



Chapter 19

'Why do you want the pass?', Smith asked, 'It's of no use now, is it?'
'Not to anyone else, perhaps, but it's the only thing that will get me out of the Reich.'

Walther had a big and unpleasant problem: Kaltenbrunner. The security chief was seeing the failure of Walther's peace initiative as opportunity to eliminate a rival. 'Rival for what?', Smith wanted to know.

'For Himmler's ear, of course.'

Smith could not believe what he was hearing. 'Himmler is finished,' he protested. 'In a few days he may not even have an ear. He'll be arrested or dead.'

Walther shook his head. 'You do not understand how either of them thinks. Himmler still hopes to lead a post-war German government.

Kaltenbrunner hopes that there will be a place for him.'

'So why can't you rely on Himmler to protect you?'

'I have failed him. Where is the peace in the west that I promised him, so that we could continue defending Europe against the Asiatic hordes?'

'That's hardly your fault.'

As if that mattered, Walther's look clearly said. 'Success has many parents, but failure is an orphan sired by a scapegoat. No, if I have any future in our profession it will be as the servant of a different Germany.'

Smith tried to digest all of this, but it was too far removed from reality for a rational mind. 'Tell me about Berlin.'

'What, the SS purge that followed the leak about negotiations?'

'Where did that come from?'

'You should know.'

Smith's face went blank. 'Not British Intelligence?'

'London, anyway.'

Smith's mind raced. Who would want to abort separate peace negotiations? Or want to keep Germany fighting on both fronts? Or use information about separate peace negotiations to sow discord among the Allies? It was a fruitless exercise. The chief suspects were different in each case: (a) the Americans, (b) the Russians, and (c) the Germans. The only ones without a motive were those being accused, (d) the British. He shook his head and sighed. 'Alright then, tell me about the purge.'

'Fegelein was just the right man in the wrong place at the wrong time. He knew nothing about my negotiations except that we had been trying to



start some, which was hardly a secret in the SS. What I don't understand is how that gave rise to a scare about Russian infiltration of the *Fuehrerbunker*. Anyway, it was very damaging; it got the Russians interested in what might be going on, and how it might isolate them.' Smith could see how the discovery of a Nagant revolver would have worried the Russians. Stalin knew that it wasn't he who was trying to assassinate Hitler (not this time, anyway), so who was, and why were they trying to blame Russia? Walther was wrong; the discovery of the Russian weapon wouldn't have damaged his cause, it would have helped. One didn't have to be as paranoid as Stalin to wonder if an assassination scare might not cause Hitler to look more favourably on an anti-Soviet accomodation with the West.

'This is making my head hurt,' said Smith, 'and it was bad enough before we started.' He looked at Rani, who had Sophie sitting on the table playing peek-a-boo. 'You'll have to tell me what to do here, Rani. Do I shoot him, or do I give him the pass and let him go to his friends in Sweden.'

For the first time Walther spoke directly to Rani. 'I was hoping that you would come with me.' She shook her head.

'No, I didn't think so', he said, 'not now I see these two together. Sophie Smith, eh? He's a very lucky man.' Rani looked embarassed.

'That's no to shooting him, I take it', said Smith, irritated in spite of himself. 'I won't say good luck.'

'That's alright', said Walther, 'I won't offer to shake hands. What did Gruenberg say? Britain and Germany on the same side, against the Russians, in 1948? Perhaps then.'

'Don't hold your breath. Goodbye.'

Walther took Rani's hand in his, bowed over it and clicked his heels. As he passed Sophie he tousled her hair. She squealed with delight and held her arms up to be kissed. He placed his lips on her forehead, and turned in the doorway. 'You were right, Englishman, when we first met, to say that you were expendable. When you get home, watch your back.'

Smith was torn. Rani was on the verge of collapse; she had been denied the rest that the beating in Havelberg had visited on him, and reunion with Sophie had withdrawn the spur of anxiety. She had to rest, dream or no dream, and soon...but not here.



'We can't be sure that the Gestapo won't turn up, looking for Walther. If we head for Hamburg we're bound to run into an Allied unit. Are you up to it?'

She nodded dumbly, too tired to speak.

