



Chapter 1

Stockholm, 1942

Despite his reputation for wild living, the English prince had never been the most confident of men. He was nervous, his fingers and neck taut with apprehension and the burden of knowing the significance of this meeting. A meeting that must forever be kept secret.

He took his seat with the briefest of nods to his German cousin. No smile, for a smile might be seen as encouragement or collusion.

The German prince was less cautious, more sure of himself, and *did* offer a smile as he sat opposite his old friend. The two men had known and liked each other for many years but today there was to be no small talk, no comfortable conversation or warm, shared remembrances. Today they were enemies.

Their eyes met across the large table in a rather beautiful room with green silk walls and large paintings of long-dead royals from the days when Sweden was a great European power, and then they both looked away, like cats that cannot hold eye contact. The English prince studied the high ceiling and found himself counting the gilded crenellations on the cornice. He waited.

They were here in this room with only two others present – one aide for each man – with a single purpose: discovery.

What did the other man want? What could he offer?

Summer light streamed down on them from a tall window. Outside, the afternoon was hot, but here in this chamber in the



heart of Drottningholm Palace, on the eastern shore of Lovön island in the forest-fringed Lake Mälaren seven miles to the west of central Stockholm, there was a definite chill. The English prince shivered.

The flying boat that had brought him here was moored in a large lake several miles further west, well away from populated areas where it might draw attention. He and his closest aides had made the final leg of their gruelling and secret journey in an anonymous motor-launch.

No one from the Swedish royal family had been here to greet them; they could not be involved in this other than to allow the princes the use of this palace, a splendid eighteenth-century building said to have been inspired by Versailles but with its own distinctive Nordic flavour, with stucco exterior walls of smoky yellow.

Apart from the scraping of chairs, the only sound was bird-song, muffled and distant. The air was still, fresh and lightly perfumed by the wax polish administered to the table and chairbacks by maidservants that morning.

As the two princes settled in there was an awkward silence between them, such that one might wonder whether either man would ever break it. At last the German, Philipp von Hessen, spoke. 'We both want the same thing, Georgie – peace. Is that not so? Is that not the desire of the whole civilised world? Peace in Europe?'

'This is not about what *we* want, Philipp. The question is, what does your friend want?'

'My friend?'

'I wouldn't be here if I didn't know how close you have become to Hitler.' The English prince, easily the more handsome and imposing of the two cousins, chose his words with

utmost care. His purpose could be so easily misunderstood, both here in this room and – if word of this meeting were ever to leak – in other places.

The German prince stiffened, almost imperceptibly. ‘Of course, we know each other . . .’

‘Some say you are his only true friend. His sounding board and his go-between.’

‘You make it sound like an insult.’

‘Little Otto’s godfather, isn’t he?’

Philipp confected another smile. ‘I have many friends. I thought *you* were my friend, Georgie. That is why I agreed to meet you. All I can tell you is that the Führer is prepared to listen to what you have to say. I am his ears.’ He spoke perfect English; he had after all been sent to school in the south of England three decades earlier and had been back and forth in the intervening years.

‘But *you* requested this meeting, Phli.’ Phli – or *Flea* – that was the nickname the extended family had used for Philipp since childhood. ‘I assumed you had something to say, something to impart.’ Prince George had not returned his royal cousin’s smile. He could not afford ambiguity. His mind kept returning to the sensitivity surrounding this meeting; just one misplaced word, one misinterpreted expression might cause untold harm.

This was too delicate. There must be no suggestion that he had come to this place seeking any sort of accommodation with the Nazis. This was a recce mission, nothing more. There must be no misapprehension on that score.

‘Georgie? Talk to me. Tell me what you want. What does your brother want, for pity’s sake? You wouldn’t have come unless you wanted something.’

Prince George, Duke of Kent, brother of the King of England, did not respond. He could have shaken his head and said ‘that’s not so,’ but instead he just waited. He turned his head away; the grand fireplace in his line of vision had a gilt ormolu clock on the mantelpiece and he noted the time. How long should he allow this meeting to last? Ten minutes? Perhaps fifteen? Certainly no more than that. It would not do to seem keen to prolong the engagement.

Philipp and George were great-grandsons of Queen Victoria. In their scandalous, hedonistic youth, they had both exuded glamour and danger, but things were different now. There had been tales of women, of intimate relationships with men, of drugs and alcohol and scandalous parties. But for George those days were long gone. He might be diffident, but at least he had a maturity about him while his cousin, once beloved of poets and artists, still seemed not to have grown up. And there was something else that George noticed in his cousin – an air of tired desperation. The face that had once charmed men and women alike was pinched and diminished. Perhaps Hitler’s charms were wearing thin; perhaps the aristocratic Philipp no longer felt secure among the lower-class thugs of the Third Reich.

