Citadel

Bibliomysteries

by Stephen Hunter, 1946–

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For
R. Sidney Bowen, author of Dave Dawson with the R.A.F.
and
Red Randall at Pearl Harbor

and so many others, for teaching me
the glory of the story sixty-odd years ago

> A book is a physical object in a world of physical objects. It is a set of dead symbols. And then the right reader comes along and the words—or, rather, the poetry behind the words, for the words themselves are mere symbols—spring to life.
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges

First Day

The Lysander took off in the pitch-dark of 0400 British Standard War Time, Pilot Officer Murphy using the prevailing south-southwest wind to gain atmospheric traction, even though the craft had a reputation for short takeoffs. He nudged it airborne, felt it surpass its amazingly low stall speed, held the stick gently back until he reached 150 meters, then commenced a wide left-hand bank to aim himself and his passenger toward Occupied France.

Murphy was a pro and had done many missions for his outfit, No. 138 (Special Duties Squadron), inserting and removing agents in coordination with the Resistance. But that didn't mean he was blasé, or without fear. No matter how many times you flew into Nazi territory, it was a first time. There was no predicting what might happen, and he could just as easily end up in a POW camp or against the executioner's wall as back in his quarters at RAF Newmarket.

The high-winged, single-engine plane hummed along just over the 150-meter notch on the altimeter to stay under both British and, twenty minutes on, German radar. It was a moonless night, as preferred, a bit chilly and damp, with ground temperature at about four degrees centigrade. It was early April 1943; the destination, still two hours ahead, was a meadow outside Sur-la-Gane, a village fortyeight kilometers east of Paris. There, God and the Luftwaffe willing, he would deviate from the track of a railroad, find four lights on the ground, and lay the plane down between them, knowing that they signified enough flatness and tree clearance for the airplane. He'd drop his passenger, the peasants of whichever Maquis group was receiving that night (he never knew) would turn the plane around, and in another forty seconds he'd be airborne, now headed west toward tea and jam. That was the ideal, at any rate.

He checked the compass at the apex of the Lysander's primitive instrument panel and double-checked his heading (148° ENE), his fuel (full), and his airspeed (175 mph), and saw through the Perspex windscreen, as expected, nothing. Nothing was good. He knew it was a rare off-night in the war and that no fleets of Lancasters filled the air and radio waves to and from targets deep in Germany, which meant that the Luftwaffe's night fighters, Me110s, wouldn't be up and about. No 110 had ever shot down a Lysander because they operated at such different altitudes and speeds, but there had to be a first time for everything.

Hunched behind him was an agent named Basil St. Florian, a captain in the army by official designation, commissioned in 1932 into the Horse Guards—not that he'd been on horseback in over a decade. Actually Basil, a ruddy-faced, ginger-haired brute who'd once sported a giant moustache, didn't know or care much about horses. Or the fabulous traditions of the Horse Guards, the cavalry, even the army. He'd only ended up there after a youth notorious for spectacular crack-ups, usually involving trysts with American actresses and fights with Argentine polo players. His father arranged the commission, as he had arranged so much else for Basil, who tended to leave debris wherever he went, but once in khaki Basil veered again toward glamorous self-extinction until a dour little chap from Intelligence invited him for a drink at Boodle's. When Basil learned he could do unusual things and get both paid and praised for it, he signed up. That was 1934, and Basil had never looked back.

As it turned out, he had a gift for languages and spoke French, German, and Spanish without a trace of accent. He could pass for any European nationality except Irish, though the latter was more on principle, because he despised the Irish in general terms. They were so loud.

He liked danger and wasn't particularly nonplussed by fear. He never panicked. He took pride in his considerable wit, and his bons mots were famous in his organization. He didn't mind fighting, with fist or knife, but much preferred shooting, because he was a superb pistol and rifle shot. He'd been on safari at fifteen, again at twenty-two, and a third time at twenty-seven; he was quite used to seeing large mammals die by gunshot, so it didn't particularly perturb him. He knew enough about trophy hunting to hope that he'd never end up on another man's wall.

He'd been in the agent trade a long time and had the nightmares to show for it, plus a drawerful of ribbons that someone must organize sooner or later, plus three bullet holes, a raggedy zigzag of scar tissue from a knife (don't ask, please, don't *ever* ask), as well as piebald burn smears on back and hips from a long session with a torturer. He finally talked, and the lies he told the man were among his finest memories. His other favorite memory: watching his torturer's eyes go eightball as Basil strangled him three days later. Jolly fun!

Basil was cold, shivering under an RAF sheepskin over an RAF aircrew jumpsuit over a black wool suit of shabby prewar French manufacture. He sat uncomfortably squashed on a parachute, which he hadn't bothered to put on. The wind beat against him, because on some adventure or another the Lysander's left window had been shot out and nobody had got around to replacing it. He felt vibrations as the unspectacular Bristol Mercury XII engine beat away against the cold air, its energy shuddering through all the spars, struts, and tightened canvas of the aircraft.

"Over Channel now, sir," came the crackle of a voice from the earphones he wore, since there was entirely too much noise for pilot and passenger to communicate without it. "Ten minutes to France."

"Got it, Murphy, thanks."

Inclining toward the intact window to his starboard, Basil could see the black surface of the Channel at high chop, the water seething and shifting under the powerful blast of cold early-spring winds. It somehow caught enough illumination

from the stars to gleam a bit, though without romance or beauty. It simply reminded him of unpleasant things and his aversion to large bodies of the stuff, which to him had but three effects: it made you wet, it made you cold, or it made you dead. All three were to be avoided.

In time a dark mass protruded upon the scene, sliding in from beyond to meet the sea.

"I say, Murphy, is that France?"

"It is indeed, sir."

"You know, I didn't have a chance to look at the flight plan. What part of France?"

"Normandy, sir. Jerry's building forts there, to stop an invasion."

"If I recall, there's a peninsula to the west, and the city of Cherbourg at the tip?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me, if you veered toward the west, you'd cross the peninsula, correct? With no deviation then, you'd come across coastline?"

"Yes, sir."

"And from that coastline, knowing you were to the western lee of the Cherbourg peninsula, you could easily return home on dead reckoning, that is, without a compass, am I right?"

"Indeed, sir. But I have a compass. So why would—"

Basil leaned forward, holding his Browning .380 automatic pistol. He fired once, the pistol jumping, the flash filling the cockpit with a flare of illumination, the spent casing flying away, the noise terrific.

"Good Christ!" yelped Murphy. "What the bloody hell! Are you mad?"

"Quite the opposite, old man," said Basil. "Now do as I suggested—veer westerly, cross the peninsula, and find me coastline."

Murphy noted that the bullet had hit the compass bang on, shattered its glass, and blown its dial askew and its needle arm into the vapors.

A few days earlier

"Basil, how's the drinking?" the general asked.

"Excellent, sir," Basil replied. "I'm up to seven, sometimes eight whiskies a night."

"Splendid, Basil," said the general. "I knew you wouldn't let us down."

"See here," said another general. "I know this man has a reputation for wit, as it's called, but we are engaged in serious business, and the levity, perhaps appropriate to the officers' mess, is most assuredly inappropriate here. There should be no laughing here, gentlemen. This is the War Room."

Basil sat in a square, dull space far underground. A few dim bulbs illuminated it but showed little except a map of Europe pinned to the wall. Otherwise it was featureless. The table was large enough for at least a dozen generals, but there were only three of them—well, one was an admiral— and a civilian, all sitting across from Basil. It was rather like orals at Magdalen, had he bothered to attend them.

The room was buried beneath the Treasury in Whitehall, the most secret of secret installations in wartime Britain. Part of a warren of other rooms—some offices for administrative or logistical activities, a communications room, some sleeping or eating quarters—it was the only construction in England that might legitimately be called a lair. It belonged under a volcano, not a large office building. The prime minister would sit in this very place with his staff and make the decisions that would send thousands to their death in order to save tens of thousands. That was the theory, anyway. And that also is why it stank so brazenly of stale cigar.

"My dear sir," said the general with whom Basil had been discussing his drinking habits to the general who disapproved, "when one has been shot at for the benefit of crown and country as many times as Captain St. Florian, one has the right to set the tone of the meeting that will most certainly end up getting him shot at quite a bit more. Unless you survived the first day on the Somme, you cannot compete with him in that regard."

The other general muttered something, but Basil hardly noticed. It really did not matter, and since he believed himself doomed no matter what, he now no longer listened to those who did not matter.

The general who championed him turned to him, his opposition defeated. His name was Sir Colin Gubbins and he was head of the outfit to which Basil belonged, called by the rather dreary title Special Operations Executive. Its mandate was to Set Europe Ablaze, as the prime minister had said when he invented it and appointed General Gubbins as its leader. It was the sort of organization that would have welcomed Jack the Ripper to its ranks, possibly even promoted, certainly decorated him. It existed primarily to destroy—people, places, things, anything that could be destroyed. Whether all this was just mischief for the otherwise unemployable or long-term strategic wisdom was as yet undetermined. It was up for considerable debate among the other intelligence agencies, one of which was represented by the army general and the other by the naval admiral.

As for the civilian, he looked like a question on a quiz: Which one does not belong? He was a good thirty years younger than the two generals and the admiral, and hadn't, as they did, one of those heavy-jowled authoritarian faces. He was rather handsome in a weak sort of way, like the fellow who always plays Freddy in any production of *Pygmalion*, and he didn't radiate, as did the men of power. Yet here he was, a lad among the Neanderthals, and the others seemed in small ways to defer to him. Basil wondered who the devil he could be. But he realized he would find out sooner or later.

"You've all seen Captain St. Florian's record, highly classified as it is. He's one of our most capable men. If this thing can be done, he's the one who can do it. I'm sure before we proceed, the captain would entertain any questions of a general nature."

"I seem to remember your name from the cricket fields, St. Florian," said the admiral. "Were you not a batsman of some renown in the late twenties?

"I have warm recollections of good innings at both Eton and Magdalen," said Basil.

“Indeed,” said the admiral. “I’ve always said that sportsmen make the best agents. The playing field accustoms them to arduous action, quick, clever thinking, and decisiveness.”

“I hope, however,” said the general, “you’ve left your sense of sporting fair play far behind. Jerry will use it against you, any chance he gets.”

“I killed a Chinese gangster with a cricket bat, sir. Would that speak to the issue?”

“Eloquently,” said the general.

“What did your people do, Captain?” asked the admiral.

“He manufactured something,” said Basil. “It had to do with automobiles, as I recall.”

“A bit hazy, are we?”

“It’s all rather vague. I believe that I worked for him for a few months after coming down. My performance was rather disappointing. We parted on bad terms. He died before I righted myself.”

“To what do you ascribe your failure to succeed in business and please your poor father?”

“I am too twitchy to sit behind a desk, sir. My bum, pardon the French, gets all buzzy if I am in one spot too long. Then I drink to kill the buzz and end up in the cheap papers.”

“I seem to recall,” the admiral said. “Something about an actress—’31, ’32, was that it?”

“Lovely young lady,” Basil said, “A pity I treated her so abominably. I always plucked the melons out of her fruit salad and she could not abide that.”

“Hong Kong, Malaysia, Germany before and during Hitler, battle in Spain—shot at a bit there, eh, watching our Communists fight the generalissimo’s Germans, eh?” asked the army chap. “Czecho, France again, Dieppe, you were there? So was I.”

“Odd I didn’t see you, sir,” said Basil.

“I suppose you were way out front then. Point taken, Captain. All right, professionally, he seems capable. Let’s get on with it, Sir Colin.”

“Yes,” said Sir Colin. “Where to begin, where to begin? It’s rather complex, you see, and someone important has demanded that you be apprised of all the nuances before you decide to go.”

“Sir, I could save us all a lot of time. I’ve decided to go. I hereby officially volunteer.”

“See, there’s a chap with spirit,” said the admiral. “I like that.”

“It’s merely that his bum is twitchy,” said the general.

“Not so fast, Basil. I insist that you hear us out,” said Sir Colin, “and so does the young man at the end of the table. Is that not right, Professor?”

“It is,” said the young fellow.

“All right, sir,” said Basil.

“It’s a rather complex, even arduous story. Please ignore the twitchy bum and any need you may have for whisky. Give us your best effort.”

“I shall endeavor, sir.”

“Excellent. Now, hmm, let me see… oh, yes, I think this is how to start. Do you know the path to Jesus?”

The First Day (cont'd.)

Another half hour flew by, lost to the rattle of the plane, the howl of the wind, and the darkness of Occupied France below. At last Murphy said over the intercom, "Sir, the west coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula is just ahead. I can see it now."

"Excellent," said Basil. "Find someplace to put me down."

"Ah…"

"Yes, what is it, Pilot Officer?"

"Sir, I can't just land, you see. The plane is too fragile—there may be wires, potholes, tree stumps, ditches, mud, God knows what. All of which could snarl or even wreck the plane. It's not so much me. I'm not that important. It's actually the plane. Jerry's been trying to get hold of a Lysander for some time now, to use against us. I can't give him one."

"Yes, I can see that. All right then, perhaps drop me in a river from a low altitude?"

"Sir, you'd hit the water at over 100 miles per hour and bounce like a billiard ball off the bumper. Every bone would shatter."

"On top of that, I'd lose my shoes. This is annoying. I suppose then it's the parachute for me?"

"Yes, sir. Have you had training?"

"Scheduled several times, but I always managed to come up with an excuse. I could see no sane reason for abandoning a perfectly fine airplane in flight. That was then, however, and now, alas, is now."

Basil shed himself of the RAF fleece, a heavy leather jacket lined with sheep's wool, and felt the coldness of the wind bite him hard. He shivered. He hated the cold. He struggled with the straps of the parachute upon which he was sitting. He found the going rather rough. It seemed he couldn't quite get the left shoulder strap buckled into what appeared to be the strap nexus, a circular lock-like device that was affixed to the right shoulder strap in the center of his chest. He passed on that and went right to the thigh straps, which seemed to click in admirably, but then noticed he had the two straps in the wrong slots, and he couldn't get the left one undone. He applied extra effort and was able to make the correction.

"I say, how long has this parachute been here? It's all rusty and stiff."

"Well, sir, these planes aren't designed for parachuting. Their brilliance is in the short takeoff and landing drills. Perfect for agent inserts and fetches. So, no, I'm afraid nobody has paid much attention to the parachute."

"Damned thing. I'd have thought you RAF buckos would have done better. Battle of Britain, the few, all that sort of thing."

"I'm sure the 'chutes on Spits and Hurricanes were better maintained, sir. Allow me to make a formal apology to the intelligence services on behalf of the Royal Air Force."

"Well, I suppose it'll have to do," sniffed Basil. Somehow, at last, he managed to get the left strap snapped in approximately where it belonged, but he had no idea

if the thing was too tight or too loose or even right side up. Oh, well, one did what one must. Up, up, and play the game, that sort of thing.

"Now, I'm not telling you your job, Murphy, but I think you should go lower so I won't have so far to go."

"Quite the opposite, sir. I must go higher. The 'chute won't open fully at 150 meters. It's a 240-meter minimum, a thousand far safer. At 150 or lower it's like dropping a pumpkin on a sidewalk. Very unpleasant sound, lots of splash, splatter, puddle, and stain. Wouldn't advise a bit of it, sir."

"This is not turning out at all as I had expected."

"I'll buzz up to a thousand. Sir, the trick here is that when you come out of the plane, you must keep hunched up in a ball. If you open up, your arms and legs and torso will catch wind and stall your fall and the tail wing will cut you in half or at least break your spine."

"Egad," said Basil. "How disturbing."

"I'll bank hard left to add gravity to your speed of descent, which puts you in good shape, at least theoretically, to avoid the tail."

"Not sure I care for 'theoretically.'" "There's no automatic deployment on that device, also. You must, once free of the plane, pull the ripcord to open the 'chute."

"I shall try to remember," said Basil.

"If you forget, it's the pumpkin phenomenon, without doubt."

"All right, Murphy, you've done a fine job briefing me. I shall have a letter inserted in your file. Now, shall we get this nonsense over with?"

"Yes, sir. You'll feel the plane bank, you should have no difficulty with the door, remember to take off earphones and throat mike, and I'll signal go. Just tumble out. Rip cord, and down you go. Don't brace hard in landing—you could break or sprain something. Try to relax. It's a piece of cake."

"Very well done, Murphy."

"Sir, what should I tell them?"

"Tell them what happened. That's all. I'll happily be the villain. Once I potted the compass, it was either do as I say or head home. On top of that, I outrank you. They'll figure it out, and if they don't, then they're too damned stupid to worry about!"

"Yes, sir."

Basil felt the subtle, then stronger pull of gravity as Murphy pulled the stick back and the plane mounted toward heaven. He had to give more throttle, so the sound of the revs and the consequent vibrations through the plane's skeleton increased. Basil unhitched the door, pushed it out a bit, but then the prop wash caught it and slammed it back. He opened it a bit again, squirmed his way to the opening, scrunched to fit through, brought himself to the last point where he could be said to be inside the airplane, and waited.

Below, the blackness roared by, lit here and there by a light. It really made no difference where he jumped. It would be completely random. He might come down in a town square, a haystack, a cemetery, a barn roof, or an SS firing range. God would decide, not Basil.

Murphy raised his hand, and probably screamed "Tally-ho!"

Basil slipped off the earphones and mike and tumbled into the roaring darkness.

A few days earlier (cont'd.)

"Certainly," said Basil, "though I doubt I'll be allowed to make the trip. The path to Jesus would include sobriety, a clean mind, obedience to all commandments, a positive outlook, respect for elders, regular worship, and a high level of hygiene. I am happily guilty of none of those."

"The damned insouciance," said the army general. "Is everything an opportunity for irony, Captain?"

"I shall endeavor to control my ironic impulses, sir," said Basil.

"Actually, he's quite amusing," said the young civilian. "A heroic chap as imagined by Noël Coward."

"Coward's a poof, Professor."

"But a titanic wit."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said Sir Colin. "Please, let's stay with the objective here, no matter how Captain St. Florian's insouciance annoys or enchants us."

"Then, sir," said Basil, "the irony-free answer is no, I do not know the path to Jesus."

"I don't mean in general terms. I mean specifically *The Path to Jesus*, a pamphlet published in 1767 by a Scottish ecclesiastic named Thomas MacBurney. Actually he listed twelve steps on the way, and I believe you scored high on your account, Basil. You only left out thrift, daily prayer, cold baths, and regular enemas."

"What about wanking, sir? Is that allowed by the Reverend MacBurney?"

"I doubt he'd heard of it. Anyway, it is not the content of the reverend's pamphlet that here concerns us but the manuscript itself. That is the thing, the paper on which he wrote in ink, the actual physical object." He paused, taking a breath. "The piece began as a sermon, delivered to his congregation in that same year. It was quite successful—people talked much about it and requested that he deliver it over and over. He did, and became, one might say, an ecclesiastical celebrity. Then it occurred to him that he could spread the Word more effectively, and make a quid or two on the side— he was a Scot, after all—if he committed it to print and offered it for a shilling a throw. Thus he made a fair copy, which he delivered to a jobbing printer in Glasgow, and took copies around to all the churches and bookstores. Again, it was quite successful. It grew and grew and in the end he became rather prosperous, so much so that—this is my favorite part of the tale—he gave up the pulpit and retired to the country for a life of debauchery and gout, while continuing to turn out religious tracts when not abed with a local tart or two."

"I commend him," said Basil.

"As do we all," said the admiral.

"The fair copy, in his own hand, somehow came to rest in the rare books collection at the Cambridge Library. That is the one he copied himself from his own notes on the sermon, and which he hand-delivered to Carmichael & Sons, printers, of 14 Middlesex Lane, Glasgow, for careful reproduction on September 1, 1767. Mr. Carmichael's signature in receipt, plus instructions to his son, the

actual printer, are inscribed in pencil across the title page. As it is the original, it is of course absurdly rare, which makes it absurdly valuable. Its homilies and simple faith have nothing to do with it, only its rarity, which is why the librarian at Cambridge treasures it so raptly. Are you with me, Basil?"

"With you, sir, but not with you. I cannot begin to fathom why this should interest the intelligence service, much less the tiny cog of it known as Basil St. Florian. Do you think exposure to it would improve my moral character? My character definitely needs moral improvement, but I should think any book of the New Testament would do the job as well as the Reverend MacBurney."

"Well, it happens to be the key to locating a traitor, Basil. Have you ever heard of the book code?"

The Second Day

There was a fallacy prevalent in England that Occupied France was a morose, death-haunted place. It was gray, gray as the German uniforms, and the conquerors goose-stepped about like Mongols, arbitrarily designating French citizens for execution by firing squad as it occurred to them for no reason save whimsy and boredom and Hun depravity. The screams of the tortured pierced the quiet, howling out of the many Gestapo torture cellars. The Horst Wessel song was piped everywhere; swastikas emblazoned on vast red banners fluttered brazenly everywhere. Meanwhile the peasants shuffled about all hangdog, the bourgeoisie were rigid with terror, the civic institutions were in paralysis, and even the streetwalkers had disappeared.

