

APRIL 1939



CHAPTER 1

The room was square, airless and its single window was closed. Located on the third floor of the vast IG Farben building, it had been chosen for its bland anonymity and its thick, deadening walls. As a precaution it had been swept for listening devices that morning, but no one expected to find any. Why would anyone bug such a room?

Five men sat at a plain elm-wood table. A sixth, Reinhard Heydrich, paced behind them in his immaculate SS uniform, his profile pale and predatory, his short fair hair oiled away from his smooth, bloodless forehead; his hands clasped behind his back.

At the head of the table sat General Erich Schumann, a man equally at home in the military and scientific worlds. Today he wore a brown civilian suit, with a party badge at the collar. As a scientist, he was known for his work with explosives and acoustics. As a soldier, he was head of research at the *Heereswaffenamt*, the Army Ordnance Office. As a man of culture and the grandson of the composer Robert Schumann, he liked to think of himself as something of a musical genius in his own right.

Next to him, and less prepossessing, was his younger and cleverer subordinate Kurt Diebner, a nuclear physicist. His thinning hair was swept back, his eyes encased in round tortoiseshell spectacles.

Sitting opposite Diebner was Otto Ambros, an untidy man with a sandy, greying moustache. For five years he had worked for the chemicals giant IG Farben, developing weapons here in Frankfurt and at various other plants.

The last two men round the table were using aliases, at the insistence of Heydrich. If you had chanced upon them together in a Munich *Bierkeller*, you might have thought them brothers, but they were in fact unrelated. 'Herr Grün' was an agent with the *Abwehr* – military intelligence. His shirt front, bulging across his large frame, was damp with sweat. The other – known to this day only as 'Herr Schwarz' – was an officer in the *Sicherheitsdienst* or SD, Heydrich's internal intelligence agency. His eyes followed his master's every move and word.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ Heydrich said. ‘You have been given time to gather your thoughts, and so you will now bring them together. No minutes will be taken at this meeting, and no one will make notes either now or later. Herr Professor Schumann, straight to the point if you please . . .’

Schumann nodded. ‘Four days ago, Paul Harteck, who is closely associated with the *Heereswaffenamt*, advised us that a fission weapon – an atomic bomb if you prefer – is no longer the stuff of fiction, but an immediate possibility. This follows recent advances made by Otto Hahn in Berlin and the Joliot-Curies in Paris. In the past twenty-four hours I have spoken with Carl von Weizsäcker, one of the finest of our younger physicists, and he says making such a bomb might be remarkably easy.’

Heydrich stopped pacing. ‘Should he not be here?’

Schumann raised a doubtful eyebrow. He respected Weizsäcker’s scientific opinions and was impressed that he enjoyed the confidence of his peers, especially Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, but Schumann did not trust him; his loyalty to the party was uncertain. Perhaps as the son of Hitler’s second-highest Foreign Office official, he believed himself untouchable. Such men needed to be watched.

‘No,’ Heydrich agreed. ‘Perhaps not.’ He resumed his pacing. ‘Herr Dr Diebner?’

Diebner’s shoulders stiffened and he gave a brisk dip of his head. ‘We are pursuing this technology as a matter of urgency. Tomorrow, advanced and targeted research will begin under the auspices of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kernphysik*. We are gathering together the best men. Unfortunately, the *best* does not necessarily mean the most reliable politically. I will be watching them closely and reporting directly to General Schumann regularly.’

‘That alone may not be enough,’ Heydrich said.

‘Indeed not, Herr *Obergruppenführer*. This is now a race.’

‘And you believe the British, French and Americans understand the implications of this, Herr Dr Diebner?’

‘Yes, sir. The Paris laboratory has repeated Hahn’s experiment and has discovered that secondary neutrons are released in fission, meaning that a runaway chain reaction is possible.’

‘A runaway chain reaction?’

‘In other words, a bomb. An atomic bomb. Powerful enough to destroy a town, perhaps. The most destructive weapon ever conceived. Everyone in the close-knit world of particle physics knows what it means. I believe there is much excitement in Britain and America.’

‘Then it is, indeed, a race,’ Heydrich said. ‘But this is not the Olympic games. There is no room for sportsmanship here. This is a matter of survival and conquest. Even as we strive for this weapon, we must prevent our enemies acquiring it.’

None of the others spoke.

‘As I understand it,’ Heydrich continued, ‘the pre-eminent laboratory outside Germany is in Cambridge, England.’

‘Yes, sir,’ Diebner said. ‘The Cavendish Laboratory. The atom was first split there.’

‘I want to know what they know, and I want to know what they can achieve.’

‘Of course, sir.’

‘And when we have *all* their knowledge, we will cut the tendons at their heels so that they cannot run, so they cannot even *enter* the race. To which end, I have brought you gentlemen here today.’

The men gazed at each other around the table. There was a shuffling of hands and feet.

