



ROBERT
WALLACE

VALENTINES
CUP

THE FIRST STORY IN THE VALENTINE SERIES

1943 BAVARIA

UNDERCOVER AGENT ALISTAIR VALENTINE
OVERHEARS A FEW WORDS THAT WILL
ALTER THE COURSE OF THE WAR

Valentines Cup

The Robert Wallace Portfolio

The Valentine Series

Valentines Cup

Crimson Wing

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Operation Gunfleet

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*A Victorian detective thriller based on
real events and revolutionary ideas
from Isambard Kingdom Brunel*

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The Vengeance Series

The Betrayal of Jacqueline Flower

The Revenge of Catherine Delane

The Reincarnation of Camille Boissier

Who Killed Nina Rossi?

About the Author

Robert Wallace was born and raised in Bristol and spent many years working in the medical field which took him to Europe, the United States, Japan, Australia and Scandinavia. It sparked a lifelong interest in travel. His work involves turning historical events into works of semi-fiction, retaining the factual background, creating fictional characters to share their lives with real people.

More at: www.robertwallace.media

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Valentines Cup is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. The roles played in this novel by Adolf Hitler, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Admiral Wilhelm Franz Canaris, other members of the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service, the chief executives of German industries and members of British intelligence however, abide by the generally known facts of their real lives, and I have sometimes quoted from their works and letters, et passim. The storyline . . . and all the passages relating to events . . . have no factual basis.

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This book is in memory of
André Smolinski and Jeremy Warner.
Dear friends taken too soon.
Remembered with love and affection.

*'No war can be conducted successfully
without early and good intelligence.'*

*John Churchill,
1st Duke of Marlborough, 1715*

20th February 1933 Bavaria, Germany

*Six years prior to the British declaration of war on
Germany.*

TEN MEN'S SHOES CRUNCHED across thin ice and snow. It was morning, well below freezing; each man had clear need of their expensive cashmere overcoats, impeccable suits and hand-stitched brogues. These spectral figures resembled a line of mourners; heads slightly bowed. Each had abandoned chauffeured limousines at the foot of the drive of a sprawling Bavarian country mansion. No one spoke; their breath vaporising in the air, gloved hands clenched. Hazy sunlight filtered through bare trees in the encircling forest. The air was still, save the sound of their footsteps, almost in unison, single file; these men marched with purpose.

Only the last in line, a squat and muscular man, walked contrarily – awkwardly. He looked confident, dangerous; his chin lifted in the chill. Silence still prevailed as they reached the open front door. These ghostly silhouettes all knew one another; all were preoccupied with what lay ahead.

With names such as Gustav, Carl, Wilhelm, Erich ... they were the

wealthiest industrialists in Germany and best known for the companies they owned: BASF, Bayer, Agfa, Opel, IG Farben, Krupp, Siemens, Allianz, Telefunken, Hoesch AG and Spengler GmbH. They sat at a large table in an opulent, high-ceilinged, oak-panelled room lit by electric chandeliers. And they waited. A murmur of muffled voices drifted from an anteroom; the doors swung open and President of the Reichstag, Hermann Goering, strolled in, smiling, full of benevolent greetings. The industrialists all knew what he wanted ... money. Lots of it.

Goering walked around the table, dispensing kind words, clasping hands with a self-assured, confident welcome. After a well-timed interval, the new, brown-uniformed Chancellor of Germany strode into the hall. Those who had not met him were curious to see him in the flesh; all they had known was from hearsay or exaggerated media reports. Adolf Hitler was smiling, relaxed, not as they had imagined. Once introductions had been made, the men listened. He spoke clearly and with authority. Changes must be made in Germany, he said. They must put an end to this weak regime, ward off the Communist menace, eliminate trade unions and encourage industry. Prosperity and the work ethic should be encouraged, particularly to the young. Hitler's speech lasted an hour; and, when it finished, Gustav Krupp stood and assured him of their support. He thanked Hitler for clarifying the political situation as he saw it in Germany, and his vision of the future.

Once Hitler left, Goering took to the floor, echoing and enhancing Hitler's ideas. First, they needed money for the 5th of March elections. The Nazi Party was broke; it needed funding for a successful campaign as Election Day approached. They would all gain

when Hitler took complete power. There were nods of approval.

By the end of the gathering, millions of Marks had been either collected or promised. It was a unique moment in German corporate history, unprecedented compromise with the Nazis. This was a business transaction pure and simple, fund-raising. The ten sat like silent cash registers, waiting for the gates of hell to open; another war would make them huge amounts of money.

As the meeting dispersed, Goering approached Erich Spengler, perhaps the most feared man in the hall that day. Spengler, as an engineer, was elite among this assembly of German industrialists. He was certainly one of the wealthiest, with factories throughout greater Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. Shipping, oil, coal, steel, machinery; Spengler had fingers in many pies.

“You were quiet, Herr Spengler. Is everything all right?” said Goering cautiously and respectfully. He glanced at the man’s brutal features. An injury in the Great War – 111 Cavalry – had given him a haunted look and his posture was rigid, the result of a fall from a horse in combat.

Spengler closed the notebook in front of him; his sinewy hands caressed the leather surface. He made no eye-contact: “What will it cost?” His words were slow and menacing.

“To do what, Herr Spengler?” Goering innocently put his right palm to his chest as if swearing an oath. But Spengler was not a man to be fooled.

“To re-arm Germany for war. Oh yes, you may need funding for your little rallies and party-political showmanship ...”

Goering made to protest; Spengler stopped him dead. He stood awkwardly, put his notebook in his jacket pocket and continued ...

“... fighters, bombers, U-boats, battleships, tanks ... manpower. You know exactly what I mean,” Spengler said with a sigh, “invasions cost money.”

“Two million Reichsmark, Herr Spengler,” Goering admitted, “that’s just what we need today.”

Spengler looked Goering in the eye before leaving: “Lucky for you then, we have deep pockets ... the rest of it you’ll have to steal.”

Goering looked at the retiring figure and swallowed. Spengler knew something. He pictured Adolf Hitler in the next room, listening carefully to every word uttered.

Hooked

Westminster, London, England

PROFESSOR NICHOLAS BRIMBLECOMBE, eminent academic and connoisseur of the finer things in life, was very well connected. As a senior member of British Intelligence, he was the ultimate spymaster. In his capacity as European Chief of Operations he had a network of contacts from Basle to Washington DC, and the sanction of the PM to authorise certain coercive measures when ‘deemed necessary.’

But it was his passion for logic, reasoning and subterfuge which had brought him to the attention of Winston Churchill in the summer of 1934. They originally met at a tea party organised by Clementine, Churchill’s wife, at Chartwell. Earl Grey and cakes were the last thing on the minds of both men, and they became firm friends and close confidants.

Sometime later over a whisky, Churchill said: “Had much experience in recruitment, Brim?”

“Not really, Winston. But I’m always open to ideas.”

*

On a cold January morning a letter arrived on Brim's desk. It was addressed to 'Head of British Intelligence, Whitehall, London, England'. It was postmarked Zermatt, Switzerland and its content stark:

"Sir, I have known Alistair Valentine, his mother and brother for many years. His mother and I are distant cousins. Alistair is a multi-lingual athlete: a natural hunter, climber and skier. He would be perfect for British Intelligence. His late father Lt. Col. Stephen Valentine was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross in 1916 for bravery in France. Alistair inherits his father's loyalty, courage and sense of duty to his country.

Please do not tell Alistair I recommended him; he would never forgive me. He is currently working for Michael Wood, a London wine merchant. He gives talks on wine."

The letter was handwritten in German and signed by a man called Günter Seiler. Fortunately, Brim was also multi-lingual, though his hunting and climbing skills were somewhat limited.

Brim strolled down Belgrave Road towards Millbank and the Thames. One of his favourite walks in London. He turned up the collar of his greatcoat, strolled over Lambeth Bridge and up to Waterloo. He had much on his mind. In a few hours' time he would take a taxi to the Coburg Hotel. Somebody would be there who he was

very much looking forward to meeting.

*

The young man at the podium certainly knew his subject. And spoke with confidence. He was tallish, just under six foot, with blue-grey eyes and foppish fair hair. He spoke, mostly without notes, about the wines of Bordeaux, and Clarets in particular. Then he moved to red Burgundy; Nuits-St-Georges seemed to be one of his specialities. The audience at the London Wine Society were a mixture of buyers, sommeliers, restaurateurs, and the public. In the winter of 1936, wine was not at the top of most people's shopping list. But there was a small, elite group who were interested. 'Investors, connoisseurs and quaffers,' as Alistair had so elegantly put it to his semi-amused audience.

A man raised his hand to ask a question. He spoke in Parisian-accented French about the wine label Alistair was showing them. A Beaune Premier Cru, 1927. Alistair's boss, Mr. Michael Wood, was at the presentation and looked at him expectantly.

If members of the audience thought Alistair might embarrass himself, they were in for a surprise. Alistair addressed the Parisian – who clearly knew little about wine – of the complexities of 'colour' – 'flavour' – and 'texture' – of wine. Not just taste. He suggested, with charm and self-deprecation, that if the man would like to order a case, he could savour the palette for himself. There was hesitant laughter in the room. Then the man agreed to the purchase and made a show of it, with a plump wallet full of Francs.

Professor Brimblecombe – who clearly did know a little about wine – raised his hand and asked if they could move on to German

wines, as advertised in the Society's Winter Programme. Alistair was pleased to acquiesce. He noticed Michael Wood's wife and daughter were also present, busily serving wine 'tasters' to Society members in the bar area. The daughter, Emma, was busily watching him and enjoying his good humour. A subtle hint of irreverence.

"Yes, sir," said Alistair, "but let us first take a quick look at these three Alsace wines out of interest: Tokay Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer and Pinot Blanc."

Brimblecombe nodded and Alistair spoke with authority about the history of the region, both political and commercial, and this was followed by a tasting. The tasting was informal with various cheeses, grapes, and nuts being served by Emma. Traditional finger food for such times. Alistair, with one eye distracted by Emma, was complimented by a German grower on his extensive knowledge. Alistair replied in fluent German about a car journey he had taken through Alsace and his love of the area. He spoke in detail about soil, climate and the local foods he had relished during the holiday. The German, impressed by Alistair's command of the language, told him he was from Saarbrücken. A friendship was made, and a contact developed for Michael Wood's wine emporium.