Basil knew this to be untrue. In fact, Occupied France was quite gay. The French barely noted their own conquest before returning to bustling business as usual, or not as usual, for the Germans were a vast new market. Fruit, vegetables, slabs of beef, and other provisions gleamed in every shop window, the wine was ample, even abundant (if overpriced), and the streetwalkers were quite active. Perhaps it would change later in the war, but for now it was rather a swell time. The Resistance, such as it was—and it wasn't much—was confined to marginal groups: students, Communists, bohemians, professors—people who would have been at odds with society in any event; they just got more credit for it now, all in exchange for blowing up a piddling bridge or dynamiting a rail line which would be repaired in a few hours. Happiness was general all over France.

The source of this gaiety was twofold. The first was the French insistence on being French, no matter how many panzers patrolled the streets and crossroads. Protected by their intensely high selfesteem, they thought naught of the Germans, regarding the *feldgrau* as a new class of tourist, to be fleeced, condescended to ("Red wine as an aperitif! *Mon Dieu!*"), and otherwise ignored. And there weren't nearly as many Nazi swastikas fluttering on silk banners as one might imagine.

The second reason was the immense happiness of the occupiers themselves. The Germans loved the cheese, the meals, the whores, the sights, and all the pleasures of France, it is true, but they enjoyed one thing more: that it was Not Russia.

This sense of Not-Russia made each day a joy. The fact that at any moment they could be sent to Is-Russia haunted them and drove them to new heights of sybaritic release. Each pleasure had a melancholy poignancy in that he who experienced it might shortly be slamming 8.8 cm shells into the breach of an antitank gun as fleets of T-34s poured torrentially out of the snow at them, this drama occurring at minus thirty-one degrees centigrade on the outskirts of a town with an unpronounceable name that they had never heard of and that offered no running water, pretty women, or decent alcohol.

So nobody in all of France in any of the German branches worked very hard, except perhaps the extremists of the SS. But most of the SS was somewhere else, happily murdering farmers in the hundreds of thousands, letting their fury, their rage, their misanthropy, their sense of racial superiority play out in real time.

Thus Basil didn't fear random interception as he walked the streets of downtown Bricquebec, a small city forty kilometers east of Cherbourg in the heart of the Cotentin Peninsula. The occupiers of this obscure spot would not be of the highest quality, and had adapted rather too quickly to the torpor of garrison life. They lounged this way and that, lazy as dogs in the spring sun, in the cafés, at their very occasional roadblocks, around city hall, where civil administrators now gave orders to the French bureaucrats, who had not made a single adjustment to their presence, and at an airfield where a flock of Me110 night fighters were housed, to intercept the nightly RAF bomber stream when it meandered toward targets in southern Germany. Though American bombers filled the sky by day, the two-engine 110s were not nimble enough to close with them and left that dangerous task to younger men in faster planes. The 110 pilots were content to maneuver close to the Lancasters, but not too close, to hosepipe their cannon shells all over the sky, then to return to schnapps and buns, claiming extravagant kill scores which nobody took seriously. So all in all, the atmosphere was one of snooze and snore.

Basil had landed without incident about eight kilometers outside of town. He was lucky, as he usually was, in that he didn't crash into a farmer's henhouse and awaken the rooster or the man but landed in one of the fields, among potato stubs just barely emerging from the ground. He had gathered up his 'chute, stripped off his RAF jumpsuit to reveal himself to be a rather shabby French businessman, and stuffed all that kit into some bushes (he could not bury it, because a] he did not feel like it and b] he had no shovel, but c] if he had had a shovel, he still would not have felt like it). He made it to a main road and walked into town, where he immediately treated himself to a breakfast of eggs and potatoes and tomatoes at a railway station café.

He nodded politely at each German he saw and so far had not excited any attention. His only concession to his trade was his Browning pistol, wedged into the small of his back and so flat it would not print under suit and overcoat. He also had his Riga Minox camera taped to his left ankle. His most profound piece of equipment, however, was his confidence. Going undercover is fraught with tension, but Basil had done it so often that its rigors didn't drive him to the edge of despair, eating his energy with teeth of dread. He'd simply shut down his imagination and considered himself the cock of the walk, presenting a smile, a nod, a wink to all.

But he was not without goal. Paris lay a half day's rail ride ahead; the next train left at four, and he had to be on it. But just as he didn't trust the partisans who still awaited his arrival 320 kilometers to the east, he didn't trust the documents the forgery geniuses at SOE had provided him with. Instead he preferred to pick up his own—that is, actual authentic docs, including travel permissions— and he now searched for a man who, in the terrible imagery of document photography, might be considered to look enough like him.

It was a pleasant day and he wandered this way and that, more or less sightseeing. At last he encountered a fellow who would pass for him, a welldressed burgher in a black homburg and overcoat, dour and official-looking. But the bone structure was similar, given to prominent cheekbones and a nose that looked like a Norman axe. In fact the fellow could have been a long-lost cousin. (Had he cared to, Basil could have traced the St. Florian line back to a castle not 100 kilometers from where he stood now, whence came his Norman forebears in 1044—but of course it meant nothing to him).

Among Basil's skills was pickpocketing, very useful for a spy or agent. He had mastered its intricacies during his period among Malaysian gunrunners in 1934, when a kindly old rogue with one eye and fast hands named Malong had taken a liking to him and shown him the basics of the trade. Malong could pick the fuzz off a peach, so educated were his fingers, and Basil proved an apt pupil. He'd never graduated to the peach-fuzz class, but the gentleman's wallet and document envelopes should prove easy enough.

He used the classic concealed hand dip and distraction technique, child's play but clearly effective out here in the French hinterlands. Shielding his left hand from view behind a copy of that day's *Le Monde*, he engineered an accidental street-corner bump, apologized, and then said, "I was looking at the air power of *les amis* today." He pointed upward, where a wave of B-17s painted a swath in the blue sky with their fuzzy white contrails as they sped toward Munich or some other Bavarian destination for an afternoon of destruction. "It seems they'll never stop building up their fleet. But when they win, what will they do with all those airplanes?"

The gentleman, unaware that the jostle and rhetoric concealed a deft snatch from inside not merely his overcoat but also his suit coat, followed his interrupter's pointed arm to the aerial array.

"The Americans are so rich, I believe our German visitors are doomed," said the man. "I only hope when it is time for them to leave they don't grow bitter and decide to blow things up."

"That is why it is up to us to ingratiate ourselves with them," said Basil, reading the eyes of an appeaser in his victim, "so that when they do abandon their vacation, they depart with a gentleman's deportment. *Vive la France*."

"Indeed," said the mark, issuing a dry little smile of approval, then turning away to his far more important business.

Basil headed two blocks in the opposite direction, two more in another, then rotated around to the train station. There, in the men's loo, he examined his trove: 175 francs, identity papers for one Jacques Piens, and a German travel authority "for official business only," both of which wore a smeary black-and-white photo of

M. Piens, moustachioed and august and clearly annoyed at the indignity of posing for German photography.

He had a coffee. He waited, smiling at all, and a few minutes before four approached the ticket seller's window and, after establishing his bona fides as M. Piens, paid for and was issued a firstclass ticket on the four p.m. Cherbourg–Paris run.

He went out on the platform, the only Frenchman among a small group of Luftwaffe enlisted personnel clearly headed to Paris for a weekend pass's worth of fun and frolic. The train arrived, as the Germans had been sensible enough not to interfere with the workings of the French railway system, the continent's best. Spewing smoke, the engine lugged its seven cars to the platform and, with great drama of steam, brakes, and steel, reluctantly halted. Basil knew where first class would be and parted company with the privates and corporals of the German air force, who squeezed into the other carriages.

His car half empty and comfortable, he put himself into a seat. The train sat … and sat … and sat. Finally a German policeman entered the car and examined the papers of all, including Basil, without incident. Yet still the train did not leave.

Hmm, this was troubling.

A lesser man might have fumbled into panic. The mark had noticed his papers missing, called the police, who had called the German police. Quickly enough they had put a hold on the train, fearing that the miscreant would attempt to flee that way, and now it was just a matter of waiting for an SS squad to lock up the last of the Jews before it came for him.

However, Basil had a sound operational principle which now served him well. *Most bad things don't happen.* What happens is that in its banal, boring way, reality bumbles along.

The worst thing one can do is panic. Panic betrays more agents than traitors. Panic is the true enemy.

At last the train began to move.

Ah-ha! Right again.

But at that moment the door flew open and a late-arriving Luftwaffe colonel came in. He looked straight at Basil.

"There he is! There's the spy!" he said.

A few days earlier (cont'd)

"A book code," said Basil. "I thought that was for Boy Scouts. Lord Baden-Powell would be so pleased."

"Actually," said Sir Colin, "it's a sturdy and almost impenetrable device, very useful under certain circumstances, if artfully employed. But Professor Turing is our expert on codes. Perhaps, Professor, you'd be able to enlighten Captain St. Florian."

"Indeed," said the young man in the tweeds, revealing himself by name. "Nowadays we think we're all scienced up. We even have machines to do some of the backbreaking mathematics to it, speeding the process. Sometimes it works,

sometimes it doesn't. But the book code is ancient, even biblical, and that it has lasted so long is good proof of its applicability in certain instances."

"I understand, Professor. I am not a child."

"Not at all, certainly not given your record. But the basics must be known before we can advance to the sort of sophisticated mischief upon which the war may turn."

"Please proceed, Professor. Pay no attention to Captain St. Florian's abominable manners. We interrupted him at play in a bawdy house for this meeting and he is cranky."

"Yes, then. The book code stems from the presumption that both sender and receiver have access to the same book. It is therefore usually a common volume, shall we say Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare. I want to send you a message, say 'Meet me at two p.m. at the square.' I page through the book until I find the word 'meet.' It is on page 17, paragraph 4, line 2, fifth word. So the first line in my code is 17-4-2-5. Unless you know the book, it is meaningless. But you, knowing the book, having the book, quickly find 17-4-2-5 and encounter the word 'meet.' And on and on. Of course variations can be worked—we can agree ahead of time, say, that for the last designation we will always be value minus two, that is, two integers less. So in that case the word 'meet' would actually be found at 17-4-2-3. Moreover, in picking a book as decoder, one would certainly be prone to pick a common book, one that should excite no excitement, that one might normally have about."

"I grasp it, Professor," said Basil. "But what, then, if I take your inference, is the point of choosing as a key book the Right Reverend MacBurney's *The Path to Jesus*, of which only one copy exists, and it is held under lock and key at Cambridge? And since last I heard, we still control Cambridge. Why don't we just go to Cambridge and look at the damned thing? You don't need an action-this-day chap like me for that. You could use a lance corporal."

"Indeed, you have tumbled to it," said Sir Colin. "Yes, we could obtain the book that way. However, in doing so we would inform both the sender and the receiver that we knew they were up to something, that they were control and agent and had an operation under way, when our goal is to break the code without them knowing. That is why, alas, a simple trip to the library by a lance corporal is not feasible."

"I hope I'm smart enough to stay up with all these wrinkles, gentlemen. I already have a headache."

"Welcome to the world of espionage," said Sir Colin. "We all have headaches. Professor, please continue."

"The volume in the library is indeed controlled by only one man," Turing said. "And he is the senior librarian of the institution. Alas, his loyalties are such that they are not, as one might hope and expect, for his own country. He is instead one of those of high caste taken by fascination for another creed, and it is to that creed he pays his deepest allegiance. He has made himself useful to his masters for many years as a 'talent spotter,' that is, a man who looks at promising undergraduates, picks those with keen policy minds and good connections, forecasts their rise, and woos them to his side as secret agents with all kinds of babble of the sort that appeals to the mushy romantic brain of the typical English

high-class idiot. He thus plants the seeds of our destruction, sure to bloom a few decades down the line. He does other minor tasks too, running as a cutout, providing a safe house, disbursing a secret fund, and so forth. He is committed maximally and he will die before he betrays his creed, and some here have suggested a bullet in the brain as apposite, but actually, by the tortured rules of the game, a live spy in place is worth more than a dead spy in the ground. Thus he must not be disturbed, bothered, breathed heavily upon— he must be left entirely alone."

"And as a consequence you cannot under any circumstances access the book. You do not even know what it looks like?" Basil asked.

"We have a description from a volume published in 1932, called *Treasures of the Cambridge Library*."

"I can guess who wrote it," said Basil.

"Your guess would be correct," said Sir Colin. "It tells us little other than that it comprises thirtyfour pages of foolscap written in tightly controlled nib by an accomplished freehand scrivener. Its eccentricity is that occasionally apostolic bliss came over the author and he decorated the odd margin with constellations of floating crosses, proclaiming his love of all things Christian. The Reverend MacBurney was clearly given to religious swoons."

"And the librarian is given to impenetrable security," said the admiral. "There will come a time when I will quite happily murder him with your cricket bat, Captain."

"Alas, I couldn't get the bloodstains out and left it in Malay. So let me sum up what I think I know so far. For some reason the Germans have a fellow in the Cambridge library controlling access to a certain 1767 volume. Presumably they have sent an agent to London with a coded message he himself does not know the answer to, possibly for security reasons. Once safely here, he will approach the bad-apple librarian and present him with the code. The bad apple will go to the manuscript, decipher it, and give a response to the Nazi spy. I suppose it's operationally sound. It neatly avoids radio, as you say it cannot be breached without giving notice that the ring itself is under high suspicion, and once armed with the message, the operational spy can proceed with his mission. Is that about it?"

"Almost," said Sir Colin. "In principle, yes, you have the gist of it—manfully done. However, you haven't got the players quite right."

"Are we then at war with someone I don't know about?" said Basil.

"Indeed and unfortunately. Yes. The Soviet Union. This whole thing is Russian, not German."

The Second Day (cont'd.)

If panic flashed through Basil's mind, he did not yield to it, although his heart hammered against his chest as if a spike of hard German steel had been pounded into it. He thought of his L-pill, but it was buried in his breast pocket. He thought next of his pistol: Could he get it out in time to bring a few of them down before

turning it on himself? Could he at least kill this leering German idiot who… but then he noted that the characterization had been delivered almost merrily.

"You must be a spy," said the colonel, laughing heartily, sitting next to him. "Why else would you shave your moustache but to go on some glamorous underground mission?"

Basil laughed, perhaps too loudly, but in his chest his heart still ran wild. He hid his blast of fear in the heartiness of the fraudulent laugh and came back with an equally jocular, "Oh, that? It seems in winter my wife's skin turns dry and very sensitive, so I always shave it off for a few months to give the beauty a rest from the bristles."

"It makes you look younger."

"Why, thank you."

"Actually, I'm so glad to have discovered you. At first I thought it was not you, but then I thought, Gunther, Gunther, who would kidnap the owner of the town's only hotel and replace him with a double? The English are not so clever."

"The only thing they're any good at," said Basil, "is weaving tweed. English tweed is the finest in the world. "

"I agree, I agree," said the colonel. "Before all this, I traveled there quite frequently. Business, you know."

It developed that the colonel, a Great War aviator, had represented a Berlin-based hair tonic firm whose directors had visions, at least until 1933, of entering the English market. The colonel had made trips to London in hopes of interesting some of the big department stores in carrying a line of lanolin-based hair creams for men, but was horrified to learn that the market was controlled by the British company that manufactured Brylcreem and would use its considerable clout to keep the Germans out.

"Can you imagine," said the colonel, "that in the twenties there was a great battle between Germany and Great Britain for the market advantage of lubricating the hair of the British gentleman? I believe our product was much finer than that English goop, as it had no alcohol and alcohol dries the hair stalk, robbing it of luster, but I have to say that the British packaging carried the day, no matter. We could never find the packaging to catch the imagination of the British gentleman, to say nothing of a slogan. German as a language does not lend itself to slogans. Our attempts at slogans were ludicrous. We are too serious, and our language is like potatoes in gravy. It has no lightness in it at all. The best we could come up with was, *Our tonic is very good*. Thus we give the world Nietzsche and not Wodehouse. In any event, when Hitler came to power and the air forces were reinvigorated, it was out of the hair oil business and back to the cockpit."

It turned out that the colonel was a born talker. He was on his way to Paris on a three-day leave to meet his wife for a "well-deserved, if I do say so myself" holiday. He had reservations at the Ritz and at several four-star restaurants.

Basil put it together quickly: the man he'd stolen his papers from was some sort of collaborationist big shot and had made it his business to suck up to all the higher German officers, presumably seeing the financial opportunities of being in league with the occupiers. It turned out further that this German fool was soft and supple when it came to sycophancy and he'd mistaken the Frenchman's oleaginous demeanor with actual affection, and he thought it quite keen to have

made a real friend among the wellborn French. So Basil committed himself to six hours of chitchat with the idiot, telling himself to keep autobiographical details at a minimum in case the real chap had already spilled some and he should contradict something previously established.

That turned out to be no difficulty at all, for the German colonel revealed himself to have an awesomely enlarged ego, which he expressed through an autobiographical impulse, so he virtually told his life story to Basil over the long drag, gossiping about the greed of Göring and the reluctance of the night fighters to close with the Lancasters, Hitler's insanity in attacking Russia, how much he, the colonel, missed his wife, how he worried about his son, a Stuka pilot, and how sad he was that it had come to pass that civilized Europeans were at each other's throats again, and on and on and on and on, but at least the Jews would be dealt with once and for all, no matter who won in the end. He titillated Basil with inside information on his base and the wing he commanded, Nachtjagdgeschwader-9, and the constant levies for Russia that had stripped it of logistics, communications, and security people, until nothing was left but a skeleton staff of air crew and mechanics, yet still they were under pressure from Luftwaffe command to bring down yet more Tommies to relieve the night bombing of Berlin. Damn the Tommies and their brutal methods of war! The man considered himself fascinating, and his presence seemed to ward off the attention of the other German officers who came and went on the trip to the Great City. It seemed so damned civilized that you almost forgot there was a war on.

It turned out that one of the few buildings in Paris with an actual Nazi banner hanging in front of it was a former insurance company's headquarters at 14 rue Guy de Maupassant in the sixth arrondissement. However, the banner wasn't much, really just an elongated flag that hung limply off a pole on the fifth floor. None of the new occupants of the building paid much attention to it. It was the official headquarters of the Paris district of the Abwehr, German military intelligence, ably run from Berlin by Admiral Canaris and beginning to acquire a reputation for not being all that crazy about Herr Hitler.

They were mostly just cops. And they brought cop attributes to their new headquarters: dyspepsia, too much smoking, cheap suits, fallen arches, and a deep cynicism about everything, but particularly about human nature and even more particularly about notions of honor, justice, and duty. They did believe passionately in one cause, however: staying out of Russia.

"Now let us see if we have anything," said Hauptmann Dieter Macht, chief of Section III-B (counterintelligence), Paris office, at his daily staff meeting at three p.m., as he gently spread butter on a croissant. He loved croissants. There was something so exquisite about the balance of elements— the delicacy of the crust, which gave way to a kind of chewy substrata as you peeled it away, the flakiness, the sweetness of the inner bread, the whole thing a majestic creation that no German baker, ham-thumbed and frosting-crazed, could ever match.

"Hmmm," he said, sifting through the various reports that had come in from across the country. About fifteen men, all ex-detectives like himself, all in droopy plain clothes like himself, all with uncleaned Walthers holstered sloppily on their hips, awaited his verdict. He'd been a Great War aviator, an actual ace in fact, then the star of Hamburg Homicide before this war, and had a reputation for

sharpness when it came to seeing patterns in seemingly unrelated events. Most of III-B's arrests came from clever deductions made by Hauptmann Macht.

"Now this is interesting. What do you fellows make of this one? It seems in Sur-la-Gane, about forty kilometers east of here, a certain man known to be connected to inner circles of the Maquis was spotted returning home early in the morning by himself. Yet there has been no Maquis activity in that area since we arrested Pierre Doumaine last fall and sent him off to Dachau."

"Perhaps," said Leutnant Abel, his second-in-command, "he was at a meeting and they are becoming active again. Netting a big fish only tears them down for a bit of time, you know." "They'd hold such a meeting earlier. The French like their sleep. They almost slept through 1940, after all. What one mission gets a Maquis up at night? Anyone?"

No one.

"British agent insertion. They love to cooperate with the Brits because the Brits give them so much equipment, which can either be sold on the black market or be used against their domestic enemies after the war. So they will always jump lively for the SOE, because the loot is too good to turn down. And such insertions will be late-night or early-morning jobs."

"But," said Leutnant Abel, "I have gone through the reports too, and there are no accounts of aviation activities in that area that night. When the British land men in Lysanders, some farmer always calls the nearby police station to complain about low-flying aviators in the dark of night, frightening the cows. You never want to frighten a peasant's cows; he'll be your enemy for life. Believe me, Hauptmann Macht, had a Lysander landed, we'd know from the complaints."

"Exactly," said Macht. "So perhaps our British visitor didn't arrive for some reason or other and disappointed the Sur-la-Gane Resistance cell, who got no loot that night. But if I'm not mistaken, that same night complaints did come in from peasants near Bricquebec, outside Cherbourg."

"We have a night fighter base there," said Abel. "Airplanes come and go all night—it's meaningless."

"There were no raids that night," said Macht. "The bomber stream went north, to Prussia, not to Bavaria."

"What do you see as significant about that?"

"Suppose for some reason our fellow didn't trust the Sur-la-Gane bunch, or the Resistance either. It's pretty well penetrated, after all. So he directs his pilot to put him somewhere else."