‘Then so be it, Georgie – I will *tell* you what you want as you seem so reluctant to say the words. You want to make an honourable peace with Germany. This week’s events in northern France must have shown you that you have an empire to lose and nothing to gain by continuing this war. Your situation is hopeless. Damn it, you couldn’t even hold on to Singapore. India will be next, then Australia – your colonies will fall like ninepins. So join us, Georgie – join us, save the British Empire and crush the bloody Bolsheviks.’

‘Is that what Hitler wants, a joint effort against the Soviets? He needs England, does he?’

‘You are twisting my words. Germany doesn’t *need* England. But many of us have great affection for our old friends across the North Sea. We want to save you from unnecessary pain and destruction. We want you to keep your great empire. Imagine a federal Europe with German armies of the west and north returned to their pre-war stations, France and parts of the Low Countries back to their pre-war borders, all protected from the Asiatic hordes by a greater German Reich. Relations with Japan could be broken off with benefit to us all. We are natural allies – you know we are.’

‘It sounds to me as though your friend is frantic to do a deal with us so that he can divert his western divisions to the East.’

A shaft of sunlight crossed over Philipp’s eyes and he blinked rapidly. ‘That is not so. He is conquering the world – you know he is. He is Attila, Tamburlaine, Alexander and Napoleon. No one can stop him.’

‘Napoleon didn’t fare so well in Russia.’

‘Now you are being trivial. The advance on Stalingrad and the siege of Leningrad are just mopping-up operations.’

‘Then why is he seeking an accommodation with England?’

‘He has always loved your country. Read his book: it tells you everything you need to know about his aims. He wishes to share the spoils, nothing more. Has Germany not offered an olive branch already by cutting back on its bombing raids on your cities – even though provoked by your own raids?’

‘That’s not an olive branch, Phli, that’s strategic necessity – Goering needs the Luftwaffe in the East.’

‘Not so, Georgie – not so.’

‘So it’s an act of altruism by Adolf? Be nice to the poor little Brits?’ Prince George smiled at last, then glanced again at the clock and laughed quietly as he rose from his chair at the table. ‘Thank you, Phli, you have told me everything I wanted to know.’

‘I have told you nothing!’

‘Oh, I rather think you have. All except his terms – and you haven’t even asked what Britain’s terms might be. Your Luftwaffe has done much damage. It would have to be paid for. We wouldn’t even agree a temporary ceasefire without the guarantee of substantial reparations.’

‘Georgie, now you are making fun of me!’

‘And you are trying to take me for a fool, Phli.’

‘Georgie, Georgie, I beg you, don’t throw away this chance. There will not be another. If you do not make peace, then he will crush you utterly – and neither of us can desire that. Please, let us meet again this evening. Perhaps over some supper and wine. Just the two of us.’ He swept his left arm wide to indicate his proposed dismissal of their aides.

Prince George, Duke of Kent, hesitated. ‘I don’t know.’

‘We can talk about old times. I want to know about your family – Marina, the children, the new baby. We have more in common than separates us, Georgie. Much more. It has to be worth preserving.’

‘Just the two of us?’

‘You and me. Like old times.’

Behind them, the eyes of their aides met. Philipp von Hessen did not notice.

At first Tom Wilde failed to recognise the young man. He looked older, wore a rather ragged military moustache and

was in army uniform. Wilde smiled briefly and nodded, as you do when you're alone in a railway carriage and someone new comes in.

'Good evening,' Wilde said and returned to his newspaper.

The young man grunted, then slumped into a seat in the far corner by the window, delved into a khaki service bag and pulled out a tin of sweets. He lifted the lid and popped one in his mouth, then offered the tin to Wilde.

'Fruit drop, professor?'

Wilde looked up, astonished at being addressed by his title. He was about to ask how the officer knew him when he realised he was acquainted with the young soldier. 'Ah, it's you, Cazerove – sorry, I didn't recognise you under the moustache. And thanks for the offer, but no to the sweet.'

'I imagine you'd prefer a Scotch. You always did, as I recall.'

'Do you have some then?'

'Afraid not.'

It was the last train of the day. The blackouts were secured and the train pulled out of Liverpool Street at a crawl. Wilde was surprised by Peter Cazerove's shabby appearance; he had been one of the more sharply dressed undergraduates, if not the most diligent.

'Changed a lot, have I, Professor Wilde?'

'Oh, you know, my mind was elsewhere, that's all. Still used to seeing you in your civvy bags and gown.'

'You look pretty much the same. Still at the old college, I suppose.'

'Indeed.' He wasn't going to tell this man that he was now engaged full-time working in Grosvenor Street for the Office of Strategic Services – or OSS – the newly formed American intelligence agency. This journey back to Cambridge was a rare

break from a hectic schedule. He was longing to see Lydia and their two-year-old son Johnny for the first time in two months. He wanted Lydia badly. Even after six years together, the fire still burned. 'As I recall, Cazerove, you had plans to go back to your old school to teach.'