The evening was a success. By eleven o'clock forty cases of wines from France and Germany had been sold and Alistair had been persuaded by Brimblecombe that he was perfect for the world of Intelligence.

By the middle of February 1936, Alistair Valentine was well ensconced into Brim's world of espionage and secrets, although he had yet to participate in the commando training at Sgian Dubh in the

highlands of Scotland. That was a treat in store for him: meeting Fairburn and Sykes who would push him to the limit.

The idea of working in Intelligence appealed to him. He was, after all, intelligent and articulate. But undercover? In Germany? Might that be a bridge too far, even for him? Everyone knew Germany was becoming dangerous. A nation ruled by the Nazis under Hitler's command presented a massive threat to peace in Europe. Could Valentine, gifted actor, and linguist, really be competent enough to infiltrate Hitler's entourage? And, even more difficult, survive working undercover in Germany. Discovery would mean death. And yet the excitement of at least trying was overwhelmingly tempting for Alistair.

Brimblecombe and Alistair were having tea in the basement canteen of the Baker Street safe house.

"What would you do, if you hadn't agreed to come and work with us, Alistair?" Brim was fond of asking such questions to newly appointed recruits.

"Remain in the wine trade, I suppose. A bit of travel. Old man Wood seems to appreciate my talents," said Alistair, fishing.

"I bet his daughter does too. What was her name, Emma?"

Alistair decided to say nothing. In fact, Emma was not his type. Too frivolous. A spoilt only child with expensive tastes. And indiscreet friends.

Brimblecombe, who had now invited Alistair to call him 'Brim,' was dressed immaculately as always: double-breasted blazer, pressed white shirt and club tie. This invitation was only made to a select, chosen few. He sipped Earl Grey, without milk or sugar, a choice

specified to the familiar waitress. She vaguely curtsied when he placed his order, such was his demeanour. The gesture amused Alistair and he found it difficult to hide.

“Not the wine trade if there’s a war in Europe, old sport,” said Brim, continuing their conversation. “What we need from you is a far remove from selling a few cases of Burgundy. And charming the boss’s wife.”

“I see.”

Brim began to outline exactly what the role in Berlin would entail. “Observation, infiltration, espionage, surveillance. And, certainly, impersonation. All vital to your appointment in Berlin.” Brim regarded Alistair with level eyes and a blank expression. He did not want to reveal just how much he needed Alistair on his team. He was vital for what British Intelligence had in mind.

“Appointment in Berlin? Sounds like a novel, Brim.”

“Tell me. What do you fear most?” Brim’s blue eyes twinkled; it was another question he liked to press with all new recruits.

“Fear itself,” responded Alistair as a reflex, “the very thought of being frightened unnerves me.”

Alistair quickly remembered Herr Seiler, his surrogate Swiss father saying: “You don’t possess a single grain of fear, Alistair. That emotion passed you by.”

“Fear itself, that’s a good answer.” Brim stood up, flicked at his jacket as if to brush imaginary crumbs away. The invisible-morsel routine was one of the Professor’s many traits. “Although not entirely original.”

Alistair grinned: “I thought it was too clever to be me!” He laughed at his own joke.

Brim smiled: "Right, a few items to put in your diary. I'd like you to go to the Berlin Olympics. It starts at the beginning of August."

"Which event? Running?"

Brim ignored Alistair's levity: "I want you to meet Manfred Lochar. He's my Nexus contact from Switzerland."

Alistair was now serious and attentive: "Nexus?"

"A highly secret organisation of, let's say, facilitators. Manfred will explain when you meet him at the Olympic village. You'll be given valid papers and identification."

"That's six months off, Brim."

"Quite." Brim pursed his lips as if in thought. "Ever been to Scotland?"

"No."

Brim checked his watch: "You will have by this time tomorrow; perhaps a little bit later." He put his hand into the inside pocket of his blazer and produced railway tickets and what looked like a timetable. "I will see you in a month or so. And good luck. It won't be a holiday."

Brim was known for thrusting people in at the deep end. At the last minute. He handed Alistair a brown envelope. "Fifty pounds; should keep you out of mischief. Although, where you're going, you'll have nothing to spend it on ... Sgian Dubh... bliss!"

Brim chuckled and waddled off like a diminutive, plump penguin, weaving from side to side through the canteen tables. He gave a little wave to the waitress. She blushed.

Alistair Valentine

*Sgian Dubh, British Intelligence Commando
Training Centre, Scotland*

BLOODY HELL, I'M GOING TO DROWN! I thought to myself. I knew I could tolerate danger, but this was something else. Something perilous. And the water was freezing. I dropped further into the darkening abyss. Endless, it seemed, immeasurably deep, my chest tightened. I must push myself further ...

Foul water was starting to seep through my sealed, numb lips and the ancient diving suit did little to disguise the temperature. The loch darkened more as I descended. I just wanted to get this over and knock back a couple of pints with single malt chasers in the bar at Arisaig House. I swam as powerfully as I could, very conscious of my lung capacity ... and time.

The resistance of the water and the awkwardness of my suit impaired both my speed and agility. This underwater world felt alien; myriad eyes of marine life danced and sparkled in curiosity: who was this intruder? I plunged deeper into the icy darkness.

Thirty feet below in the murky water was the object of my

mission: a wooden crate nestling in what looked like a field of undulating weed. It resembled a treasure chest. I clasped a padlock key in my right fist with such determination that I was sure I would drop it. This, too, hampered my ability to swim effectively. It was a nightmare. The one-piece diving mask trapped a volume of air around my eye sockets and nose. It had become slightly askew during my descent and some water had leaked in. I blew a cautious sniff of air through my nose to try and push some of the water out. It worked, thank God. And resealed.

It was desperately cold, and I felt my lungs were bursting. I swam deeper, focusing on the crate – twenty feet – ten. I could picture the two men above me – in a fishing boat – stopwatches primed as they watched the seconds ticking.

Five more feet and I was there; my knees scraped the bed of the loch, releasing a cloud of debris and bubbles. The padlock looked old and rusty. I tilted it with my left hand until the keyhole was visible. My bare hands were numb with cold, but I needed the tactility. I felt for the indented aperture of the lock with the pad of my thumb and then inserted the key and rotated the oval shackle.

Thirty seconds with no air and my lungs were bursting. I desperately removed the padlock and opened the lid of the trunk, just enough. A few bubbles of air escaped. The trunk had been sealed and tethered to a rock protrusion with sturdy ropes. A No. 76 Special Incendiary Grenade stared back at me. It was grey and sinister. I thrust it into the diving bag strapped onto the front of my suit, closed the trunk's lid and re-locked the padlock. As I turned the shackle back and re-engaged the mechanism, I dropped the key.

Forty seconds. And then I spotted it, floating just above the loch

bed, suspended in the weed like a dead fish. I grabbed it and swam back up towards the boat, desperate for air, willing myself to swim faster and faster. Finally, my palm brushed against the wooden hull, and then a hand was there, hauling me out of the freezing water. I tore off the diving mask, gasping for air, panting frantically.

A burly Scotsman named Captain Sykes looked at me, deadpan: “That wasn’t so bad, was it, lad?”

“Alistair Valentine, reporting for duty, sir,” I said and collapsed onto the deck, breathless. I didn’t notice the grenade had fallen out of my diving bag and was rolling across the wooden planks toward the edge of the deck.

The other soldier, Fairburn, sarcastic to the last: “Lucky it wasn’t bloody armed, or we’d all have been toasted.”

“Aye, on both sides,” said Sykes with a grimace.

“Piss off,” I said sharply. Or did I imagine it?

*

They’d told him, of course, that the training would be brutal. And it was. A matter of focused endurance and survival. Besides the ‘retrieval test’ as it was quaintly known, Alistair would be taught weapons handling, sabotage, radio comms, self defence and climbing. The tools of Intelligence. He couldn’t tell a soul, not even his brother Freddie. Not yet.

By the end of the training, his masters in London would receive a missive from Captain William Fairburn:

*Valentine (Alistair.) 100%:
outstanding, but dangerous.*

Astrid

Baden-Baden, Germany.

THE NARROW ROOM IN THE HOSPITAL at Baden-Baden was stark white, its louvred shutters closed against the brightness of the sun. However, the overlapping slats had been crafted and angled to admit a certain amount of sunlight. Beams projected into the darkened room onto a white sheet covering the still figure lying on a wrought-iron bed.

Astrid Lochar, barely nineteen, clutched the thin sheet tightly up to her neck. The skin covering her knuckles was taut and white. Slowly she opened her eyes and stared up at the high, ornate ceiling. She was aware of two people on chairs at the end of her bed; but couldn't determine who they were or why they were there. It didn't make sense. Nothing made sense.

The figures were silent shadows, illuminated too by strips of sunlight and tiny dust motes which floated in the still, warm air. She blinked and swallowed. Her mouth was too dry to speak; her lips encrusted with dried saliva. Her head throbbed from dehydration. 'Where am I? Why am I here?' she thought.

As soon as she moved, one of the people stood up, then the other. Gently they edged to the head of the bed without a sound. A hand tenderly lifted her head from the pillows. She then heard the gurgle of water being poured. She felt the rim of a tumbler pressed to her mouth.

“Drink, Liebling,” the sound of her mother, at once familiar. “You must try and drink.”

The tumbler was tipped again, but her uncooperative lips refused to part. Her mother, Ingrid, softly caressed them with the tip of her wetted finger, urging tenderly. Astrid swallowed and licked her lips with her tongue.

“Try now,” her mother said again, “please?”

This time she felt the water trickle into her mouth. She swallowed and felt the excess run down her chin and onto her neck. It felt cool.

She knew the taste well, that mineral flavour. Spa water from Baden.

Home. She drank until the tumbler was drained.

“Thank you,” she said faintly.

The hand lowered her head gently into the spongy goose down. All of a sudden Astrid felt lightheaded. She closed her eyes; she didn’t know for how long. A minute? An hour? When she awoke her mother and father were still there, keeping silent vigil.

“What happened to me?” she asked; she didn’t recognise the sound of her own voice; it felt distant and detached. Not her at all.

“You lost a baby, Liebling,” said her mother unequivocally.

You lost a baby. Not the baby. A significant qualification of the truth lay in her statement. Of course, because nobody knew about it: it was her secret.

