

An excerpt from **THE DARKEST HOUR** by Tony Schumacher

Epigraph:

“We do not yet know what will happen in France or whether the French resistance will be prolonged, both in France and in the French Empire overseas. The French Government will be throwing away great opportunities and casting away their future if they do not continue the war in accordance with their Treaty obligations, from which we have not felt able to release them. The House will have read the historic declaration in which, at the desire of many Frenchmen, and of our own hearts, we have proclaimed our willingness to conclude at the darkest hour in French history a union of common citizenship. However matters may go in France or with the French Government or with another French Government, we in this island and in the British Empire will never lose our sense of comradeship with the French people. If we are now called upon to endure what they have suffered we shall emulate their courage...

I expect that the battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire.”

--Winston Churchill, House of Commons, June 18, 1940

CHAPTER ONE

It was the dream with the blood.

So much blood.

Pouring from a wound he couldn't find, covering his hands, making them so wet he couldn't open his tunic. No matter how hard he tried to grip, his hands slipped and splashed in the blood.

Around him crowded grey faces, leaning and towering, looking down as he looked up, slipping and splashing, coughing and choking, he looked down for the wound and then back up at the faces.

He surfaced in his bed.

John Henry Rossett listened to the rain lashing against the window. Panic over, sleep long deserted, he listened to the rain outside and pretended.

He pretended nothing had changed and that the world was the one he'd known back when he was a boy. A boy curled under the covers listening to his father toss damp coal on the kitchen fire after a night shift. On mornings like this, if he closed his eyes and tried, he could hear the work boots, studs clattering across the backyard with the clang of the dirty metal bucket coming to rest on the cobbles.

Long ago now.

Before the blood.

Before the grey faces.

A gust elbowed the window and more rain rattled on the glass like tossed gravel. Rossett shivered and opened half an eye to look at the clock on the wooden chair next to his bed; half past four. He realised it wasn't that he'd woken early, because he hadn't woken up. He would have had to sleep to wake up, and what he'd managed for the last four and a half hours wasn't sleep.

He reached out of the bed and switched off the alarm before it had a chance to disturb the rest of the house, then pulled his bare arm back into the warmth.

He sighed, rolled onto his back, sighed again, stared at the ceiling for a moment and then threw back the blankets. He got out of the bed and pulled on the old dressing gown that had been on top of the bedclothes as moral support. He wrapped it around him and shuddered with the cold and then coughed a sticky wet bark full of mornings and cigarettes.

He walked to the window and lit a cigarette from the pack in his dressing gown and took his first drag.

His breath felt heavy. When he ran his tongue around his mouth, his teeth and his tongue felt thick and sticky. He coughed again, this time dipping his head, trying to catch what was shifting but failing.

Nobody was moving in the street outside. His little Austin sat under the lamp, looking like it was about to be swept away by the water rushing down the gutter. Rossett wondered if he'd pushed the driver's side window all the way up or if he'd have a wet arse on his drive to work again.

He dragged on the cigarette. The end flared orange in the glass and looked like a distant explosion that was only inches away. His tired eyes tried to focus and he blinked away some sleep and heard a rattly wet cough through the thin wall. It was coming from the room next door, and Rossett decided he needed to get going before the boarding house came alive and a queue formed on the landing.

It wasn't easy being a Police Sergeant attached to the SS in London 1946, and Rossett didn't want to make it any harder than it already was.

He dressed and then silently smoked another cigarette, sitting on the wooden stool by the window, looking at the floor, cast in a shadow of the streetlamp. Eventually, he rose with a sigh and went downstairs to the small kitchen at the back of the house. His landlady was already up, and a fat, sweating tea pot sat waiting on the cast iron stove behind her, grey steam whispering from its spout. She nodded as he entered and silently poured him a cup and set it on the table.

"I've only got toast and dripping," she eventually said as Rossett reached for the tea spoon before adding, "There is no sugar or milk either, so don't bother asking."

He placed the tea spoon on the table next to the cup and wrapped his hand around the brew, more for the warmth than anything else. He wouldn't drink it, he never did; morning tea didn't agree with midnight scotch.

"I don't see what the point is of having a police sergeant live in your house if he can't get you things," she said as she sat down across the table from him. "I barely have coke for the stove, let alone food to cook in it."

"The point is that he pays you rent; it's not his job to steal food for you, as well," Rossett said flatly, blinking through the smoke of yet another cigarette.

"Trust me to get the only law abiding copper in London."

Rossett half smiled at her and she smiled back, laughter lines and eyes coming alive beautifully.

One New Year's Eve, three sherries the wrong side of sober, she had told him she would wait "*all my life for my Ronnie.*"

Ronnie hadn't come back from Dunkirk.

That was the night Rossett realised he was jealous of a dead man.

They'd danced at midnight, in each other's arms for one song on the parlour radio, eyes closed, hearts open for five minutes.

He didn't drink the tea. He stood and she fetched his heavy raincoat from the hook on the back of the door. It was still damp from the night before, and he shivered as it was smoothed across his shoulders and then pulled across his chest.

He tossed what was left of his cigarettes onto the table. "Fry those for now," he said as he walked out the door, "I'll see you tonight."

He sat in the car and looked at the folders lying on the front seat.

The job.

The damn job, waiting next to him, eager to get going, already sitting in the car.

Rossett wondered about the grey faces in his dream, he couldn't remember when they had first started to appear.