Heydrich nodded towards the chemist. ‘This is Herr Dr Ambros. He has been doing important work for IG Farben, work which will be at your disposal.’ Heydrich’s narrow eyes widened a fraction and he nodded to Ambros.

‘Thank you, Herr *Obergruppenführer*.’ Ambros paused until he was sure he had everyone’s full attention. ‘We have a new chemical compound – one that we hope will have major implications in the course of any future military campaigns. Full-scale production is planned in the months ahead. We believe – *I* believe – it will perform the task you require in this present operation. It is subtle and transportable. And as far as I am concerned, its use in this operation will have the bonus of being an invaluable test of its effectiveness.’

The room fell silent.

Heydrich turned towards Grün and Schwarz. ‘So it is up to you – and to our friends abroad. Herr Ambros is giving you the tool, the Scavenger will give you the means. You will make it work.’ He walked over to the door and turned the handle. ‘I will return this afternoon, by which time every piece will be in place, every possibility accounted for. Clear heads, gentlemen. Find out what they know, and then destroy them.’

MAY 1939



CHAPTER 2

Geoffrey Lancing felt sick. Above him, the little green biplane circled against a clear sky and prepared to land. He had longed to see his sister again; yet now the moment had come, he was riven with apprehension. The world adored her, but he knew the truth.

Boldbourne was a private airfield. A small, unremarkable place a few miles south of Cambridge, one of many such aerodromes dotted around the English countryside. It had no runway, as such, just a broad, flat expanse of grass. It was of limited use when the rains came and churned the turf to mud, but the land drained well here, so it was fine for its purpose most of the year. Now, in late May, the ground was parched after a dry spring.

There were three buildings: a large corrugated-iron barn that served as a hangar for a couple of light aircraft, and two squat, flat-roofed brick constructions. One of them contained chutes and flying suits and there were some armchairs and a table where fliers and their companions could relax with a flask of tea or a bottle of spirits. The other building was a workshop, where spares, fuel, oil, coolant and the mechanics' tools were stored.

The green biplane was on its final approach now. Clarissa had always been a superb aviatrix and today she was at her best; she came into land with barely a bump. Lancing, standing alone on the concrete apron in front of the buildings, watched nervously. As she taxied towards him, he could see her exquisite face through the screen. She brought the little aeroplane to a halt and killed the engine.

Her telegram two days earlier had sent a shiver through his veins. His sister, the great movie star, was coming home for the summer. She would be staying at Hawksmere Old Hall with the Hardimans, she announced. There would be champagne, jazz, dancing and tennis.

In the past eight years, Geoff Lancing had only seen Clarissa on the silver screen. But now here she was, in the flesh, stepping from the cockpit, more slender and gorgeous than ever, even in her boy's flying jacket,

goggles perched on her forehead. Glamour personified. The elder sister he adored and feared in equal measure. What would she demand of him this time? Of all the men in the world who loved her from afar, who genuflected at her very name, only he knew her secrets, and even then not all of them. And yet he could say nothing, for he was in thrall to her.

She was smiling; arms wide for his embrace. A perfunctory kiss on the cheek; then the hug and her exquisite scent enveloping him like a Parisian boudoir.

‘Welcome home,’ he said. The words seemed hopelessly inadequate.

‘Geoffrey, darling, you’re so fresh-faced! You’re still my baby brother. You don’t look a day older.’

Nor did she. She was thirty-two now – two years his senior – but looked younger than ever. The magic of Hollywood, perhaps.

‘How was my landing?’

‘Oh, you know, not bad for a beginner.’

She laughed and jabbed him in the ribs.

‘All right,’ he conceded. ‘It was perfect, as always.’

‘Lovely little thing – Hornet Moth. She was waiting for me when the boat docked at Southampton. But come on, you’ve got a car for me, yes?’

‘Powder-blue Hispano. Devil’s own job to get hold of it at such short notice.’

‘You’re a miracle worker. Let’s go. Can’t keep the champagne waiting. I want dancing and picnics, cocktails and croquet, and I want to meet all your friends, Geoffrey. Especially the handsome ones.’

‘Oh, my friends are all far too dull for you. Swots to a man, just like me.’

‘I don’t believe that,’ she said, grabbing him by the elbow and pulling him along with her. ‘What about Tom Wilde? He sounds like fun. You’ve told me so much about him in your letters, so I must meet him. Just consider yourself my social secretary. So much to talk about, darling. Come on, I’ll drive.’

Tom Wilde was ushered into the Oval Office by the president’s private secretary, Missy LeHand. Roosevelt was already standing at the side of his enormous desk, his hands gripping the edge, but he made no move

towards his guest. Wilde waited by the door, his eyes acclimatising to the light that streamed in through the three high windows behind the president.

‘This is Professor Wilde, Mr President,’ the secretary said.