'That was always the idea. I did a year, then duty called.'

'Athelstans, wasn't it? War's bugging up a lot of careers.'

'Quite.'

'No time for sixteenth-century studies either, I suppose?'

'Oh, I read a little now and then.'

'I remember you were always rather interested in the French side of things. Henry of Navarre, Catherine of Medici, House of Guise . . .'

Cazerove smiled weakly. 'Debauchery, incest and poison, you mean?'

'Well, yes, they did indulge in quite a lot of that.'

It was clear they would have the carriage to themselves. The journey was certain to be long and gruelling at this time of night, the train stopping at every small out-of-the-way station en route, and so conversation was unavoidable, which was irritating. Wilde had had a long day of meetings, including a four-hour session with Lord Templeman and other senior MI5 and MI6 men on the practicalities of sharing information and ensuring the American and British secret services did not cross wires. 'You shall share our secrets,' Churchill had promised John Winant when he arrived as ambassador. Well, Templeman had been supremely accommodating; nothing would be too much trouble when it came to keeping their allies from across the pond in the loop. Wilde had listened with scepticism. He had had enough dealings with Britain's spies to know that they were about as trustworthy as a pride of lions babysitting infant

wildebeest. But that was all in the past; they *had* to work together now, for the duration at least.

Here on this train, he was exhausted and wanted nothing but to travel home in silence, perhaps nod off for an hour and then, when he was home, drink a couple of whiskies with Lydia and retire with her to bed. Unfortunately the presence of Cazerove made silence impossible. Reluctantly he folded up his day-old copy of *The Times* and placed it on the seat at his side, looked up at his former student and prepared to make small talk. 'So tell me, how have you been keeping?'

'Do you really want to know?'

'Yes, of course, that's why I asked. Haven't seen you for, what is it, four years?'

Cazerove took another sweet from his tin. 'OK then, here goes. I'm the loneliest man in the world, professor. Broken. There. That just about sums it up.'

This wasn't what he expected to hear. For a moment, he was stunned into silence. 'I'm sorry to hear it,' he said at last.

'Well, you did ask.'

'Indeed, yes, I did.'

'So there you are.'

Wilde realised he was supposed to delve deeper. His former undergraduate badly wanted to get something off his chest. 'What is it, Cazerove? Girl trouble, perhaps? This wretched war? You're not alone, you know – these things get a lot of men down.' Wilde was embarrassed by his platitudes even as he uttered them, but what else was there to say? He was responding to an unanticipated outburst; usually people said they were fine, thank you, however badly things were going. 'Mustn't grumble, old man, we're all in the same boat.' That was the British way.

‘Girl trouble, professor? Not in the way you mean it.’

Wilde tried to offer a sympathetic smile. But he was disturbed. He didn’t like this encounter one bit and wondered where the conversation was going. Things happened on trains, and not all of them good.

‘Do you want to talk about it? Not really my business, of course, but I’m a fairly good listener.’

Cazerove returned the smile, but it was still utterly humourless. He was, thought Wilde, a curious specimen. A strong, athletic face, quite handsome but certainly not in the movie-star mould. He wore a lieutenant’s two pips, which was about right for his age – what, twenty-five or so? At Cambridge, he had not always been easy to teach because he had strong preconceived notions about history that were difficult to reconfigure. He was also a bit full of himself, as were so many of the scions of landed gentry that Wilde had encountered during his years in England; he certainly hadn’t been one of the undergraduates that Wilde warmed to and nor did he expect him to achieve much. That wouldn’t harm his prospects for a life of wealth and ease, however, because his family owned vast tracts of land in Norfolk, he recalled.

And as an old boy from Athelstans, he was most likely a member of the Athels. They tended to consider themselves the most elite and ancient of societies – both in Cambridge and elsewhere – and looked after each other. War or no war, the old boy network was here to stay.

That said, Cazerove had done enough to earn a 2:2.

‘You’ll hate me, professor,’ the younger man said. ‘You will loathe and despise me and spit on me. I was an arrogant and thoughtless young fool, conditioned to do the bidding of others, and I have paid a terrible price. Worse, my country has paid a terrible price . . .’

Once again, Wilde was caught off guard by the young man's vehemence. 'You're making it sound very dramatic.'

'I've just killed hundreds of men. Thousands, perhaps – I don't know the exact figure.'

Wilde couldn't help frowning. What had Cazerove just said? 'I'm sorry? You're losing me.'

'Killed in cold blood. Never stood a chance, poor blighters.'

'What?'

'Operation Jubilee. Lambs to the slaughter. The Germans were waiting for us.'

'You'd better start again, Cazerove. I'm not sure what you're saying.' A chill was shuddering down Wilde's spine, and he was beginning to think a slug of Scotch might be rather a good idea.

Cazerove was silent for a few moments. He was looking at Wilde, but his focus was elsewhere; his eyes were heavy.