"They can't put Lysanders down just anywhere," said another man. "It has to be set up, planned, torches lit. That's why it's so vulnerable to our investigations. So many people—someone always talks, maybe not to us, but to someone, and it always gets to us."

"The Bricquebec incident described a roar, not a put-put or a dying fart. The roar would be a Lysander climbing to parachute altitude. They normally fly at 500, and any agent who made an exit that low would surely scramble his brains and his bones. So the plane climbs, this fellow bails out, and now he's here."

"Why would he take the chance on a night drop into enemy territory? He could come down in the Gestapo's front yard. Hauptsturmführer Boch would enjoy that very much."

Actually the Abwehr detectives hated Boch more than the French and English combined. He could send them to Russia.

"I throw it back to you, Walter. Stretch that brain of yours beyond the lazy parameters it now sleepily occupies and come up with a theory."

"All right, sir, I'll pretend to be insane, like you. I'll postulate that this phantom Brit agent is very crafty, very old school, clever as they come. He doesn't trust the Maquis, nor should he. He knows we eventually hear everything. Thus he improvises. It's just his bad luck that his airplane awakened some cows near Bricquebec, the peasants complained, and so exactly what he did not want us to know is exactly what we do know. Is that insane enough for you, sir?"

Macht and Abel were continually taking shots at each other, and in fact they didn't like each other very much. Macht was always worried about Is-Russia as opposed to Not-Russia, while the younger Abel had family connections that would keep him far from Stalin's millions of tanks and Mongols and all that horrible snow.

"Very good," said Macht. "That's how I read it. You know when these boys arrive they stir up a lot of trouble. If we don't stop them, maybe we end up on an antitank gun in Russia. Is anyone here interested in that sort of a job change?"

That certainly shut everyone up fast. It frightened Macht even to say such a thing.

"I will make some phone calls," Abel said. "See if there's anything unusual going on."

It didn't take him long. At the Bricquebec prefecture, a policeman read him the day's incident report, from which he learned that a prominent collaborationist businessman had claimed that his papers were stolen from him. He had been arrested selling black-market petrol and couldn't identify himself. He was roughly treated until his identity was proven, and he swore he would complain to Berlin, as he was a supporter of the Reich and demanded more respect from the occupiers.

His name, Abel learned, was Piens.

"Hmmm," said Macht, a logical sort. "If the agent was originally going to Sur-la-Gane, it seems clear that his ultimate destination would be Paris. There's really not much for him to do in Bricquebec or Sur-la-Gane, for that matter. Now, how would he get here?"

"Clearly, the railway is the only way."

"Exactly," said Hauptmann Macht. "What time does the train from Cherbourg get in? We should meet it and see if anyone is traveling under papers belonging to M. Piens. I'm sure he'd want them returned."

A few days earlier (cont'd.)

"Have I been misinformed?" asked Basil. "Are we at war with the Russians? I thought they were our friends."

"I wish it were as easy as that," said Sir Colin. "But it never is. Yes, in one sense we are at war with Germany and at peace with Russia. On the other hand, this fellow Stalin is a cunning old brute, stinking of bloody murder to high heaven, and

thus he presumes that all are replicas of himself, equally cynical and vicious. So while we are friends with him at a certain level, he still spies on us at another level. And because we know him to be a monster, we still spy on him. It's all different compartments. Sometimes it's damned hard to keep straight, but there's one thing all the people in this room agree on: the moment the rope snaps hard about Herr Hitler's chicken neck, the next war begins, and it is between we of the West and they of the East."

"Rather dispiriting," said Basil. "One would have thought one had accomplished something other than clearing the stage for the next war."

"So it goes, alas and alack, in our sad world. But Basil, I think you will be satisfied to know that the end game of this little adventure we are preparing for you is actually to help the Russians, not to hurt them. It benefits ourselves, of course, no doubt about it. But we need to help them see a certain truth that they are reluctant, based on Stalin's various neuroses and paranoias, to believe."

"You see," said the general, "he would trust us a great deal more if we opened a second front. He doesn't think much of our business in North Africa, where our losses are about one-fiftieth of his. He wants our boys slaughtered on the French beaches in numbers that approach the slaughter of his boys. Then he'll know we're serious about this Allies business. But a second front in Europe is a long way off, perhaps two years. A lot of American men and matériel have to land here before then. In the meantime we grope and shuffle and misunderstand and misinterpret. That's where you'll fit in, we hope. Your job, as you will learn at the conclusion of this dreadful meeting about two days from now, is to shine light and dismiss groping and shuffling and misinterpretation."

"I hope I can be of help," said Basil. "However, my specialty is blowing things up."

"You have nothing to blow up this time out," said Sir Colin. "You are merely helping us explain something."

"But I must ask, since you're permitting me unlimited questions, how do you know all this?" said Basil. "You say Stalin is so paranoid and unstable he does not trust us and even spies upon us, you know this spy exists and is well placed, and that his identity, I presume, has been sent by this absurd book-code method, yet that is exactly where your knowledge stops. I am baffled beyond any telling of it. You know so much, and then it stops cold. It seems to me that you would be more likely to know all or nothing. My head aches profoundly. This business is damned confounding."

"All right, then, we'll tell you. I think you have a right to know, since you are the one we are proposing to send out. Admiral, as it was your service triumph, I leave it to you."

"Thank you, Sir Colin," said the admiral. "In your very busy year of 1940, you probably did not even notice one of the world's lesser wars. I mean there was our war with the Germans in Europe and all that blitzkrieg business, the Japanese war with the Chinese, Mussolini in Ethiopia, and I am probably leaving several out. 1940 was a very good year for war. However, if you check the back pages of the *Times*, you'll discover that in November of 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. The border between them has been in dispute since 1917. The Russians expected an easy time of it, mustering ten times the number of soldiers as did the

Finns, but the Finns taught them some extremely hard lessons about winter warfare, and by early 1940 the piles of frozen dead had gotten immense. The war raged for four long months, killing thousands over a few miles of frozen tundra, and ultimately, because lives mean nothing to Communists, the Russians prevailed, at least to the extent of forcing a peace on favorable terms."

"I believe I heard a bit of it."

"Excellent. What you did not hear, as nobody did, was that in a Red Army bunker taken at high cost by the Finns, a half-burned codebook was found. Now since we in the West abandoned the Finns, they were sponsored and supplied in the war by the Third Reich. If you see any photos from the war, you'll think they came out of Stalingrad, because the Finns bought their helmets from the Germans. Thus one would expect that such a highvalue intelligence treasure as a codebook, even half burned, would shortly end up in German hands.

"However, we had a very good man in Finland, and he managed somehow to take possession of it. The Russians thought it was burned. The Germans never knew it existed. Half a code is actually not merely better than nothing, it is *far* better than nothing, and is in fact almost a whole codebook, because a clever boots like young Professor Turing here can tease most messages into comprehension."

"I had nothing to do with it," said the professor. "There were very able men at Bletchley Park before I came aboard."

What, wondered Basil, *would Bletchley Park be?*

"Thus we have been able to read and mostly understand Soviet low- to midlevel codes since 1940. That's how we knew about the librarian at Cambridge and several other sticky lads who, though they speak high Anglican and know where their pinkie goes on the teacup, want to see our Blighty go all red and men like us stood up to the wall and shot for crimes against the working class."

"That would certainly ruin my crease. Anyhow, before we go much further, may I sum up?" said Basil.

"If you can."

"By breaking the Russian crypto, you know that a highly secure, carefully guarded book code has been given to a forthcoming Russian spy. It contains the name of a highly important British traitor somewhere in government service. When he gets here, he will take the code to the Cambridge librarian, present his bona fides, and the librarian will retrieve the Reverend Thomas MacBurney's *Path to Jesus*—wait. How would the Russians themselves have… Oh, now I see, it all hangs together. It would be easy for the librarian, not like us, to make a photographed copy of the book and have it sent to the Russian service."

"NKVD, it is called."

"I think I knew that. Thus the librarian quickly unbuttons the name and gives it to the new agent, and the agent contacts him at perhaps this mysterious Bletchley Park that the professor wasn't supposed to let slip—"

"That was a mistake, Professor," said Sir Colin. "No milk and cookies for you tonight."

"So somehow I'm supposed to, I don't know what, do something somewhere, a nasty surprise indeed, but it will enable you to identify the spy at Bletchley Park."

"Indeed, you have the gist of it."

“And you will then arrest him.”

“No, of course not. In fact, we shall promote him.”

The Second Day/The Third Day

It was a pity the trip to Paris lasted only six hours with all the local stops, as the colonel had just reached the year 1914 in his life. It was incredibly fascinating. Mutter did not want him to attend flying school, but he was transfixed by the image of those tiny machines in their looping and spinning and diving that he had seen—and described in detail to Basil—in Mühlenberg in 1912, and he was insistent upon becoming an aviator.

This was more torture than Basil could have imagined in the cellars of the Gestapo, but at last the conductor came through, shouting, “Paris, Montparnasse station, five minutes, end of the line.”

“Oh, this has been such a delight,” said the colonel. “Monsieur Piens, you are a fascinating conversationalist—”

Basil had said perhaps five words in six hours.

“—and it makes me happy to have a Frenchman as an actual friend, beyond all this messy stuff of politics and invasions and war and all that. If only more Germans and French could meet as we did, as friends, just think how much better off the world would be.”

Basil came up with words six and seven: “Yes, indeed.”

“But, as they say, all good things must come to an end.”

“They must. Do you mind, Colonel, if I excuse myself for a bit? I need to use the loo and prefer the first class here to the *pissoirs* of the station.”

“Understandable. In fact, I shall accompany you, *monsieur*, and—oh, perhaps not. I’ll check my documents to make sure all is in order.”

Thus, besides a blast of blessed silence, Basil earned himself some freedom to operate. During the colonel’s recitation—it had come around to the years 1911 and 1912, vacation to Cap d’Antibes— it had occurred to him that the authentic M. Piens, being a clear collaborationist and seeking not to offend the Germans, might well have reported his documents lost and that word might, given the German expertise at counterintelligence, have reached Paris. Thus the Piens documents were suddenly explosive and would land him either in Dachau or before the wall.

He wobbled wretchedly up the length of the car—thank God here in first class the seats were not contained as in the cramped little compartments of second class!—and made his way to the loo. As he went he examined the prospective marks: mostly German officers off for a weekend of debauchery far from their garrison posts, but at least three French businessmen of proper decorum sat among them, stiff, frightened of the Germans and yet obligated by something or other to be there. Only one was anywhere near Basil’s age, but he had to deal with things as they were.

He reached the loo, locked himself inside, and quickly removed his M. Piens documents and buried them in the wastebasket among repugnant wads of tissue. A more cautious course would have been to tear them up and dispose of them via

the toilet, but he didn't have time for caution. Then he wet his face, ran his fingers through his hair, wiped his face off, and left the loo.

Fourth on the right. Man in suit, rather blasé face, impatient. Otherwise, the car was stirring to activity as the occupants set about readying for whatever security ordeal lay ahead. The war—it was such an inconvenience.

As he worked his way down the aisle, Basil pretended to find the footing awkward against the sway of the train on the tracks, twice almost stumbling. Then he reached the fourth seat on the right, willed his knees to buckle, and, with a squeal of panic, let himself tumble awkwardly, catching himself with his left hand upon the shoulder of the man beneath, yet still tumbling further, awkwardly, the whole thing seemingly an accident as one out-of-control body crashed into the other, in-control body.

"Oh, excuse me," he said, "excuse, excuse, I am so sorry!"

The other man was so annoyed that he didn't notice the deft stab by which Basil penetrated his jacket and plucked his documents free, especially since the pressure on his left shoulder was so aggressive that it precluded notice of the far subtler stratagem of the pick reaching the brain.

Basil righted himself.

"So sorry, so sorry!"

"Bah, you should be more careful," said the mark.

"I will try, sir," said Basil, turning to see the colonel three feet from him in the aisle, having witnessed the whole drama from an advantageous position.

Macht requested a squad of *feldpolizei* as backup, set up a choke point at the gate from the platform into the station's vast, domed central space, and waited for the train to rumble into sight. Instead, alas, what rumbled into sight was his nemesis, SS Hauptsturmführer Boch, a toadlike Nazi true believer of preening ambition who went everywhere in his black dress uniform.

"Dammit again, Macht," he exploded, spewing his excited saliva everywhere. "You know by protocol you must inform me of any arrest activities."

"Herr Hauptsturmführer, if you check your orderly's message basket, you will learn that at tenthirty p.m. I called and left notification of possible arrest. I cannot be responsible for your orderly's efficiency in relaying that information to you."

"Calculated to miss me, because of course I was doing my duty supervising an *aktion* against Jews and not sitting around my office drinking coffee and smoking."

"Again, I cannot be responsible for your schedule, Herr Hauptsturmführer." Of course Macht had an informer in Boch's office, so he knew exactly where the SS man was at all times. He knew that Boch was on one of his Jew-hunting trips; his only miscalculation was that Boch, who was generally unsuccessful at such enterprises, had gotten back earlier than anticipated. And of course Boch was always unsuccessful because Macht always informed the Jews of the coming raid.

"Whatever, it is of no consequence," said Boch. Though both men were technically of the same rank, captains, the SS clearly enjoyed Der Führer's confidence while the Abwehr did not, and so its members presumed authority in any encounter. "Brief me, please, and I will take charge of the situation."

"My men are in place, and disturbing my setup would not be efficient. If an arrest is made, I will certainly give the SS credit for its participation."

"What are we doing here?"

“There was aviation activity near Bricquebec, outside Cherbourg. Single-engine monoplane suddenly veering to parachute altitude. It suggested a British agent visit. Then the documents of a man in Bricquebec, including travel authorization, were stolen. If a British agent were in Bricquebec, his obvious goal would be Paris, and the most direct method would be by rail, so we are intercepting the Cherbourg–Paris night train in hopes of arresting a man bearing the papers of one Auguste M. Piens, restaurateur, hotel owner, and well-known ally of the Reich, here in Paris.”

“An English agent!” Boch’s eyes lit up. This was treasure. This was a medal. This was a promotion. He saw himself now as Obersturmbannführer Boch. The little fatty all the muscular boys had called Gretel and whose underdrawers they tied in knots, an Obersturmbannführer! That would show them!

“If an apprehension is made, the prisoner is to be turned over to the SS for interrogation. I will go to Berlin if I have to on this one, Macht. If you stand in the way of SS imperatives, you know the consequences.”

The consequence: *“Russian tanks at 300! Load shells. Prepare to fire.”“Sir, I can’t see them. The snow is blinding, my fingers are numb from the cold, and the sight is frozen!”*

Even though he had witnessed the brazen theft, the colonel said nothing and responded in no way. His mind was evidently so locked in the beautiful year 1912 and the enchantment of his eventual first solo flight that he was incapable of processing new information. The crime he had just seen had nothing whatsoever to do with the wonderful French friend who had been so fascinated by his tale and whose eyes radiated such utter respect, even hero worship; it could not be fitted into any pattern and was thus temporarily disregarded for other pleasures, such as, still ahead, a narration of the colonel’s adventures in the Great War, the time he had actually shaken hands with the great Richthofen, and his own flight-ending crash—left arm permanently disabled. Luckily, his tail in tatters, he had made it back to his own lines before going down hard early in ’18. It was one of his favorite stories.

He simply nodded politely at the Frenchman, who nodded back as if he hadn’t a care in the world.

In time the train pulled into the station, issuing groans and hisses of steam, vibrating heavily as it rolled to a stop.

“Ah, Paris,” said the colonel. “Between you and me, M. Piens, I so prefer it to Berlin. And so especially does my wife. She is looking forward to this little weekend jaunt.”

They disembarked in orderly fashion, Germans and Frenchmen combined, but discovered on the platform that some kind of security problem lay ahead, at the gate into the station, as soldiers and SS men with machine pistols stood along the platform, smoking but eyeing the passengers carefully. Then the security people screamed out that Germans would go to the left, French to the right, and on the right a few dour-looking men in fedoras and lumpy raincoats examined identification papers and travel authorizations. The Germans merely had to flash leave papers, so that line moved much more quickly.

“Well, M. Piens, I leave you here. Good luck with your sister’s health in Paris. I hope she recovers.”

"I'm sure she will, Colonel."

"Adieu."

He sped ahead and disappeared through the doors into the vast space. Basil's line inched its way ahead, and though the line was shorter, each arrival at the security point was treated with thorough Germanic ceremony, the papers examined carefully, the comparisons to the photographs made slowly, any bags or luggage searched. It seemed to take forever.

What could he do? At this point it would be impossible to slip away, disappear down the tracks, and get to the city over a fence; the Germans had thrown too many security troops around for that. Nor could he hope to roll under the train; the platform was too close to it, and there was no room to squeeze through.

Basil saw an evil finish: they'd see by the document that his face did not resemble the photograph, ask him a question or two, and learn that he had not even seen the document and had no idea whose papers he carried. The body search would come next, the pistol and the camera would give him away, and it was off to the torture cellar. The L-pill was his only alternative, but could he get to it fast enough?

At the same time, the narrowing of prospects was in some way a relief. No decisions needed to be made. All he had to do was brazen it out with a haughty attitude, beaming confidence, and it would be all right.

Macht watched the line while Abel examined papers and checked faces. Boch meanwhile provided theatrical atmosphere by posing heroically in his black leather trench coat, the SS skull on his black cap catching the light and reflecting impulses of power and control from above his chubby little face.

Eight. Seven. Six. Five.

Finally before them was a well-built chap of light complexion who seemed like some sort of athlete. He could not be a secret agent because he was too charismatic. All eyes would always turn to him, and he seemed accustomed to attention. He could be English, indeed, because he was a sort called "ginger." But the French had a considerable amount of genetic material for the hue as well, so the hair and the piercing eyes communicated less than the Aryan stereotypes seemed to proclaim.

"Good evening, M. Vercois," said Abel in French as he looked at the papers and then at the face, "and what brings you to Paris?"

"A woman, Herr Leutnant. An old story. No surprises."

"May I ask why you are not in a prisoner-of-war camp? You seem military."

"Sir, I am a contractor. My firm, M. Vercois et Fils—I am the son, by the way—has contracted to do much cement work on the coastline. We are building an impregnable wall for the Reich."

"Yes, yes," said Abel in a policeman's tired voice, indicating that he had heard all the French collaborationist sucking-up he needed to for the day.

"Now do you mind, please, turning to the left so that I can get a good profile view. I must say, this is a terrible photograph of you."

"I take a bad photograph, sir. I have this trouble frequently, but if you hold the light above the photo, it will resolve itself. The photographer made too much of my nose."

Abel checked.

It still did not quite make sense.

He turned to Macht.

"See if this photo matches, Herr Hauptmann. Maybe it's the light, but—"

At that moment, from the line two places behind M. Vercois, a man suddenly broke and ran crazily down the platform.

"That's him!" screamed Boch. "Stop that man, goddammit, stop that man!"

The drama played out quickly. The man ran and the Germans were disciplined enough not to shoot him, but instead, like football athletes, moved to block him. He tried to break this way, then that, but soon a younger, stronger, faster Untersharführer had him, another reached the melee and tangled him up from behind, and then two more, and the whole scrum went down in a blizzard of arms and legs.

"Someone stole my papers!" the man cried. "My papers are missing, I am innocent. Heil Hitler. I am innocent. Someone stole my papers."

"Got him," screamed Boch. "Got him!" and ran quickly to the melee to take command of the British agent.

"Go on," said Abel to M. Vercois as he and Macht went themselves to the incident.

His face blank, Basil entered the main station as whistles sounded and security troops from everywhere ran to Gate No. 4, from which he had just emerged. No one paid him any attention as he turned sideways to let the heavily armed Germans swarm past him. In the distance German sirens sounded, that strange two-note *caw-CAW* that sounded like a crippled crow, as yet more troops poured to the site.

Basil knew he didn't have much time. Someone smart among the Germans would understand quickly enough what had happened and would order a quick search of the train, where the M. Piens documents would be found in the first-class loo, and they'd know what had transpired. Then they'd throw a cordon around the station, call in more troops, and do a very careful examination of the horde, person by person, looking for a man with the papers of poor M. Vercois, currently undergoing interrogation by SS boot.

He walked swiftly to the front door, though the going was tough. Too late. Already the *feldpolizei* had commanded the cabs to leave and had halted buses. More German troops poured from trucks to seal off the area; more German staff cars arrived. The stairs to the Métro were all blocked by armed men.

He turned as if to walk back, meanwhile hunting for other ways out.

"Monsieur Piens, Monsieur Piens," came a call. He turned and saw the Luftwaffe colonel waving at him.

"Come along, I'll drop you. No need to get hung up in this unfortunate incident."

He ran to and entered the cab, knowing full well that his price of survival would be a trip back to the years 1912 through 1918. It almost wasn't worth it.

A few days earlier (cont'd.)

"Promote him!" said Basil. "The games you play. I swear I cannot keep up with them. The man's a traitor. He should be arrested and shot."

But his anguish moved no one on the panel that sat before him in the prime minister's murky staff room.