‘Wilde,’ Roosevelt thrust out his right hand, holding firm to the desk with the left. He nodded to his grey-haired secretary and she bowed out, closing the door behind her.

Wilde approached across the oval carpet, then dipped his head in salute. ‘Mr President.’

They shook hands.

‘It’s a pleasure to meet you, Professor Wilde.’ He waved towards the leather sofa against the wall. ‘Take a seat. I’m sorry to have kept you waiting. Please take a seat. Don’t worry about me.’

‘Thank you, sir.’ Wilde sat down and found himself at a disadvantage; FDR remained standing.

The President noticed his guest’s discomfort and smiled. ‘I hope you’re not put out. It’s the devil’s own job for me to get myself standing, and I wanted to be on my feet when the German chargé d’affaires arrived. Didn’t want that damned Nazi looking down on me. The bastard’s gone now. Actually, as Nazis go, Thomsen is a fair enough guy.’

The room was cool and pleasant – an aroma of clean air and polished wood – but the president was sweating and Wilde guessed he was in pain. Paralysed by polio eighteen years earlier at the age of thirty-nine, he fought like a demon to make the world see him as able-bodied and capable of standing at the lectern for speeches or at important events; Wilde was well aware that it was all show. He began to rise. ‘I could assist you to your chair if you like, sir.’

‘Would you? That would be swell.’

Wilde lent him an arm and guided him to his desk chair.

‘Ah, that’s a sight better. Now then, Professor Wilde, sit back down again and let me start by saying that I have admired your work from afar for some years.’ Roosevelt flipped open a silver box, took out a long cigarette and lit it. As an after thought he proffered the case to Wilde, who shook his head. ‘I was most impressed by your book on Sir Francis Walsingham and his destruction of the Queen of Scots.’

‘Thank you, sir.’

‘Power raw in tooth and claw.’ The president grinned, acknowledging kinship with Walsingham across three hundred and fifty years. He drew deep on his cigarette, and then flicked the tip at an ashtray, though there was, as yet, no ash to dislodge. ‘But we’re not here to discuss the lethal machinations of a spymaster, nor your own literary attributes. What interests me is that you live in England. I am, of course, disappointed that a man of your talents and accomplishments should choose to live outside America, but let’s make use of it. America needs men like you. As a Cambridge don, I guess you meet a lot of well-connected, knowledgeable people, so I ask you this: is there going to be war?’

‘Yes, Mr President. And sooner rather than later.’

Roosevelt nodded. ‘Did you read my Chicago speech?’

‘Yes, sir. And I agreed with every word. The world is about to explode and America will not be protected by the oceans alone.’

There was a knock on the door and a servant appeared with coffee. Roosevelt waved his hand towards the desk and the man put down his tray. ‘How do you take it, Wilde?’

‘Black. No sugar.’

The servant poured the coffee and backed out of the room with a bow. As the door was about to close, another face appeared round it.

Roosevelt cupped his hand and signalled the newcomer to step forward. A man of about fifty emerged from the shadows. His gingery red hair was razored sharp at the sides and back, leaving a thick shock on top. His face was narrow and freckled, and he wore a military uniform, minus cap or jacket.

‘Do you know Dexter Flood, Professor?’

Wilde rose to his feet once more. ‘We haven’t met, sir, but of course I know of him.’

‘Colonel Flood is presently seconded to the War Department, on the Army General Staff, though like you he has a background in academia.’

Flood crossed the room and shook Wilde’s hand. ‘Good to meet you, Professor. I’ve heard a lot about you.’

Had he? What had he heard? Wilde certainly knew something of Flood. In the early thirties, he had attended a lecture he gave: *Friends*

and Enemies: Fascism and Bolshevism in the Old World. Flood had taken a hawkish line against the Soviet Union; less so against the fascist movements in Europe. Perhaps that had been understandable before the full threat of Hitler and Mussolini became clear.

‘Colonel Flood is central to the reason I asked you here, Tom. If you agree to help us, he’ll be your point of contact.’

Why *had* he been summoned here? The question had troubled and intrigued Wilde since the invitation arrived by courier at his mother’s Boston home two days ago.

‘Oh, you have to go, Tom!’ his mother had insisted. ‘An invitation from the president? Of course you have to accept!’

Wilde had shrugged. Of course he’d go, but he was more than a little surprised; he had no idea Roosevelt had even heard of him.

Flood poured himself a coffee and cream and spooned in sugar, then took a hard-back chair to the right of Wilde. He had a pad of lined paper and he unscrewed a large red fountain pen. He scribbled a heading at the top of the pad, and then underlined it.

‘OK then, here’s a straight question, Professor Wilde,’ Roosevelt said, ‘and I want a yes/no answer, one that hasn’t been filtered through embassies and the State Department. Where does England stand in all this? Are they expecting to be part of this coming war?’