He looked at the files again, sighed and then started the car.

The window on the Austen had stayed up for once, so his drive across the city wasn't as grim as usual. The few private cars left on the roads had barely a sip of fuel, so the journey only took him twenty minutes through a black and white London that was still half asleep and confused in fog.

As he approached the marked house, he saw three army trucks and a black Rover police car parked just out of sight on the corner. He checked his watch, five thirty five, everything on schedule.

He parked behind the third lorry, nodding to the eyes that watched him pull up. A couple nodded in return but most stayed huddled in heavy coats and capes, arms folded like surly schoolboys outside a headmaster's office, heads sagging with just snatched sleep.

He got out of the car and walked past the trucks and banged on the misted up window of the Rover. The door opened almost immediately, and Rossett leant down to speak to the occupants.

His boss, Brewer, and a uniformed inspector he didn't know nodded in the half light of the yellow bulb in the back of the car. A uniformed sergeant Rossett vaguely recalled from a previous operation climbed out the front of the car and smoothed his tunic, nodding at Rossett.

"We okay to go, sir?" Rossett addressed Brewer directly.

"Whatever you think best, sergeant,," replied Brewer, who was pretending, quite badly, to read some papers on a clipboard in an effort to stay out of the operation.

"I'll check that the men are ready to roll," said Rossett, already closing the door so as to prevent objection.

Rossett flicked his head to the sergeant. Although Brewer didn't respond--he seldom did--the inspector was supposed to monitor Rossett's work as a courtesy to the Met, but in truth he only turned up under protest and seldom even spoke to the Germans.

"If you don't mind, sergeant, I'll stay out of your work as much as I can. I'm sure I can trust you not to get us, or for that matter, me, into any bother?" That was all he'd said when they first met.

And for the past nine months, that was how things had stayed.

Rossett and the sergeant stepped across the road as a pack of cigarettes and some matches came out. Rossett shielded the flame with his hands as the other sergeant held the match for him to draw on. Once their cigarettes were lit, they walked the short distance from the car to the corner of the street. Rossett blew the smoke from his mouth and, staying close to the corner of the building, sneaked a glance around like a sniper. He looked into Caroline Street, their eventual destination, not wanting to be seen, quickly ducking back after he'd checked the target house.

"Anyone moving?" said the sergeant.

"No."

"It's a bloody awful morning for this sort of work."

"I've never known a good one for this sort of work."

"I don't know how you do it."

"Someone has to; it may as well be me," Rossett replied, checking his watch.

"When I was a nipper, there was a family of them used to live in our street; they weren't a bad sort, kept to themselves. Not sure I could be all heavy handed if I met them today. I used to play football with their lad, we was about the same age..." The uniformed sergeant spoke almost to himself as he looked at the end of his cigarette and picked a piece of imaginary tobacco off the tip of his tongue.

Rossett stared at him for a moment and then flicked his own cigarette towards the gutter; it fell short and rolled in a half circle hissing to a halt in a puddle.

"We get in, we hit them hard and fast. Tell your lads lots of shouting and banging, and don't let them settle or start to argue. If any of them gives any backchat, just give them a crack." This time Rossett stared at the sergeant as he jabbed his thumb in the direction of Caroline Street. "They will offer all sorts of things,--money, jewels, even food to be left in the house if you give them a chance. So you make sure you let your men know, if anyone takes anything he will be on that cattle wagon faster than the Jew who tried to bribe him. If everything goes to plan, you'll be drinking tea in the canteen in an hour and all this will be forgotten. Understood?"

The sergeant dropped his cigarette and ground it out, suddenly aware of the tiny swastika badge on the lapel of Rossett's raincoat.

"Yes, of course. I'll pass the word," he said, turning towards the trucks. Rossett watched him go and dug his hands into his coat pockets, very much aware of the tiny swastika badge himself.

CHAPTER TWO

It took another five minutes for the two SS officers to turn up, their Mercedes contrasting with the battered old Austin and Rover as it eased to a certain stately stop.

When the Germans arrived in London, it hadn't taken them long to requisition the best of everything Scotland Yard had to offer. The best cars, the best secretaries, the best offices and the best officers.

That was how Rossett had ended up sitting across the desk from the new assistant commissioner and the senior liaison officer for Einsatzgruppen Six. Prior to that day he'd been working the crime desk over in Wapping, earning a reputation as a top thief taker.

The Oberst had sat and silently read his file as Rossett stood wondering what was going on. The assistant commissioners had shaken his head and given him a filthy look when, after five minutes, Rossett politely coughed in the hope it would jump start something.

When the German had finally looked up, ten minutes later, Rossett was rocking backwards and forwards on his heels and looking at the ceiling, his patience with the whole affair long exhausted.

"Are you in a hurry to leave, sergeant?"

"I've important work to do, sir."

"You do, and you are going to do it with us from now on. Report to the Office of Jewish Affairs at Charing Cross tomorrow at nine."

And that was that. No interview, no chance to ask questions, no chance to turn it down, no chance, and no choice.

When he got back to Wapping, he'd found his desk already cleared and the last of the lads lingering at the station steadfastly avoiding his gaze. He realised that news travelled faster than central London traffic and he stuck his head into his DI's office as a courtesy,

"Come in, Rossett, take a seat."