'You know what I'm talking about, Mr Wilde.'

'Jubilee. That's the raid in northern France, isn't it? Didn't do badly, did we?' In fact, Wilde knew otherwise, but the population at large certainly didn't.

Cazerove snorted. 'You must know better than that. It was a bloody disaster. Hundreds of Allied troops killed, thousands injured or captured. Ships lost, a hundred planes shot out of the sky.'

'That's not what the BBC has been saying.'

'Well, they wouldn't, would they?'

'And you believe the Germans were waiting for us.' Wilde picked up his copy of *The Times*. 'Here,' he said, flicking through the paper, then stabbing his forefinger at an editorial column, 'page eight – it says quite clearly the enemy was taken by surprise.'

'That's bull, professor. Propaganda.'

‘OK, so if I accept your version, Cazerove, perhaps you’ll explain how you blame yourself for the debacle – if that’s what it was. With all due respect, you seem to be a rather junior lieutenant. I imagine the decision to stage the raid was taken by men a great deal higher up the chain of command than you.’

‘You don’t know the half of it. It wasn’t even the worst thing I’ve done.’

‘Do you want to enlighten me?’

‘You’ll hear soon enough.’

‘What? What will I hear?’

Cazerove shrugged, then slumped back into his corner and closed his eyes.

The train chugged on slowly into the night. Every now and then it waited an age at a darkened station platform, but no one seemed to get on or off. Wilde was rather glad that Cazerove had brought the conversation to an abrupt end, but he was also disturbed by what he had said. Sighing, he picked up his copy of *The Times* and turned back to the crossword. He had almost finished it and realised they must be approaching the end of the journey when some instinct made him glance across at Cazerove. Tears were flowing down his cheeks.

‘Cazerove?’

He blinked furiously and wiped a sleeve across his eyes. ‘Sorry.’

‘I wish I could help.’

‘No one can. I told them, professor. I told the Germans that we were coming. Date, time, numbers, battle plan, air deployment. The whole shooting match. That’s why they were waiting – that’s why our boys were shot to pieces.’

Wilde was aghast. ‘Are you serious?’

‘Deadly.’

‘But how would you even have had such information?’

‘Didn’t I mention? I’m on attachment to the War Office.’

‘Ah.’ This was serious. ‘Yes, I see. But if you inadvertently let some bit of information slip, I’m not the person you need to talk to. Go to your immediate superior, Cazerove. Face the music.’

‘I followed *you*, Professor Wilde. I had no one else to talk to. You’re American.’

‘What’s that got to do with it?’

‘I haven’t betrayed *you*.’ Cazerove delved once more into his bag where his fruit drops were stowed. In the dim carriage light, Wilde saw him place a sweet on his tongue. He smiled strangely.

‘Then tell me more.’

‘That’s the problem. I can’t. I thought I could talk to you, but now that it comes to it, I simply can’t. And northern France was just the beginning. Today was worse.’

‘Today? What happened today?’

He gave a half-hearted shrug, as though he were almost past caring. ‘If you don’t know already, you’ll discover soon enough . . . tomorrow.’

‘We’re almost in Cambridge. Where are you staying, Cazerove? Why don’t you come home with me? Lydia will make up a bed for you – and we can talk in the morning when we’ve both had a good night’s sleep. I know one or two people who may be able to advise you.’

Cazerove shook his head slowly and the corners of his lips creased into a smile of eternal sadness. ‘An oath is sacred, isn’t it? That’s what the Athels always say. But which is more binding, professor – a vow of silence or a declaration of love?’

‘They shouldn’t come into conflict. But you’ll really have to make yourself clearer, Cazerove. I’m afraid you’re losing me again.’

‘I’m sorry . . . there’s so much worse to come.’

He bit down on the sweet, but it sounded more like crunching glass than the hard sugar of a fruit drop. For a few moments, he gazed on Wilde with a beatific expression, as though he were already in a higher place. ‘I didn’t want to die alone,’ he whispered. His head fell forward.

‘Cazerove?’ Wilde suspected instantly what was happening.

The young officer collapsed sideways across the bench seat, a long groan of pain emerging from the depths of his tortured body, then a last exhalation of air from his lungs. Wilde moved towards him, trying to help. He cradled Cazerove’s head, but there was nothing to be done. His lips were still set in that strange smile. His eyes bulged and bled cherry red.

A faint, bitter whiff of almonds caught Wilde’s nostrils.

Chapter 2

Rupert Weir, police surgeon, examined the body, then stood back and gazed at it dispassionately. 'Prussic acid, almost certainly, but we'll have to get the forensics boys on the case to be sure.'

'It was very quick.'

'That's the point. That's why people take it. You'll need to give the police a full statement, Tom. Clearly suicide from what you say, but the method raises a few difficult questions. Where did he get a hydrogen cyanide pill? Can't buy them off the shelf at Jesse Boot's.'