Once again, Wilde did not hesitate in replying. ‘Yes.’

‘They won’t just roll over? They’re not going to sign up to some kind of dishonourable fudge with the Hun?’

‘No. That won’t happen, not after Czechoslovakia, though there are some who would wish it so.’

Roosevelt nodded slowly, as though Wilde were confirming something he already suspected. ‘Now tell me about morale. Do the British think they can win? Because Joe Kennedy and plenty of others sure don’t think they can.’

‘I don’t think it ever occurs to the British that they could possibly lose. The last time they lost a war was against us a couple of centuries back.’

Roosevelt laughed out loud as he stubbed his cigarette in the ash-tray, immediately fishing in his silver box for a fresh one. ‘The history man speaks.’

‘But people aren’t happy about the prospect of war. Many fought in the trenches and they don’t want it to happen again.’

‘That’s understandable.’

Wilde had always liked what he read about Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He was a man of intellect and high education who managed to communicate with the working man and woman and make them believe he was on their side. The evidence seemed to prove their faith was justified. But you could never be sure, not with politicians. Any history man would tell you that.

‘How long have you been home, Wilde?’

‘Ten weeks, Mr President, much of it visiting my mother in Boston. I’ve given some lectures at the east coast universities, tried to sell a few copies of my new biography of Sir Robert Cecil and I’ve listened to some blues and jazz.’ He had also spent hours at the graveside of his late wife, Charlotte, and their child, talking to her about Lydia, asking her thoughts and advice. But that wasn’t something he needed to share.

‘And you’re going back when?’

‘The ship sails tomorrow.’

‘Did you get to hear Billie Holiday?’

‘Caught up with her at Café Society in the Village, sir. Worth the trip over just for that.’

Roosevelt adjusted his rimless pince-nez on the bridge of his patrician nose and stared for a moment at Wilde. It was unlikely the President had the freedom to go to jazz clubs in New York.

‘Lucky you,’ Roosevelt said. ‘Anyway, down to business.’ He nodded in Flood’s direction. ‘Over to you, Dexter.’

‘Thank you, Mr President.’

Wilde met the colonel’s serious gaze. He wondered why Flood hadn’t made general; he surely had the qualifications: hero of the Great War having led an assault that captured a German command post in September 1918, military historian with a professorship from Princeton, something of an expert on European politics in the twentieth century. Had he fallen foul of someone somewhere – surely something or somebody had halted his advance?

‘Have you heard of fission, Professor Wilde? The new science papers coming out of Germany?’

‘Sure, I’ve heard of it, even tried to understand it. Why?’

His old friend Geoff Lancing had attempted, briefly, to explain it to him; it was a difficult concept for the layman.

‘Because there are physics men here in America who believe it means that a superbomb might be possible. What some people like to call an atomic bomb. Even Einstein believes it’s no longer merely the stuff of H. G. Wells. The War Department has to take such warnings seriously.’

Fission. Lancing, a brilliant young physics professor back in Cambridge, had bubbled over with enthusiasm – and not a little trepidation – as he’d tried to interest Wilde in the subject. Much of the technical detail had gone over Wilde’s head, but he had got the gist. This wasn’t just splitting the atom; this, as he understood it, was bursting them apart with explosive force.

‘I have a good friend who tried to explain it,’ said Wilde, ‘but I couldn’t claim to understand the fine detail.’

‘Nor me, Professor, nor me,’ Roosevelt said. ‘How could a tiny thing like an atom cause an explosion? Gas, that’s the thing that scares me. The Italians have dropped it from the air in Abyssinia, so you have to think about it coming from the sky onto a crowded Western city. Hell on earth. But this atom thing, well, that beats me . . .’

‘It really isn’t my field, Mr President.’

‘Of course not. Back to you, Dexter.’

‘OK, Wilde, you’re not a scientist. But you have eyes and ears. And you’re going home to Cambridge, which is the place where it all began. The Cavendish Laboratory.’

The Cavendish, in the heart of Cambridge, was where men had first split the atom. The lab had long been at the very heart of experimental particle physics and Geoff Lancing was one of its leading lights.

Wilde studied Flood. What he saw was a career man who hadn’t quite made it to the top, but still managed to wield influence. Perhaps he had spent too long on campus, not enough time on the parade ground.

‘We need to know what’s going on there,’ Flood continued. ‘The world of atomic physics is a small place. There are questions to which we would

like answers. For instance, do Britain's top men believe this superbomb is possible? How difficult is it to make? Who are the real brains – the leaders in the field? We'd like to hear what you can find out. And we'd like to hear it in layman's terms. Simple as that.'

'Then I'll keep my eyes and ears open.'

'Come on, Wilde,' Flood said. 'We know your background. You may not call yourself a spy, you may not be part of any agency, but goddamn it, Professor, you're in the thick of it already! You take briefings from Vanderberg at the US embassy, you watch your contemporaries like a bird of prey . . .'