DI Rimmer had been waiting for him. On the desk had sat two glasses of scotch, a rare commodity since the invasion, especially the Red Label that sat between them now. Rossett recalled having seen similar bottles being carried into the station evidence store a few days earlier, seized from the docks, if he remembered rightly. He wondered how many were left there.

"You've heard, sir?"

"We've all heard, within ten minutes of your leaving, they'd cleared your desk. For a moment, I thought you'd been up to something you shouldn't. Scotch?"

"No, thank you."

"No of course." The DI took the bottle from his desk and slowly started to pour Rossett's glass back into it. The glass rattled slightly as he held it against the top of the bottle and embarrassed them both.

"I'm moving to the Office of Jewish Affairs, at Charing Cross."

"They were Gestapo who turned up here; I thought it best to let them get on with it." The DI didn't look at Rossett as he poured. Rossett wondered if the old man was scared, watching his words almost as closely as he watched the whisky, making sure not to spill too much of either.

"I'll reallocate my case files."

"It's already done." The DI put the now empty glass back onto the desk and screwed the bottle top onto the scotch. He licked his finger and finally looked up at Rossett before looking down again and tapping the same finger against his own glass. "Shame to waste it."

"Indeed."

"Murder to come by a decent drop now."

"Difficult to come by anything decent."

"Did you request the move, Rossett?"

"First I heard was this morning."

"Are you... do you... well do you know what they are up to?"

"I think so."

"And are you happy with it?"

"It's been a while since I've been happy with anything."

"Yes." Another sip of scotch. "You are going to be doing a difficult job; one wonders why they chose you?"

Rossett stared at Rimmer; eventually he tilted his head slightly and then adjusted his gaze onto the scotch.

“Maybe they thought they could trust me?”

Rimmer followed his eyes and then took the bottle and placed it into his drawer, out of sight of anyone passing the office window.

“Will you be having a leaving drink with the chaps?”

“No.”

“Probably for the best.”

Rimmer suddenly looked old. Rossett watched as he seemed to shrink into the alcoholic, the whole station knew him to be. He’d once been a good boss, respected, until the bottle had gotten hold of him. Now he seldom ventured from his desk. Rossett imagined his panicking when the Gestapo had marched in to clear his property. He felt sorry for him; retirement was a few years off, if it came at all. Rimmer had the look of someone who wouldn’t last long holding up to the new wind that was blowing through the job, and the country.

“I’d best be off, sir.”

“Hmm.” Rimmer stared at the glass and waved his hand as if swatting a fly in slow motion.

Rossett stood and turned to leave, as he reached the door, the old man piped up one last time,

“Be careful Rossett, you’ll be doing a difficult job.”

“Mostly admin, I expect, sir.”

“No. They’ll make sure your hands will be dirty.”

“I don’t think so, sir, I expect they’ll...”

The old man raised his hand and finally looked Rossett in the eye, for the first time in a long time.

“Your hands will be dirty sergeant, take my word for it.”

Rossett nodded, turned and left the office. The constables’ writing room was deserted. He walked past the empty parade room and along a silent corridor, a busy station had turned into the Marie Celeste, except this time there was no mystery as to where the crew had gone.

Rossett knew they were choosing to avoid him. He checked his desk, now stripped bare, the only sign he had been there was the dent in the old leather chair he'd sat on for the last few years.

As he left the station, even the cleaners stared at the floor, polishing like their lives depended on it.

"Maybe my hands are dirty already," he thought as he dropped the flap on the enquiry desk behind him for the last time.

Rossett had found himself working under Major Ernst Koehler. Initially, they'd kept their distance, but over time, Rossett had come to like his new boss, with his easy smile and laid back charm.

One night, when they had been attending a planning conference in Manchester, Koehler had shown Rossett pictures of his wife and daughter who were back in Germany.

They'd sat and drank in the hotel bar and Koehler had told Rossett he'd been involved in the invasion of France.

"Maybe it was me who chased you across the channel?" Koehler laughed.

Rossett had stared at the beer in front of him and the German had known enough to let the matter drop. After some time Koehler had leaned across the table and chinked his glass against Rossett's.

"War does terrible things to men, John." Koehler paused then lifted his glass and both men had drunk together and then softly placed their glasses on the table.

"I heard about your wife and son, I'm sorry." Koehler spoke, looking towards Rossett but not at him. He fixed his eyes on a distant part of the room, unsure of how the Englishman would react.

Rossett nodded silent thanks and took out a cigarette and put it in his mouth before shifting in the chair as he searched for his matches. Koehler beat him to a box and slid his across the table. Rossett picked them up, took his time opening them and finally drew one out and lit it.

"Do you have family?" Rossett asked, more as a courtesy to break the silence than a genuine enquiry.

"Yes, back in Germany, Lotte, my wife and Ava my daughter, she is eight, I miss them terribly." Koehler pulled out his wallet, opened it and then proudly leant forward so that Rossett could see the picture inside.

Rossett barely glanced then twitched a smile and nodded before Koehler leant back in his seat, suddenly aware that his statement seemed inappropriate in the face of Rossett's loss.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have..." Koehler said as he closed his wallet "Don't be sorry. What happened wasn't your fault; you didn't plant the bomb."

"No, but, well it is thoughtless, it must be difficult enough for you without people like me sticking photos under your nose."

"Just because I lost my family doesn't mean everyone else has to forget theirs," Koehler nodded at the logic and took another drink before signalling the waitress across the room by holding up two fingers and pointing at his pint. He swallowed the beer and licked his lips before putting down the glass.