Their secret.

“Where is Oskar?” asked Astrid weakly. Her eyelids flickered with sudden concern.

There was a pause as she waited.

“Don’t worry about him now, Astrid,” said her father; but the emphasis was definitely on him.

“But I need to know, Papa. Please? I cannot remember.”

“He’s gone, Astrid. No one knows where.” His inadequate words trailed off.

Astrid let out a sharp cry of grief. Where had he gone? What did this mean? Had she lost them both? Oskar and their child? Their secret? Their future? All of their dreams shattered, but why?

“What happened?” she asked grimly. She felt a dismal new world unravelling ahead of her.

“You fell. You were running in the street, chasing after a car,” her mother explained, “don’t you remember?”

“No.”

“We didn’t know, Astrid. Why didn’t you tell us? We would have understood. We would have supported you, of course.” Her father’s words were more perplexed than angry.

They had felt bewildered when they had learned their only daughter had been “with child” and they didn’t even know. She had betrayed them; at least, not confided in them. Wasn’t it the same thing? She hadn’t confessed to them because she didn’t know how they would react.

Astrid unclenched her right hand and tunnelled it down slowly under the bed sheet. She was wearing a loose-fitting hospital gown, but it had ridden up her otherwise naked body. She cautiously

explored. The flat palm of her hand was on her stomach, her fingers stretched out curiously; her skin felt wet and sticky with perspiration. Between her legs some sort of absorbent gauze dressing had been carefully placed. That too felt warm and moist. Her hand immediately shot out from under the sheet; she saw it was caked in tacky blood, the colour of rust.

“Oh God,” she called out, shocked. Then she broke down and cried, howling in despair and confusion.

There was nothing in the world Manfred and Ingrid Lochar could do to calm their precious daughter. It broke their hearts. They held each other’s hands and gazed down at her pale face.

Oskar Rosenbaum and his family had fled from Germany for fear of persecution. It was their car Astrid had been chasing.

Olympics

Berlin, Germany.

IN SUMMER 1936, BERLIN FELT HOT, HUMID AND AIRLESS. But the city's atmosphere was charged by the energy and excitement surrounding the Olympic Games.

The centrepiece of the 11th Summer Games was the vast Olympiastadion, ordered by Adolf Hitler and built by Werner March. It was constructed as part of the Reichssportfeld, a great sports complex, which included a development of buildings and hotels to house athletes and visitors from all over the world.

Alistair Valentine travelled to the Olympic Village of Elstal, his mind consumed with sadness. It was four days after he and his brother Freddie had nearly come to blows at Waterloo station. It was a stupid misunderstanding concerning their mother, Christina. On the surface he appeared relaxed and carefree; yet he was covertly looking for his Nexus contact.

Manfred Lochar looked through his compact Zeiss binoculars; the blurred image of Alistair came sharply into view.

“What do you think?” He handed the glasses to his daughter,

Astrid, who had discreetly been studying a 10x8-inch photograph.

The black and white print had been taken a month earlier in a studio behind Baker Street, on Brimblecombe's orders. Manfred and Astrid had a secluded vantage point behind a bus stop opposite the entrance to the Olympic Village.

She pressed the glasses to her eyes and looked at the man in question: he was tallish, fair haired and athletic. He moved with graceful economy, observing his surroundings keenly.

"Definitely him," Astrid mused. "He blends in well; he looks like a competitor, a runner or a swimmer."

"Neither, Liebling. Professor Brimblecombe sent him. I am his Nexus contact. Come, we have work to do."

"When do we meet him?" Astrid asked hopefully.

"I meet him later. Back at the stadium ... inside. You can observe, from a safe distance."

"Oh," she sounded disappointed. She took the glasses away from her eyes and without looking at her father continued: "Let's follow him for an hour and see how good he is."

Seconds later, she looked through the glasses again. Valentine had vanished. She scanned left and right. Nothing.

"Yes, very good," she said.

After her miscarriage in Baden-Baden the year before, Astrid could easily have gone to pieces. But hadn't.

Manfred and Ingrid Lochar not only wanted to support their daughter in her physical recovery, but also psychologically, to distract from the trauma. They chose to introduce her to their world; the clandestine realm of espionage – working with the British and Swiss against the Nazis. An odd remedy, for certain, but one in which she

became a natural affiliate.

Like her parents, Astrid hated Hitler. Seeing what the Nazis were doing to Germany reinforced her loathing. She had the attributes of a spy - intelligence, resourcefulness, and loyalty – and used them wisely. The Lochars and their contacts worked with Professor Brimblecombe in London and Helmut Siebenthal in Basle. Nexus was a highly secret organisation, existing below the surface, out of sight of the authorities. And the Nazis. Their funding came from all walks of life: lawyers, doctors, academics, bankers, farmers, landowners, old German families. With old German money.

Once Astrid learned the truth about what happened to Oskar Rosenbaum and his family, her motivation in life became clear. She had a purpose: to avenge the loss of her child and her lover, by joining a network of people whose sole aim was to destroy the cause of that loss.

She would do anything to help Nexus – and, of course, her beloved parents.

On her first meeting with Siebenthal in Basle he said to her: “I am sorry about what happened to you, Astrid, but there it is. But your feelings have a purpose, you see; they act as a guide to what is important in your life.

“Fear will always keep you safe and alert, but revenge is sweet, no matter what people tell you. That is why we take the risk; it is worth it. It has to be. We must be rid of Hitler and his thugs, no matter what.”

She agreed without question. Nexus was her destiny and her saviour. Yet she would never forget the baby so cruelly denied her and the young man she had loved.

She handed the glasses and the photograph back to her father.

“Yes,” said Manfred, pinching his nose in his characteristic way. “Brim says Alistair is one of the best he has ever recruited, a natural with an uncanny flair for languages.

“His German is flawless,” he continued. “But Brim wants him, what did he say, ‘naturalised’ and active within six months. So, no English spoken, no English food, no English newspapers or radio. And no contact with anyone in Britain, apart from Brim. Then he will move into an apartment in Berlin with his new persona in place.”

Manfred gave her a sideways glance she did not see. And just as well, for he had something further up his sleeve he didn’t dare reveal until the time was right.

“I see. Where will he live until then?” Astrid’s tone was more than curious. She could read her father like a book.

Manfred was hesitant: “With us, to start with. I am not sure for how long. He’ll spend some time in Basle, training. But Brim believes he won’t need much preparation: he spent much of his childhood in Switzerland. He knows the traditions, culture and language. Everything one needs for deep cover in a foreign country. And Brim is not known for praise, quite the reverse.”

“A British agent. Imagine!” Astrid exclaimed.

“Yes. And he has a younger brother called Frederick, studying at Cambridge. But Brim tells me his ambition is to join the Royal Air Force.”

“To become a pilot?”

“Of course,” said Manfred, smiling at his daughter.

“It was the glint of the glasses that gave you away,” said Alistair

suddenly and in fluent German, “particularly when you panned one hundred and eighty degrees. A simple glint.”

Astrid nearly jumped out of her skin; but she could see her father was already holding his 7.65mm Luger under his jacket. He was always ready, always cautious. Alistair nimbly dropped down from a metre-high elevated ridge behind the bus stop and grinned at them both.

“Astrid, this is Alistair Valentine,” Manfred said a little sheepishly. She looked puzzled: “Wait. You’ve met before?”

“Yesterday,” Alistair interjected politely, “your father wasn’t going for a walk after all.”

Astrid frowned, irritated and a little humiliated. Her father was always one step ahead; field-craft was his trade.

“I wanted to meet him alone the first time, Liebling. A precaution. Habit, I suppose.”

“More like instinct. And it can save your life. I’d have done the same,” said Alistair. “Let’s go to the hotel. You have the camera?”

Astrid smiled a little coyly: “You speak perfect German, Herr Valentine.”

His smile was charming: “Well, I’ve had plenty of practice.”

Manfred: “Yes. Here is the cine camera, spare rolls of film, oh, and a press pass for the stadium. Security will be strict.” Manfred handed the items over in a leather case.

“Perfect, thank you. I’m going to take close-ups of Hitler’s entourage. There may be some new faces.”

“Ja. And some old ones: Goering, Himmler and Bormann. The opening ceremony is tomorrow. It will be a spectacle, like something out of Ancient Rome. The world will be watching Germany:

newspapers and television from all over Europe and beyond.”

“And so will I with this. Does it take stills?”

“Yes. Single-frame or cine. There’s a switch to select. Herr Siebenthal was very particular. It’s the best camera in the world. Swiss-made, of course.”

“Excellent.”

Manfred raised his bushy eyebrows: “There are two changes since we spoke yesterday.”

“Oh?” Alistair flashed his blue-grey eyes at Astrid and smiled.

“I have secured your identity. Stephan Beck. When the time comes you will have a job at Telefunken in Berlin. And a house in Potsdam. Everything will be legitimate. Until then you will need to lie low. Can you go back to Switzerland? Chalet Monte Rosa?”

“Yes, that’s what I plan to do. What was the other change?”

“This is important and, of course, highly classified. Nexus has a spy inside Abwehr headquarters, 76/78 Tirpitzufer in the centre of Berlin. Her name is Monika.” Manfred’s hushed words were met with astonishment.

“God, that’s impressive.

“She will be your Berlin contact. Her loyalty to Nexus is unquestioned. And, like Canaris, her father is an admiral. A core member of the Black Orchestra.”

“Understood.”

“In time we hope she will be in a position to have access to the schedules of everyone in the Abwehr, including Canaris. Monika will be very important to you and she’ll let you know when the mission is on.”

Alistair nodded. It was a lot to take in: “Tell me, Manfred. Are you

able to get these films to London? MI6 will want to know who is in Hitler's entourage at the games. And get a feel for the atmosphere. Maybe the faces of some of the Nazi supporters."

Manfred raised his eyebrows and smiled for the first time: "What do you think, Herr Valentine?"

Alistair turned to Astrid and looked her in the eye: "I think Nexus can move mountains. Especially you and Astrid."

Freddie Valentine

Tiger Moth over England.

“BLOODY HELL, I’M GOING TO CRASH!” shouted Freddie to himself. He’d lost control. The engine was overheating. It misfired. The nose dipped. He jerked the stick back in panic.

“And I’m just doing Squires a favour!”