The three of them took the road that meandered northwest alongside the little stream, the Dove Elbe. Neuengamme village straggled on, unwilling to let them go until, suddenly, they were in open country with only a single house standing sentry at the last intersection. The front door, which faced them, was open. Before Rani could restrain her, Sophie ran inside. 'Stop her', Rani said weakly, but Smith was already in pursuit. The windows were tiny and the interior dark. The child was not in the front parlour and he passed through two more rooms before he found her, legs swinging from a rocking chair, in the kitchen. She gave him an angelic smile and said, 'Mummy sleep here.' They were the first words that Smith had heard his daughter speak, and they brought him up short; she had taken charge, and she was right. The house was deserted, difficult to approach undetected, and intact. There was still crockery on the dresser, a cloth on the table and washing up in the sink. The *Marie Celeste* could not have been abandoned any more completely or urgently, thought Smith. 'OK. Mummy sleep here'. He brought Rani into the room and sat her in the rocker. 'Rest. I'll keep watch upstairs.' Rani took Sophie in her lap. The child tried to play peek-a-boo again, and placed her hands over Rani's eyes. Instantly, her mother was asleep.

Tired though he was, Smith was thorough. He found windows with views down each of the roads that met at the intersection. The front door and the kitchen door, at the back, were the only two exits. For a while he moved from room to room, but he was too stiff to do it for long. He decided that any threat was most likely to come from the north and east, and settled down in the corner bedroom that had windows facing in those directions. The bed had crisp white linen on it, and was so inviting. 'Lie down on that, Father Bear', he said to himself, 'and Goldilocks herself wouldn't stir you.' He sat on the windowsill instead, looking north. The afternoon was wearing on, and he was beginning to wonder if he should wake Rani. Or if he could. The thought chilled him, but still he sat. To sleep, perchance to dream. He was with Shakespeare rather than Freud on that; a random occurrence, nice if it's about something you like, a bit scary if it's not, but you wake up in the morning with no damage done. How could one deal with Rani's alternative universe, in which expecting to dream was



inevitably a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the dream itself was merely a presentiment of reality. If that's the case, he concluded, half the damage has already been done. 'So what can I do about the other half?'

A glint of light shone briefly from a fringe of trees half a kilometre up the road. Smith leaned from the window and watched intently. For a while there was nothing, then a boxy shape showed in the space between two of the trees. The tank hurriedly crossed the gap and vanished back into cover, its gun traversing in the direction of the house. To Smith it had a familiar profile. 'A Churchill, and about to put a round in here to be on the safe side!' He ran to the bed, pulled a sheet from it, and hung it from the window. He found some books to hold the sheet from the sill and looked down. The window was directly above the kitchen door. He paused in thought, and then quickly removed the books.

He ran down to the kitchen, to be met by an extraordinary scene. Sophie's doll had been placed on the table, just out of reach of the rocking chair where the child sat in her sleeping mother's lap. Sophie had been gently rocking the chair, trying to get enough momentum to reach the table without waking Rani. The doll was still out of reach but the tablecloth was not, and with a last lunge Sophie seized it with both hands. The backwards swing of the chair stripped the cloth from the table and carried it over both Sophie and Rani. Rani woke screaming, and did not stop screaming until Smith had pulled the cloth from her face. Wild-eyed, she was totally disoriented until she saw Sophie, and even then she was still in panic, gulping air in huge draughts. Sophie was mildly alarmed but did not cry. She retrieved her doll from the floor and gave it to Rani to nurse.

When Rani had calmed down, Smith told her about the tank and the need to leave the house. He led her to the door and turned the handle. He pushed but it would not open. 'Try pulling', Rani said. It opened, revealing the sheet hanging limply beyond. Shaken or not, Rani could still laugh. 'Outside doors open inwards, silly, but thank you anyway.' She picked up Sophie. 'And thank you, Zina.'

'I thought we weren't to speak your grandmother's name', Smith said, more than a little deflated.

'It is no longer grandmother's name. It belongs to the gifted one, the one who continues.'

'But you have the gift.'



'No. I need to speak. This one' - she jiggled the child - 'this one needs only the hand and the eye.'

Smith led them out to the road. The sun was setting directly in their faces, reducing the squat outline of the tank to a mere hump in the road ahead. Smith handed a corner of the tablecloth to Rani. With the child between them, holding her mother's hand, the three of them began to walk. The adults lifted the white cloth above and behind them, and their figures were shadowed against the material. The child held out her doll to Smith, who solemnly took it by its other arm. 'It is over, isn't it?', said Rani.