'Take briefings from Jim Vanderberg? He's a friend, that's all, an old college friend. We just talk, shoot the breeze like friends do.'

Flood held up a defensive hand and grinned. 'No one's accusing you of anything, Professor. You do good work. We've got a pretty good idea what you did at the back end of '36. You're just the sort of guy we need.'

Did Flood really know Wilde's role in those events? The foiling of the conspiracy to prevent the abdication of Edward VIII had been a closely guarded secret. Wilde shrugged. 'I suppose I should be flattered.'

Roosevelt clapped his hands. 'Good man. We don't want to be caught off guard. If anyone looks like they're going to get a superbomb, I want to know about it.' He glanced at his watch and Wilde began to rise, as did Colonel Flood. The interview was over. Ten short minutes in which they had covered the likelihood of war, the possibility of an atomic superbomb and the pleasures of jazz. All that and good White House coffee. The President put the dying butt of his second cigarette in the ashtray groove, then leant across and shook Wilde's hand warmly. 'Good to meet you, Professor. Keep in touch. I need a clear, unbiased voice over there in the dark days that lie ahead of us. Missy LeHand is my gatekeeper and she will tell you exactly how to contact me. I'd value your view over those of a dozen diplomats. Just keep everything short and to the point. On the science matter, communicate with Dexter.'

'Certainly, Mr President.'

'And perhaps you'd send me a signed copy of your new book.'

'It would be my pleasure, sir. I think you'll find that Sir Robert Cecil was every bit as ruthless in his own way as Walsingham.'

‘Power politics! Nothing changes down the ages.’

Flood walked towards the door. ‘I’ll show the professor out, Mr President.’

‘Thank you, Dexter.’

As the door closed behind them, Dexter Flood clapped his hand on Wilde’s shoulder. ‘Glad to have you on board, Wilde. You keep me in the loop, OK.’

‘Of course.’

‘This friend of yours inside the Cavendish, that would be Dr Lancing, right? Augustin G. Lancing?’

Wilde moved away from Flood’s chummy hand. ‘What makes you think that?’

Flood shrugged and grinned through his mass of freckles. ‘A hunch, Wilde, just a hunch.’

‘Well, you should know that Lancing has wisely dropped the Augustin. He’s Geoffrey Lancing. But why mention him particularly? I know two or three people inside the Cavendish. There’s a Cavendish man in my own college.’

‘That would be Paul Birbach, right?’

‘You know a lot, Colonel.’

‘Who else?’

‘What?’

‘Who else do you know in the Cavendish?’

‘Only passing acquaintances, I’m afraid.’

‘Torsten Hellquist, yes?’

‘Yes, I do know him slightly. Why?’

‘Because Hellquist and Birbach are the ones that worry us. They have dubious sympathies. We don’t believe they’re on our side.’

So that was why he had been called here. Somehow they knew about his acquaintance with Lancing and Birbach and Hellquist. If they knew so much already, why did they need him?

Flood lowered his voice. ‘I want to know what goes on in that Cambridge laboratory. I want to know about those two goddamned foreigners, what they’re doing – when they screw and when they fart. Got it?’

‘I won’t see them that much, I’m afraid. Our paths don’t cross that often.’

‘Then find a way in. Use Lancing. Ask him who’s best – who among his researchers has a brain the size of Texas? Those are the guys we need to worry about – the clever fellers, not the also-rans. No one gets a super-bomb before the USA. *Comprende?*’

Wilde did not reply.

‘There’s one other thing. Have you heard of Milt Hardiman?’

‘No, should I have?’

‘Only if you read the society columns. But he’s a good man, for all his wealth. A patriot. He’s over there and he’ll be making contact with you. He’s on our side and he’ll be working with us on this. Confide in him – work together. He can get messages to me.’

‘Milt Hardiman.’

‘Milt. Short for Milton. Everyone calls him Milt. Just don’t play poker with him – he’ll rob you blind.’ Dexter Flood grinned and put out his hand, gripping Wilde’s in a warm, friendly handshake. ‘You’ll be OK, feller. Serve your country.’

A few minutes later, walking out into the fresh air on Pennsylvania Avenue, Wilde tried to make sense of the whirlwind meeting. One thing was clear – the invitation to the Oval Office had been nothing more than an attempt to schmooze him, so that Dexter Flood could use him. *Schmoozed and used.*

Roosevelt’s role had been peripheral. He had been there to flatter Wilde. Devious bastard. For all his down-home, folksy appearance, Roosevelt was as wily and unscrupulous as Queen Elizabeth I’s spymaster, Walsingham.

In which case, who exactly was Colonel Dexter Flood?