Flight Lieutenant Alfred ‘Freddie’ Valentine was alone flying the Tiger Moth biplane. At 27, he had already enjoyed a varied military career. Now it appeared to be in peril.

He had been seconded, no bribed, to fly the de Havilland DH82 from where he had learned to fly, RAF Attlebridge, near Norwich, to a smaller base in Lincolnshire. He should not have flown that day. He was a fighter pilot, flying Spitfires, but had agreed to the jaunt to appease his old instructor.

“Come on, Freddie,” Squadron Leader Squires had said: “We’ll send the Humber up to collect you. Back in no time and I’ll buy you a few pints in the Mess; doddle for an ace like you.”

The Tiger Moth was a friend, so Freddie thought. Yet she’d felt odd when he’d gunned the engine. After flying for half an hour, the

aircraft became erratic. He was confused. Should he turn back?

“Only doing circuits and bumps, eh Freddie?” he could already hear his former CO’s mocking voice. He flew on. The light was bad; dusk; to the west a setting sun bled streaks of red over the horizon. Twice the engine sputtered and twice Freddie recovered airspeed. The biplane, however, remained lumpy – contrary to the Moth’s customary agility. He visualised the mechanical components of the single-prop engine toiling furiously. Somewhere, something was not right.

Sweat surged from his hot flesh inside his flight suit; the stench of oil and grease seemed to permeate every pore. Freddie checked gauges and instruments as he had been taught. Squires had been a hard taskmaster; altimeter, airspeed indicator – 80 knots – too fast to land even if he could. Altitude indicator, climb-and-descent indicator, oil pressure and oil temperature gauges.

Too hot, much too hot, but why?

He glanced at the gyro and compass to check direction. Squire’s golden rule was to use the instruments, don’t look outside for reference. Glare from the sunset was blinding. Nothing was right. It didn’t make sense. The engine screamed, making the airframe shake.

“Damn bucket!” he shouted. He wanted to kick something, but there wasn’t room.

“Beer Don One,” the radio operator bellowed into his headset, “where the hell are you?”

For a moment he couldn’t answer.

His goggles were not fooling him; there were plumes of vapour all around him. He pulled the stick backwards. No response. The needle on the faintly lit altimeter span backwards. The flatlands of the Fens

should have been visible below him.

“Freddie!” The RO screamed again. The line crackled with static like distant gunfire.

Freddie was too focused, too hell-bent on surviving. He tried to reply but could barely speak: “Mayday,” his constricted throat croaked.

He was below cloud, but it was dark. Sea smells: he saw small waves in the Wash as he crossed the coast. Freddie was exhausted. He lifted his oily goggles, removed a glove, rubbed his sore eyes, and squinted at the controls.

Damn, heading west. The engine protested again. He tried to turn the juddering Moth starboard and north, keeping the brighter horizon on his left shoulder. He was at less than a thousand feet now, too low to parachute.

Finally, the aircraft fleetingly responded. He rotated his cramped body and checked the altimeter; five hundred feet, still falling. Then the engine sputtered, misfired and died. The warm evening air dashed against his face; he was gliding to the ground.

Freddie remembered the buffeting, the lifeless propeller, and the wheels smashing into soggy turf. Thank God he was low on fuel; full and the Moth might have exploded. Trapped and seared in a fiery cockpit, he shuddered at the notion.

Wet turf flipped the biplane, which smashed and sank into the ground. As the Moth had rotated and dropped, Freddie’s legs burned with pain. The starboard wing flew off and the fuselage disintegrated.

Then nothing; was he dead or alive? He had considered this moment before; how would he feel and what would he see? Slowly, darkness prevailed.

Later, a blurred choir of masked faces with intense shiny eyes looked down on him, but these angels were not singing. He smelt chemicals and heard a hubbub of serious voices. Sounds echoed in his head: the clatter of instruments on stainless-steel trays, the thump of some machine, like a giant piston pumping up and down, the gentle hiss of gas.

He felt a slap on his arm, then the sharp jab of a needle penetrating skin and vein. The warm, soporific benison of morphine rushed into his bloodstream. He slipped into a realm of curious images and nightmarish ghouls. Welcome to hell, Mr. Valentine.

Himmler

The Bavarian Alps, Austria.

HEINRICH HIMMLER WAS A terrible figure. A cold-blooded monster who ruthlessly ordered the extermination of millions of prisoners by every refinement of sadistic torture. He was pitiless; nothing horrified him. With his shaven skull and steel-rimmed glasses, he personified the face of evil.

After an uncomfortable, protracted journey from the East, Himmler made his way towards the Berghof, in Obersalzberg. He was sitting in the back of a chauffeur-driven Mercedes and glanced out at the beautiful Austrian countryside. The Bavarian Alps in the distance looked magnificent, breath-taking to normal people. They made no impression upon Himmler whatsoever; he had other matters on his mind. Matters of the Third Reich. And an appointment with Hitler and the Presidium. His thin face twisted; they were in for a few surprises, he thought to himself.

He closed his eyes, reassured by the presence of the armed motorcycle outriders and thought about the forthcoming few hours.

He had Hitler on his side; of that there was no question. Hermann Goering, Commander of the Luftwaffe, would give him air power; Admiral Karl Doenitz, chief of the German Navy, unlimited naval support. Most important of all, perhaps, Erich Spengler, the most influential industrialist in Germany, had given millions for special weapons development. Even Giles Walcott, the Irish Republican, had given him manpower and money, on the promise of a free Ireland.

Only Rear Admiral Wilhelm Canaris – Head of German Intelligence – the Abwehr – stood in his way. But Himmler had plans for him. Within a matter of weeks Germany would wreak havoc over Britain; a reign of terror that had never been witnessed before. And it was he who had orchestrated it.

Britain would surrender and Germany would be victorious in Europe. And there was nothing in the world anyone could do to prevent it. A smile crossed his face. What if the Führer became ill? He wasn't well. What then? Germany would be his for the taking. And he could not wait.

Berghof

June 1943, Obersalzberg, Bavaria, Germany.

WHEN ADOLF HITLER WALKED INTO THE GREAT HALL of the Berghof, it was as if someone had simultaneously sucked the air out. Members of the conference assembled that day felt fear. It was raw and undeniable.

Hitler was a slight, pale-looking man with short brown hair, parted to one side. He had a sallow complexion and, with his distinct, blunt, ink-smudge moustache, looked almost comical. Until he spoke. His persuasive rhetoric embraced, almost strangled, the listener into belief and acceptance nobody, it seemed, could inhibit.

The Führer's steel-blue eyes held a bewitching, hypnotic quality. He could hold his audience under a spell by the sheer force of his passion and conviction; his ability to alter tone and syntax of speech mesmerised. Hitler was a skilful performer; a man who rehearsed his act to harvest maximum effect.

The hall looked out onto the sun terrace and it was in this room that a very secret meeting was about to take place. Each of the chairs around the table was occupied by a member of Hitler's elite entourage

and notes taken, as usual, by Gertraud ‘Traudi’ Junge, Hitler’s private secretary since December 1942. She sat at a separate desk and took detailed minutes of every word uttered, in rapid shorthand.

Hitler wore his customary silver-grey tunic, pressed black trousers and polished knee-length jackboots. He paced around the room, hands clasped behind his back, occasionally smoothing his hair down with the heel of his hand. He spoke firmly and with passion; each member of this particular meeting believed he was addressing them personally, for every word seemed to have an edge.

The Führer picked up a document from the table and spoke without introduction or greeting:

“This document is Führer Memorandum 267,” his eyes flashed, “and the operation described herein will change the course of the war and secure victory for Germany. And the German people ...” He paused for effect.

“It will be presented by Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler, unless there are any questions first ...”

He paused once more. Hitler’s eyes scanned the apprehensive faces and continued; his voice lowered a theatrical notch:

“Memorandum 267. You will all see there is a copy in front of you. I have sub-headed this operation: DAS SCHLOSS, for reasons that will become apparent. The document is not to be opened or consulted until the Reichsführer has addressed you ...”

Hitler replaced the document carefully on the table and continued stomping around the hall, boots echoing. Before he sat, he looked at the men around the table, waiting.

“So, no questions. Good.”

This was his inner circle – the Presidium – the most powerful men in the Third Reich:

Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy - Karl Doenitz. Joseph Goebbels: Reichsminister for Propaganda for Nazi Germany. Hermann Goering: Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe. Field Marshall Erwin Rommel. Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt. Wilhelm Keitel: Field Marshall of the German Army (Wehrmacht) and Hitler's Chief of Staff. Admiral Canaris, head of the Abwehr.

And finally, Himmler. Reichsführer of the entire SS. He cast his eyes around the table before he spoke:

“Many of our spies in England have either been hanged, committed suicide or supposedly turned. But there are two who have been living under cover in West London – since 1930 – as Admiral Canaris of the Abwehr is particularly aware. The Abwehr, as their controllers, have done an outstanding job ...”

Canaris acknowledged the compliment with the slightest of nods and wondered what was coming next. Himmler continued; his glasses glinting in the sunlight from the terrace:

“They remain not only undetected by the enemy but are also active sleeper spies. They run a hotel and are anonymous; their English is impeccable – an asset of the highest order...

their identities, of course, are not revealed in this file ...” He paused.

Himmler permitted himself a smile: “Thanks to the support of my friend and colleague Karl Doenitz, an essential naval component of the operation has been made available: A U-Boat and her crew ...” Only a few of the men were aware of the whole story; and these key members of the Presidium would exclude Canaris. Doenitz

acknowledged the shallow compliment with a brief nod.

Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt, cleared his throat: “What is 267?”

Himmler’s thin lips parted: “A series of aerial attacks by the Luftwaffe on five strategic targets in the south of England and London; originating from the Fifteenth Army Division in Northern France. But with a lethal pay load.”

Von Rundstedt: “Pay load?”

“Yes. It will contain a lethal nerve gas called Tabun.”

“How will it be deployed?” asked Rommel. There was a hint of concern in his voice.

It was Hermann Goering who replied, but first he repeated the question to emphasise the cleverness of his answer:

“How will it be deployed? The bomb bays of ten Heinkels have been adapted to facilitate and launch ten high-speed ballistic missiles, each with an explosive warhead. The missiles are primed with pressurised Tabun. A gyroscopically stabilised fin will guide these weapons to their target.”