Indeed, it had occurred to Wilde that poison capsules tended to be specially created for secret agents. The sort of thing the OSS would be handing out to its operatives behind enemy lines when it became fully operational in the near future. Useful for a quick exit when the unpleasant prospect of slow, agonising death at the hands of the Gestapo was the only alternative.

Weir yawned and loosened his tie. As always, winter or summer, he was wearing one of his signature tweed suits. 'Hell of a day. I'm wiped out, Tom.'

'Me too. All I want is home and bed.' He put a hand on his old friend's shoulder. 'And perhaps a small dram.'

'Good plan. By the way, do you have any information about poor Cazerove's next of kin?'

'Yes, I can help with that. His people are prosperous farmers, somewhere between Downham Market and Swaffham. The college will have details on file.'

Weir nodded towards the two policemen standing outside the carriage. 'The body's all yours, Sergeant Talbot. Get it to

the mortuary at Addenbrooke's in the first instance, and I'll contact Scotland Yard about further tests.' He turned back to Wilde. 'By the way, the rest of the fruit drops in the tin seem like regular sweets, so he probably wasn't trying to poison you when he offered them to you. But I'll have them analysed anyway, just to be sure. Do you want to go to the nick and give a statement now?'

'I'd rather leave it until morning. Lydia will be waiting up for me.'

'Tomorrow morning will be fine, sir,' the sergeant said. 'I'll let them know you're coming in.'

'Thank you.'

'Come on then,' Weir said. 'Let's get you home.'

They walked down the platform with the sergeant, leaving the constable with the train guard to look after the body and organise its removal. Once more, Wilde went over the story of his journey with Cazerove, adding details as he remembered them.

As they passed the barrier, the concourse was empty save for a couple of members of staff. But then Wilde noticed a man standing outside the waiting room, which was closed for the night. He had his hands in his pockets and his dark, deep-set eyes had been following their movements. Something about him interested Wilde. 'One moment, Rupert,' he said and approached the man, who instantly made as if to back away. Wilde stayed him with a hand to his arm.

'Are you waiting for someone?' Wilde said.

The man was in his early twenties and he wasn't an impressive specimen, little more than five feet tall. He had the gaunt look of someone whose growth had been stunted by childhood malnutrition. Bow-legged like a jockey and with the pinched

cheekbones of a rickets sufferer. He looked up at Wilde. 'Are you a copper?'

'No, why?'

'Well, your mate is, that's why.' He inclined his head towards the uniformed sergeant. 'Something happened, has it, mister?'

'A man died on the train. Were you waiting for him?'

'What man? How did he die?' The thin, reedy voice ratcheted up a couple of notches.

'You are answering my questions with questions of your own.'

'Well, I don't know who you sodding are, do I?'

'I'm Thomas Wilde, a professor here in Cambridge. Who are you?'

'You said a man died, who was it?'

'First *your* name.'

The young man hesitated, then mumbled a word. It sounded like 'Mortimer' to Wilde, but he wasn't sure he had heard correctly.

'Mortimer? Is that your name?'

'Call me what you sodding like.'

'Does the name Cazerove mean anything to you? Peter Cazerove?'

The young man shook his head, but his skin had turned a shade paler. His sharp, furtive eyes glanced past Wilde to where the large, tweed-clad form of Rupert Weir was coming their way. Without a word, the young man ducked down out of Wilde's reach and slid along the wall, then hurried towards the station exit. Wilde considered chasing him, but wasn't sure there was any point, so let him go.

'What was that, Tom?' Weir asked.

‘I think he was waiting for Peter Cazerove. Taxi driver, perhaps?’ He turned to Sergeant Talbot. ‘Have you seen that lad before? He said his name was Mortimer.’

Talbot shook his head. ‘No. Not a member of the Cambridge criminal fraternity to my knowledge – but from the way he scarp-ered when he saw me approaching, I think it’s fair to assume he doesn’t like bobbies.’

‘My thought too. Very odd. He seemed to have a vaguely West Country accent.’

‘I’ll ask the lads down at the station. Easy one to describe, that boy. Someone might know him.’

As they drove slowly from the railway station through the dark-ened streets of Cambridge, Wilde recalled what Cazerove had said to him and posed the question to Weir. ‘Cazerove referred to something in the news, something worse than the disastrous French raid. Has there been some kind of big event today, Rupert? I’ve been up to my eyes in meetings, paperwork and operational planning, so I’m afraid I’ve rather blanked the outside world.’

‘Big event, Tom? The world is ablaze with big events.’ Rupert Weir sat comfortably in the driver’s seat, his belly propped against the steering wheel as he manoeuvred the Wolseley through the centre of town. As a police surgeon, he divided his time between his work as family doctor and police work when-ever they needed him to examine a corpse or wanted to deter-mine whether someone had been driving drunk. The hours were long and he looked as tired as Wilde felt.