"Do you have photos of your family?"

"No, they were taken from me in a POW camp."

"Maybe I can get them back for you? They'll be somewhere. I'm sure if I..."

"They were ripped up and thrown on the floor." Rossett stared flatly at Koehler as he spoke, smoke spiralling up from his hand that rested on the arm of the chair.

"Why?"

Rossett shrugged, "Because some guard thought it would be funny, I suppose. Like you said, war does terrible things to a man."

"They died before you got out, didn't they?"

Rossett nodded.

"I read it in your file, before you came. That bomb, it was--I don't know how to say it--it was..." Koehler looked for the word until Rossett filled in the blank.

"A massacre."

"A massacre, it was a massacre." Koehler paused again, looking for a way to push the conversation on. "What about your other family?"

"I don't have any. I lost my father before the war and my mother in the invasion. I've a brother in Liverpool, but we don't speak."

"Why?"

"Because of this." Rossett tapped the Swastika on his lapel and shrugged.

"You should maybe try speaking to him again; it's been a while now, people have started to get used to us."

"We didn't have much to say to each other before the war, we've even less now. I don't need him, I don't need anyone anymore. I just get by on my own."

"You should come out in London with me, maybe we can see a band or a show?"

Rossett shook his head. "I don't do that sort of thing, I don't, I don't do anything anymore. My life is simple." Rossett shrugged at the simplicity of his statement and then shook his head again. "I'm like a monk." He managed a half smile at Koehler who smiled back, somewhat sadly.

The waitress appeared and placed two full pints off a tray onto the table in front of them. Rossett ignored her and Koehler flashed her a charming smile that caused the waitress to smile back and tap at her hair with her free hand.

"Keep the change." Koehler flashed the smile again and placed some coins on her tray and then watched her walk away from the table before turning back to Rossett. "Is that why you came to work for us?"

"Is what why?"

"The resistance bomb, killing your family, is that why you came to us?"

"No."

"Why did you choose to work for us then?"

"I didn't, I just did as I was told, I just do my job. If I'm told to work for the Germans I work for the Germans." Rossett shook his head like he'd never considered the point before. "I just do my job," he added, as much for his own hearing as Koehler's.

Koehler slid a pint towards Rossett before picking up his own.

“Well John, all I can say is that I’m glad you do. I like working with you, you do it well. There are not many men in London who could do what you do as well as you. I salute you.” Koehler lifted his full pint and then took a drink.

Rossett watched him and then leant forward to stub out his cigarette in the half full ashtray that sat between them before speaking softly,

“Why do you do it?” he asked, causing Koehler to pause from his drinking and to look at him over the top of the pint glass. “You’re a soldier; this isn’t fighting, this is management, dealing with a problem. Why do you do it?”

Koehler finished his gulp and then placed the pint down on the table. He leant forward and wiped a hand across his top lip to remove a line of froth that had settled there. The German realised that he was slightly drunk so he paused before speaking and breathed deeply, considering his words.

“I fought in France, like I said, then across the rest of fucking Europe. I made it as far as Moscow.”

“I know, the Knights Cross.” Rossett pointed at his own throat to signify where Koehler wore his medal when in dress uniform.

“Knights Cross with Oak Leaves,” Koehler corrected with mock seriousness, pointing his own wagging finger at Rossett, who smiled in return.

“With oak leaves,” Rossett parroted, picking up his pint.

“I made it to Moscow. It was crazy there, John; you haven’t seen anything like it. Winter was setting in, the whole city had broken down, people were eating corpses they found in the street. Can you believe it? Corpses in the street? Animals, they are fucking animals.”

“Maybe they were desperate?”

“Nobody knew what they were doing. We’d charged halfway across Russia and ended up stuck in this shit hole waiting for the weather to get better when one day I get told to start rounding up Jews. I think they were just looking for a job to give us. The men were bored, no fighting, no training; you know what soldiers are like if they haven’t got something to do?”

Rossett nodded.

“Well I set up teams, started dragging in Rabbis plus Russian community leaders and civil servants.” Koehler leant forward as he spoke, warming to the subject. “I realised, sooner than wander around the city rounding up two or three Jews, I could, with a little organisation, get

the bastards to walk into the fucking hotel we were staying in and hand themselves over to us. And to make matters certain, I told the Russians to let it be known that I would give a bag of potatoes and a loaf of bread for every Jew to whoever handed them in. The next day the queue was around the block. Half the fucking Jews the Russians brought me were dead already, but I didn't care. It kept my men busy and the bosses off my back."

"You did well." Rossett nodded as he took a drink.

"I did brilliantly," Koehler replied as he pulled a cigarette out of Rossett's pack. He put the cigarette in his mouth and the tip bobbed up and down as he continued to speak. "I did so fucking brilliantly I got pulled out of Moscow and sent back to Berlin. People notice good work, John. You should know that, you got the Victoria Cross." Koehler lit his cigarette and gasped as the smoke went down, he watched his exhalation a moment and then continued through squinting eyes. "Next thing I know I'm in an office being told I'm coming to London to 'continue my great work with the Jewish Question.' I couldn't believe my luck, I swear to god, I nearly shit when I was told Himmler himself had taken notice of what I'd managed in Moscow. Apparently, my unit had rounded up five times more than the nearest unit. I got a promotion and this job, and... to cap it all... I got to work with you, my friend." Koehler beamed across the table at Rossett who found himself smiling back.