"Basil, so it should be with men of action, but you posit a world where things are clear and simple," said Sir Colin. "Such a planet does not exist. On this one, the real one, direct action is almost always impossible. Thus one must move on the oblique, making concessions and allowances all the way, never giving up too much for too little, tracking reverberations and rebounds, keeping the upper lip as stiff as if embalmed in concrete. Thus we leave small creatures such as our wretch of a Cambridge librarian alone in hopes of influencing someone vastly more powerful. Professor, perhaps you could put Basil in the picture so he understands what it is we are trying to do, and why it is so bloody important."

"It's called Operation Citadel," said Professor Turing. "The German staff has been working on it for some time now. Even though we would like to think that the mess they engineered on themselves at Stalingrad ended it for them, that is mere wishful dreaming. They are wounded but still immensely powerful."

"Professor, you speak as if you had a seat in the OKW general officers' mess."

"In a sense he does. The professor mentioned the little machines he builds, how they are able to try millions of possibilities and come up with solutions to the German code combinations and produce reasonable decryptions. Thus we have indeed been able to read Jerry's mail. Frankly, I know far more about German plans than about what is happening two doors down in my own agency, what the Americans are doing, or who the Russians have sent to Cambridge. But it's a gift that must be used sagely. If it's used sloppily, it will give up the game and Jerry will change everything. So we just use a bit of it now and then. This is one of those nows or thens. Go on, Professor."

"I defer to a strategic authority."

"General Cavendish?"

Cavendish, the army general, had a face that showed emotions from A all the way to A–. It was a mask of meat shaped in an oval and built bluntly around two ball bearings, empty of light, wisdom, empathy, or kindness, registering only force. He had about a pound of nose in the center of it and a pound of medals on his tunic.

"Operation Citadel," he delivered as rote fact, not interpretation, "is envisioned as the Götterdämmarung of the war in the East, the last titanic breakthrough that will destroy the Russian warmaking effort and bring the Soviets to the German table, hats in hand. At the very least, if it's successful, as most think it will be, it'll prolong the war by another year or two. We had hoped to see the fighting stop in 1945; now it may last well into 1947, and many more millions of men may die, and I should point out that a good number of those additional millions will be German. So we are trying to win—yes, indeed—but we are trying to do so swiftly, so that the dying can stop. That is what is at stake, you see."

"And that is why you cannot crush this little Cambridge rat's ass under a lorry. All right, I see that, I suppose, annoyed at it though I remain."

"Citadel, slated for May, probably cannot happen until July or August, given the logistics. It is to take place in southwest Russia, several hundred miles to the west of Stalingrad. At that point, around a city called Kursk, the Russians find themselves with a bulge in their lines—a salient, if you will. Secretly the Germans

have begun massing matériel both above and beneath the bulge. When they believe they have overwhelming superiority, they will strike. They will drive north from below and south from above, behind walls of Tigers, flocks of Stukas, and thousands of artillery pieces. The infantry will advance behind the tanks. When the encirclement is complete, they will turn and kill the 300,000 men in the center and destroy the 50,000 tanks. The morale of the Red Army will be shattered, the losses so overwhelming that all the American aid in the world cannot keep up with it, and the Russians will fall back, back, back to the Urals. Leningrad will fall, then Moscow. The war will go on and on and on."

"I'm no genius," said Basil, "but even I can figure it out. You must tell Stalin. Tell him to fortify and resupply that bulge. Then when the Germans attack, they will fail, and it is they who will be on the run, the war will end in 1945, and those millions of lives will have been saved. Plus I can then drink myself to death uninterrupted, as I desire."

"Again, sir," said the admiral, who was turning out to be Basil's most ardent admirer, "he has seen the gist of it straight through."

"There is only one thing, Basil," said Sir Colin. "We have told Stalin. He doesn't believe us."

The Third Day

"Jasta 3 at Vraignes. Late 1916," said Macht. "Albatros, a barge to fly."

"He was an ace," said Abel. "Drop a hat and he'll tell you about it."

"Old comrade," said Oberst Gunther Scholl, "yes. I was Jasta 7 at Roulers. That was in 1917. God, so long ago."

"Old chaps," said Abel, "now the nostalgia is finished, so perhaps we can get on with our real task, which is staying out of Russia."

"Walter will never go to Russia," said Macht. "Family connections. He'll stay in Paris, and when the Americans come, he'll join up with them. He'll finish the war a lieutenant-colonel in the American army. But he does have a point."

"Didi, that's the first compliment you ever gave me. If only you meant it, but one can't have everything."

"So let's go through this again, Herr Oberst," said Macht to Colonel Scholl. "Walter reminds us that there's a very annoyed SS officer stomping around out there and he would like to send you to the Russian front. He would also like to send all of us to the Russian front, except Walter. So it is now imperative that we catch the fellow you sat next to for six hours, and you must do better at remembering."

The hour was late, or early, depending. Oberst Scholl had imagined himself dancing the night away at Maxim's with Hilda, then retiring to a dawn of love at the Ritz. Instead he was in a dingy room on the rue Guy de Maupassant, being grilled by gumshoes from the slums of Germany in an atmosphere seething with desperation, sour smoke, and cold coffee.

"Hauptmann Macht, believe me, I wish to avoid the Russian front at all costs. Bricquebec is no prize, and command of a night fighter squadron does not suggest, I realize, that I am expected to do big things in the Luftwaffe. But I am

happy to fight my war there and surrender when the Americans arrive. I have told you everything."

"This I do not understand," said Leutnant Abel. "You had previously met Monsieur Piens and you thought this fellow was he. Yet the photography shows a face quite different from the one I saw at the Montparnasse station."

"Still, they are close," explained the colonel somewhat testily. "I had met Piens at a reception put together by the Vichy mayor of Bricquebec, between senior German officers and prominent, sympathetic businessmen. This fellow owned two restaurants and a hotel, was a power behind the throne, so to speak, and we had a brief but pleasant conversation. I cannot say I memorized his face, as why would I? When I got to the station, I glanced at the registration of French travelers and saw Piens's name and thus looked for him. I suppose I could say it was my duty to amuse our French sympathizers, but the truth is, I thought I could charm my way into a significant discount at his restaurants or pick up a bottle of wine as a gift. That is why I looked for him. He did seem different, but I ascribed that to the fact that he now had no moustache. I teased him about it and he gave me a story about his wife's dry skin."

The two policemen waited for more, but there wasn't any "more."

"I tell you, he spoke French perfectly, no trace of an accent, and was utterly calm and collected. In fact, that probably was a giveaway I missed. Most French are nervous in German presence, but this fellow was quite wonderful."

"What did you talk about for six hours?"

"I run on about myself, I know. And so, with a captive audience, that is what I did. My wife kicks me when I do so inappropriately, but unfortunately she was not there."

"So he knows all about you but we know nothing about him."

"That is so," said the Oberst. "Unfortunately."

"I hope you speak Russian as well as French," said Abel. "Because I have to write a report, and I'm certainly not going to put the blame on myself."

"All right," said Scholl. "Here is one little present. Small, I know, but perhaps just enough to keep me out of a Stuka cockpit."

"We're all ears."

"As I have told you, many times, he rode in the cab to the Ritz, and when we arrived I left and he stayed in the cab. I don't know where he took it. But I do remember the cabbie's name. They must display their licenses on the dashboard. It was Philippe Armoire. Does that help?"

It did.

That afternoon Macht stood before a squad room filled with about fifty men, a third his own, a third from Feldpolizei Battalion 11, and a third from Boch's SS detachment, all in plain clothes. Along with Abel, the *feldpolizei* sergeant, and Hauptsturmführer Boch, he sat at the front of the room. Behind was a large map of Paris. Even Boch had dressed down for the occasion, though to him "down" was a bespoke pin-striped, double-breasted black suit.

"All right," he said. "Long night ahead, boys, best get used to it now. We think we have a British agent hiding somewhere here," and he pointed at the fifth arrondissement, the Left Bank, the absolute heart of cultural and intellectual Paris. "That is the area where a cabdriver left him early this morning, and I believe

Hauptsturmführer Boch's interrogators can speak to the truthfulness of the cabdriver."

Boch nodded, knowing that his interrogation techniques were not widely approved of. "The Louvre and Notre Dame are right across the river, the Institut de France dominates the skyline on this side, and on the hundreds of streets are small hotels and restaurants, cafés, various retail outlets, apartment buildings, and so forth and so on. It is a catacomb of possibilities, entirely too immense for a dragnet or a mass cordon and search effort.

"Instead, each of you will patrol a block or so. You are on the lookout for a man of medium height, reddish to brownish hair, squarish face. More recognizably, he is a man of what one might call charisma. Not beauty per se, but a kind of inner glow that attracts people to him, allowing him to manipulate them. He speaks French perfectly, possibly German as well. He may be in any wardrobe, from shabby French clerk to priest, even to a woman's dress. If confronted he will offer wellthought- out words, be charming, agreeable, and slippery. His papers don't mean much. He seems to have a sneak thief 's skills at picking pockets, so he may have traded off several identities by the time you get to him. The best tip I can give you is, if you see a man and think what a great friend he'd be, he's probably the spy. His charm is his armor and his principle weapon. He is very clever, very dedicated, very intent on his mission. Probably armed and dangerous as well, but please be forewarned. Taken alive, he will be a treasure trove. Dead, he's just another Brit body."

"Sir, are we to check hotels for new registrations?"

"No. Uniformed officers have that task. This fellow, however, is way too clever for that. He'll go to ground in some anonymous way, and we'll never find him by knocking on hotel room doors. Our best chance is when he is out on the street. Tomorrow will be better, as a courier is bringing the real Monsieur Piens's photo up from Bricquebec and our artist will remove the moustache and thin the face, so we should have a fair likeness. At the same time, I and all my detectives will work our phone contacts and listen for any gossip, rumors, and reports of minor incidents that might reveal the fellow's presence. We will have radio cars stationed every few blocks, so you can run to them and reach us if necessary and thus we can get reinforcements to you quickly if that need develops. We can do no more. We are the cat, he is the mouse. He must come out for his cheese."

"If I may speak," said Hauptsturmführer Boch.

Who could stop him?

And thus he delivered a thirty-minute tirade that seemed modeled after Hitler's speech at Nuremberg, full of threats and exotic metaphors and fueled by pulsing anger at the world for its injustices, perhaps mainly in not recognizing the genius of Boch, all of it well punctuated by the regrettable fact that those who gave him evidence of shirking or laziness could easily end up on that cold antitank gun in Russia, facing the Mongol hordes.

It was not well received.

Of course Basil was too foxy to bumble into a hotel. Instead, his first act on being deposited on the Left Bank well after midnight was to retreat to the alleyways of more prosperous blocks and look for padlocked doors to the garages. It was his belief that if a garage was padlocked, it meant the owners of the house

had fled for more hospitable climes and he could safely use such a place for his hideout. He did this rather easily, picking the padlock and slipping into a large vault of a room occupied by a Rolls-Royce Phantom on blocks, clear evidence that its wealthy owners were now rusticating safely in Beverly Hills in the United States. His first order of the day was rest: he had, after all, been going full steam for forty-eight hours now, including his parachute arrival in France, his exhausting ordeal by Luftwaffe Oberst on the long train ride, and his miraculous escape from Montparnasse station, also courtesy of the Luftwaffe Oberst, whose name he did not even know.

The limousine was open; he crawled into a back seat that had once sustained the arsses of a prominent industrialist, a department store magnate, the owner of a chain of jewelry stores, a famous whore, whatever, and quickly went to sleep.

He awoke at three in the afternoon and had a moment of confusion. Where was he? In a car? Why? Oh, yes, on a mission. What was that mission? Funny, it seemed so important at one time; now he could not remember it. Oh, yes, *The Path to Jesus*.

There seemed no point in going out by day, so he examined the house from the garage, determined that it was deserted, and slipped into it, entering easily enough. It was a ghostly museum of the aristocratic du Clercs, who'd left their furniture under sheets and their larder empty, and by now dust had accumulated everywhere. He amused himself with a little prowl, not bothering to go through drawers, for he was a thief only in the name of duty. He did borrow a book from the library and spent the evening in the cellar, reading it by candlelight. It was Tolstoy's great *War and Peace*, and he got more than three hundred pages into it.

He awakened before dawn. He tried his best to make himself presentable and slipped out, locking the padlock behind himself. The early-morning streets were surprisingly well populated, as workingmen hastened to a first meal and then a day at the job. He melded easily, another anonymous French clerk with a day-old scrub of beard and a somewhat dowdy dark suit under a dark overcoat. He found a café and had a *café au lait* and a large piece of buttered toast, sitting in the rear as the place filled up.

He listened to the gossip and quickly picked up that *les boches* were everywhere today; no one had seen them out in such force before. It seemed that most were plainclothesmen, simply standing around or walking a small patrol beat. They preformed no services other than looking at people, so it was clear that they were on some sort of stakeout duty. Perhaps a prominent Resistance figure— this brought a laugh always, as most regarded the Resistance as a joke—had come in for a meet-up with Sartre at Les Deux Magots, or a British agent was here to assassinate Dietrich von Choltitz, the garrison commander of Paris and a man as objectionable as a summer moth. But everyone knew the British weren't big on killing, as it was the Czechs who'd bumped off Heydrich.

After a few hours Basil went for his reconnaissance. He saw them almost immediately, chalkfaced men wearing either the tight faces of hunters or the slack faces of time-servers. Of the two, he chose the latter, since a loafer was less apt to pay attention and wouldn't notice things and further- more would go off duty exactly when his shift was over.

The man stood, shifting weight from one foot to the other, blowing into his hands to keep them warm, occasionally rubbing the small of his back, where strain accumulated when he who does not stand or move much suddenly has to stand and move.

It was time to hunt the hunters.

A few days ago (cont'd.)

"It's the trust issue again," said General Cavendish, in a tone suggesting he was addressing the scullery mice. "In his rat-infested brain, the fellow still believes the war might be a trap, meant to destroy Russia and Communism. He thinks that we may be feeding him information on Operation Citadel, about this attack on the Kursk salient, as a way of manipulating him into overcommitting to defending against that attack. He wastes men, equipment, and treasure building up the Kursk bulge on our say-so, then, come July, Hitler's panzer troops make a feint in that direction but drive en masse into some area of the line that has been weakened because all the troops have been moved down to the Kursk bulge. Hitler breaks through, envelops, takes, and razes Moscow, then pivots, heavy with triumph, to deal with the moribund Kursk salient. Why, he needn't even attack. He can do to those men what was done to Paulus's Sixth Army at Stalingrad, simply shell and starve them into submission. At that point the war in the East is over and Communism is destroyed."

"I see what where you're going with this, gentlemen," said Basil. "We must convince Stalin that we are telling the truth. We must verify the authenticity of Operation Citadel, so that he believes in it and acts accordingly. If he doesn't, Operation Citadel will succeed, those 300,000 men will die, and the war will continue for another year or two. The soldiers now say 'Home alive in '45,' but the bloody reality will be 'Dead in heaven in '47.' Yet more millions will die. We cannot allow that to happen."

"Do you see it yet, Basil?" asked Sir Colin. "It would be so helpful if you saw it for yourself, if you realized what has to be done, that no matter how long the shot, we have to play it. Because yours is the part that depends on faith. Only faith will get you through the ordeal that lies ahead."

"Yes, I do see it," said Basil. "The only way of verifying the Operation Citadel intercepts is to have them discovered and transmitted quite innocent of any other influence by Stalin's most secret and trusted spy. That fellow has to come across them and get them to Moscow. And the route by which he encounters them must be unimpeachable, as it will be vigorously counterchecked by the NKVD. That is why the traitorous librarian at Cambridge cannot be arrested, and that is why no tricky subterfuge of cracking into the Cambridge rare books vault can be employed. The sanctity of the Cambridge copy of *The Path to Jesus* must be protected at all costs."

"Exactly, Basil. Very good."

"You have to get these intercepts to this spy. However—here's the rub—you have no idea who or where he is."

“We know where he is,” said the admiral. “The trouble is, it’s not a small place. It’s a good-sized village, in fact, or an industrial complex.”

“This Bletchley, whose name I was not supposed to hear—is that it?”

“Professor, perhaps you could explain it to Captain St. Florian.”

“Of course. Captain, as I spilled the beans before, I’ll now spill some more. We have Jerry solved to a remarkable degree, via higher mathematical concepts as guidelines for the construction of electronic *thinking machines*, if you will…”

“Turing engines, they’re called,” said Sir Colin. “Basil, you are honored by hearing this from the prime mover himself. It’s like a chat with God.”

“Please continue, your Supreme Beingness,” said Basil.

Embarrassed, the professor seemed to lose his place, then came back to it. “ …thinking machines that are able to function at high speed, test possibilities, and locate patterns which cut down on the possible combinations. I’ll spare you details, but it’s quite remarkable. However, one result of this breakthrough is that our location—Bletchley Park, about fifty kilometers out of London, an old Victorian estate in perfectly abominable taste—has grown from a small team operation into a huge bureaucracy. It now employs over eight hundred people, gathered from all over the empire for their specific skills in extremely arcane subject matters.

“As a consequence, we have many streams of communication, many units, many subunits, many sub-subunits, many huts, temporary quarters, recreational facilities, kitchens, bathrooms, a complex social life complete with gossip, romance, scandal, treachery, and remorse, our own slang, our own customs. Of course the inhabitants are all very smart, and when they’re not working they get bored and to amuse themselves conspire, plot, criticize, repeat, twist, engineer coups and countercoups, all of which further muddies the water and makes any sort of objective ‘truth’ impossible to verify. One of the people in this monstrous human beehive, we know for sure from the Finland code, reports to Joseph Stalin. We have no idea who it is—it could be an Oxbridge genius, a lance corporal with Enfield standing guard, a lady mathematician from Australia, a telegraph operator, a translator from the old country, an American liaison, a Polish consultant, and on and on. I suppose it could even be me. All, of course, were vetted beforehand by our intelligence service, but he or she slipped by.

“So now it is important that we find him. It is in fact mandatory that we find him. A big security shakeout is no answer at all. Time-consuming, clumsy, prone to error, gossip, and resentment, as well as colossally interruptive and destructive to our actual task, but worst of all a clear indicator to the NKVD that we know they’ve placed a bug in our rug. If that is the conclusion they reach, then Stalin will not trust us, will not fortify Kursk, et cetera, et cetera.”

“So breaking the book code is the key.”

“It is. I will leave it to historians to ponder the irony that in the most successful and sophisticated cryptoanalytic operation in history, a simple book code stands between us and a desperately important goal. We are too busy for irony.”

Basil responded, “The problem then refines itself more acutely: it is that you have no practical access to the book upon which the code that contains the name for this chap’s new handler is based.”

“That is it, in a nutshell,” said Professor Turing.

“A sticky wicket, I must say. But where on earth do I fit in? I don’t see that there’s any room for a boy of my most peculiar expertise. Am I supposed to—well, I cannot even conjure an end to that sentence. You have me…”

He paused.

“I think he’s got it,” said the admiral.

“Of course I have,” said Basil. “There has to be another book.”

The Fourth Day

It had to happen sooner or later, and it happened sooner. The first man caught up in the Abwehr observe-and-apprehend operation was Maurice Chevalier.

The French star was in transit between mistresses on the Left Bank, and who could possibly blame Unterscharführer Ganz for blowing the whistle on him? He was tall and gloriously handsome, he was exquisitely dressed, and he radiated such warmth, grace, confidence, and glamour that to see him was to love him. The sergeant was merely acting on the guidance given the squad by Macht: if you want him to be your best friend, that’s probably the spy. The sergeant had no idea who Chevalier was; he thought he was doing his duty.

Naturally, the star was not amused. He threatened to call his good friend Herr General von Choltitz and have them *all* sent to the Russian front, and it’s a good thing Macht still had some diplomatic skills left, for he managed to talk the elegant man out of that course of action by supplying endless amounts of unction and flattery. His dignity ruffled, the star left huffily and went on his way, at least secure in the knowledge that in twenty minutes he would be making love to a beautiful woman and these German peasants would still be standing around out in the cold, waiting for something to happen. By eight p.m. he had forgotten entirely about it, and on his account no German boy serving in Paris would find himself on that frozen antitank gun.

As for SS Hauptsturmführer Otto Boch, that was another story. He was a man of action. He was not one for the patience, the persistence, the professionalism of police work. He preferred more direct approaches, such as hanging around the Left Bank hotel where Macht had set up his headquarters and threatening in a loud voice to send them all to Russia if they didn’t produce the enemy agent quickly. Thus the Abwehr men took to calling him the Black Pigeon behind his back, for the name took into account his pigeonlike strut, breast puffed, dignity formidable, self-importance manifest, while accomplishing nothing tangible whatsoever except to leave small piles of shit wherever he went.

His SS staff got with the drill, as they were, fanatics or not, at least security professionals, and it seemed that even after a bit they were calling him the Black Pigeon as well. But on the whole, they, the Abwehr fellows, and the 11th Battalion *feldpolizei* people meshed well and produced such results as could be produced. The possibles they netted were not so spectacular as a regal movie star, but the theory behind each apprehension was sound. There were a number of handsome men, some gangsters, some actors, one poet, and a homosexual hairdresser. Macht and Abel raised their eyebrows at the homosexual hairdresser, for it

occurred to them that the officer who had whistled him down had perhaps revealed more about himself than he meant to.