Goering went on to say that their astonishing speed was achieved by a mixture of alcohol and liquid oxygen.

“They can fly,” Goering continued enthusiastically, “at more than 1,200 km/h, much faster than an ME 262 Schwalbe. Or a Spitfire. Too fast for British early warning systems and anti-aircraft guns. They may hear them, but they certainly won’t see them. Until it is too late.”

The Presidium was silent; Goering rarely consulted any notes. He could see the impression he was making by the looks on their faces. Particularly Canaris. He continued:

“The conversion of the aircraft has been carried out undercover by Spengler GmbH and an assigned team of Luftwaffe engineers. Apart from these loyal Germans and this Presidium, nobody else knows of this offensive.”

Hitler paced around the Great Hall again, watching every face and every minute reaction.

Himmler continued with the plan: “The five strategic targets will be attacked by groups of Heinkels from concealed airbases at carefully worked out geographical intervals, to create a domino effect. The first four from hangars in Boulogne, two from Calais, two from Dunkirk and the last two from Koksijde.”

“And the targets?” asked Rommel grimly. “What are the targets?”

Himmler looked around the room, assessing the mood as Hitler almost imperceptibly nodded:

“The first four crucial aircraft leaving Boulogne will strike at Biggin Hill, to knock out the RAF radar systems and the others at specific command and control centres in the south, to do likewise. To paralyse their defences.”

Rommel looked pale: “But the RAF will try and counterattack, will they not?”

“No. These missiles will be deployed suddenly – after a signal – less than 4 kilometres from the continental coast. At the speed they are travelling, it will be seconds before they reach their target,” said Himmler, “that’s the importance of striking Biggin Hill first.” He pressed the palms of his hands together as if he were praying and lowered his voice:

“Such an attack has never been attempted before. This operation will certainly cause the enemy to sue for peace. DAS SCHLOSS will

end the war. We will control Europe.”

The Great Hall went quiet and it was Canaris who broke the uncomfortable silence after a break of more than fifteen seconds:

“My Führer, why is the operation so called?”

Hitler waited, strutting around the room. Nobody challenged. Nobody spoke because nobody dared:

“Because Windsor Castle is the prime target ...” He glanced at Karl Doenitz; a split imperceptible second ...

“U-Boat 302 will leave the Bergen flotilla and make for Cromer on the east coast of England. Her crew will discharge cylinders of Tabun – each with a fixed warhead – into the hands of the London sleeper spies ...” Hitler glanced around the hall to make sure the clever plan was understood. It was ...

“They will then transport the weapons to Windsor Castle in a specially converted vehicle. An on-the-ground attack.” And so, the crucial lie had been cunningly delivered to mislead certain members of the Presidium. One man in particular.

“Why Windsor?” asked Rommel.

Hitler answered in a matter-of-fact tone: “Windsor Castle is the symbol of the Royal Family. One of their seats of power. We take that first and then their command centres. It is vital, essential, Windsor is the first strike.” His blue eyes shone as he scanned the faces around the table.

The Great Hall fell silent as each man absorbed the words. And, of course, nobody challenged. Hitler and Himmler exchanged the very briefest of eye contacts. Himmler said:

“German boots on British soil.” Everybody knew the significance of those words, but none dare acknowledge them.

Hitler turned to Traudi Junge, who sat at her desk, her pencil poised above her notebook. She raised her eyes, and he smiled his avuncular smile:

“Did you get all that, my dear?”

Traudi rose to her feet, instinctively: “Yes, my Führer. Thank you, I did.” She blushed; but it was not out of embarrassment. It was out of pride: Hitler had taken the trouble to consult her in front of the Presidium. That simple gesture momentarily defused the tension in the room.

“Good.” Hitler nodded at her absent-mindedly. It was as if he was checking she had enough money for typewriter ribbon. This tiny detail was not missed by a single member; so typical of Hitler’s skill and ability to switch from serious to mundane.

But suddenly his tone changed again; he scanned the faces of every man in the room before he spoke: “Is there any possibility Enigma could have been compromised?”

The silence in the hall was palpable. It was as if nobody dared commit to an answer they might one day regret. It was Goering who finally broke that silence: “No, my Führer. None whatsoever. Enigma is unbreakable. The enemy are blind.”

Hitler considered: “Even so, not one word of DAS SCHLOSS will be communicated in any form. Secrecy is essential to success. Is that understood?”

They all nodded, and Hitler watched them as they rose from their seats. He then gave his traditional, informal Nazi salute and left the hall. Himmler, Goering and Doenitz gathered their papers simultaneously, each aware Hitler had picked up on a detail they had all overlooked. Himmler glanced at Admiral Canaris with an

expression that chilled him.

Once again, Canaris mentally questioned the sanity and rationality of Hitler and Himmler. But it was more than that. Because he knew that, in the end, Germany would pay for such madness. His thoughts briefly flicked back to the meeting in Spain with Churchill and Brimblecombe in the mid 1930's. Well, nobody could say they had not been warned. But never, in the furthest realms of his imagination could he have anticipated a U-Boat discharging chemical warfare and an aerial attack on England that would kill millions and annihilate the British Royals and their Guard.

Admiral Canaris picked up the DAS SCHLOSS file in front of him and put it into a leather briefcase. He locked the two clasps and walked out of the Great Hall, his head slightly bowed. Fear crawled up his spine and lodged itself in the back of his throat.

Driver

Obersalzberg, Bavaria, Germany.

LATER, STILL SHOCKED, THE ADMIRAL walked down the steps of the Berghof towards a dozen or more cars lined up at the bottom. With him was Erwin Rommel to whom he had offered a lift to the airport. The two spoke in hushed tones.

Canaris's black Mercedes Benz Abwehr staff car drew alongside; the driver got out and swiftly opened the rear door.

"Where's my normal driver?" growled Canaris, surprised and suspicious. The driver responded in self-deprecating manner, mixing charm and perplexed confusion.

"To be honest, Herr Admiral, I don't know. It was all last minute. I understood from the dispatcher he was rushed to the Krankenhaus in Salzburg. Ruptured appendix or something."

Canaris sighed; he was tired.

"My papers," said Alistair Valentine, presenting documents, "my name is ..."

"Never mind. Why wasn't I told?" Canaris snapped.

"With respect, Herr Admiral, I was told not to interrupt you, since

you were here in conference with ...”

“I know who I was in conference with. Get me back to the airport. I need to return to Berlin. So does my colleague.” He glanced at Rommel.

Alistair proffered his documents again: “Stephan Beck, Herr Admiral.”

“Quickly.”

Alistair opened the back doors of the car; Canaris and Rommel climbed inside and made themselves comfortable.

“Where are you from, and what did you say your name was?” asked Canaris again.

“Stephan Beck, Herr Admiral. I live in Potsdam.”

“Then you can fly back with us to Tempelhof. I need a driver in Berlin.”

“But my family are here in Salzburg for the music festival, Herr Admiral.” Alistair sounded genuinely concerned for his ‘family’, his protest heartfelt, and his German fluent and flawless.

“Do you want the damn job? There are other drivers.”

“Ja, Herr Admiral, of course. I shall be delighted to accompany you.”

“Drive quickly, we don’t have the luxury of time.”

“Ja, Herr Admiral. There is a flask of coffee, fresh bread and cheese in the cabinet between the seats.”

Just as Canaris wound up the divider screen between the front and back of the car, Alistair heard Rommel mumble a few words. He recognized the Field Marshall immediately.

“Schlafende Spione in London ... I’m surprised they are not all ...”

The screen suddenly sealed the two compartments. Soundproof. Yet it was enough. A few momentous words: *Schlafende Spione* in London – sleeper spies in London. This could only mean a deep cover spy network, passing themselves off as English. But where exactly in London? More importantly, who? A member of the general public? Or worse. He would have to communicate this intelligence back to his superiors, as soon as he returned to Potsdam. Spying, after all, was exactly what he was doing in Germany. And he knew the incredible risk he and his partner were taking.

If Canaris, Rommel and Stephan Beck had remained in Salzburg until later that day they might have seen a brief report in the local evening newspaper.

Police mystified by body in Hauptstrasse

The corpse of a man believed to be around thirty years old was found today hidden at the river end of Hauptstrasse. He had been stabbed once fatally, there was no sign of a struggle and no clue to his identity as his body was stripped to underclothes. Police are appealing for information and witnesses.

Shadow

8 Prinz-Albrecht Strasse, Berlin, Germany.

STURMBANNFÜHRER OTTO KREBBS, assault unit leader in the SS, stood stock still, his grey overcoat harmonised with overcast sky; a mannequin shadowed by tall trees. He watched and waited. He always watched and waited. The Admiral was due.

Krebbs was the image of Teutonic visual perfection; his face and physique promoted that coveted image of Aryan master race. A natural candidate: indeed, six foot four, physically honed, blond, with clear, Pacific-blue eyes. Yet his look of Nordic perfection was marred. His left cheek sported a livid, ugly scar running from temple to jawline; the work of a fourteen-year-old girl with a dessert fork. She had witnessed him raping her sister; he would never be caught off guard like that again.

A few days before he had watched, camouflaged by undergrowth and dumbfounded, when Canaris's chauffeur was summarily murdered. Krebbs furtively witnessed the slaying; despised it; wished to intervene; but did nothing. Orders.

Himmler had asked him – no, commanded him - to observe. Take no action. No matter what you see; do nothing, he had said. He obeyed; loyalty immovable. The Reichsführer was his master.

The surveyed execution, for that's what it was – a targeted kill - had been rapidly finished by an agile, dark-skinned, sturdy man of medium build. Krebbs noted his age, nearing fifty or so, his mop of unkempt hair, droopy eyelids and bushy eyebrows. His speed of movement impressed; Krebbs was astonished at the killer's pace, precision and sheer accuracy.

This assassin was no novice. Was he southern Italian or Sicilian, thought Krebbs? His swarthy appearance and nonchalant expression said as much. He wore thin leather gloves, was clinically professional and used a stiletto or switchblade. Whichever; one movement, one blow. Immediate death.

The chauffeur died with no inkling of what was happening. His executioner cut away and bagged up all his outer clothes in less than 20 seconds; no one saw him. This corpse, then hurled into the nearby copse, would be anonymous. Krebbs, in civilian clothes, turned, walked up to the main square and merged into the crowd as the discreet executioner, carrying the bloodied clothes, walked in the opposite direction towards the glistening water.