"Lucky me,".

"So, just make sure you remember," Koehler leant forward again and picked up his pint, "If you fuck up and I get sent back to Russia I'll kill you before I go, Victoria Cross or no Victoria Cross, understand?" Koehler winked and Rossett smiled back.

It had been Koehler who convinced Rossett to join the British Nazi Party. At first, Rossett had refused, telling his boss that he had no interest in politics, that he didn't see how it would make any difference in his work. But Koehler had quietly sat at his desk one afternoon and explained that if he wished to remain with the Office of Jewish Affairs, it was best that he joined.

"If you don't, things may become difficult; you may have to leave here, you may have to leave the police. If you have no job, you'll be forced to join the National Labour Service-- poor money, poor food, and always the chance that you'll be sent out east to work on the defences against the Russians. Just sign the papers, Rossett, don't be a fool."

“I don’t have to be in the party to stay in the police? I can change departments.”

“Nobody will have you; you’ll be out, especially after doing this job, your hands are dirty now. Just sign the papers, it’s only a formality.”

“Your hands are dirty,” thought Rossett. The phrase seemed to crop up more and more, but mean less and less the dirtier they got.

And so he’d signed, and a week later he’d stood in front of the South East Area Commander of the SS as he’d pinned the tiny swastika onto his lapel and handed him his party membership card. When the German had raised his arm and said “Heil Hitler!” Rossett had stiffened, but then did the same, embarrassed to hear the medals on his suit banging together as he did so.

Once he was in the party, things had changed, ever so slightly, but change they had. He’d started to find that sometimes when he shopped, his ration tickets hadn’t been ripped out by the shopkeeper. One day, the butcher had slyly winked and passed his money back as he took his shopping. Rossett had returned later that evening to pay for the goods and to explain that such favours would not be accepted.

“But Mr Rossett, if I can make you happy with little things, well, you know, we can make each other happy, look after each other, you know what I mean?”

The butcher had tapped his nose and slid something wrapped in paper towards Rossett, who noted the blood soaking through and leaving a trail on the counter. He quietly shook his head and whispered,

“I am the law, I live by the law. I do what’s right. Mark my words and remember them.”

He had then turned on his heel and left the shop, not sure if what he had said was true or not.

That night, he’d not slept a wink, and it was that night he’d opened the scotch again.

Other things had changed. He was given the Austen and fuel that allowed for some personal use. Occasionally, he would drive out to Southend and stare at the sea. One afternoon, he had taken Mrs Ward, his landlady, and they sat on the beach drinking tea from a thermos.

After some time, he’d noticed he was crying and that she was holding his hand.

They never spoke of it again, nor had they ever again taken that drive out to the sea. It was forgotten, like so many other things.

“Sergeant Rossett, good morning.” Koehler reached across and shook Rossett’s hand and then gestured to the other man who had stepped out of the Mercedes “This is Schmitt of the Gestapo, just arrived from Paris. I’ve brought him along to see how we do things here. He’ll be working with us for a while.”

Rossett nodded to Schmitt who ignored him and peered around the corner of the still silent street.

“How many are in the building?” Schmitt asked, his thick German accent contrasting sharply with Koehler’s excellent English.

“About eighty,” Rossett replied.

“About?” Schmitt turned and raised an eyebrow. “You don’t know exactly?”

“Eighty-four. I’ve every birth date, set of fingerprints and photo in the car, plus all the relevant documentation if you would like to see it?”

Schmitt smiled and nodded to Koehler, who beamed like a proud father, and then went back to looking around the corner.

“Do we expect any trouble from the other residents of the street?”

“No, but in case there is we’ve brought along twenty Home Defence Troops, armed with clubs. We’ll get them to form up as soon as the Bobbies enter the house.”

The Home Defence Troops were mostly made up of ex British Union of Fascists members and a few thugs who just liked cracking heads. Many had been interned at the start of the war, and they had quickly joined up as soon as Mosley had moved into Downing Street. The incoming Germans had organised them with uniforms and, at first, a mostly German command structure.

They tended to be unarmed and, in some areas, worked alongside the regular police, their sky blue uniforms with red shoulder flashes contrasting sharply with the sombre serge of the British Bobbies.

The further north you went the fewer Home Defence Troops there seemed to be. North of the demarcation line, which stretched from Liverpool to Newcastle, they were virtually

nonexistent. North of the D line, the country was governed by the Northern Assembly that operated under the British Nazi Party. It was demilitarised in theory, but Rossett knew that there were a few thousand German troops up in Glasgow; he'd seen the trains full of them one night leaving Nine Elms Goods Yard. Rumours abounded of another base centred on the Luftwaffe station in Lossiemouth. And, no doubt, there was a German naval base guarding what was left of the British Navy stuck in Rosyth.

The Germans had gotten everywhere.

The Home Defence Troops command structure had gradually evolved to accommodate ex British officers who had come over to the cause, and, as time passed, they had become more disciplined, and many new members had joined for the extra rations and security the organisation brought.

Rossett had noticed that the Germans still hadn't found time to arm the group, though; old suspicions died hard.

"Are we ready to proceed, Sergeant? I have an important meeting at nine," Schmitt said, still peeping around the corner.