‘Something out of the ordinary.’

‘It’s all out of the ordinary. I long for the return of ordinary.’

Wilde was dropped at Cornflowers, the old house he shared with Lydia Morris, the love of his life and mother of his son. He

had offered Rupert Weir a nightcap, but the offer was declined. 'I need my bed, Tom. Let's talk tomorrow after you've called in at St Andrew's Street.'

Lydia was sleepy-eyed and clad in a dressing gown as she opened the door. Without a word, she sank into Wilde's arms. They kissed and his hands strayed inside the gown, finding warm flesh. Then he stood back. 'Look at you,' he said, 'more beautiful than ever.'

'Smooth-talking bastard.'

He laughed, then hauled his suitcase over the threshold and followed her through to the sitting room. It was a cool late August evening. A standard lamp glowed above the armchair where he knew she would have been curled up like a cat, reading a novel.

'A drink, my master?'

'Just the one, and then bed. How's the boy?'

'Johnny's fine. Sleeps through the night then talks non-stop. All day long he's been saying "Daddy come, Daddy come". He'll be all over you in the morning. Anyway, what kept you?'

As Lydia poured two whiskies, Wilde told her about the incident on the train and Cazerove's despair and guilt over the disastrous Dieppe raid and some other 'big event'.

'Peter Cazerove?' she said, frowning as she handed Wilde his glass. 'Did I ever meet him?'

'You did, but you probably won't recall it. I invited him home for supper, but there were half a dozen other undergraduates along too. It wasn't a very memorable evening and Cazerove was rather quiet, I think.'

'Perhaps I do vaguely remember him. A bit stiff but very dapper?'

'That sounds about right.'

‘It’s all coming back to me. Wasn’t he a rather effete young man?’

‘Not a word I’d use for him. Bumptious, maybe. A bit aloof. He was an Athel – and they’re all a bit like that.’

‘Oh yes, the Athels. Rather austere lot, a bit like Jesuits in that.’

‘Yes, that probably sums them up. But he wasn’t like that tonight.’

‘Did you like him, Tom?’

‘Shouldn’t speak ill of the dead, but frankly, no, I didn’t. But then I don’t think I’ve ever liked any of the Athelstans crew. Unpleasantly cliquey – seem to think themselves a cut above the rest of us. As an American who loves England, your snobbish elitism is one of the things that always left me cold.’

‘My snobbish elitism?’

‘Well, not yours personally, but you know what I mean.’

‘Do I? Oh dear.’

‘All those bloody clubs in Pall Mall whose sole purpose is to keep out the plebs. The Apostles here in Cambridge with their silly secrecy – even though everyone knows who they are. And then there are the Athels, who look on the Apostles as upstarts.’

She laughed. ‘Says the man from bloody Harrow!’

Wilde couldn’t help laughing too. ‘Are you suggesting I’m a snob?’

She kissed his cheek. ‘You tell me.’

‘Well, I hope not, but yes, there were some arrogant bastards there. Some were downright cruel – but I’ve told you this before, haven’t I? It was survival of the fittest and so I became a boxer. If I hadn’t, I might have gone under.’

‘And on the subject of privilege and discrimination, what about this university that employs you? I believe they’re still

insisting that women are not clever enough to be granted degrees.'

'Quite. That, too.'

'Got it all off your chest now, have you, darling?'

'Sorry, it's been one hell of an evening.'

'Well then, sink your whisky. You know I've got nothing on under this dressing gown, don't you?'

'I had noticed . . . you're shameless, Miss Morris.'

'Then what are you going to do about it, Mr Wilde?'



Chapter 3

Wilde woke at 7 a.m. to the distant sound of the telephone ringing and dragged himself downstairs to the hall, but Lydia had beaten him to it.

‘Hang on, he’s here.’ She held out the handset to him.

‘Hello?’

‘Ah, Professor Wilde, it’s Terence Carstairs here. I have been asked to inform you, sir, that Mr Eaton will be with you in the next hour or so.’

‘Eaton? Coming here?’ Wilde could not disguise his lack of enthusiasm for the message.

‘Indeed, sir.’

‘Any vague clue as to the purpose of his visit?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t help you with that, sir. Good day, professor.’

The phone went dead. Wilde held the handset for a few moments longer, as though it might yet impart some information, then replaced it on the stand by the front door.

‘What was that, Tom?’

‘Philip Eaton’s on his way.’

‘Oh dear, that always means trouble. Well, come into the kitchen and say hello to your son. He’s been screaming for you this past hour. I’ve had the devil of a job preventing him from going upstairs and jumping on your head.’

Johnny was in his high chair wolfing down a bowl of porridge. As soon as he saw his father, he bounced up and down and burst into a fit of giggles. Wilde plucked him from his wooden throne and gave him a kiss on the forehead and a hug. In return, he received a splodge of the boy’s breakfast on his pyjama jacket.