Eventually the first shift went off and the second came on. These actually were the sharper fellows, as Macht assumed that the British agent would be more likely to conduct his business during the evening, whatever that business might be. And indeed the results were, if not better, more responsible. In fact one man brought in revealed himself to be not who he claimed he was, and that he was a wanted jewel thief who still plied his trade, Occupation or no. It took a shrewd eye to detect the vitality and fearlessness this fellow wore behind shoddy clothes and darkened teeth and an old man's hobble, but the SS man who made the catch turned out to be highly regarded in his own unit. Macht made a note to get him close to any potential arrest situations, as he wanted his best people near the action. He also threatened to turn the jewel thief over to the French police but instead recruited him as an informant for future use. He was not one for wasting much.

Another arrestee was clearly a Jew, even if his papers said otherwise, even if he had no possible connection to British Intelligence. Macht examined the papers carefully, showed them to a bunco expert on the team, and confirmed that they were fraudulent. He took the fellow aside and said, "Look, friend, if I were you I'd get myself and my family out of Paris as quickly as possible. If I can see through your charade in five seconds, sooner or later the SS will too, and it's off to the East for all of you. These bastards have the upper hand for now, so my best advice to you is, no matter what it costs, get the hell out of Paris. Get out of France. No matter what you think, you cannot wait them out, because the one thing they absolutely will do before they're either chased out of town or put against a wall and shot is get all the Jews. That's what they live for. That's what they'll die for, if it comes to that. Consider this fair warning and probably the only one you'll get."

Maybe the man would believe him, maybe not. There was nothing he could do about it. He got back to the telephone, as, along with his other detectives, he spent most of the time monitoring his various snitches, informants, sympathizers, and sycophants, of course turning up nothing. If the agent was on the Left Bank, he hadn't moved an inch.

And he hadn't. Basil sat on the park bench the entire day, obliquely watching the German across the street. He got so he knew the man well: his gait (bad left hip, Great War wound?); his policeman's patience at standing in one place for an hour, then moving two meters and standing in that place for an hour; his stubbornness at never, ever abandoning his post, except once, at three p.m., for a brief trip to the pissoir, during which he kept his eyes open and examined each passerby through the gap at the pissoir's eye level. He didn't miss a thing— that is, except for the dowdy Frenchman observing him from ninety meters away, over an array of daily newspapers.

Twice, unmarked Citroëns came by and the officer gave a report to two other men, also in civilian clothes, on the previous few hours. They nodded, took careful records, and then hastened off. It was a long day until seven p.m., a twelve-hour shift, when his replacement moseyed up. There was no ceremony of changing the guard, just a cursory nod between them, and then the first policeman began to wander off.

Basil stayed with him, maintaining the same ninety-meter interval, noting that he stopped in a café for a cup of coffee and a sandwich, read the papers, and smoked, unaware that Basil had followed him in, placed himself at the bar, and also had a sandwich and a coffee.

Eventually the German got up, walked another six blocks down Boulevard Saint-Germain, turned down a narrower street called rue de Valor, and disappeared halfway down the first block into a rummy-looking hotel called Le Duval. Basil looked about, found a café, had a second coffee, smoked a Gauloise to blend in, joked with the bartender, was examined by a uniformed German policeman on a random check, showed papers identifying himself as Robert Fortier (picked freshly that morning), was checked off against a list (he was not on it, as perhaps M. Fortier had not yet noted his missing papers), and was then abandoned by the policeman for other possibilities.

At last he left and went back to rue de Valor, slipped down it, and very carefully approached the Hotel Duval. From outside it revealed nothing—a typical Baedeker two-star for commercial travelers, with no pretensions of gentility or class. It would be stark, clean, well run, and banal. Such places housed half the population every night in Europe, except for the past few years, when that half-the-population had slept in bunkers, foxholes, or ruins. Nothing marked this place, which was exactly why whoever was running this show had chosen it. Another pro like himself, he guessed. It takes a professional to catch a professional, the saying goes.

He meekly entered as if confused, noting a few sour-looking individuals sitting in the lobby reading *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and smoking, and went to the desk, where he asked for directions to a hotel called Les Deux Gentilhommes and got them. It wasn't much, but it enabled him to make a quick check on the place, and he learned what he needed to know.

Behind the desk was a hallway, and down it Basil could see a larger room, a banquet hall or something, full of drowsy-looking men sitting around listlessly, while a few further back slept on sofas pushed in for just that purpose. It looked police.

That settled it. This was the German headquarters.

He moseyed out and knew he had one more stop before tomorrow.

He had to examine his objective.

A few days previously (cont'd.)

"Another book? Exactly yes and exactly no," said Sir Colin.

"How could there be a second original? By definition there can be only one original, or so it was taught when I was at university."

"It does seem like a conundrum, does it not?" said Sir Colin. "But indeed, we are dealing with a very rare case of a second original. Well, of sorts."

"Not sure I like the sound of that," said Basil.

"Nor should you. It takes us to a certain awkwardness that, again, an ironist would find heartily amusing."

"You see," said Basil, "I am fond of irony, but only when applied to other chaps."

“Yes, it can sting, can it not?” said General Cavendish. “And I must say, this one stings quite exhaustively. It will cause historians many a chuckle when they write the secret history of the war in the twenty-first century after all the files are finally opened.”

“But we get ahead of ourselves,” said Sir Colin. “There’s more tale to tell. And the sooner we tell it, the sooner the cocktail hour.”

“Tell on, then, Sir Colin.”

“It all turns on the fulcrum of folly and vanity known as the human heart, especially when basted in ambition, guilt, remorse, and greed. What a marvelous stew, all of it simmering within the head of the Reverend MacBurney. When last we left him, our God-fearing MacBurney had become a millionaire because his pamphlet *The Path to Jesus* had sold endlessly, bringing him a shilling a tot. As I said, he retired to a country estate and spent some years happily wenching and drinking in happy debauchery.”

“As who would not?” asked Basil, though he doubted this lot would.

“Of course. But then in the year 1789, twenty-two years later, he was approached by a representative of the bishop of Gladney and asked to make a presentation to the Church. To commemorate his achievement, the thousands of souls he had shepherded safely upon the aforenamed path, the bishop wanted him appointed deacon at St. Blazefield’s in Glasgow, the highest church rank a fellow like him could achieve. And Thomas wanted it badly. But the bishop wanted him to donate the original manuscript to the church, for eternal display in its ambulatory. Except Thomas had no idea where the original was and hadn’t thought about it in years. So he sat down, practical Scot that he was, and from the pamphlet itself he back-engineered, so to speak, another ‘original’ manuscript in his own hand, a perfect facsimile, or as perfect as he could make it, even, one must assume, to the little crucifix doodles that so amused the Cambridge librarian. That was shipped to Glasgow, and that is why to this day Thomas MacBurney lounges in heaven, surrounded by seraphim and cherubim who sing his praises and throw petals where he walks.”

“It was kind of God to provide us with the second copy,” said Basil.

“Proof,” said the admiral, “that He is on our side.”

“Yes. The provenance of the first manuscript is well established; as I say, it has pencil marks to guide the printer in the print shop owner’s hand. That is why it is so prized at Cambridge. The second was displayed for a century in Glasgow, but then the original St. Blazefield’s was torn down for a newer, more imposing one in 1857, and the manuscript somehow disappeared. However, it was discovered in 1913 in Paris. Who knows by what mischief it ended up there? But to prevent action by the French police, the owner anonymously donated it to a cultural institution, in whose vaults it to this day resides.”

“So I am to go and fetch it. Under the Nazis’ noses?”

“Well, not exactly,” said Sir Colin. “The manuscript itself must not be removed, as someone might notice and word might reach the Russians. What you must do is photograph certain pages using a Riga Minox. Those are what must be fetched.”

“And when I fetch them, they can be relied upon to provide the key for the code and thus give up the name of the Russian spy at Bletchley Park, and thus you will be able to slip into his hands the German plans for Operation Citadel, and thus

Stalin will fortify the Kursk salient, and thus the massive German summer offensive will have its back broken, and thus the boys will be home alive in '45 instead of dead in heaven in '47. Our boys, their boys, all boys."

"In theory," said Sir Colin Gubbins.

"Hmm, not sure I like 'in theory,'" said Basil.

"You will be flown in by Lysander, dispatched in the care of Resistance Group Philippe, which will handle logistics. They have not been alerted to the nature of the mission as yet, as the fewer who know, of course, the better. You will explain it to them, they will get you to Paris for recon and supply equipment, manpower, distraction, and other kinds of support, then get you back out for Lysander pickup, if everything goes well."

"And if it does not?"

"That is where your expertise will come in handy. In that case, it will be a maximum huggermugger sort of effort. I am sure you will prevail."

"I am not," said Basil. "It sounds awfully dodgy."

"And you know, of course, that you will be given an L-pill so that headful of secrets of yours will never fall in German hands."

"I will be certain to throw it away at the first chance," said Basil.

"There's the spirit, old man," said Sir Colin.

"And where am I headed?"

"Ah, yes. An address on the Quai de Conti, the Left Bank, near the Seine."

"Excellent," said Basil. "Only the Institut de France, the most profound and colossal assemblage of French cultural icons in the world, and the most heavily guarded."

"Known for its excellent library," said Sir Colin.

"It sounds like quite a pickle," said Basil.

"And you haven't even heard the bad part."

The Fourth Day, near midnight

In the old days, and perhaps again after the war if von Choltitz didn't blow the place up, the Institut de France was one of the glories of the nation, emblazoned in the night under a rippling tricolor to express the high moral purpose of French culture. But in the war it, too, had to fall into line.

Thus the blazing lights no longer blazed and the cupola ruling over the many stately branches of the singularly complex building overlooking the Seine on the Quai de Conti, right at the toe of the Île de la Cité and directly across from the Louvre, in the sixth arrondissement, no longer ruled. One had to squint, as did Basil, to make it out, though helpfully a searchlight from some far-distant German antiaircraft battery would backlight it and at least accentuate its bulk and shape. The Germans had not painted it *feldgrau*, thank God, and so its white stone seemed to gleam in the night, at least in contrast to other French buildings in the environs. A slight rain fell; the cobblestones glistened; the whole thing had a cinematic look that Basil paid no attention to, as it did him no good at all and he was by no means a romantic.

Instead he saw the architectural tropes of the place, the brilliant façade of colonnades, the precision of the intersecting angles, the dramatically arrayed approaches to the broad steps of the grand entrance under the cupola, from which nexus one proceeded to its many divisions, housed each in a separate wing. The whole expressed the complexity, the difficulty, the arrogance, the insolence, the ego, the whole *je ne sais quoi* of the French: their smug, prosperous country, their easy treachery, their utter lack of conscience, their powerful sense of entitlement.

From his briefing, he knew that his particular goal was the Bibliothèque Mazarine, housed in the great marble edifice but a few hundred meters from the center. He slid that way, while close at hand the Seine lapped against its stone banks, the odd taxi or bicycle taxi hurtled down Quai de Conti, the searchlights crisscrossed the sky. Soon midnight, and curfew. But he had to see.

On its own the Mazarine was an imposing building, though without the columns. Instead it affected the French country palace look, with a cobblestone yard which in an earlier age had allowed for carriages but now was merely a car park. Two giant oak doors, guarding French propriety, kept interlopers out. At this moment it was locked up like a vault; tomorrow the doors would open and he would somehow make his penetration.

But how?

With Resistance help he could have mounted an elaborate ruse, spring himself to the upper floors while the guards tried to deal with the unruliness beneath. But he had chosen not to go that way. In the networks somebody always talked, somebody always whispered, and nothing was really a secret. The Resistance could get him close, but it could also earn him an appetizer of strychnine L-pill.

The other, safer possibility was to develop contacts in the French underworld and hire a professional thief to come in from below or above, via a back entrance, and somehow steal the booklet, then replace it the next day. But that took time, and there was no time.

In the end, he only confirmed what he already knew: there was but one way. It was as fragile as a Fabergé egg, at any time given to yield its counterfeit nature to anyone paying the slightest attention. Particularly with the Germans knowing something was up and at high alert, ready to flood the place with cops and thugs at any second. It would take nerve, a talent for the dramatic, and, most important, the right credentials.

A few days previously (fini)

"Are you willing?" said Sir Colin. "Knowing all this, are you willing?"

"Sir, you send men to their death every day with less fastidiousness. You consign battalions to their slaughter without blinking an eye. The stricken gray ships turn to coffins and slide beneath the ocean with their hundreds; *c'est la guerre*. The airplanes explode into falling pyres and nobody sheds a tear. Everyone must do his bit, you say. And yet now, for me, on this, you're suddenly squeamish to an odd degree, telling me every danger and improbability and how low the odds of success are. I have to know why. It has a doomed feel to it. If I must die, so be it, but somebody wants nothing on his conscience."

“That is very true.”

“Is this a secret you will not divulge?”

“I will divulge, and what’s more, now is the time to divulge, before we all die of starvation or alcohol withdrawal symptoms.”

“How very interesting.”

“A man on this panel has the ear of the prime minister. He holds great power. It is he who insisted on this highly unusual approach, it is he who forces us to overbrief you and send you off with far too much classified information. Let him speak, then.”

“General Sir Colin means me,” said the professor. “Because of my code-breaking success, I find myself uniquely powerful. Mr. Churchill likes me, and wants me to have my way. That is why I sit on a panel with the barons of war, myself a humble professor, not even at Oxford or Cambridge but at Manchester.”

“Professor, is this a moral quest? Do you seek forgiveness beforehand, should I die? It’s really not necessary. I owe God a death, and he will take it when he sees fit. Many times over the years he has seen fit not to do so. Perhaps he’s bored with me and wants me off the board. Perhaps he tires of my completely overblown legendary wit and sangfroid and realizes I’m just as scared as the next fellow, am a bully to boot, and that it ended on a rather beastly note with my father, a regret I shall always carry. So, Professor, you who have saved millions, if I go, it’s on the chap upstairs, not you.”

“Well spoken, Captain St. Florian, like the hero I already knew you to be. But that’s not quite it. Another horror lies ahead and I must burden you with it, so I will be let alone enough by all those noisy screamers between my ears to do my work if the time comes.”

“Please enlighten.”

“You see, everyone thinks I’m a genius. Of course I am really a frail man of many weaknesses. I needn’t elucidate. But I am terrified of one possibility. You should know it’s there before you undertake.”

“Go ahead.”

“Let us say you prevail. At great cost, by great ordeal, blood, psychic energy, morale, whatever it takes from you. And perhaps other people die as well—a pilot, a Resistance worker, someone caught by a stray bullet, any of the routine whimsies of war.”

“Yes.”

“Suppose all that is true, you bring it back, you sit before me exhausted, spent, having been burned in the fire, you put it to me, the product of your hard labors, and *I cannot decode the damned thing*.”

“Sir, I—”

“*They* think I can, these barons of war. Put the tag ‘genius’ on a fellow and it solves all problems. However, there are no, and I do mean no, assurances that the pages you bring back will accord closely enough with the original to yield a meaningful answer.”

“We’ve been through this a thousand times, Professor Turing,” said the general. “You will be able, we believe, to handle this. We are quite confident in your ability and attribute your reluctance to a high-strung personality and a bit of stage fright, that’s all. The variations cannot be that great, and your Turing engine or one of

those things you call a bombe ought to be able to run down other possible solutions quickly and we will get what we need."

"I'm so happy the men who know nothing of this sort of work are so confident. But I had to face you, Captain St. Florian, with this truth. It may be for naught. It may be undoable, even by the great Turing. If that is the case, then I humbly request your forgiveness."

"Oh, bosh," said Basil. "If it turns out that the smartest man in England can't do it, it wasn't meant to be done. Don't give it a thought, Professor. I'll simply go off and have an inning, as best I know how, and if I get back, then you have your inning. What happens, then that's what happens. Now, please, gentleman, can we hasten? My arse feels as if Queen Victoria used it for needlepoint!"

Action This Day

Of course one normally never went about in anything but bespoke. Just wasn't done. Basil's tailor was Steed-Aspell, of Davies & Son, 15 Jermyn Street, and Steed-Aspell ("Steedy" to his clients) was a student of Frederick Scholte, the Duke of Windsor's genius tailor, which meant he was a master of the English drape. His clothes hung with an almost scary brilliance, perfect. They never just crumpled. As gravity took them, they formed extraordinary shapes, presented new faces to the world, gave the sun a canvas for compositions playing light against dark, with gray working an uneasy region between, rather like the Sudetenland. Basil had at least three jackets for which he had been offered immense sums (Steed-Aspell was taking no new clients, though the war might eventually open up some room on his waiting list, if it hadn't already), and of course Basil merely smiled drily at the evocations of want, issued a brief but sincere look of commiseration, and moved onward, a lord in tweed, perhaps *the* lord of the tweeds.

Thus the suit he now wore was a severe disappointment. He had bought it in a secondhand shop, and *monsieur* had expressed great confidence that it was of premium quality, and yet its drape was all wrong, because of course the wool was all wrong. One didn't simply use *any* wool, as its provincial tailor believed. Thus it got itself into twists and rumples and couldn't get out, its creases blunted themselves in moments, and it had already popped a button. Its rise bagged, sagged, and gave up. It rather glowed in the sunlight. Buttoned, its two breasts encased him like a girdle; unbuttoned, it looked like he wore several flags of blue pinstripe about himself, ready to unfurl in the wind. He was certain his clubman would not let him enter if he tried.

And he wanted very much to look his best this morning. He was, after all, going to blow up something big with Germans inside.

"I tell you, we should be more severe," argued SS Hauptsturmführer Otto Boch. "These Paris bastards, they take us too lightly. In Poland we enacted laws and enforced them with blood and steel and incidents quickly trickled away to nothing. Every Pole knew that disobedience meant a polka at the end of a rope in the main square."

"Perhaps they were too enervated on lack of food to rebel," said Macht. "You see, you have a different objective. You are interested in public order and the thrill of

public obedience. These seem to you necessary goals, which must be enforced for our quest to succeed. My goal is far more limited. I merely want to catch the British agent. To do so, I must isolate him against a calm background, almost a still life, and that way locate him. It's the system that will catch him, not a single guns-blazing raid. If you stir things up, Herr Hauptsturmführer, I guarantee you it will come to nothing. Please trust me on this. I have run manhunts, many times successfully."

Boch had no remonstrance, of course. He was not a professional like Macht and in fact before the war had been a salesman of vacuums, and not a very good one.

"We have observers everywhere," Macht continued. "We have a photograph of M. Piens, delicately altered so that it closely resembles the man that idiot Scholl sat next to, which should help our people enormously. We have good weather. The sun is shining, so our watchers won't hide themselves under shades or awnings to get out of the rain and thus cut down their visibility. The lack of rain also means our roving autos won't be searching through the slosh and squeal of wiper blades, again reducing what they see. We continue to monitor sources we have carefully been nurturing since we arrived. Our system will work. We will get a break today, I guarantee it."

The two sat at a table in the banquet room of the Hotel Duval, amid a batch of snoozing agents who were off shift. The stench of cigarette butts, squashed cigars, and tapped-out pipe tobacco shreds hung heavy in the room, as did the smell of cold coffee and unwashed bodies. But that was what happened on manhunts, as Macht knew and Boch did not. Now nothing could be done except wait for a break, then play that break carefully and…

"Hauptmann Macht?" It was his assistant, Abel.

"Yes?"

"Paris headquarters. Von Choltitz's people. They want a briefing. They've sent a car."

"Oh, Christ," said Macht. But he knew this was what happened. Big politicos got involved, got worried, wanted credit, wanted to escape blame. No one anywhere in the world understood the principle that sometimes it was better not to be energetic and to leave things alone instead of wasting energy in a lot of showy ceremonial nonsense.

"I'll go," said Boch, who would never miss a chance to preen before superiors.

"Sorry, sir. They specified Hauptmann Macht."

"Christ," said Macht again, trying to remember where he'd left his trench coat.

A street up from the Hotel Duval, Basil found the exact thing he was looking for. It was a Citroën Traction Avant, black, and it had a large aerial projecting from it. It was clearly a radio car, one of those that the German man-hunter had placed strategically around the sixth arrondissement so that no watcher was far from being able to notify headquarters and get the troops out.

Helpfully, a café was available across the street, and so he sat at a table and ordered a coffee. He watched as, quite regularly, a new German watcher ambled by, leaned in, and reported that he had seen nothing. Well organized. They arrived every thirty minutes. Each man came once every two hours, so the walk over was a break from standing around. It enabled the commander to get new information to the troops in an orderly fashion, and it changed the vantage point of the

watchers. At the same time, at the end of four hours, the car itself fired up and its two occupants made a quick tour of their men on the street corners. The point was to keep communications clear, keep the men engaged so they didn't go logy on duty, yet sacrifice nothing in the way of observation. Whoever was running this had done it before.

He also noted a new element. Somehow they had what appeared to be a photograph. They would look it over, pass it around, consult it frequently in all meetings. It couldn't be of him, so possibly it was a drawing. It meant he had to act today. As the photo or drawing circulated, more and more would learn his features and the chance of his being spotted would become greater by degrees. Today the image was a novelty and would not stick in the mind without constant refreshment, but by tomorrow all who had to know it would know it. The time was now. Action this day.