"I'll have the men fall in." Rossett nodded to the uniformed police sergeant who was now standing some ten feet away at the back of one of the wagons. He, in turn, whistled softly and the HDT and police started to climb down from the back of the trucks. Everyone was silent, aware that the two Germans had arrived. From the area car, the two Inspectors appeared. Both happy to let Rossett deal with the situation, they crossed the road to watch proceedings from afar.

Rossett watched them and silently shook his head; only his hands dirty again.

He walked to the rapidly falling in groups of Bobbies and troops.

"You've all been briefed boys. Fast and quick, understood?"

Some nodded whilst others drew truncheons. The HDT troops shouldered pick handles and made ready to run into the middle of the road.

"On my whistle." Rossett held up his police whistle and stood at the head of the group. He waited a moment for the silence to fall again, took a deep breath and blew hard.

CHAPTER THREE

Rossett ran at the head of the group, the sound of their studded boots echoing off the high buildings either side of the narrow street. He arrived at the door and signalled for the first policeman to kick it in; it crashed aside almost immediately. The first few Bobbies rushed past him and he turned to watch the rest and the HDT. All was going well, just as it had done so many times before.

He took a moment and then entered the hallway, waving the coppers up the stairs, urging them on, keeping them moving.

“Come on boys! Speed and noise! Come on!” Rossett shouted, and, in return, the officers around him started to shout also, urging the house occupants to get out of bed and show themselves.

Rossett stepped aside as blue clad Valkyries charged past him and up to the startled families, who, bleary eyed, were being dragged from their beds by hair and hands. It always surprised him how easy it was to motivate the men around him; maybe it was the thrill of the hunt.

Rossett turned when the door behind him in the hallway opened. He hadn't expected anyone to be in the small front room at this time of the morning. He spun and found Levi Cohen, one of the community elders whom Rossett had been liaising with for the last few months, peeking around the door frame.

Rossett pushed open the door fully and saw that the old man was standing in tattered grey long johns. Across his shoulders was an even older threadbare dressing gown. It struck Rossett that it was the first time he'd seen Cohen without a Star of David sewn on his chest.

He pushed past the old man to look into the room. On a makeshift bed lay Cohen's wife, Martha, and two other old people. He realised they'd been sleeping near to the fire place for warmth.

"What is happening here?" Cohen was angry now, pulling his dressing gown across his pigeon chest and watching as people were being herded down the stairs by the police officers. Many of the Jews had no shoes or outdoor clothing and were complaining loudly. One passed with blood running down his face from a scalp wound, inflicted as encouragement to come quietly, the fresh red the only colour in the hallway.

"Get up and get outside." Rossett spoke to the people in the bed pointing first at them and then the street. He then turned to Cohen. "You are being moved to more suitable accommodation; get outside."

"But we have only just arrived; you told us to move here!"

"Get outside Levi; get your people outside quickly."

"You keep moving us to smaller and smaller places. How are we supposed to put up with this? Can we not have a moment to gather our things? The old people, they have no shoes!" Cohen was pointing along the hallway and out the front door to the street where the Jews were being corralled by the HDT with their pick axe handles.

"I'll organise for their things to be brought along; get outside," Rossett said calmly. He glanced back to the bed where the others remained, sitting up, but not getting out.

Striding across the room, he kicked at the broken wooden bed base.

"Move!"

One of the old women glared at Rossett, thrusting out her chin.

"You should be ashamed!" Her heavily accented voice rang out. "I come here to get away from men like you! You are a disgrace!"

A young bobby appeared in the doorway, buzzing with adrenaline, "Shall I move 'em sir?" Wild eyed and eager.

"Yes," Rossett replied, quietly turning away from the doorway. Cohen followed him.

"We did as you said. You told us we would be safe here, you told us if we moved here we would be left alone, and now you move us again?"

"Get outside, Levi." This time Rossett spoke softly.

"How many times? How many times will you lie to us? Move us? How many times?" The old man was shouting now.

"I'm just doing my job."

"Doing your job? You call this a job?" Cohen grabbed Rossett's arm and yanked him back towards the room.

Rossett head-butted the old man, who dropped to the floor, dazed but still conscious.

Behind them, Martha screamed as the young bobby dragged her from the bed. Other constables ran back to the house to assist their colleague, and quickly the room filled with shouting policemen, two of whom lifted Cohen and dragged him away. The old man looked confused for a moment and then his eyes found focus; he stared at Rossett as he was taken outside, a treacherous goblet of blood hanging from his nose. His eyes fixed on Rossett's as he was pushed into the crowd and the waiting arms of his people. The blood dropped from his nose onto his long-johns and the old man let it fall, red on grey.

It was Rossett who looked away first.

It had started to rain again as the wagons reversed around the corner. The older Jews were lifted by the younger ones up into the backs of the vehicles as two policemen stood either side and counted heads. Rossett stayed in the doorway and lit a cigarette, watching the houses opposite. He'd heard there had been shots fired at police during a clearance in Manchester a few weeks before. The Germans had come down hard on that street. The last thing Rossett wanted was for some locals to take umbrage while he had the two Germans watching.

All he noticed was a few curtains flicking open, then closing just as quickly. It seemed everyone was turning a blind eye and things were going to pass quietly.

His forehead stung from the head butt and he gingerly touched it before sucking on the cigarette again.

It hurt.