JUNE 1939



CHAPTER 3

Eva Haas and the man she knew only as Baumgarten drew up outside the barbed wire of Dachau concentration camp near Munich in a large, closed-top Opel car. In the vehicle's trunk, there were two sets of hiking clothes, one for her, one for Arnold Lindberg.

Baumgarten was dressed in the full, menacing black uniform of an SS captain – a *Hauptsturmführer*. Eva wore a dark, sexless jacket and skirt, with a party badge at her breast, a face scrubbed clean of make-up, with her hair hidden beneath a braided wig, in the tight style favoured by Wagnerian singers at Bayreuth. She looked at herself in the mirror and the face that stared back at her was horribly similar to that of the sinister Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, leader of the *NS-Frauenschaft*. Eva was shaking and tried to bring her body under control. She must show no fear.

'Hell on earth,' Baumgarten said, looking through the electrified wire at the regimented rows of prisoner huts. On both sides were watchtowers manned by guards with sub-machine guns.

'First the telephone,' Frau Haas said. 'We do nothing until I know for certain.'

'Of course.' He smiled reassuringly, put the Opel into gear, then drove at a steady speed into the nearest village. They scanned the dull, empty streets for a telephone kiosk, but were out of luck. 'Perhaps the railway station,' he said.

The station had no public phone, but Baumgarten approached one of the platform guards, a small, timid man whose eyes bulged in terror at the sight of an approaching SS officer. The little man's body stiffened and he snapped a sharp salute. 'Heil Hitler!'

'I need a telephone.'

'Yes, sir. In the signal box. Let me take you, sir. Wesselmann will help you, sir.'

The signal box was a hundred metres away at the point where the road crossed the track. The signalman, Wesselmann, was less deferential than

his colleague but had no option but to allow the call. No one could refuse an SS officer.

‘Please leave us,’ Baumgarten said.

Reluctantly, the signalman abandoned his post and climbed down the steps. From the window Eva could see him light up a cigarette.

‘Now call her,’ Baumgarten said.

Her hands wet with sweat, Eva called a number in Berlin. It was answered after less than a minute. ‘Miss Forster?’

‘Frau Dr Haas?’

‘Yes, is –’

‘All is well, dear, he’s on the train. No fuss at all, and he’s in a carriage with some nice children. I heard just an hour ago that the train has now crossed into Holland. All is well, my dear.’

‘Thank you, thank you, Miss Forster.’

Eva’s terror ebbed away. Her hands and body stopped shaking. Now, there was no doubt in her mind. She had to get out of Germany – and if Baumgarten had an idea that might work, she had to try it.

Together, they drove back towards Dachau, but they stopped on the way and parked in a lay-by in the shade of thick woodland. Baumgarten climbed out of the car and removed the bags with their hiking gear, placing them carefully in a bramble thicket. ‘They may search the car,’ he explained.

At the concentration camp, they were confronted once again by barbed wire, watchtowers and by an endless line of shuffling prisoners on the other side of the wire. Eva felt enveloped by a profound fear and darkness. *Arbeit Macht Frei*, the entrance sign said, *work makes you free*. No freedom behind this wire. They pulled in at the main gate and climbed from the vehicle, presenting themselves at the guardhouse with sharp, straight-arm salutes. Baumgarten did the talking. Even in uniform, women were nothing but helpmeets and breeding machines in the new Germany.

Baumgarten slapped a signed and stamped paper down on the counter in a high-handed manner. ‘Transfer to Sachsenhausen. Inmate Lindberg, Arnold,’ he said, and rattled off Lindberg’s official prison number.

The chief guard, like Baumgarten an SS officer complete with death’s head insignia on his cap, laughed. ‘Doesn’t he like the food here?’

‘He is needed for questioning in Berlin. Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse.’

The guard stiffened. ‘Ah, yes, well, that makes sense, of course, Herr *Hauptsturmführer*.’ Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse was the headquarters of the SS, the Gestapo and the SD, the domain of Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. If the orders came from there, then there could be no argument; Sachsenhausen was only a short drive from Berlin.

The guard looked at the transfer paper supplied by Baumgarten, then shuffled through his own record of the day’s orders. ‘He is not on the list, Herr *Hauptsturmführer*.’

‘Nor will he be. This is top secret.’

The guard looked uneasily from Baumgarten to Eva.

‘This is Frau Haas, my secretary. She will take notes on the journey.’ The implication being that time was of the essence: the interrogation would start immediately.

‘I must put a call through to the commandant.’

‘Do that, but be quick. We have a long drive. Here’ – he handed over a swastika-embossed card – ‘tell him to ring that number. Tell him my name is Baumgarten.’

The guard’s eyes widened as he looked at the name on the card. He clicked his heels and saluted. ‘Yes, sir, straightaway, sir.’

An hour later, they had Arnold Lindberg in the car. The camp commandant had asked them to stay for lunch in the officers’ mess, but Baumgarten had tapped his watch and declined.