Wilde laughed, gave him another kiss and plonked him back in his chair.

The room smelt of brewing coffee, and Lydia held up the pot. 'Well?'

'You have such a thing as real coffee?'

'Reserved for days such as this when my man comes home and performs his nuptial duties with aplomb.'

'Well, that's quite an endorsement. Thank you. Real coffee would be perfect.'

'I imagine you get the proper stuff all the time at Grosvenor Street.'

'Classified information, I'm afraid.'

'That's what the diplomatic pouch is for, isn't it – coffee and hooch from the Americas. Anyway, we have rationing here, so I've only got one egg and it's for Johnny.'

'As is only right and proper. I'll be very happy with toast and Marmite. A little butter, too, if we have such a luxury.'

'You are a very demanding man.'

'As I recall, you were quite demanding yourself last night.'

'Can we stop the dirty talk now? There are young ears in attendance.' She laughed and ruffled Wilde's hair, then kissed his cheek. 'Here,' she said, sliding a newspaper in front of him on the kitchen table. 'You might want to take a look at this.'

Wilde glanced at the front page and the hairs on his neck prickled. DUKE OF KENT KILLED IN CRASH ran the headline in large type. The story was dated just before midnight and carried an official statement:

The Air Ministry deeply regrets to announce that Air Commodore HRH the Duke of Kent was killed on active service in the afternoon when a

Sunderland flying boat crashed in the north of Scotland. His Royal Highness, who was attached to the Staff of the Inspector-General of the Royal Air Force, was proceeding to Iceland on duty. All the crew of the flying boat lost their lives.

‘Good God.’

‘I thought you might be interested.’

‘This . . .’ he began.

‘. . . is a big event.’

‘Could this really be what Cazerove was referring to, Lydia? Look here.’ He indicated the strapline at the top of the page. ‘It makes it clear the news wasn’t announced until just before midnight. How would Cazerove have known?’

She shrugged and poured two coffees.

‘I suppose the War Office would have been informed hours earlier,’ he muttered, half to himself.

‘I know no more than you, darling.’

Wilde grunted. ‘It’s difficult not to draw conclusions.’

Eaton turned up at ten past eight. He told Wilde he had been chauffeured up from London by a ministry driver and had barely slept. Wilde offered his sympathy then ushered both men indoors.

Lydia took the driver off to the kitchen to be fed tea and toast, leaving Wilde in the sitting room with Eaton. Wilde was concerned to see that the MI6 man did not seem to be moving at all well. His left leg had been shattered in a road incident more than three years earlier, and he had lost his left arm, but the last time the two men had met, at Christmas, his physical health had been improving.

‘Eaton, how are you doing?’

‘Don’t worry about me, Wilde. Bit stiff from the drive, that’s all. Cooped up in the passenger seat for two and a half hours.’

‘Well, spread yourself out on the sofa. Now, tell me, what does MI6 want with a Cambridge professor of history this fine summer’s day?’

Eaton lowered himself gingerly into the soft cushions and breathed a sigh of relief. ‘Ah, that’s better. God knows why car seats can’t be made as comfortable as a decent sofa.’

‘Well?’

‘Oh, I think you must have a fair idea why I’m here, Wilde.’

‘Events on the train from London last night, is that what you mean?’

‘Of course.’

‘Then how in God’s name are you here so quickly?’

‘Ah, yes, well, that was the poison capsule. The local plod panicked, called the Yard, who immediately involved Special Branch. From there it was a short hop to Five – and then I got a 2 a.m. call from Dagger Templeman, who recalled my connection to you. He asked me to nip up here to see what was going on. It’s possible you have stumbled into something significant, Wilde.’

‘I didn’t *stumble* into anything. Cazerove sought me out. He wanted to tell me something – but in the end he couldn’t bring himself to do it. Found it easier to die than break some “sacred oath”. At least I think that’s what he called it.’ He noticed Eaton nodding as though he quite understood Cazerove’s point of view. Such was the effect of the English public school system, Wilde supposed. Loyalty and duty above all else. ‘Anyway,’ he continued. ‘You still haven’t explained why you’re here.’

‘Oh, I just wanted to hear exactly what Cazerove said to you. Some clue as to why he killed himself.’

‘I told the police everything.’

‘I’d like it from the horse’s mouth. In particular, did he mention any names?’

Wilde began pacing around the room, aware of Eaton’s eyes following him. He stopped and met the MI6 man’s gaze. ‘There were no names.’

‘Are you certain?’

‘Absolutely. He told me he had been seconded to the War Office. I suppose that means he had access to secrets. Is that why you’re worried?’

Eaton held up his hand, palm forward. ‘Forgive me, Wilde, I’m here to listen not talk.’