The Jews were squeezed onto the back of the trucks, with canvas sheets eventually rolled down to cover their cargo from prying eyes, out of sight and out of mind.

Rossett waved two policemen across to him.

“You guard the back and front of the house, and don’t let anyone in till I come back, understand?”

“Does that include the Germans, sarge?”

“That includes Hitler; no one goes in there till I get back.”

One broke away to make his way around to the rear whilst the other stepped into the hallway out of the rain.

“Outside,” said Rossett, “nobody goes in, including you.”

The bobby stepped out and pulled what was left of the door closed behind him. As the trucks fired up, Rossett nodded to the uniformed sergeant.

“Get half of your lads in the empty wagon; follow us down to the rail yard. I’ll need them to help load the train.”

The sergeant nodded, almost shell shocked, then took a deep breath and started issuing orders as Rossett walked back to his car; he’d almost made it when he heard Koehler call his name. When he turned, he saw the two Germans walking towards him.

“Well done, sergeant, an excellent operation.” Schmitt was smiling now. He held out his hand for Rossett to shake.

“It seemed to go well. We still have to load the trains, but I doubt they’ll give us any problems.”

“They will do as they are told. They understand when they are met with someone who is determined to do his job.” Schmitt turned to Koehler. “I do enjoy early morning sport; thank you for the entertainment.”

Koehler smiled and nodded to Rossett.

“Another satisfied customer.”

“I’d best be going, don’t want to keep the trucks waiting too long..”

“Of course, we don’t want any of those Jews dying before we get them on the train!” Schmitt laughed a little too loudly at his own joke.

Rossett climbed into the Austen.

“I’ll see you back at the office,” he said to Koehler “Unless you are coming down to the train?”

“No, you deal with it.” Koehler turned from the car and headed to his Mercedes. Schmitt gave Rossett a wave and followed Koehler. It occurred to Rossett that Koehler never went to the station to see the Jews being loaded. He watched the Germans get into the car and thought for a moment about how Koehler contrasted with Schmitt, who was now laughing and pointing at the truck. Koehler looked across to him and nodded his head. Rossett did the same thing back and watched them drive away.

“Were they happy with how things went?” Rossett jumped as the uniformed inspector leant in through his fallen down window.

“Yes.”

“Will you let them know what station we are from? It’s nice to stay on Jerry’s side, you understand?”

“Everything will be in my report.”

“Anytime, sergeant,” said the inspector as he walked briskly towards the area car, which sat waiting, its engine already running with a belch of smoke trapped behind it in the cold air.

Brewer lifted a hand to Rossett from the back as it pulled away from the kerb. The trucks pulled out of the street in front of him, and he gunned the little Austen and fell in behind them to make the journey across to Nine Elms goods yard.

The German sentries on the yard already had the barrier up as they approached. They waved the convoy straight through with a friendly half-hearted salute and a shouted joke to the police hanging onto the back of the third truck. Although the rain had petered out to a drizzle, there was now a strong wind blowing across the tracks and the wide open spaces offered no shelter as the trucks bounced across the yard towards the waiting goods train.

Rossett always arranged for these operations to happen before the place came to life in the morning, a nightmare taking place while the rail workers had sweet dreams. He’d told the Ministry of Railways that he needed the yard in the early mornings so that it didn’t interfere with their schedules, but he knew it was because he didn’t want to be seen pushing and prodding Jews into rail cars by too many judgmental eyes.

The freight train was already waiting for them when they arrived. It would have travelled all night, Glasgow to London, stopping along the way at Preston, Liverpool and Birmingham to collect the Jews who were no longer useful. Rossett wondered when the trains would run out of cargo. He lit another cigarette and rubbed his forehead again, trying not to think about who would be chosen to fill the train the day it ran out of Jews.

He stayed in the Austin, about forty feet from the blackness of the freight car, watching as the trucks with the Jews backed up to the wooden ramp. Two railway workers quickly made themselves scarce as the police and HDT climbed down from their own transport and formed a human cordon to channel the Jews.

Rossett looked around the yard; no civilians in sight. He considered whether to pull on his hat but decided against it as a gust of wind shoved the little car and made it rock. Across the yard, the men waiting by the rear of the trucks glanced across over for the okay to start work so they could get out of the rain as fast as possible.

Everyone wanted it to be over for their own reasons.

Rossett sighed and got out of the Austin and made his way towards the waiting troops, who were squinting towards him through the drizzle. As Rossett passed the other freight cars he could make out shouts and the banging of fists against the heavy timber doors. He'd once made the mistake of stopping and listening, a mistake he wouldn't make again.

"We okay to crack on, Sarge?" said the Bobby nearest the canvas flap at the rear of one of the wagons.

"Who is counting?"

"I am, Sarge, and Kelly on the ramp," said another policeman who held up his notebook.

Rossett nodded to the first policeman who started to untie the ropes holding down the canvas. Once the flap was open and the tail gate dropped, the bobby stepped back, expecting the Jews to jump down.

They didn't.

Koehler had once said they were like *"Rats in a tipping barrel, creeping further into the dark away from the light."*

Apart from the wind and the flapping of the newly untied canvas, there was no other sound until Rossett took his cigarette out of his mouth and shouted,

"Come on, we'll be here all day, get them off!"

Almost immediately the men came to life and started to shout into the wagon. A couple of them jumped up onto the bed of the truck and disappeared into the darkness. Soon, the first of the Jews, men, women and pensioners, started to tumble down like leaves in autumn, into the waiting arms of the HDT and police.

