another explanation. 'Shots, from the gate house!'

'At us?'

'Can't tell. I don't think so.'

He shut the throttle. They looked at each other. 'It wouldn't be of any use to go back', he said. 'I know', she replied. He resumed course. Rani stared fixedly astern so that Smith could not see her tears. Gruenberg's face was a mask of pain.



They were in sight of a line of fires that Smith took for the Potsdam bridges before the diesel died. Rani was alarmed, not least because there was water eddying around her feet. Smith took to the pump. 'Don't worry, there's a landing ahead. We'll have to see what we can beg, borrow or steal.' Current and wind gently shepherded the launch towards the points of light.