Wilde snorted. ‘Same old Eaton. Gather information, reveal nothing. Well, my friend, we’re in the same business now – so if you want something from me, I’ll want something back.’

‘Damn it, Wilde. You still owe me, you know.’

Wilde was well aware of his unpaid debt to Eaton for getting an extremely vulnerable young woman to safety against all the rules, but this might not be the time to settle it. ‘I’m not denying it,’ he said. ‘But last night I spent a very uncomfortable couple of hours with a former undergraduate who then ended it all with some sort of poison pill. Right in front of my very eyes. Forgive me if I’m feeling a little brittle this morning.’

Lydia arrived with fresh coffee and they heard wailing from Johnny in the background.

‘Your boy, I suppose. What is he now, two?’

‘Getting on for two and a half.’

‘Who does he take after?’

‘Oh, Lydia’s good looks and my reckless stupidity. What do you want me to say? Anyway, stop changing the subject. Yes, I owe you a favour, but as you know I am now working for the OSS, so I have other loyalties and oaths of silence. However, I can see no good reason not to tell you everything that passed between Cazerove and me – and in return I think a little cooperation on your part is also called for. Fair enough?’

‘Message received.’

‘Here goes then.’ Wilde started at the beginning and went through the story of the train journey yet again. ‘And that’s about it,’ he said finally. ‘If anything else occurs to me, I’ll let you know. But I repeat, there were no names mentioned. So tell me – is there really anything in his astonishing claim that he tipped off the Germans about the Dieppe raid?’

‘Absolute tosh. Cazerove would have known very little about the attack. Anyway, the Hun has been waiting for something of the sort for weeks now, so of course they were prepared. They didn’t need information from a junior British officer.’

‘But it was a disaster.’

‘Yes, Wilde, it was an utter fuck-up. It was poorly planned and doomed to failure all along. Churchill and the chiefs of staff knew there was no chance of success, but they needed a show – a rehearsal for the day we embark on a full-scale invasion. Damned unfair on the poor bastards who laid their lives on the line in an unwinnable venture.’

Eaton’s summation left a bitter taste, which Wilde attempted to wash away with a mouthful of coffee. It was weak, but at least it was coffee. ‘So Cazerove’s guilt . . .’

‘The man was a fantasist.’

‘That doesn’t mean he was innocent.’

Eaton shrugged.

‘Anyway,’ Wilde said, knowing he was going to get nowhere with specific questions. ‘Ask away. I’ll tell you everything I know.’

‘I told you, I just want to know exactly what was said. A young soldier killing himself with a poison pill has to be investigated. You can see that, can’t you, Wilde?’

‘What about the other thing – his insistence that something else was looming?’

‘Most likely another fantasy. Cazerove had come through Dunkirk. One must accept that he could have been suffering shell shock.’

‘Then why would he have been attached to the War Office? Unsound men aren’t wanted there, are they?’

‘He was a bright lad, good education. Perhaps his nerves were too shot for the front line, but his brain was big enough for office work. Apart from that, no comment.’

‘Oh, don’t be ridiculous, Eaton.’ Wilde tried to meet the MI6 man’s eyes again, but Eaton was now gazing into his coffee. Time to push his luck. ‘This other thing’s a hell of a business, isn’t it?’

Eaton looked up. ‘Other business?’

‘The Duke of Kent crashing into a Scottish mountain.’

Eaton frowned. ‘Why do you mention that, Wilde?’

‘Oh, you know – intuition. Big event . . .’

Eaton shook his head and laughed. ‘Now your imagination really is running away with you. The RAF chaps are absolutely clear that the Caithness crash was a tragic accident.’

‘I’m sure you’re right.’ The thing was, Wilde had no idea what possible connection there could be between the suicide of a lowly army officer and a plane crash in the far north of Scotland. But Cazerove couldn’t have been much clearer:

‘This is just the beginning,’ he had said. ‘You’ll discover soon enough . . . tomorrow.’ Well, tomorrow had come, and one item of news would be on everyone’s lips: the death of the King’s youngest brother. The war in the Pacific and Germany’s advance on Stalingrad would have to take second billing today.

‘There’ll be a court of inquiry, of course,’ Eaton continued. ‘But look, can we get back to Cazerove – do you have any idea why he might have picked on you to witness his dramatic exit?’

‘He said it was because I was American, so he hadn’t betrayed me.’

‘Were you close when he was your pupil?’

‘Honestly, I can’t say I ever liked him much.’

‘You said he mentioned a woman.’

‘Well, yes, he did – obliquely. He asked which was more binding, a vow of silence or a declaration of love. I assumed he was talking about a particular woman, but he didn’t name names. And when I asked if there was girl trouble, he said “not the way you mean it”. Talking in riddles. Anyway, does it mean anything to you, Eaton?’

‘No, I’m afraid not.’

Wilde raised an eyebrow. Eaton’s reply had come too quickly, as though he had already primed himself for denial.