When he felt he had mastered the schedule and saw a clear break coming up in which nobody would report to the car for at least thirty minutes, he decided it was time to move. It was about three p.m. on a sunny, if chilly, Paris spring afternoon. The ancient city's so-familiar features were everywhere as he meandered across Boulevard Saint-Germain under blue sky. There was a music in the traffic and in the rhythm of the pedestrians, the window shoppers, the pastry munchers, the café sitters, the endless parade of bicyclists, some pulling passengers in carts, some simply solo. The great city went about its business, Occupation or no, action this day or no.

He walked into an alley and reached over to fetch a wine bottle that he had placed there early this morning, while it was dark. It was, however, filled with kerosene drained from a ten-liter tin jug in the garage. Instead of a cork it had a plug of wadded cotton jammed into its throat, and fifteen centimeters of strip hung from the plug. It was a gasoline bomb, constructed exactly to SOE specification. He had never done it before, since he usually worked with Explosive 808, but there was no 808 to be found, so the kerosene, however many years old it was, would have to do. He wrapped the bottle in newspaper, tilted it to soak the wad with the fuel, and then set off jauntily.

This was the delicate part. It all turned on how observant the Germans were at close quarters, whether or not Parisians on the street noticed him, and if so, if they took some kind of action. He guessed they wouldn't; actually, he gambled that they wouldn't. The Parisians are a prudent species.

Fortunately the Citroën was parked in an isolated space, open at both ends. He made no eye contact with its bored occupants, his last glance telling him that one leaned back, stretching, to keep from dozing, while the other was talking on a telephone unit wired into the radio console that occupied the small back seat. He felt that if he looked at them they might feel the pressure of his eyes, as those of predatory nature sometimes do, being weirdly sensitive to signs of aggression.

He approached on the oblique, keeping out of view of the rear window of the low-slung sedan, all the rage in 1935 but now ubiquitous in Paris. Its fuel tank was in the rear, which again made things convenient. In the last moment as he approached, he ducked down, wedged the bottle under the rear tire, pulled the paper away, lit his lighter, and lit the end of the strip of cloth. The whole thing took one second, and he moved away as if he'd done nothing.

It didn't explode. Instead, with a kind of airsucking gush, the bottle erupted and shattered, smearing a billow of orange-black flame into the atmosphere from beneath the car, and in the next second the gasoline tank also went, again without explosion as much as flare of incandescence a hundred meters high, bleaching the color from the beautiful old town and sending a cascade of heat radiating outward.

Neither German policeman was injured, except by means of stolen dignity, but each spilled crazily from his door, driven by the primal fear of flame encoded in the human race, one tripping, going to hands and knees and locomoting desperately from the conflagration on all fours like some sort of beast. Civilians panicked as well, and screaming became general as they scrambled away from the bonfire that had been an automobile several seconds earlier.

Basil never looked back, and walked swiftly down the street until he reached rue de Valor and headed down it.

Boch was lecturing Abel on the necessity of severity in dealing with these French cream puffs when a man roared into the banquet room, screaming, "They've blown up one of our radio cars. It's an attack! The Resistance is here!"

Instantly men leaped to action. Three ran to a gun rack in a closet where the MP 40s were stored and grabbed those powerful weapons up. Abel raced to the telephone and called Paris command with a report and a request for immediate troop dispatch. Still others pulled Walthers, Lugers, and P38s from holsters, grabbed overcoats, and readied themselves to move to the scene and take command.

Hauptsturmführer Boch did nothing. He sat rooted in terror. He was not a coward, but he also, for all his worship of severity and aggressive interrogation methods, was particularly inept at confronting the unexpected, which generally caused his mind to dump its contents in a steaming pile on the floor while he sat in stupefaction, waiting for it to refill.

In this case, when he found himself alone in the room, he reached a refill level, stood up, and ran after his more agile colleagues.

He stepped on the sidewalk, which was full of fleeing Parisians, and fought against the tide, being bumped and jostled in the process by those who had no idea who he was. A particularly hard thump from a hurtling heavyweight all but knocked him flat, and the fellow had to grab him to keep him upright before hurrying along. Thus, making little progress, the Hauptsturmführer pulled out his Luger, trying to remember if there was a shell in the chamber, and started to shout in his bad French, "Make way! German officer, make way!" waving the Luger about as if it were some kind of magic wand that would dissipate the crowd.

It did not, so taken in panic were the French, so he diverted to the street itself and found the going easier. He made it to Boulevard Saint-Germain, turned right, and there beheld the atrocity. Radio Car Five still blazed brightly. German plainclothesmen had set up a cordon around it, menacing the citizens with their MP 40s, but of course no citizens were that interested in a German car, and so the street had largely emptied. Traffic on the busy thoroughfare had stopped, making the approach of the fire truck more laggard—the sound of klaxons arrived from far away, and it was clear that by the time the firemen arrived the car would be largely burned to a charred hulk. Two plainclothesmen, Esterlitz, from his SS unit,

and an Abwehr agent, sat on the curb looking completely unglued while Abel tried to talk to them.

Boch ran to them.

"Report," he snapped as he arrived, but nobody paid any attention to him.

"Report!" he screamed.

Abel looked over at him.

"I'm trying to get a description from these two fellows, so we know who we're looking for."

"We should arrest hostages at once and execute them if no information is forthcoming."

"Sir, he has to be in the area still. We have to put people out in all directions with a solid description."

"Esterlitz, what did you see?"

Esterlitz looked at him with empty eyes. The nearness of his escape, the heat of the flames, the suddenness of it all, had disassembled his brain completely. Thus it was the Abwehr agent who answered.

"As I've been telling the lieutenant, it happened so quickly. My last impression in the split second before the bomb exploded was of a man walking north on Saint-Germain in a blue pinstripe that was not well cut at all, a surprise to see in a city so fashion-conscious, and then whoosh, a wall of flame behind us."

"The bastards," said Boch. "Attempting murder in broad daylight."

"Sir," said Abel, "with all due respect, this was not an assassination operation. Had he wanted them dead, he would have hurled the Molotov through the open window, soaking them with burning gasoline, burning them to death. Instead he merely ignited the petrol tank, which enabled them to escape. He didn't care about them. That wasn't the point, don't you see?"

Boch looked at him, embarrassed to be contradicted by an underling in front of the troops. It was not the SS way! But he controlled his temper, as it made no sense to vent at an ignorant police rube.

"What are you saying?"

"This was some sort of distraction. He wanted to get us all out here, concentrating on this essentially meaningless event, because it somehow advanced his higher purpose."

"I—I—" stuttered Boch.

"Let me finish the interview, then get the description out to all other cars, ordering them to stay in place. Having our men here, tied up in this jam, watching the car burn to embers, accomplishes nothing."

"Do it! Do it!" screamed Boch, as if he had thought of it himself.

Basil reached the Bibliothèque Mazarine within ten minutes and could still hear fire klaxons sounding in the distance. The disturbance would clog up the sixth arrondissement for hours before it was finally untangled, and it would mess up the German response for those same hours. He knew he had a window of time—not much, but perhaps enough.

He walked through the cobbled yard and approached the doors, where two French policemen stood guard.

"Official business only, *monsieur*. German orders," said one.

He took out his identification papers and said frostily, “I do not care to chat with French policemen in the sunlight. I am here on business.”

“Yes, sir.”

He entered a vast, sacred space. It was composed of an indefinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one could see, interminably, the upper and lower floors. The distribution of the galleries was invariable. Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, covered all the sides except two; their height, which was the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeded that of a normal bookcase. The books seemed to absorb and calm all extraneous sounds, so that as his heels clicked on the marble of the floor on the approach to a central desk, a woman behind it hardly seemed to notice him. However, his papers got her attention and her courtesy right away.

“I am here on important business. I need to speak to *le directeur* immediately.”

She left. She returned. She bade him follow. They went to an elevator where a decrepit Great War veteran, shoulders stooped, medals tarnished, eyes vacant, opened the gate to a cage-like car. They were hoisted mechanically up two flights, followed another path through corridors of books, and reached a door.

She knocked, then entered. He followed, to discover an old Frenchie in some kind of frock coat and goatee, standing nervously.

“I am Claude De Marque, the director,” he said in French. “How may I help you?”

“Do you speak German?”

“Yes, but I am more fluent in my own tongue.”

“French, then.”

“Please sit down.”

Basil took a chair.

“Now—”

“First, understand the courtesy I have paid you. Had I so chosen, I could have come with a contingent of armed troops. We could have shaken down your institution, examined the papers of all your employees, made impolite inquiries as we looked for leverage and threw books every which way. That is the German technique. Perhaps you shield a Jew, as is the wont of your kind of prissy French intellectual. Too bad for those Jews, too bad for those who shield him. Are you getting my meaning?”

“Yes, sir, I—”

“Instead I come on my own. As men of letters, I think it more appropriate that our relationship be based on trust and respect. I am a professor of literature at Leipzig, and I hope to return to that after the war. I cherish the library, this library, any library. Libraries are the font of civilization, do you not agree?”

“I do.”

“Therefore, one of my goals is to protect the integrity of the library. You must know that first of all.”

“I am pleased.”

“Then let us proceed. I represent a very high science office of the Third Reich. This office has an interest in certain kinds of rare books. I have been assigned by

its commanding officer to assemble a catalog of such volumes in the great libraries of Europe. I expect you to help me."

"What kinds of books?"

"Ah, this is delicate. I expect discretion on your part."

"Of course."

"This office has an interest in volumes that deal with erotic connections between human beings. Our interest is not limited to those merely between male and female but extends to other combinations as well. The names de Sade and Ovid have been mentioned. There are more, I am sure. There is also artistic representation. The ancients were more forthright in their descriptions of such activities. Perhaps you have photos of paintings, sculptures, friezes?"

"Sir, this is a respectable—"

"It is not a matter of respect. It is a matter of science, which must go where it leads. We are undertaking a study of human sexuality, and it must be done forthrightly, professionally, and quickly. We are interested in harnessing the power of eugenics and seek to find ways to improve the fertility of our finest minds. Clearly the answer lies in sexual behaviors. Thus we must fearlessly master such matters as we chart our way to the future. We must ensure the future."

"But we have no salacious materials."

"And do you believe, knowing of the Germans' attributes of thoroughness, fairness, calm and deliberate examination, that a single assurance alone would suffice?"

"I invite you to—"

"Exactly. This is what I expect. An hour, certainly no more, undisturbed in your rare book vault. I will wear white gloves if you prefer. I must be free to make a precise search and assure my commander that either you do not have such materials, as you claim, or you do, and these are the ones you have. Do you understand?"

"I confess a first edition of Sade's *Justine*, dated 1791, is among our treasures."

"Are the books arranged by year?"

"They are."

"Then that is where I shall begin."

"Please, you can't—"

"Nothing will be disturbed, only examined. When I am finished, have a document prepared for me in which I testify to other German officers that you have cooperated to the maximum degree. I will sign it, and believe me, it will save you much trouble in the future."

"That would be very kind, sir."

At last he and the Reverend MacBurney were alone. *I have come a long way to meet you, you Scots bastard*, he thought. *Let's see what secrets I can tease out of you.*

MacBurney was signified by a manuscript on foolscap, beribboned in a decaying folder upon which *The Path to Jesus* had been scrawled in an ornate hand. It had been easy to find, in a drawer marked *1789*; he had delicately moved it to the tabletop, where, opened, it yielded its treasure, page after page in the round hand of the man of God himself, laden with swoops and curls of faded brown ink. In the fashion of the eighteenth century, he had made each letter a construction of grace

and agility, each line a part of the composition, by turning the feather quill to get the fat or the thin, these arranged in an artistic cascade. His punctuation was precise, deft, studied, just this much twist and pressure for a comma, that much for a (more plentiful) semicolon. It was if the penmanship itself communicated the glory of his love for God. All the nouns were capitalized, and the *S*'s and the *F*'s were so close it would take an expert to tell which was which; superscript showed up everywhere, as the man tried to shrink his burden of labor; frequently the word "the" appeared as "ye," as the penultimate letter often stood in for *th* in that era. It seemed the words on the page wore powdered periwigs and silk stockings and buckled, heeled shoes as they danced and pirouetted across the page.

Yet there was a creepy quality to it, too. Splats or droplets marked the creamy luster of the page— some of wine perhaps, some of tea, some of whatever else one might have at the board in the eighteenth century. Some of the lines were crooked, and the page itself felt off-kilter, as though a taint of madness had attended, or perhaps drunkenness, for in his dotage old MacBurney was no teetotaler, it was said.

More psychotic still were the drawings. As the librarian had noticed in his published account of the volume in *Treasures of the Cambridge Library*, the reverend occasionally yielded to artistic impulse. No, they weren't vulvas or naked boys or fornicators in pushed-up petticoats or farmers too in love with their cows. MacBurney's lusts weren't so visible or so nakedly expressed. But the fellow was a doodler after Jesus. He could not compel himself to be still, and so each page wore a garland of crosses scattered across its bottom, a Milky Way of holiness setting off the page number, or in the margins, and at the top silhouetted crucifixions, sketches of angels, clumsy reiterations of God's hand touching Adam's as the great Italian had captured upon that ceiling in Rome. Sometimes the devil himself appeared, horned and ambivalent, just a few angry lines not so much depicting as suggesting Lucifer's cunning and malice. It seemed the reverend was in anguish as he tried desperately to finish this last devotion to the Lord.

Basil got to work quickly. Here of all places was no place to tarry. He untaped the Riga Minox from his left shin, checked that the overhead light seemed adequate. He didn't need flash, as Technical Branch had come up with extremely fast 21.5 mm film, but it was at the same time completely necessary to hold still. The lens had been prefocused for 15 cm, so Basil did not need to play with it or any other knobs, buttons, controls. He took on faith that he had been given the best equipment in the world with which to do the job.

He had seven pages to photograph—2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, and 15—for the codebreaker had assured him that those would be the pages on which the index words would have to be located, based on the intercepted code.

In fact, Sade's *Justine* proved very helpful, along with a first edition of Voltaire's *Pensées* and an extra-illustrated edition of *Le Decameron de Jean Boccace*, published in five volumes in Paris in 1757, Ah, the uses of literature! Stacked, they gave him a brace against which he could sustain the long fuselage of the Minox. Beneath it he displayed the page. Click, wind, click again, on to the next one. It took so little time. It was too sodding easy. He thought he might find an SS firing squad just waiting for him, enjoying the little trick they'd played on him.

But when he replaced all the documents in their proper spots, retaped the camera to his leg, and emerged close to an hour later, there was no firing squad, just the nervous Marque, *le directeur*, waiting with the tremulous smile of the recently violated.

"I am finished, *monsieur le directeur*. Please examine, make certain all is appropriate to the condition it was in when I first entered an hour ago. Nothing missing, nothing misfiled, nothing where it should not be. I will not take offense."

The director entered the vault and emerged in a few minutes.

"Perfect," he said.

"I noted the Sade. Nothing else seemed necessary to our study. I am sure copies of it in not so rare an edition are commonly available if one knows where to look."

"I could recommend a bookseller," said *le directeur*. "He specializes in, er, the kind of thing you're looking for."

"Not necessary now, but possible in the future." "I had my secretary prepare a document, in both German and French."

Basil looked at it, saw that it was exactly as he had ordered, and signed his false name with a flourish.

"You see how easy it is if you cooperate, *monsieur*? I wish I could teach all your countrymen the same."

By the time Macht returned at four, having had to walk the last three blocks because of the traffic snarl, things were more or less functioning correctly at his banquet hall headquarters.

"We now believe him to be in a pinstripe suit. I have put all our watchers back in place in a state of high alert. I have placed cars outside this tangled-up area so that we can, if need be, get to the site of an incident quickly," Abel briefed him.

"Excellent, excellent," he replied. "What's happening with the idiot?"

That meant Boch, of course.

"He wanted to take hostages and shoot one every hour until the man is found. I told him that was probably not a wise move, since this fellow is clearly operating entirely on his own and is thus immune to social pressures such as that. He's now in private communication with SS headquarters in Paris, no doubt telling them what a wonderful job he has been doing. His men are all right, he's just a buffoon. But a dangerous one. He could have us all sent to Russia. Well, not me, ha-ha, but the rest of you."

"I'm sure your honor would compel you to accompany us, Walter."

"Don't bet on it, Didi."

"I agree with you that this is a diversion, that our quarry is completing his mission somewhere very near. I agree also that it is not a murder, a sabotage, a theft, or anything spectacular. In fact, I have no idea what it could be. I would advise that all train stations be double-covered and that the next few hours are our best for catching him."

"I will see to it."

In time Boch appeared. He beckoned to Macht, and the two stepped into the hallway for privacy.

"Herr Hauptmann, I want this considered as fair warning. This agent must be captured, no matter what. It is on record that you chose to disregard my advice and instead go about your duties at a more sedate pace. SS is not satisfied and

has filed a formal protest with Abwehr and others in the government. SS Reichsführer Himmler himself is paying close attention. If this does not come to the appropriate conclusion, all counterintelligence activities in Paris may well come under SS auspices, and you yourself may find your next duty station rather more frosty and rather more hectic than this one. I tell you this to clarify your thinking. It's not a threat, Herr Hauptmann, it's simply a clarification of the situation."

"Thank you for the update, Herr Hauptsturmführer. I will take it under advisement and—"

But at that moment Abel appeared, concern on his usually slack, doughy face. "Hate to interrupt, Herr Hauptmann, but something interesting."

"Yes?"

"One of Unterscharführer Ganz's sources is a French policeman on duty at the Bibliothèque Mazarine, on Quai de Conti, not far from here. An easy walk, in fact."

"Yes, the large complex overlooking the river. The cupola—no, that is the main building, the Institut de France, I believe."

"Yes, sir. At any rate, the report is that at about three p.m., less than twenty minutes after the bomb blast—"

"Flare is more like it, I hear," said Macht.

"Yes, Captain. In any event, a German official strode into the library and demanded to see the director. He demanded access to the rare book vault and was in there alone for an hour. Everybody over there is buzzing because he was such a commanding gentleman, so sure and smooth and charismatic."

"Did he steal anything?"

"No, but he was alone in the vault. In the end, it makes very little sense. It's just that the timing works out correctly, the description is accurate, and the personality seems to match. What British intelligence could—"

"Let's get over there, fast," said Macht.

This was far more than *monsieur le directeur* had ever encountered. He now found himself alone in his office with three German policemen, and none were in a good mood.

"So, if you will, please explain to me the nature of this man's request."

"It's highly confidential, Captain Macht. I had the impression that discretion was one of the aspects of the visit. I feel I betray a trust if I—"

"*Monsieur le directeur*," said Macht evenly, "I assure you that while I appreciate your intentions, I nevertheless must insist on an answer. There is some evidence that this man may not be who you think he was."

"His credentials were perfect," said the director. "I examined them very carefully. They were entirely authentic. I am not easy to fool."

"I accuse you of nothing," said Macht. "I merely want the story."

And *le directeur* laid it out, rather embarrassed.

"Dirty pictures," said Macht at the conclusion. "You say a German officer came in and demanded to check your vault for dirty pictures, dirty stories, dirty jokes, dirty limericks, and so forth in books of antiquarian value?"

"I told you the reason he gave me."

The two dumpy policemen exchanged glances; the third, clearly from another department, fixed him with beady, furious eyes behind pince-nez glasses and

somehow seemed to project both aggression and fury at him without saying a word.

"Why would I make up such a story?" inquired *le directeur*. "It's too absurd."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the third officer, a plumper man with pomaded if thinning hair showing much pate between its few strands and a little blot of moustache clearly modeled on either Himmler's or Hitler's. "We'll take ten of your employees to the street. If we are not satisfied with your answers, we'll shoot one of them. Then we'll ask again and see if—"

"Please," the Frenchman implored, "I tell the truth. I am unaccustomed to such treatment. My heart is about to explode. I tell the truth, it is not in me to lie, it is not my character."

"Description, please," said Macht. "Try hard. Try very hard."

"Mid-forties, well-built, though in a terriblefitting suit. I must say I thought the suit far beneath him, for his carriage and confidence were of a higher order. Reddish-blond hair, blue eyes, rather a beautiful chin—rather a beautiful man, completely at home with himself and—"

"Look, please," said the assistant to the less ominous of the policemen. He handed over a photograph.

"Ahhhh—well, no, this is not him. Still, a close likeness. Same square shape. His eyes are not as strong as my visitor's, and his posture is something rather less. I must say, the suit fits much better."

Macht sat back. Yes, a British agent had been here. What on Earth could it have been for? What in the Mazarine Library was of such interest to the British that they had sent a man on such a dangerous mission, so fragile, so easily discovered? They must have been quite desperate.

"And what name did he give you?" Abel asked.

"He said his name was… Here, look, here's the document he signed. It was exactly the name on his papers, I checked very closely so there would be no mistake. I was trying my hardest to cooperate. I know there is no future in rebellion."

He opened his drawer, with trembling fingers took out a piece of paper, typed and signed.

"I should have shown it to you earlier. I was nonplussed, I apologize, it's not often that I have three policemen in my office."

He yammered on, but they paid no attention, as all bent forward to examine the signature at the bottom of the page.