Krebbs needed no notebook, mnemonic, or camera. Every detail was embedded. Himmler would hear it all.

*

Ten days before the Presidium had met at the Berghof, Heinrich Himmler had summoned Krebbs to Sicherheitspolizei – Security Police - at No 8 Prinz-Albrecht Strasse in Berlin. As Reichsführer of

the SS he had command of the building and all its resources of persuasion.

Krebbs had been told to wait by an office door. It was at the far end of a long basement corridor with a high-arched ceiling lit by small lightbulbs, each encased in a wire-mesh cage. It was a stifling hot day. Even below ground the temperature soared. He was most uncomfortable. Krebbs waited two hours outside the door in full uniform; it was close and airless, and he gulped with thirst as he stood to attention. If seen, he knew sitting on a nearby chair would be insubordination.

It was quiet and eerie, save for the occasional muffled scream. He wasn't surprised. He knew what happened in this building. For several moments he sensed light bulbs flickering. Did he detect faint buzzing?

Electricity was used as torture in the SS, he knew that much. It was quick and effective compared with available drugs. Strong men broke down; conspicuously obdurate women, with increasing voltage brutally applied to intimate flesh, would swiftly confess. Communists; anti-Nazi agitators; Jewish hideaways; homosexuals; gypsy families – all, and many more, were exposed. Krebbs swallowed dryly, because he, too, had inflicted immense human cruelty, without a second thought.

“Herr Sturmbannführer.” Himmler's voice echoed as he strode along the corridor. Krebbs jolted; he was absorbed in thought, sweating, weak-kneed and light-headed through dehydration. He had failed to hear the Reichsführer's approach. The subordinate was at the point of collapse; but he dare not.

Himmler unlocked the office door: “Komm,” he said calmly.

Krebbs mirrored Himmler's steps into the large, dark office. A huge, circular table in the centre overflowed with SS documents and a selection of foreign newspapers, even American. A little light beamed through a barred window high on the cellar wall; small shafts, like miniature searchlights, shone into the room. Himmler poured himself a glass of water from a silver tray on which stood a jug and two glasses. He drained the glass greedily without looking at Krebs, then placed it gently back down.

"Now. I have selected you for a special task, Sturmbannführer Krebs." Himmler paused, dabbing his lips with a handkerchief. "What is your opinion of Admiral Canaris?"

Krebs hesitated, apprehensively, sensing fear: "I can't say I know the Admiral, sir."

"A good answer, Krebs, because, of course, you don't. But you will."

Krebs looked confused as Himmler continued: "Soon you will have the most important job in Germany," Himmler's thin, bloodless lips warped into what passed for a smile, "after the Führer, of course. They call you 'the shadow' do they not, your colleagues in the SS? This is your nickname."

Krebs was confused: "Yes, but I ..."

Himmler cut him off with just enough intonation to suggest a threat: "As from now, all your other duties are suspended indefinitely. From this moment on, you work only for me. Directly. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir. If you say so."

"I do say so! You speak to no one else. Clear?"

"Yes, sir. May I ask to do what?"

Himmler lowered his voice: "To watch Admiral Canaris ..."

"But sir, he is ..."

"I know who he is, Sturmbannführer. You watch him. Every step he takes, from now on. Cars, trains, even horses. He is partial to a canter around Wannsee at the weekend. He may be meeting someone. I want to know who, where, and when. You take no action, no matter what you see. You observe, you are a shadow."

"Yes, sir."

Himmler chuckled: "You haven't asked why, Sturmbannführer Krebbs? Or asked if the Führer approves of the surveillance of such a high-ranking officer. He is the Head of Intelligence, after all."

"It is not my business to question your instructions, sir. Or your authority. Merely to follow them as a humble servant of the Reich."

"Another good answer, Krebbs. I can see why you have risen through the ranks with such ease. You will do so more in the future. Obeying senior orders without question."

"Sir." Krebbs looked ahead avoiding eye contact.

Himmler poured some water into the second glass: "A drink, Sturmbannführer?"

A flicker of light from the cellar window briefly caught Himmler's steel-rimmed glasses and in that moment Krebbs realised he'd been trapped.

Manipulated.

The instruction to wear full uniform at the height of a humid Berlin summer, the specific location and the implication of torture, the two-hour wait, the intense dehydration. Then the praise.

Krebbs shook his head; he could feel the sweat running down his spine: "No thank you, sir."

“Good,” said Himmler, “this second glass contains finely powdered cyanide, just in case you had questioned my authority. And I would have hated to – lose you – at this late stage.” As Krebbs was dismissed and left Himmler’s office with a “Heil Hitler” salute, he had no idea if he was joking or not. Himmler watched the closing door and drank the second glassful with that twisted smile. Now he owned Krebbs.

Signal

Potsdam, Berlin, Germany.

BY JUNE 1943, ALISTAIR VALENTINE HAD SPENT more than six years living incognito at Chalet Monte Rosa, Zermatt. He had trained vigorously: climbing, hunting, swimming and skiing when possible. His skills were honed; he had been waiting patiently for the message from Manfred and Nexus; and confirmation from Brim. His transition from the mountains of Switzerland to Berlin at war had to be carefully orchestrated. Monika, as predicted by Manfred at the Olympics, had been a vital element.

Alistair could not have been 'blended' into that metamorphosis without the help of Nexus. Monika, from her office at Abwehr headquarters, had provided the identification papers he needed if he were ever challenged by the Gestapo or the SS. Stephan Beck existed and Alastair had the documents and ID photograph to support it. He had a work permit and history with Telefunken and domestic bills to substantiate any claim he might need: Beck had been married for two years and lived with his wife Astrid at the house in Potsdam. There were no children and there was no plan to have any.

Monika also had ‘sight’ of Admiral Canaris’s personal diary and his schedule of Kriegsmarine commitments. The June 1943 meeting at Obersalzberg was internally described as a conference. There was no mention of the presence of Hitler, Himmler, the Presidium, and certainly not the planned aerial assault on England. Das Schloss, as a plan, did not exist.

Canaris’s genuine chauffeur had been watched by Manfred in Salzburg until the right opportunity arose. Then he was disposed of quickly and discreetly. Alistair slipped into the role of Canaris’s chauffeur with meticulous planning so he could arrive at the Berghof at exactly the right time. But, on the day, neither Manfred nor Alistair noticed the tall blond man with the livid scar, camouflaged by undergrowth. Otto Krells – assault leader in the SS – would report everything he had seen back to Himmler.

Alistair returned to his house in Potsdam on the S-Bahn, feeling a sense of risk and danger, his two old demons. Astrid knew at once something was not right; the look on his face sometimes betrayed his innermost feelings. He kissed her on the cheek as a nephew might greet his favourite aunt and looked up at the ceiling:

“I have to go to the attic, Astrid. I have overheard something which I am sure is of paramount importance to British Intelligence.”

“Do I need to alert my father?” she asked with a worried smile.

“Yes. Siebenthal’s normal weather code. Public phone. I’ll explain shortly.”

Astrid smiled: “Of course.”

Alistair went upstairs and released the attic trap door and a set of makeshift wooden steps dropped down. His heart was pounding like thunder and his mouth was dry, a sure sign of tension. The risk he

was taking was chilling, because if he was caught, if the message was somehow intercepted and traced, the SS would torture and kill him, and Astrid. For her it would be worse. Yet the knife-edged danger thrilled him. It always did.

It was midnight in the UK, 12th June 1943.

He slipped on his earphones and tuned the radio to the agreed frequency. He tapped out the identification signal that would ensure the recipient knew it was genuine:

J - U - P - I - T - E - R

A few seconds later the radio operator at Biggin Hill responded:

P - R - O - C - E - E - D

He drew a breath and blinked his eyes tightly:

*CODE RED ALERT ... RVR ... SCHLAFENDE SPIONE
IN LONDON ... END*

Now all he could do was wait. After ten seconds he turned off the equipment. The Code Red Alert indicated the level of emergency: red was the highest. The RVR was a Rendezvous Request – to send a courier – to meet him. Alistair was confident the four words of warning would have the desired effect: Sleeper Spies in London. Brim and British Intelligence would be swept into panic. The brevity of his words reflected their supreme urgency.

“It’s done,” he said as he saw Astrid in the hallway.

“And I have called Baden,” she whispered and gave him a coquettish smile. She bit her bottom lip and wondered: was there any way in the world things could work out between them? The pretence of marriage, which was everything but physical, was for her, unbearable. Could he or would he see sense? Or was it the strain on both of them which made him so preoccupied and aloof all the time?

The look on her beautiful features said: ‘I know you can’t make love to me. But I really need the comfort and I crave some passion.’

Reading her expression, he thought: ‘I’m desperately sorry, Astrid; sorry for you, but that is the last thing on my mind.’

Astrid smiled: “I know why we are here, Alistair. And what we have to do. I was thinking while you were out, about how it all started. Do you remember?”

Alistair took her hand. In his own way, he loved her: “Of course I do. Come on, let’s have a drink. I think we deserve one, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

They went to the tiny kitchen and took cold beers from the pantry. Astrid poured carefully. The beer frothed into the tall glasses her mother had given them as a ‘wedding present.’ They chinked the glasses and drank the foaming beer.

Alistair’s face cracked into his charming smile, the blue-grey eyes regarded her: “What were you thinking about, Astrid? Tell me, I want to hear.”

They sat in the tiny lounge; Alistair turned on the radio, the music was soft and unobtrusive. They always spoke German, as a pretence, even alone, at home. Their masquerade was perfect.

“Oh! Before I met you, back in ’35. Then the Berlin Olympics. My father Manfred. When I first met you. You were so ...”

He grinned and sipped his beer: “I still am so ...”

Sally

Bayswater, London, England.

SALLY BROOKE LAY NAKED under a single sheet on the bed. The hotel in Bayswater had few luxuries, but staff asked no questions of Freddie and Sally, indeed of any customer. War had changed the moral compass of London. Their plain but clean bedroom was swathed in shafts of morning sunlight, despite flimsy curtains tightly drawn.

Freddie combed his hair and glanced at the scratched mirror on the dressing table. In the reflection, he couldn't take his eyes off Sally. She looked relaxed in bed, appeared carefree, seductive and happy. He was wearing grey suit trousers and a white pressed shirt, cufflinks engraved with the image of a Spitfire. They were a gift from Squadron Leader David Squires, and made from metal salvaged from Freddie's crashed Tiger Moth. Squires had a warped sense of humour.