There had been no time for greetings or explanations. They drove back to the woodland and collected their new outfits from the thicket. In the event, the car had not been searched, but better safe than sorry. Eva changed quickly and then, with great difficulty, persuaded her uncle to do the same. She had to help the shaking man to do up the buttons on his shirt. Then Baumgarten drove them to the station at Munich, handed them tickets to Innsbruck – and bade them farewell.

Lydia Morris clutched the grainy photograph, stared at it for a few moments, then raised her eyes and peered across the concourse of the railway station. There were so many children, all in coats and hats, despite the June warmth. Each carried a small box or case and each had a number

and a name on a tag hanging by a string around their necks. Like so many parcels.

Which one was Albert? She looked again at the photograph that the child's mother, Eva, had sent her. It really wasn't very good. One or two of the boys might fit the bill, but she wasn't at all sure. A photograph is a dead, static thing, and these children were alive and moving.

It was difficult to think with all the noise. The hiss of steam, the railway men's whistles, the background murmur of men and women here to collect their new wards, the yelling of the newspaper sellers and the porters trying to outdo each other, the greetings and farewells of passengers, the common daily discourse of the railway workers and the echoing clatter of metalled boots on concrete. All this and the stench of oil and smoke and sweat.

Lydia wove through the crowd of waiting adults towards the children. She felt very small beneath the soaring vaulted roof, all glass and steel. The children were silent and scared. Their journey from Germany by train and boat had been long and full of emotion. For some it had been an adventure with cheerful bouts of singing and gratitude for the gifts of food from the kind mothers of Holland when they crossed the border. For others it had been unutterable misery, nothing but tears, unable to eat. But now at Liverpool Street Station, they were all as one – exhausted and homesick, their faces drawn and wide-eyed yet trying to smile, anxious to please. Few of them had any real idea where they were. They were strangers in a strange land. Was this the end of their journey? Who would be meeting them? They all yearned for their mothers and fathers. When would they be joining them?

She made a beeline for the most likely of the two boys she had spotted. Close up, however, he didn't really resemble the boy in the picture. The only thing he had in common with the photographic image was the pair of round, metal-framed spectacles perched on his little nose. She glanced at his name tag: Blaustein, Isaac. Moving on, she approached the second boy. The child tried to smile, but his tears were very close to the surface. She smiled back and put a comforting arm on his shoulder. It wasn't Albert.

There were more girls than boys, which narrowed her search. She studied each of their faces in turn, took their labels between her fingers

and examined them quickly. She smiled at each of the boys and said '*Wie heissen Sie?*' – what is your name? Each of them pointed to their name tag and answered most correctly, with stiff shoulders, meeting her gaze as they had been taught to do by their loving parents and their strict schoolteachers.

Lydia did not feel confident enough to engage them in conversation; her German was rusty from lack of use. She said the boy's name in the form of a question: 'Albert Haas? Do you know him?'

They all shook their heads. The name clearly meant nothing to them.

Bertha Bracey appeared at her side, large and comforting like a mother duck. 'Not found him yet, my dear?'

She shook her head. 'There are so many of them.'

'No more than usual.'

No, of course not. Lydia had met several of these trainloads of children over the past three months and there had sometimes been twice as many as today's quota, but this was the first time she was supposed to meet one specific child.

'This is very different, Bertha.'

'I know, my dear. But don't worry, they'll begin to thin out soon and then we'll find the little chap. Whatever you do, keep that smile fixed to your face – let them know you're friendly.'

'Bertha, I have changed the habit of a lifetime and dressed up for this and done my hair, or perhaps you hadn't noticed. Of course, I'll smile.'

The older woman laughed. 'Yes, I had noticed the hair. Very nice.'

Lydia raised an eyebrow. She rather thought that Bertha wasn't at all impressed by her efforts: neatly brushed hair and a rather frumpy summer dress which she hoped would make her look more like a homely German Jewish *Hausfrau* than the slightly tattered bohemian English-woman which was closer to the truth.

'Perhaps he's still on the train. He might have fallen asleep and been forgotten, Bertha. I'm sure that's happened before. I'll just hop aboard and look.'

'Do that – and don't worry. We'll find him. We haven't mislaid one yet.'

Albert Haas wasn't on the train. He wasn't on the concourse of Liverpool Street Station. Something was clearly amiss. The two leaders who accompanied the children from Germany were already on the ferry home and had been replaced by English leaders at Harwich, neither of whom had any recollection of the boy.

'He can't have got on the train,' Bertha Bracey said. She put an arm around Lydia's shoulders. 'Come on, my dear, let's get back to Bloomsbury and call Berlin.'

'But that's not what the cable said.' Lydia had seen the telegram from Miss Forster. It said quite clearly that Albert had boarded the Hook of Holland train with the other children at Berlin's Zoo Station, in the Charlottenburg district.