It said, *Otto Boch, SS Hauptsturmführer, SSRHSA, 13 rue Madeleine, Paris*.

Action This Day (cont'd.)

The train left Montparnasse at exactly five minutes after five p.m. As SS Hauptsturmführer Boch, Gestapo, 13 rue Madeleine, Paris, Basil did not require anything save his identification papers, since Gestapo membership conferred on him an elite status that no rail clerk in the Wehrmacht monitoring the trains would dare challenge. Thus he flew by the ticket process and the security checkpoints and the flash inspection at the first-class carriage steps.

The train eased into motion and picked up speed as it left the marshaling yards resolving themselves toward blur as the darkness increased. He sat alone amid a smattering of German officers returning to duty after a few stolen nights in Paris. Outside, in the twilight, the little toy train depots of France fled by, and inside, the vibration rattled and the grumpy men tried to squeeze in a last bit of relaxation before once again taking up their vexing duties, which largely consisted of waiting until the Allied armies came to blow them up. Some of them thought of glorious death and sacrifice for the fatherland; some remembered the whores in whose embraces they had passed the time; some thought of ways to surrender to the Americans without getting themselves killed, but also of not being reported, for one never knew who was keeping records and who would see them.

But most seemed to realize that Basil was an undercover SS officer, and no one wanted to brook any trouble at all with the SS. Again, a wrong word, a misinterpreted joke, a comment too politically frank, and it was off to that dreaded 8.8 cm antitank gun facing the T-34s and the Russians. All of them preferred their luck with the Americans and the British than with the goddamn Bolsheviks.

So Basil sat alone, ramrod straight, looking neither forward nor back. His stern carriage conveyed seriousness of purpose, relentless attention to detail, and a devotion to duty so hard and true it positively radiated heat. He permitted no mirth to show, no human weakness. Most of all, and hardest for him, he allowed himself to show no irony, for irony was the one attribute that would never be found in the SS or in any Hitlerite true believer. In fact, in one sense the Third Reich and its adventure in mass death was a conspiracy against irony. Perhaps that is why Basil hated it so much and fought it so hard.

Boch said nothing. There was nothing to say. Instead it was Macht who did all the talking. They leaned on the hood of a Citroën radio car in the courtyard of the Bibliothèque Mazarine.

“Whatever it was he wanted, he got it. Now he has to get out of town and fast. He knows that sooner or later we may tumble to his acquisition of Herr Boch’s identity papers, and at that point their usefulness comes to an abrupt end and they become absolutely a danger. So he will use them now, as soon as possible, and get as far away as possible.”

“But he has purposefully refused any Resistance aid on this trip,” said Abel.

“True.”

“That would mean that he has no radio contact. That would mean that he has no way to set up a Lysander pickup.”

“Excellent point, Walter. Yes, and that narrows his options considerably. One way out would be to head to the Spanish border. However, that’s days away, involves much travel and the danger of constant security checks, and he would worry that his Boch identity would have been penetrated.”

They spoke of Boch as if he were not there. In a sense, he wasn’t. *“Sir, the breech is frozen.” “Kick it! They’re almost on us!” “I can’t, sir. My foot fell off because of frostbite.”*

“He could, I suppose, get to Calais and swim to Dover. It’s only thirty-two kilometers. It’s been done before.”

“Even by a woman.”

“Still, although he’s a gifted professional, I doubt they have anyone quite that gifted. And even if it’s spring, the water is four or five degrees centigrade.”

“Yes,” said Macht. “But he will definitely go by water. He will head to the most accessible seaport. Given his talents for subversion, he will find some sly fisherman who knows our patrol boat patterns and pay the fellow to haul him across. He can make it in a few hours, swim the last hundred yards to a British beach, and be home with his treasure, whatever that is.”

“If he escapes, we should shoot the entire staff of the Bibliothèque Mazarine,” said Boch suddenly. “This is on them. He stole my papers, yes, he pickpocketed me, but he could have stolen anyone’s papers, so to single me out is rather senseless. I will make that point in my report.”

“An excellent point,” said Macht. “Alas, I will have to add that while he *could* have stolen anyone’s papers, he *did* steal yours. And they were immensely valuable to him. He is now sitting happily on the train, thinking of the jam and buns he will enjoy tomorrow morning with his tea and whether it will be a DSC or a DSO that follows his name from now on. I would assume that as an honorable German officer you will take full responsibility. I really don’t think we need to go shooting up any library staffs at this point. Why don’t we concentrate on catching him, and that will be that.”

Boch meant to argue but saw that it was useless. He settled back into his bleakness and said nothing.

“The first thing: which train?” Macht inquired of the air. The air had no answer and so he answered it himself. “Assuming that he left, as *le directeur* said, at exactly three forty-five p.m. by cab, he got to the Montparnasse station by four-fifteen. Using his SS papers, he would not need to stand in line for tickets or checkpoints, so he could leave almost immediately. My question thus has to be, what trains leaving for coastal destinations were available between four-fifteen and four forty-five? He will be on one of those trains. Walter, please call the detectives.”

Abel spoke into the microphone by radio to his headquarters and waited. A minute later an answer came. He conveyed it to the two officers.

“A train for Cherbourg left at four-thirty, due to arrive in that city at eleven-thirty p.m. Then another at—”

“That’s fine. He’d take the first. He doesn’t want to be standing around, not knowing where we are in our investigations and thus assuming the worst. Now, Walter, please call Abwehr headquarters and get our people at Montparnasse to check the gate of that train for late-arriving German officers. I believe they have to sign a travel manifest. At least, I always do. See if Hauptsturmführer—ah, what’s the first name, Boch?”

“Otto.”

“SS Hauptsturmführer Otto Boch, Gestapo, came aboard at the last moment.”

“Yes, sir.”

Macht looked over at Boch. “Well, Hauptsturmführer, if this pans out, we may save you from your 8.8 in Russia.”

“I serve where I help the Führer best. My life is of no consequence,” said Boch darkly.

“You may feel somewhat differently when you see the tanks on the horizon,” said Macht.

“It hardly matters. We can never catch him. He has too much head start. We can order the train met at Cherbourg, I suppose, and perhaps they will catch him.”

“Unlikely. This eel is too slippery.”

“Please tell me you have a plan.”

“Of course I have a plan,” said Macht.

“All right, yes,” said Abel, turning from the phone. “Hauptsturmführer Boch did indeed come aboard at the last moment.”

He sat, he sat, he sat. The train shook, rattled, and clacked. Twilight passed into lightless night. The vibrations played across everything. Men smoked, men drank from flasks, men tried to write letters home or read. It was not an express, so every half hour or so the train would lurch to a stop and one or two officers would leave, one or two would join. The lights flickered, cool air blasted into the compartment, the French conductor yelled the meaningless name of the town, and on and on they went, into the night.

At last the conductor yelled, “Bricquebec, twenty minutes,” first in French, then in German.

He stood up, leaving his overcoat, and went to the loo. In it, he looked at his face in the mirror, sallow in the light. He soaked a towel, rubbed his face, meaning to find energy somehow. Action this day. Much of it. A last trick, a last wiggle.

The fleeing agent’s enemy is paranoia. Basil had no immunity from it, merely discipline against it. He was also not particularly immune to fear. He felt both of these emotions strongly now, knowing that this nothingness of waiting for the train to get him where it had to was absolutely the worst.

But then he got his war face back on, forcing the armor of his charm and charisma to the surface, willing his eyes to sparkle, his smile to flash, his brow to furl romantically. He was back in character. He was Basil again.

“Excellent,” said Macht. “Now, Boch, your turn to contribute. Use that SS power of yours we all so fear and call von Choltitz’s adjutant. It is important that I be given temporary command authority over a unit called Nachtjagdgeschwader-9. Luftwaffe, of course. It’s a wing headquartered at a small airfield near the town of Bricquebec, less than an hour outside Cherbourg. Perhaps you remember our chat with its commandant, Oberst Gunther Scholl, a few days ago. Well, you had better hope that Oberst Scholl is on his game, because he is the one who will nab Johnny England for us.”

Quite expectedly, Boch didn’t understand. Puzzlement flashed in his eyes and fuddled his face. He began to stutter, but Abel cut him off.

“Please, Herr Hauptsturmführer. Time is fleeing.”

Boch did what he was told, telling his Uber- Hauptsturmführer that Hauptmann Dieter Macht, of Abwehr III-B, needed to give orders to Oberst Scholl of NJG-9 at Bricquebec. Then the three got into the Citroën and drove the six blocks back to the Hotel Duval, where they went quickly to the phone operator at the board. Though the Abwehr men were sloppy by SS standards, they were efficient by German standards.

The operator handed a phone to Macht, who didn’t bother to shed his trench coat and fedora.

“Hullo, hullo,” he said, “Hauptmann Macht here, call for Oberst Scholl. Yes, I’ll wait.”

A few seconds later Scholl came on the phone.

“Scholl here.”

“Yes, Oberst Scholl, it’s Hauptmann Macht, Paris Abwehr. Have things been explained to you?”

“Hello, Macht. I know only that by emergency directive from Luftwaffe Command I am to obey your orders.”

“Do you have planes up tonight?”

“No, the bomber streams are heading north tonight. We have the night off.”

“Sorry to make the boys work, Herr Oberst. It seems your seatmate is returning to your area. I need manpower. I need you to meet and cordon off the Cherbourg train at the Bricquebec stop. It’s due in at eleven-thirty p.m. Maximum effort. Get your pilots out of bed or out of the bars or brothels, and your mechanics, your ground crews, your fuelers. Leave only a skeleton crew in the tower. I’ll tell you why in a bit.”

“I must say, Macht, this is unprecedented.”

“Oberst, I’m trying to keep you from the Russian front. Please comply enthusiastically so that you can go back to your three mistresses and your wine cellar.”

“How did—”

“We have records, Herr Oberst. Anyhow, I would conceal the men in the bushes and inside the depot house until the train has all but arrived. Then, on command, they are to take up positions surrounding the train, making certain that no one leaves. At that point I want you to lead a search party from one end to the other, though of course start in first class. You know who you are looking for. He is now, however, in a dark blue pin-striped suit, double-breasted. He has a dark overcoat. He may look older, more abused, harder, somehow different from when last you saw him. You must be alert, do you understand?”

“Is he armed?”

“We don’t know. Assume he is. Listen here, there’s a tricky part. When you see him, you must not react immediately. Do you understand? Don’t make eye contact, don’t move fast or do anything stupid. He has an L-pill. It will probably be in his mouth. If he sees you coming for him, he will bite it. Strychnine—instant. It would mean so much more if we could take him alive. He may have many secrets, do you understand?”

“I do.”

“When you take him, order your officers to go first for his mouth. They have to get fingers or a plug or something deep into his throat to keep him from biting or swallowing, then turn him facedown and pound hard on his back. He has to cough out that pill.”

“My people will be advised. I will obviously be there to supervise.”

“Oberst, this chap is very efficient, very practiced. He’s an old dog with miles of travel on him. For years he’s lasted in a profession where most perish in a week. Be very careful, be very astute, be very sure. I know you can do this.”

“I will catch your spy for you, Macht.”

“Excellent. One more thing. I will arrive within two hours in my own Storch, with my assistant, Abel.”

“That’s right, you fly.”

“I do, yes. I have over a thousand hours, and you know how forgiving a Storch is.”

“I do.”

“So alert your tower people. I’ll buzz them so they can light a runway for the thirty seconds it takes me to land, then go back to blackout. And leave a car and driver to take me to the station.”

“I will.”

“Good hunting.”

“Good flying.”

He put the phone down, turned to Abel, and said, “Call the airport, get the plane flight-checked and fueled so that we can take off upon arrival.”

“Yes, sir.”

“One moment,” said Boch.

“Yes, Herr Hauptsturmführer?”

“As this is a joint SS-Abwehr operation, I demand to be a part of it. I will go along with you.”

“The plane holds only two. It loses its agility when a third is added. It’s not a fighter, it’s a kite with a tiny motor.”

“Then I will go instead of Abel. Macht, do not fight me on this. I will go to SS and higher if I need to. SS must be represented all through this operation.”

“You trust my flying?”

“Of course.”

“Good, because Abel does not. Now, let’s go.”

“Not quite yet. I have to change into my uniform.”

Refreshed, Basil left the loo. But instead of turning back into the carriage and returning to his seat, he turned the other way, as if it were the natural thing to do, opened the door at the end of the carriage, and stepped out onto the rattling, trembling running board over the coupling between carriages. He waited for the door behind him to seal, tested for speed. Was the train slowing? He felt it was, as maybe the vibrations were further apart, signifying that the wheels churned slightly less aggressively, against an incline, on the downhill, perhaps negotiating a turn. Then, without a thought, he leaped sideways into the darkness.

Will I be lucky? Will the famous St. Florian charm continue? Will I float to a soft landing and roll through the dirt, only my dignity and my hair mussed? Or will this be the night it all runs out and I hit a bridge abutment, a tree trunk, a barbed-wire fence, and kill myself?

He felt himself elongate as he flew through the air, and as his leap carried him out of the gap between the two cars the slipstream hit him hard, sending his arms and legs flying wildly.

He seemed to hang in the darkness for an eternity, feeling the air beat him, hearing the roar of both the wind and the train, seeing nothing.

Then he hit. Stars exploded, suns collapsed, the universe split atomically, releasing a tidal wave of energy. He tasted dust, felt pain and a searing jab in his back, then high-speed abrasion of his whole body, a piercing blow to his left hand,

had the illusion of rolling, sliding, falling, hurting all at once, and then he lay quiet.

Am I dead?

He seemed not to be.

The train was gone now. He was alone in the track bed, amid a miasma of dust and blood. At that point the pain clamped him like a vise and he felt himself wounded, though how badly was yet unknown. Could he move? Was he paralyzed? Had he broken any bones?

He sucked in oxygen, hoping for restoration. It came, marginally.

He checked his hip pocket to see if his Browning .380 was still there, and there indeed it was. He reached next for his shin, hoping and praying that the Minox had survived the descent and landfall.

It wasn't there! The prospect of losing it was so tragically immense that he could not face it and exiled the possibility from his brain as he found the tape, still tight, followed it around, and in one second touched the aluminum skin of the instrument. Somehow the impact of the fall had moved it around his leg but had not sundered, only loosened, the tape. He pried it out, slipped it into his hip pocket. He slipped the Browning into his belt in the small of his back, then counted to three and stood.

His clothes were badly tattered, and his left arm so severely ripped he could not straighten it. His right knee had punched through the cheap pinstriped serge, and it too had been shredded by abrasions. But the real damage was done to his back, where he'd evidently encountered a rock or a branch as he decelerated in the dust, and it hurt immensely. He could almost feel it bruising, and he knew it would pain him for weeks. When he twisted he felt shards of glass in his side and assumed he'd broken or cracked several ribs. All in all, he was a mess.

But he was not dead, and he was more or less ambulatory.

He recalled the idiot Luftwaffe colonel on the ride down.

"Yes, our squadron is about a mile east of the tracks, just out of town. It's amazing how the boys have dressed it up. You should come and visit us soon, *monsieur*. I'll take you on a tour. Why, they've turned a rude military installation in the middle of nothing into a comfortable small German town, with sewers and sidewalks and streets, even a gazebo for summertime concerts. My boys are the best, and our wing does more than its share against the Tommy bombers."

That put the airfield a mile or so ahead, given that the tracks had to run north–south. He walked, sliding between trees and gentle undergrowth, through a rather civilized little forest, actually, and his night vision soon arrived through his headache and the pain in his back, which turned his walk into Frankenstein's lumber, but he was confident he was headed in the right direction. And very shortly he heard the approaching buzz of a small plane and knew absolutely that he was on track.

The Storch glided through the air, its tiny engine buzzing away smoothly like a hummingbird's heart. Spindly from its overengineered landing gear and graceless on the ground, it was a princess in the air. Macht held it at 450 meters, compass heading almost due south. He'd already landed at the big Luftwaffe base at Caen for a refueling, just in case Bricquebec proved outside the Storch's 300- kilometer range. He'd follow the same route back, taking the same fuel precautions. He

knew: in the air, take nothing for granted. The western heading would bring him to the home of NJG-9 very soon, as he was flying throttle open, close to 175 km per hour. It was a beautiful little thing, light and reliable; you could feel that it wanted to fly, unlike the planes of the Great War, which had mostly been underpowered and overengineered, so close to the maximum they seemed to want to crash. You had to fight them to keep them in the air, while the Storch would fly all night if it could.

A little cool air rushed in, as the Perspex window was cranked half down. It kept the men cool; it also kept them from chatting, which was fine with Macht. It let him concentrate and enjoy, and he still loved the joy of being airborne.

Below, rural France slipped by, far from absolutely dark but too dark to make out details.

That was fine. Macht, a good flier, trusted his compass and his watch and knew that neither would let him down, and when he checked the time, he saw that he was entering NJG-9's airspace. He picked up his radio phone, clicked it a few times, and said, "Anton, Anton, this is Bertha 9-9, do you read?"

The headset crackled and snapped, and he thought perhaps he was on the wrong frequency, but then he heard, "Bertha 9-9, this is Anton—I have you; I can hear you. You're bearing a little to the southwest. I'd bear a few degrees to the north."

"Excellent, and thanks, Anton."

"When I have you overhead, I'll light a runway."

"Excellent, excellent. Thanks again, Anton."

Macht made the slight correction and was rewarded a minute later with the sudden flash to illumination of a long horizontal V. It took seconds to find the line into the darkness between the arms of the V which signified the landing strip. He eased back on the throttle, hearing the engine rpm's drop, watched his airspeed indicator fall to seventy-five, then sixty-five, eased the stick forward into a gentle incline, came into the cone of lights, and saw grass on either side of a wide tarmac built for the much larger twin-engine Me110 night fighters, throttled down some more, and alit with just the slightest of bumps.

When the plane's weight overcame its decreasing power, it almost came to a halt, but he revved back to taxi speed, saw the curved roofs of hangers ahead, and taxied toward them. A broad staging area before the four arched buildings, where the fighters paused and made a last check before deploying, was before him. He took the plane to it, pivoted it to face outward-bound down the same runway, and hit the kill switch. He could hear the vibrations stop, and the plane went silent.

Basil watched the little plane taxi to the hangers, pause, then helpfully turn itself back to the runway. Perfect. Whoever was flying was counting on a quick trip back and didn't want to waste time on the ground.

He crouched well inside the wire, about 300 meters from the airplane, which put him 350 meters from the four hangars. He knew, because Oberst Scholl had told him, that recent manpower levies had stripped the place of guards and security people, all of whom were now in transit to Russia, where their bodies were needed urgently to feed into the fire. As for the patrol dogs, one had died of food poisoning and the other was so old he could hardly move, again information provided by Scholl. The security of NJG-9's night fighter base was purely an

illusion; all nonessential personnel had been stripped away for something big in Russia.

In each hangar Basil could see the prominent outlines of the big night fighters, each cockpit slid open, resting at the nose-up, tail-down, fifteen-degree angle on the buttress of the two sturdy landing gears that descended from the huge bulge of engine on the broad wings. They were not small airplanes, and these birds wore complex nests of prongs on the nose, radar antennae meant to guide them to the bomber stream 7,600 meters above. The planes were all marked by the stark black Luftwaffe cross insignia, and their metallic snouts gleamed slightly in the lights, until the tower turned them off when the Storch had come to a safe stop.

He watched carefully. Two men. One wore a pilot's leather helmet but not a uniform, just a tent of a trench coat that hadn't seen cleaning or pressing in years. He was the pilot, and he tossed the helmet into the plane, along with an unplugged set of headphones. At the same time he pulled out a battered fedora, which looked like it had been crushed in the pocket of the coat for all the years it hadn't been pressed or cleaned.

No. 2 was more interesting. He was SS, totally, completely, avatar of dark style and darker menace. The uniform—jodhpurs and boots under a smart tunic, tight at the neck, black cap with death's head rampant in silver above the bill at a rakish angle—was more dramatic than the man, who appeared porky and graceless. He was shakier than the pilot, taking a few awkward steps to get his land legs back and drive the dizziness from his mind.

In time a Mercedes staff car emerged from somewhere in the darkness, driven by a Luftwaffer, who leaped out and offered a snappy salute. He did not shake hands with either, signifying his enlisted status as against their commissions, but obsequiously retreated to the car, where he opened the rear door.

The two officers slid in. The driver resumed his place behind the wheel, and the car sped away into the night.

"Yes, that's very good, Sergeant," said Macht as the car drove in darkness between the tower and administration complex on the left and the officers' mess on the right. The gate was a few hundred meters ahead. "Now, very quickly, let us out and continue on your way, outside the gate, along the road, and back to the station at Bricquebec, where your commanding officer waits."

"Ah, sir, my instructions are—"

"Do as I say, Sergeant, unless you care to join the other bad boys of the Wehrmacht on an infantry salient on some frozen hill of dog shit in Russia."

"Obviously, sir, I will obey."

"I thought you might."

The car slipped between two buildings, slowed, and Macht eased out, followed by Boch. Then the car rolled away, speeded up, and loudly issued the pretense that it was headed to town with two important passengers.

"Macht," hissed Boch, "what in the devil's name are you up to?"