"Where did I put my tie?" Freddie said, almost to himself.

Sally reached for a cup from a tray on a bedside table. Despite the drabness of the hotel, room service had delivered tea, boiled eggs and toast, the "Honeymoon Breakfast," as the Night Porter had caustically

described it. His furtive glance at the third finger on Sally's left hand produced a knowing look which Freddie had chosen to ignore.

"What time is it, Freddie?" Sally asked sleepily. Her freckled and lightly flushed face dissolved into a mischievous smile as she watched him dress. Something is on her mind, he thought to himself. What can it be?

"Oh, eight-ish," He replied, looking around the cramped room. On an old ottoman lay her silk underwear and skirt. And his tie. Oh yes, he remembered with a grin. It had all happened quite quickly yesterday: a torrent of passion.

"Too early." She reached out, looking gorgeous in the early morning light. Her face captivating and sensual, her golden hair dishevelled. The single cotton sheet slipped down her body as she stretched, revealing her firm, pale skin as she clasped the cup handle and sipped her tea. She quickly covered herself and giggled: the shyness of the morning after.

Freddie's eye caught her modesty in the mirror, and it amused him too; they were fully in tune with one another. Theirs was a comforting, relaxed love. He wandered over and kissed her gently on the lips; she nearly spilt her tea.

"Too late to be bashful," he said quietly, "I know every inch of you."

She kissed him back, a quick, cheeky peck. "And I of you, Mr. Valentine. Those bed baths at East Grinstead were an inspiration. You ask Nurse Lucy Fry. She's in love with you too!"

He laughed, picked up his tie and turned back to the mirror, still not taking his eyes off her. The sheet had slipped down again, but she didn't notice this time. Unless she didn't care. There was a

companionable silence between them, a closeness.

“What do you do, Freddie?” she asked suddenly. There was an emphasis on the word do. And a mischievous look in her eyes.

“Do?” Freddie appeared to struggle with his tie.

“You’re not in the RAF anymore, after your plane crash. And yet you always seem to be busy. Dashing off here and there.” Sally was apparently fishing, her eyes sparkled.

“Ministry of Defence,” he replied quickly and unconvincingly, “I thought I told you?”

She sipped her tea: “No. You didn’t.”

“Oh?”

“Do you all carry guns?” she asked him slowly, cautiously, “I unpacked your case yesterday evening, when you were in the bath. Remember?”

Freddie pulled his tie too tight and it looked misshapen.

“Let me do it,” she climbed out of bed, slipped on her gown and padded over to him barefoot. He was still facing the mirror. “You’ll have to hunker down a wee bit, Freddie. I’m only little.”

She came up behind him and unknotted his tangled tie. They eyed each other in the mirror. She re-tied it perfectly and tapped it, as a mother might do to her son before school.

“There. You’re a mystery, Mr. Valentine.”

He turned and looked her in the eyes. They still shone with coquettish affection. A love, of sorts. He wrapped his arms around her slender body.

“And I shall have to remain one, I’m afraid, Nurse Brooke.” He kissed her again, turned and put his jacket on.

Sally returned to the bed, took off her dressing gown and sat

naked, cross-legged on top of it. No sign of modesty now: “Do you have to go?” Her voice – everything about her - was loaded with sexual promise.

“Only for an hour or so. Baker Street.”

“221b?” She flicked a strand of golden hair over her shoulder and her smile was at once delicious and tempting.

“Eat your toast,” he said, blowing her a kiss, “and don’t get dressed.”

*

One day Sally would have to reveal that it was she who had recommended Freddie to Brim in the first place. They were second cousins; Brim’s father had been a well-known physician in Edinburgh and was related to Sally’s mother. At a Christmas Eve family function, two years earlier, Brim had taken Sally to one side: ‘Keep an eye out for suitable candidates, Sally. We’re always on the look out for good people. Men and women.’

Sally had been startled at the request: ‘At a hospital, Brim? Our patients are wounded; some gravely.’

Brim’s reply had been decisive: ‘Yes, but they will heal. And if they can’t fly a Spitfire or operate a tank, there are always certain other roles. British Intelligence need resourceful, loyal people.’

Sally had sipped her single malt: ‘I’ll give it some thought. There is one fellow, quite a charmer. A wounded Spitfire ace called Freddie Valentine.’

‘You have my number.’ Brim had said, ‘He sounds interesting.’

Shock

St. James's, London, England.

AND THAT IS EXACTLY what happened. Less than six months after Freddie's Tiger Moth biplane ditched in the Fens, Brim was driven down to the Royal Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead. Their meeting happened by chance. Brim was allegedly meeting another patient and had popped into the 'Guinea Pig' public house for lunch. Over a few drinks at the bar, he and Freddie had got talking, initially about the RAF, his accident, his prosthetic, his life. Freddie told Brim about his upbringing, education and life in Zermatt at Monte Rosa. Alistair was mentioned but Brim deliberately did not want to develop that discussion. Brim was impressed with Freddie's language skills – not quite on a par with his brother – but fluent in German and French. They moved to a quiet booth at the back of the pub and the waitress took their order for sandwiches.

'What will you do,' Brim asked, 'when you get your new leg?'

After a few minutes, the waitress delivered their sandwiches and another round of drinks: bottled beer for Brim and a double scotch and water for Freddie. He was in an effusive mood; pleased to be

away from the hospital and keen to talk about matters non-medical.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ Freddie had mused, ‘Squadron Leader Squires at RAF Northolt assured me there were training positions for wounded airmen. Navigation and so on.’”

‘What happened? Shot down by Jerry?’

‘No.’

Sally had told Brim the story of course. That fateful day back in September 1941. The Tiger Moth over England. The erratic de Havilland DH82. The crash. But Brimblecombe let Freddie relate his tale of woe anyway. It was cathartic and the double scotch was a rare treat. Just before closing time Brim had said:

‘Can’t see you teaching, old sport. You are a fighter pilot who was unfortunate. Skills like yours are rare.’

Freddie was a little bemused: ‘Well, there are quite a few of us in the same boat.’

Brim handed him a business card which Freddie read with interest: ‘Professor Nicholas Brimblecombe, with an address in Whitehall. What do you actually do, Professor?’

Brim had stood and said: ‘Give me a ring on that number. And I’ll tell you.’

*

It was now eighteen months or so later, a lunchtime in June 1943. Freddie had been trained by the best of British Intelligence. For obvious reasons this did not include Sgian Dubh, the MI Commando Training School in Scotland Alistair had to endure. But it did include a month at a facility at Beaulieu in Hampshire, one of the Group B finishing schools. Here he was educated in fieldcraft: ciphers and

codes, the elements of spying and surveillance, sabotage, weapons handling, lock picking and survival. By the end of the training, Brim received a missive from one of the instructors Captain David McCullum:

*‘Valentine (Frederick.) 100%:
outstanding and resourceful.’*

*

Brim walked into Freddie’s makeshift office that day with a self-assurance that implied he owned the place. As the PM’s spymaster, he had unrestricted access to all areas of St. James’s and Whitehall. Without greeting, he perched himself on the edge of Freddie’s cluttered desk, idly picking up a map of occupied Europe.

“You have a brother somewhere in Europe, do you not?” Brim said with a bright smile.

“Alistair, yes,” replied Freddie cautiously.

Brim raised his eyebrows: “Tell me about him.” He folded the map and put it back on the desk.

“I don’t really know much of late to be honest; what with my accident ... and the war, of course.”

“Then what do you know?” asked Brim innocently, brushing an imaginary fleck of dust from his pinstripe suit trouser.

“Well, I think he went to Europe in – what – thirty-six, to learn about wine. I gather the Board of Trade paid for half of his mission and his firm paid the rest. The last I heard he was going to Germany, to the Berlin Olympics. Nothing since; I suspect he’s been in Switzerland for at least some of the time.”

Brim snorted: “Board of Trade, eh? That’s very inventive. And that’s the last you heard of him – seven years ago?” Brim, of course, knew this.

A flicker of concern crossed Freddie’s face, by the choice of the past tense.

Freddie hesitated: “Yes, I’m afraid so. But we were never that close as children, or adults for that matter.” He remembered their last meeting at Waterloo station and the acrimony of an alcohol-fuelled misunderstanding.

Brim sensed dangerous territory but proceeded nonetheless: “He married, didn’t he? A German girl from Baden? Astrid Lochar?”

Now Freddie was concerned. This was news to him.

He waited a moment: “You seem to know more about my brother than I do.”

“Oh, no doubt I do.”

Brim stood up from the edge of the desk and walked over to the stone hearth. He opened a battered silver cigarette case, took out a Senior Service and lit it. He looked at Freddie through a haze of smoke.

“Is he – is Alistair all right?” Freddie looked at Brim. Rays of sunlight beamed in through the window and pierced the clouds of tobacco smoke.

“Last we heard, yes.”

“And when was that?”

“Oh, seventy-two hours ago, give or take,” said Brim dismissively.

Freddie was shocked at this and made to stand up. Brim firmly gestured him to remain where he was. He pursed his lips and shook his head; it was a curiously feminine gesture, at odds with his

distinguished, though portly appearance.

“What’s this about, Professor?” asked Freddie, his voice slightly raised; bordering on disrespect. He was irked his boss knew more about his family, in particular his brother’s marriage, than he did.

Brim picked up on this nuance but chose to ignore it. He knew the facts. He continued.

“Your brother’s fluency in German is remarkable,” he said with genuine admiration, “and mine is fairly good. So is yours, of course. You were raised with the language and variations of it.”

“In Switzerland, yes, and our mother ...”

“Yes, I know, I know,” cut in Brim, “I know the story. Your patriotism is unquestioned if that’s what you were about to say.”

“I wasn’t.”

“Good. Your upbringing in Switzerland helped Alistair evolve into an exceptional linguist. His German is refined and he both understands and can mimic regional dialects.”

“Why are you telling me this? What’s this about?” Freddie repeated, almost pleading. Brim took a moment.

“Because, like you, Alistair works for us.”

This time, Freddie, despite his disability, was out of his chair, knocking it over clumsily. He steadied himself against the desk, flushed with emotion. “What?” This time he shouted, unable to control his utter disbelief.