'There must have been some sort of mix-up. Those affairs can be pretty grim when they separate the children from their parents. We'll sort it out.'

Lydia looked at the small photograph of Albert once more. Behind the spectacles, she thought she detected intelligent, sensitive eyes. He wore a formal jacket over a white shirt with a white, lacy collar. Rather girlish and a little too serious, Lydia thought. Albert Haas looked as if he needed to get stuck in with some rugger boys. Toughen up. She tucked the picture into her jacket pocket, but she was reluctant to leave. How could Miss Forster have made such a fundamental mistake? He was either on the train or he wasn't.

Shafts of sunlight angled down from the cathedral heights of the station. The parallel beams cut through the glass and girders, the smoke and the vapour, and lit the heads of the children like so many angels.

'Lydia?'

'You're right, something must have happened. Perhaps he was taken ill at the last moment.'

'More than possible.'

The terminus was almost clear of children now. Apart from two boys of about twelve and a girl of seven or so, they had all been paired off and most of them were beginning their onward journey, by train, bus or motor car, to their new lives in far-flung corners of England.

Lydia had watched each of them go with their new guardians and felt a pang of envy; she should have been taking her own ward home today. Eight-year-old Albert was the only son of her old friend from Girton, Eva Haas, or Eva Grad as she had been then. Although they had never lived in each other's pockets at college, Lydia had been very fond of Eva, and the two women had kept in close touch. When Eva married her fellow scientist Klaus Haas back in 1930, Lydia had been a guest of honour at the wedding in Munich. That had been the last time they had seen each other, but the letters never ceased.

And now she wanted to take Eva's little boy into her home in Cambridge and lavish love and comfort on him until Eva could get to England, or until the situation improved for Jews inside Germany.

Her eyes were fixed on the last three children. They had, at last, linked up with their guardians and were being hustled away. Lydia's eyes followed them, all hope of meeting Albert vanishing with their receding figures.

Bertha Bracey's dedicated band of Quaker volunteers, the German Emergency Committee, had moved from Friends House to Bloomsbury House four months earlier to coordinate their refugee work with all the other organisations trying to help Jews escape persecution in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Bertha's main task was to find pledges of £50 from sponsors willing to give a home to a Jewish child. Without the pledge of money and a home, it was almost impossible for the children to get a visa. The British government was willing to help, but insisted the refugee children should not be a burden on the public purse.

As secretary of the Inter-Church Council for German Refugees, Bertha had a staff of a hundred people and was based on the third floor of the former Palace Hotel. They all knew what they were trying to do, and why, but no one would admit the whole truth. No one voiced the obvious point that if parents were willing to put small children on a train and send them to an unknown future in a strange land, they must have a powerful – and terrible – belief that the alternative of staying put would be a great deal worse.

As soon as she reached her desk, Bertha picked up the telephone and put a call through to Berlin. Lydia watched her intently. She spoke quickly, in English, explaining the situation to Miss Forster, one of her Quaker contacts in the city. Bertha grimaced and shook her head grimly at Lydia.

‘And you’re certain he was put on the train?’

Lydia could hear the response. ‘Yes, he was on the train.’

‘Well, something must have happened between Berlin and Harwich. Perhaps he wandered off when they stopped in Holland, or at the port while they were boarding the ferry.’

They talked for another minute, and then Bertha said, ‘Well, thank you, my dear. As soon as your leaders return, do talk to them. And I’ll call you if I hear anything.’ She put the receiver down.

‘This is madness,’ Lydia said. ‘It doesn’t make any sense.’

‘There must be some sort of simple explanation. Go and get some food and rest, my dear, I’ll deal with it.’

Lydia felt drained. ‘No. We need to talk to the other children on the train. One of them must know something.’

Bertha picked up a square packet from her desk and handed it to Lydia. ‘Sandwiches. Corned beef. You’ve got to eat something.’

She couldn’t help laughing. ‘Thank you, Bertha.’

‘And here’s the list of telephone numbers. Can you call them all yourself, Lydia? I must get on with other things.’

‘Of course.’

Bertha looked at the younger woman for a few moments. ‘You know, my dear, it is not my business or my way to push religion down people’s throats, but I can’t help feeling that it would do you no harm to come along to the meeting house once or twice. Just for some quiet reflection.’

Lydia shook her head. ‘I can’t, Bertha.’

‘Of course. I understand. But if ever . . . well, you were brought up in a Friends’ household, so you know the drill.’ Bertha turned back to her work.

Lydia’s father had been a Quaker and she loved the Quakers and all they stood for, but she simply didn’t believe in a deity. Without

enthusiasm, she began to eat the sandwich. Just half, then she reached for the handset of the black Bakelite telephone and began to call the numbers listed. After a fruitless hour, she leaned back in her chair and stretched out her arms. Poor little Albert Haas. Where was he? And poor Eva – how would she cope if something had happened to her boy?