"Use your head, Herr Hauptsturmführer. Our friend is not going to be caught like a fish in a bucket. He's too clever. He presumes the shortest possible time between his escape from Paris and our ability to figure it out and know what name he travels under. He knows he cannot make it all the way to Cherbourg and steal or hire a boat. No indeed, and since that idiot Scholl has conveniently plied him

with information about the layout and operational protocols of NJG-9, as well as, I'm certain, a precise location, he has identified it as his best opportunity for an escape. He means, I suppose, to fly to England in a 110 like the madman Hess, but we have provided him with a much more tempting conveyance—the low, slow, gentle Storch. He cannot turn it down, do you see? It is absolutely his best—his only—chance to bring off his crazed mission, whatever it is. But we will stop him. Is that pistol loaded?"

Boch slapped the Luger under the flap of his holster on his ceremonial belt.

"Of course. One never knows."

"Well, then, we shall get as close as possible and wait for him to make his move. I doubt he's a quarter kilometer from us now. He'll wait until he's certain the car is gone and the lazy Luftwaffe tower personnel are paying no attention, and then he'll dash to the airplane, and off he goes."

"We will be there," said Boch, pulling his Luger.

"Put that thing away, please, Herr Hauptsturmführer. It makes me nervous."

Basil began his crawl. The grass wasn't high enough to cover him, but without lights, no tower observer could possibly pick him out flat against the ground. His plan was to approach on the oblique, locating himself on such a line that the plane was between himself and the watchers in the tower. It wouldn't obscure him, but it would be more data in a crowded binocular view into an already dark zone, and he hoped that the lazy officer up there was not really paying that much attention, instead simply nodding off on a meaningless night of duty far from any war zone and happy that he wasn't out in the godforsaken French night on some kind of insane catch-the-spy mission two kilometers away at the train station.

It hurt, of course. His back throbbed, a bruise on his hip ached, a pain between his eyes would not go away, and the burns on knee and arm from his abrasions seemed to mount in intensity. He pulled himself through the grass like a swimmer, his fear giving him energy that he should not have had, the roughness of his breath drowning out the night noise. He seemed to crawl for a century, but he didn't look up, because, as if he were swimming the English Channel, if he saw how far he had to go, the blow to his morale would be stunning.

Odd filaments of his life came up from nowhere, viewed from strange angles so that they made only a bit of sense and maybe not even that. He hardly knew his mother, he had hated his father, his brothers were all older than he was and had formed their friendships and allegiances already. Women that he had been intimate with arrived to mind, but they did not bring pride and triumph, only memories of human fallibility and disappointment, theirs and his; and his congenital inability to remain faithful to any of them, love or not, always revealed its ugliness. Really, he had had a useless life until he signed with the crown and went on his adventures—it was a perfect match for his adventurer's temperament, his casual cruelty, his cleverness, his ruthlessness. He had no problem with any of it: the deceit, the swindles, the extortion, the cruel manipulation of the innocent, even the murder. He had killed his first man, a corrupt Malaysian police inspector, in 1935, and he remembered the jump of the big Webley, the smell of cordite, the man's odd deflation as he surrendered to gravity. He thought it would have been so much more; it was, really, nothing, nothing at all, and he supposed that his own death, in a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, a few weeks, or next year or

the year after, would mean as little to the man who killed him, probably some Hanoverian conscript with a machine pistol firing blindly into the trees that held him.

So it would go. That is the way of the wickedness called war. It eats us all. In the end, it and it alone is the victor, no matter what the lie called history says. The god of war, Mars the Magnificent and Tragic, always wins.

And then he was there.

He was out of grass. He had come to the hardpacked earth of the runway. He allowed himself to look up. The little plane was less than fifty meters away, tilted skyward on its absurdly high landinggear struts. He had but to jump to the cockpit, turn it on, let the rpm's mount, then take off the brakes, and it would pull itself forward and up, due north, straight on till morning.

Fifty meters, he thought. *All that's between myself and Blighty.*

He gathered himself for the crouched run to it. He checked: *Pistol still with me, camera in my pocket, all nice and tidy.* He had one last thing to do. He reached into his breast pocket and shoved his fingers down, probing, touching, searching. Then he had it. He pulled the L-pill out, fifty ccs of pure strychnine under a candy shell, and slid it into his mouth, back behind his teeth, far in the crevice between lip and jawbone. One crunch and he got to Neverland instantly.

"There," whispered Boch. "It's him, there, do you see, crouching just off the runway." They knelt in the darkness of the hangar closest to the Storch.

Macht saw him. The Englishman seemed to be gathering himself. *The poor bastard is probably exhausted. He's been on the run in occupied territory over four days, bluffed or brazened his way out of a dozen near misses.* Macht could see a dark doublebreasted suit that even from this distance looked disheveled.

"Let him get to the plane," said Macht. "He will be consumed by it, and under that frenzy we approach, keeping the tail and fuselage between ourselves and him."

"Yes, I see."

"You stand off and hold him with the Luger. I will jump him and get this"—he reached into his pocket and retrieved a pipe—"into his mouth, to keep him from swallowing his suicide capsule. Then I will handcuff him and we'll be done."

They watched as the man broke from the edge of the grass, running like an athlete, with surprising power to his strides, bent double as if to evade tacklers, and in a very little time got himself to the door of the Storch's cockpit, pulled it open, and hoisted himself into the seat.

"Now," said Macht, and the two of them emerged from their hiding place and walked swiftly to the airplane.

His Luger out, Boch circled to the left to face the cockpit squarely from the left side while Macht slid along the right side of the tail boom, reached the landing struts, and slipped under them.

"*Halt!*" yelled Boch, and at precisely that moment Macht rose, grabbed the astonished Englishman by the lapels of his suit, and yanked him free of the plane. They crashed together, Macht pivoting cleverly so that his quarry bounced off his hip and went into space. He landed hard, far harder than Macht, who simply rode him down, got a knee on his chest, bent, and stuffed his pipe in the man's throat.

The agent coughed and heaved, searching for leverage, but Macht had wrestled many a criminal into captivity and knew exactly how to apply leverage.

"Spit it out!" he cried in English. "Damn you, spit it out!" He rolled the man as he shook him, then slapped him with a hard palm between the shoulder blades, and in a second the pill was ejected like a piece of half-chewed, throat-obstructing meat, riding a propulsive if involuntary spurt of breath, and arched to earth, where Macht quickly put a heavy shoe on it, crushing it.

"Hands up, Englishman, goddamn you," he yelled as Boch neared, pointing the Luger directly into the face of the captive to make the argument more persuasively.

There was no fight left in him, or so it seemed. He put up his hands.

"Search him, Macht," said Boch.

Macht swooped back onto the man, ran his hands around his waist, under his armpits, down his legs.

"Only this," he said, holding aloft a small camera. "This'll tell us some things."

"I think you'll be disappointed, old man," said the Englishman. "I am thinking of spiritual enlightenment, and my photographs merely propose a path."

"Shut up," bellowed Boch.

"Now," said Macht, "we'll—"

"Not so fast," said Boch.

The pistol covered both of them.

It happened so fast. He knew it would happen fast, but not this fast. Halt! came the cry, utterly stunning him with its loudness and closeness, and then this demon rose from nowhere, pulled him—the strength was enormous—from the plane, and slammed him to the ground. In seconds the L-pill had been beaten from him. Whoever this chap was, he knew a thing or two.

Now Basil stood next to him. Breathing hard, quite fluttery from exhaustion, and trying not to face the enormity of what had just happened, he tried to make sense, even as one thing, his capture, turned into another—some weird German command drama.

The SS officer had the Luger on both of them.

"Boch, what do you think you are doing?" said the German in the trench coat.

"Taking care of a certain problem," said the SS man. "Do you think I care to have an Abwehr bastard file a report that will end my career and get me shipped to Russia? Did you think I could permit *that*?"

"My friends," said Basil in German, "can't we sit down over a nice bottle of schnapps and talk it out? I'm sure you two can settle your differences amicably."

The SS officer struck him across the jaw with his Luger, driving him to the ground. He felt blood run down his face as the cheek began to puff grotesquely.

"Shut your mouth, you bastard," the officer said. Then he turned back to the police officer in the trench coat.

"You see how perfectly you have set it up for me, Macht? No witnesses, total privacy, your own master plan to capture this spy. Now I kill the two of you. But the story is, he shot you, I shot him. I'm the hero. Moreover, whatever treasure of intelligence that little camera holds, it comes to me. I will weep pious tears at your funeral, which I'm sure will be held under the highest honors, and I will express my profound regrets to your unit as it ships out to Russia."

"You lunatic," said Macht. "You disgrace."

“Sieg Heil,” said the SS officer as he fired. He missed.

This was because his left ventricle was interrupted mid-beat by a .380 bullet fired a split second earlier by Basil’s .380 Browning in the Abwehr agent’s right hand. Thus Boch jerked and his shot plunged off into the darkness.

The SS officer seemed to melt. His knees hit first—not that it mattered, because he was already quite dead, and he toppled to the left, smashing his nose, teeth, and pince-nez.

“Excellent shot, old man,” said Basil. “I didn’t even feel you remove my pistol.”

“I knew he would be up to something. He was too cooperative. Now, sir, tell me what I should do with you. Should I arrest you and earn the Iron Cross, or should I give you back your pistol and camera and watch you fly away?”

“Even as a philosophic exercise, I doubt I could argue the first proposition with much force,” said Basil.

“Give me an argument, then. You saved my life, or rather your pistol did, and you saved the lives of the men in my unit. But I need a justification. I’m German, you know, with that heavy, irony-free, ploddingly logical mind.”

“All right, then. I did not come here to kill Germans. I have killed no Germans. Actually the only one who has killed Germans, may I point out, sir, is you. Germans will die, more and more, and Englishmen and Russians and even the odd Frog or two. Possibly an American. That can’t be stopped. But I am told that the message on the film, which is completely without military value, by the way, has a possibility of ending the war by as much as two years sooner than expected. I don’t know about you, sir, but I am sick to death of war.”

“Fair enough. I am, too. Here, take this, and your camera, and get out of here. There’s the plane.”

“Ah, one question, if I may?”

“Yes?”

“How do you turn it on?”

“You don’t fly, do you?”

“Not really, no. At least, not *technically*. I mean I’ve watched it, I’ve flown in them, I know from the cinema that one pulls the stick up to climb, down to descend, right and left, with pedals—”

“God, you are something, I must say.”

And so the German told him where the ignition was, where the brakes were, what groundspeed he had to achieve to go airborne, and where the compass was for his due north heading.

“Don’t go over 150 meters. Don’t go over 150 kilometers per hour. Don’t try anything fancy. When you get to England, find a nice soft meadow, put her down, and just before you touch down, switch off the magnetos and let the plane land itself.”

“I will.”

“And remember one thing, Englishman. You were good—you were the best I ever went after. But in the end I caught you.”

The War Room

“Gentlemen,” said Sir Colin Gubbins, “I do hope you’ll forgive Captain St. Florian his appearance. He is just back from abroad, and he parked his airplane in a tree.”

“Sir, I am assured the tree will survive,” said Basil. “I cannot have *that* on my conscience, along with so many other items.”

Basil’s right arm was encased in plaster of Paris; it had been broken by his fall from the tree. His torso, under his shirt, was encased in strong elastic tape, several miles of it, in fact, to help his four broken ribs mend. The swelling on his face, from the blow delivered by the late SS Hauptsturmführer Boch, had gone down somewhat, but it was still yellowish, corpulent, and quite repulsive, as was the blue-purple wreath that surrounded his bloodshot eye. He needed a cane to walk, and of all his nicks, it was the abraded knee that turned out to hurt the most, other than the headache, constant and throbbing, from the concussion. In the manly British officer way, however, he still managed to wear his uniform, even if his jacket was thrown about his shoulders over his shirt and tie.

“It looks like you had a jolly trip,” said the admiral.

“It had its ups and downs, sir,” said Basil.

“I think we know why we are here,” said General Cavendish, ever irony-free, “and I would like to see us get on with it.”

It was the same as it always was: the darkish War Room under the Treasury, the prime minister’s lair. That great man’s cigar odor filled the air, and too bad if you couldn’t abide it. A few posters, a few maps, a few cheery exhortations to duty, and that was it. There were still four men across from Basil, a general, an admiral, Gubbins, and the man of tweed, Professor Turing.

“Professor,” said Sir Colin, “as you’re just in from the country and new to the information, I think it best for you to acquire the particulars of Captain St. Florian’s adventures from his report. But you know his results. He succeeded, though he got quite a thrashing in the process. I understand it was a close-run thing. Now you have had the results of his mission on hand at Bletchley for over a week, and it is time to see whether or not St. Florian’s blood, sweat, and tears were worth it.”

“Of course,” said Turing. He opened his briefcase, took out the seven Minox photos of the pages from *The Path to Jesus*, reached in again, and pulled out around three hundred pages of paper, whose leaves he flipped to show the barons of war. Every page was filled with either numerical computation, handwriting on charts, or lengthy analysis in typescript.

“We have not been lazy,” he said. “Gentleman, we have tested everything. Using our decryptions from the Soviet diplomatic code as our index, we have reduced the words and letters to numerical values and run them through every electronic bombe we have. We have given them to our best intuitive code breakers—it seems to be a gift, a certain kind of mind that can solve these problems quickly, without much apparent effort. We have analyzed them up, down, sideways, and backwards. We have tested the message against every classical code known to man. We have compared it over and over, word by word, with the printed words of the Reverend MacBurney. We have measured it to the thousandth of an inch, even tried to project it as a geometric problem. Two PhDs from Oxford even tried to find a pattern in the seemingly random arrangement of

the odd crosslike formations doodled across all the pages. Their conclusion was that the *seemingly* random pattern was *actually* random."

He went silent.

"Yes?" said Sir Colin.

"There is no secret code within it," the professor finally said. "As any possible key to a book code, it solves nothing. It unlocks nothing. There is no secret code at all within it."

The moment was ghastly.

Finally Basil spoke.

"Sir, it's not what I went through to obtain those pages that matters. I've had worse drubbings in football matches. But a brave and decent man has put himself at great risk to get them to you. His identity would surprise you, but it seems there are some of them left on the other side. Thus I find it devastating to write the whole thing off and resign him to his fate for nothing. It weighs heavily."

"I understand," said Professor Turing. "But you must understand as well. Book codes work with books, don't they? Because the book is a closed, locked universe—that is the point, after all. What makes the book code work, as simple a device as it is, is, after all, that it's a book. It's mass-produced on Linotype machines, carefully knitted up in a bindery, festooned with some amusing imagery for a cover, and whether you read it in Manchester or Paris or Berlin or Kathmandu, the same words will be found on the same places on the same page, and thus everything makes sense. This, however, is not a book but a manuscript, in a human hand. Who knows how age, drinking, debauchery, tricks of memory, lack of stamina, advanced syphilis or gonorrhea may have corrupted the author's effort? It will almost certainly get messier and messier as it goes along, and it may in the end not resemble the original at all. Our whole assumption was that it would be a close enough replica to what MacBurney had produced twenty years earlier for us to locate the right letters and unlock the code. Everything about it is facsimile, after all, even to those frequent religious doodles on the pages. If it were a good facsimile, the growth or shrinkage would be consistent and we could alter our calculations by measurable quantities and unlock it. But it was not to be. Look at the pages, please, Captain. You will see that even among themselves, they vary greatly. Sometimes the letters are large, sometimes small. Sometimes a page contains twelve hundred letters, sometimes six hundred, sometimes twentythree hundred. In certain of them, it seems clear that he was drunk, pen in hand, and the lines are all atumble, and he is just barely in control. His damnable lack of consistency dooms any effort to use this as a key to a code contained in the original. I told you it was a long shot."

Again a long and ghastly silence.

"Well, then, Professor," said Gubbins, "that being the case, I think we've taken you from your work at Bletchley long enough. And we have been absent from our duties as well. Captain St. Florian needs rest and rehabilitation. Basil, I think all present will enthusiastically endorse you for decoration, if it matters, for an astonishing and insanely courageous effort. Perhaps a nice promotion, Basil. Would you like to be a major? Think of the trouble you could cause. But please don't be bitter. To win a war you throw out a million seeds and hope that some of them produce, in the end, fruit. I'll alert the staff to call—"

"Excuse me," said Professor Turing. "What exactly is going on here?"

"Ah, Professor, there seems to be no reason for us to continue."

"I daresay you chaps have got to learn to listen," he said.

Basil was slightly shocked by the sudden tartness in his voice.

"I am not like Captain St. Florian, a witty ironist, and I am not like you three high mandarins with your protocols and all that elaborate and counterfeit bowing and scraping. I am a scientist. I speak in exact truth. What I say is true and nothing else is."

"I'm rather afraid I don't grasp your meaning, sir," said Gubbins stiffly. It was clear that neither he nor the other two mandarins enjoyed being addressed so dismissively by a forty-year-old professor in baggy tweeds and wire-frame glasses.

"I said listen. *Listen!*" repeated the professor, rather rudely, but with such intensity it became instantly clear that he regarded them as intellectual inferiors and was highly frustrated by their rash conclusion.

"Sir," said General Cavendish, rather icily, "if you have more to add, please add it. As General Sir Colin has said, we have other duties—"

"*Secret* code!" interrupted the professor.

All were stupefied.

"Don't you see? It's rather brilliant!" He laughed, amused by the code maker's wit. "Look here," he said. "I shall try to explain. What is the most impenetrable code of all to unlock? You cannot do it with machines that work a thousand times faster than men's brains."

Nobody could possibly answer.

"It is the code that pretends to be a code but isn't at all."

More consternation, impatience, yet fear of being mocked.

"Put another way," said the professor, "the code is the absence of code."

No one was going to deal with that one.

"Whoever dreamed this up, our Cambridge librarian or an NKVD spymaster, he was a smart fellow. Only two people on earth could know the meaning of this communication, though I'm glad to say they've been joined by a third one. Me. It came to me while running. Great for clearing the mind, I must say."

"You have the advantage, Professor," said Sir Colin. "Please, continue."

"A code is a disguise. Suppose something is disguised as itself?"

The silence was thunderous. "All right, then. Look at the pages. *Look at them*!"

Like chastened schoolboys, the class complied.

"You, St. Florian, you're a man of hard experience in the world. Tell me what you see."

"Ah…" said Basil. He was completely out of irony. "Well, ah, a messy scrawl of typical eighteenth-century handwriting, capitalized nouns, that sort of thing. A splotch of something, perhaps wine, perhaps something more dubious."

"Yes?"

"Well, I suppose, all these little religious symbols."

"Look at them carefully."

Basil alone did not need to unlimber reading spectacles. He saw what they were quickly enough.

"They appear to be crosses," he said.

"Just crosses?"

“Well, each of them is mounted on a little hill. Like Calvary, one supposes.”

“Not like Calvary. There were three on Calvary. This is only one. Singular.”

“Yes, well, now that I look harder, I see the hill isn’t exactly a hill. It’s segmented into round, irregular shapes, very precisely drawn in the finest line his nib would permit. I would say it’s a pile of stones.”

“At last we are getting somewhere.”

“I think I’ve solved your little game, Professor,” said General Cavendish. “That pile of stones, that would be some kind of road marker, eh? Yes, and a cross has been inserted into it. Road marker, that is, marking the path, is that what it is? It would be a representation of the title of the pamphlet, *The Path to Jesus*. It is an expression of the central meaning of his argument.”

“Not what it *means*. Didn’t you hear me? Are you deaf?”

The general was taken aback by the ferocity with which Professor Turing spoke.

“I am not interested in what it means. If it means something, that meaning is different from the thing itself. I am interested in what it *is*. Is, not means.”

“I believe,” said the admiral, “a roadside marker is called a cairn. So that is exactly what it is, Professor. Is that what you—”

“Please take it the last step. There’s only one more. Look at it and tell me what it is.”

“Cairn… cross,” said Basil. “It can only be called a cairncross. But that means nothing unless …”

“Unless what?” commanded Turing.

“A name,” said Sir Colin.

Hello, hello, said Basil to himself. He saw where the path to Jesus led.

“The Soviet spymaster was telling the Cambridge librarian the name of the agent at Bletchley Park so that he could tell the agent’s new handler. The device of communication was a 154-year-old doodle. The book-code indicators were false, part of the disguise.”

“So there is a man at Bletchley named Cairncross?” asked Sir Colin.

“John Cairncross, yes,” said Professor Turing. “Hut 6. Scotsman. Don’t know the chap myself, but I’ve heard his name mentioned—supposed to be first-class.”

“John Cairncross,” said Sir Colin.

“He’s your Red spy. Gentlemen, if you need to feed information to Stalin on Operation Citadel, you have to do it through Comrade Cairncross. When it comes from him, Stalin and the Red generals will believe it. They will fortify the Kursk salient. The Germans will be smashed. The retreat from the East will begin. The end will begin. What was it again? ‘Home alive in ’45,’ not ‘Dead in heaven in ’47.’”

“Bravo,” said Sir Colin.

“Don’t *bravo* me, Sir Colin. I just work at sums, like Bob Cratchit. Save your bravos for that human fragment of the Kipling imagination sitting over there.”

“I say,” said Basil, “instead of a *bravo*, could I have a nice whisky?”