Brim merely chuckled and flashed him his most winning smile. It was an expression that had won over diplomats, soldiers and politicians.

“Yes, Freddie. Your brother is a British agent working right under the noses of the bloody Germans. He’s Admiral Canaris’s chauffeur.”

He slapped his hand across his side and looked very satisfied.

Freddie was shocked. He'd been manipulated and outmanoeuvred. Or at least, that's how it felt. How long had Alistair been working for Brim? Since when? How? A myriad of questions about Alistair and his relationship with Brim and the Service crossed his mind.

“Come on. Grab your coat and I'll buy us some lunch. There's still a restaurant in Pall Mall that hasn't been bombed. I'll tell you all about it.”

Mission

*Dégustation restaurant, Pall Mall, London,
England.*

BRIM SAID TO FREDDIE: “Have some more of this rather agreeable claret,” he poured carefully, gripping the neck of the bottle with a napkin, “not a bad drop, eh?” To find any red Bordeaux in wartime London was a rare luxury; to enjoy opulent, sensuous, 1929 Château Léoville-Barton, astonishing.

They both sat on Irish mahogany side chairs in a dining room beneath Pall Mall, where, rationing and food shortages allowing, French chef Xavier could always conjure up something highly edible. The pompously named Dégustation restaurant was never a disappointment to the few who knew about it.

Today was no exception: a slow-cooked rabbit stew with crisp vegetables and herb-filled dumplings; small portions but far more than most Londoners could get their hands on. It should have been a singular treat, but the many questions Freddie had about Alistair diminished his appetite.

One in particular lingered in Freddie’s mind: ‘Why was he really

here and what did Brim have in store for him? The facts he had learned in the past hour had shocked him.'

"Yes, thank you," said Freddie, watching Brim's furrowed brow as he poured the wine. He waited.

Suddenly Brim became serious: "Seventy-two hours ago, we received a code red alert, a really crucial one, so it appears now ..." He paused for a moment ...

"At first we thought it was a bunch of Abwehr jesters playing silly buggers. But now we don't think so. They don't have the codes and have got nowhere near cracking these signals."

"How can you be so sure?" asked Freddie.

"Oh, we have a pretty fail-safe way of checking," Brim replied. "You know those missives that appear every day in the PM's war rooms?"

"Yes, I am aware of them. But a code red alert? That's a new one on me."

"This one was from 'Jupiter' – your brother. Sent from Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin. An RVR."

"My God. How?"

"Army signals at Biggin Hill monitor a certain radio frequency at midnight, every night, to listen. It's just one of many radio routes we use," Brim explained.

"Short blasts of coded Morse," he continued. "The crib is changed every week as are all codes and cyphers. Without the crib, the cypher is meaningless."

Freddie frowned: "I find it impossible to imagine Alistair hiding somewhere with a ..."

But Brim cut him off, deadly serious: "He's onto something,

Freddie. Something big. Something so big – significant – he cannot risk a full coded transmission in any more detail or length. The nature of the words he used, he was incredibly careful ... the Abwehr have ears and eyes everywhere. We hadn't heard from Alistair for a long time."

"I see."

"He must have evidence of something vital. But he cannot tell us exactly what, that much is clear."

Freddie sipped some wine, broke off a tiny piece of stilton and popped it into his mouth. The bread was stale, but at least it was crusty. And warm.

"You mean some kind of attack?"

"We're not sure. Britain is well prepared with troops, field guns and artillery for most orthodox attacks. My God! Have you been in Hyde Park recently? It's like a battlefield. And positively hazardous at night. Ask any members of the team."

Freddie nodded.

"Jupiter – Alistair, that is – used several significant words, seconds apart; on the same frequency: 'Schlafende Spione in London.' Any ideas?"

Freddie was immediately alarmed: "Sleeper spies in London I would say was a good enough translation."

Brim lowered his voice: "Exactly. Our best guess is that it's an undercover German unit, obviously based here in London, spies waiting to be activated on command from Berlin. The Abwehr. It would be typical of Canaris's duplicity and cunning".

Freddie considered the concept: "Covert spies living in deep cover in London. Here. They would have to be bloody convincing. And

consistent.”Freddie looked over his shoulder at the other diners, sharing Brim’s caution, “Who on earth could they be? And where?”

“We don’t know. That’s just it. No idea at all. Brother and sister; husband and wife. We’ve got everybody working on it. As you say, credible people who seem part of the furniture ... invisible, if you want to be dramatic. Unseen.”

Brim sighed deeply and shook his head. Freddie knew Brim hated the unknown or unknowable.

“But why are they here? To do what?” asked Freddie.

Brim drank a generous mouthful of claret, swilled it around in his mouth and closed his eyes for a few seconds, savouring the flavours. He took out his distinctive silver cigarette case and lit non-tipped Senior Service with his Ronson.

“The list of possibilities is endless,” he said through a plume of exhaled smoke. “Sabotage is the obvious motive, to bomb army bases, aircraft factories, ports and military facilities. And do not forget Parliament, Downing Street and countless other government buildings. Even Buckingham Palace. Destroy or damage any of these landmarks and the Nazis will milk it. A dream come true for Goebbels as Reichsminister for Propaganda. He might even be behind the sleeper cell. Your brother took some incredible footage at the ’36 Olympics. All Hitler’s top brass were there on show. We have it on file, you must see it, Freddie.”

Freddie suddenly felt incredibly proud of Alistair; he had no idea he had carried out such an assignment. But all he could manage was: “I see.”

“Expanding on that idea of propaganda, I believe someone in Germany has come up with a plan which Hitler believes will win him

the war. And I am convinced new science and technology might be at its core. Alistair, I am also convinced, has somehow learned what these plans are. That is the crucial significance of the code-red alert RVR. He wouldn't go to the trouble – and enormous risk – to alert us without a damn good reason.”

“Schlafende Spione in London could they be words Alistair accidentally overheard?” Freddie speculated out loud.

“Possibly.”

“I mean why not say: I believe there are?”

Brim cut him off: “Too many words, don't you see? The crucial message is four words. And every word is vital. No flab. Anything else would be conjecture. But you are right in your line of thinking; a conversation overheard is a possibility.”

“And RVR means what exactly?”

“Rendezvous request. It means Alistair wants to meet a courier to give him something significant and bring it back here. What if it is something he has discovered? To do with this plan I spoke of?” Brim let his words sink in.

Freddie swallowed deeply and eyed Brim: “You mean me, don't you?”

Brim said simply: “The obvious choice. Our contact's brother. The fact you look quite similar might be an advantage. Who knows?”

Freddie almost laughed. In fact, later he would not remember if he had laughed or not. But he remembered his utter incredulity.

“But I'm pensioned off! Wounded. A desk Johnny. My goodness, you organised it, Professor, you were the one ...”

Brim needed to nip this in the bud: “You're only pensioned off from flying fighters, Freddie ... nothing else ...”

Brim allowed his words to trail off unfinished. The silence gave Freddie time to realise there was plenty he could do, even if not in the cockpit of a Spitfire.

“What exactly do you have in mind?” asked Freddie. He was being manipulated and it was only then that it dawned on him.

“You have Swiss papers, do you not?”

“You know I do.”

Brim enthused – but not too much: “We can get you into Basle within twenty-four hours. Less. You could then travel up into Germany and meet Alistair ... Freiburg, Stuttgart, Karlsruhe ... a rendezvous somewhere.”

“Germany! Are you stark raving mad?”

“No.” Brim patted his mouth with a starched napkin, one of the few concessions to civilised life before the war. Claret and starched napkins; bliss!

Brim looked at Freddie, he had to get commitment: “We can get you the perfect cover as a commercial traveller. Your late mother’s family are all in Switzerland and the Valle D’Aosta. You have relatives there, connections, a safe haven if need be.”

“What about my leg?”

“A disability might just work to your advantage.”

“Oh! You mean if I was captured by the bloody SS?”

“Well, yes, if it came to that.”

Freddie’s tone was loaded with sarcasm: “And how do I explain to my captors that I sustained my injury through a flying accident?”

Brim smiled. He and his team at British Intelligence had anticipated all these questions when they’d had their emergency meeting in the Situation Room forty-eight hours earlier.

“You don’t. You say it was skiing ... what was his name ... Herr Seiler, your mentor? Or a climbing accident on the Eiger or Matterhorn. Frostbite perhaps?”

“You have this all worked out,” said Freddie angrily, “don’t you? You and your cronies?”

“Yes, me and my cronies. And you’re one of them, Freddie. Perhaps the most important crony of all ...

Put it this way, we have contacted an artificial limb manufacturer in Basle – Siebenthal – they are making you a device to fit your personal specification as we speak. A replica of the one you are wearing. All Swiss components and a surface which will appear aged enough to look worn and weathered. Swiss-made clothes, of course ... he is your contact and a good friend to us. You can trust him completely.”

“And if I don’t agree to do this?” cut in Freddie sharply.

Brim signalled to the waiter for the bill.

“Then your brother’s secret will never leave Germany; and if he is caught trying to re-transmit another code red, in more detail, then neither will he.”

It was blackmailing, plain and simple; but sometimes such a threat was the only option.

The waiter appeared; Brim placed a banknote onto the proffered silver tray without even looking at the bill. Like everything in the Professor’s life, he had already anticipated the amount and calculated a margin for the discreet service. Who knows, he was probably one of Brim’s anyway.

“Keep the change,” said Brim, his eyes fixed on Freddie.

“Then I have no choice, do I? I am personally and morally bound.”

“He’s your brother, Alfred, whatever you think of him. The choice is entirely yours. It’s just inconvenient – for you – that you are the best, possibly only, person who could pull this assignment off; to solve this damn mystery.”

Freddie closed his eyes and sighed. Flattery always worked and Brim was a master of the art.

“And as I said earlier, your patriotism, your loyalty to the Crown has never been questioned. Or your brother’s.” Brim stood up and brushed some crumbs from his immaculate suit; he gave Freddie a warm smile. He’d got exactly what he wanted.

Freddie would later remember the significance of those words – on a dark foreign train somewhere – and the fact that Brim had never addressed him as “Alfred” before. And probably never would again; what did he mean by whatever you think of him? What did he know about that argument they’d had at Waterloo that night back in thirty-five?

The End (for now)

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