The wind whipped everyone in the yard, almost taking the sound of the count away with it.

"One...two...three..." as the first three shuffled along, confused and holding themselves with arms folded tightly, two old ladies and a teenage girl, their nightdresses providing little comfort in the rain and wind. Slowly the others started to jump down unaided, the younger ones helping their parents and grandparents. Some were crying whilst others just looked around sheepishly and confused. *"Fourteen, fifteen."* Nobody tried to make a dash for cover, nobody tried to fight back. They just did as they were told, the way they always did.

Rossett wondered if he would go so quietly, *"Twenty seven, twenty eight."* He liked to think he would fight back, throw a punch or two or make a dash for it. Then again, maybe he'd just do as he was told as, well.

He didn't know.

He hoped he'd never find out.

"Thirty eight, thirty nine."

Along the track, Rossett could see the steam engine reversing back to pick up the carriages. It would have been refilling with water on one of the sidings. Smoke and sparks belched from its chimney and the two red lights hanging at its rear looked like the devil's eyes closing in on a soul. He shuddered with the cold and turned back to the Jews. *"Fifty six, fifty seven."* He glanced up to the freight car. The loaded Jews huddled away from the doors, some gathering straw and stuffing it into their clothing for warmth. Rossett wondered if they would get blankets at the port. He doubted some of the older ones would survive without them.

A German officer was walking towards them from the guards' van at the rear of the train, his leather trench coat glistening with rain. In his hands were a clipboard and torch, and Rossett watched as the German glanced up at the locked cars as he passed, checking that no cargo was going to escape.

"Sixty seven, sixty eight"

The rest of the team had no need to shout encouragement now; the Jews had got the message and were moving under their own steam, picking their way over the gravel, some in bare feet.

“Sergeant!” A lone shout “Sergeant! Please! Sergeant Rossett! Please!”

Rossett looked over to the dwindling line of human cargo, unable to see where his name was being shouted from.

“Seventy!”

“Sergeant, please! I must speak to you, you must listen!”

Rossett craned his neck to look beyond the line of police, who had their backs to him.

“Seventy two, seventy three.”

“Sergeant Rossett, please! It is important information for you!”

The voice was near the freight car now. Rossett walked towards it, craning his neck to find the source.

“Seventy nine, eighty.”

“Sergeant, here!” Frantic now, almost a shriek. He noticed a scuffle on the ramp and pushed his way through towards it.

“Get these people on the train, we have a timetable!” Rossett waded into the pushing group of Jews and police, he cast a glance to the German officer who was now only thirty or forty feet away and then felt a hand grab his collar dragging, him forward, towards the darkness of the freight car.

He reached into the pocket of his raincoat for his sap as he grabbed the bony wrist of the hand that was doing the pulling.

“Please, Sergeant; please, I need to speak to you!” An old Jew owned the hand that was twisting and wrapping itself up in his raincoat. Rossett had the sap out, and he jabbed it into the old man’s ribs, but still the hand held fast, clinging on for dear life.

“Get on the train.” Rossett was pushing the old man backwards up the ramp, but in doing so he himself was boarding the train. Aware that with every step he was getting closer to its cargo, he lifted his sap so that the old man could see it. “Get on the train!”

The old man pulled him nearer, two hands on his lapels now, eyes bulging, and Rossett felt salty breath on his face. The Jew stepped on tiptoe to draw Rossett closer still. For a moment he thought the old man was about to kiss him.

“Sergeant, you must listen. My name is Galkoff, you must listen to me.” Galkoff was whispering now, his lips brushing Rossett’s ear. Rossett twisted his head but the lips stayed close. No matter which way he turned he felt the brush of stubble on his cheek and for a thousandth of a second he thought about his own father and a rare kiss from a dying man on a dirty pillow years before.

“*Eighty four! That’s the lot!*” called a voice from the foot of the ramp.

“Please, it’s so important. One moment. I have treasure... treasure for you,” Galkoff whispered, looking down the ramp past him and then back up into Rossett’s face.

Rossett finally managed to prise a finger off his lapel with his free hand.

“Get on the train.”

“It’s for you, all for you.”

“Get on the train!” A shout this time.

“I know you, I’ve seen you come and go to the house many times, I know you are honest man.” Galkoff clamped his free hand onto the side of Rossett’s face and stared deeply, with watery brown desperate eyes. Rossett looked at the old man who released his lapel and looked back towards the train, one hand still clutching Rossett’s face, fingertips like ice picks sliding across his skin. “I knew you before all this. You came into my shop. I knew your family, your father, your mother. They were good people, honest people, as soon as I saw you I recognised you. I read about what you did in France, I was so proud of you fighting for us.”

Rossett vaguely remembered the old man now, back in the day, the shop on the corner when he was a child. Suddenly, the yard fell away from him and it was just him and the old man, looking into each other’s eyes.

“I remember, but you have to get onto the train, I can’t help you. It’s my job to put you on the train.”

The old man pulled him forward again; he gripped Rossett and pushed his mouth close to Rossett’s ear.

“Behind the bookcase, third floor front room, my treasure is behind the bookcase, it is payment for you to help me, to do a thing for me. You are a good man, you’ll do it. I knew it the

moment I saw you coming to the house, you'll do this thing for me." Whispering hot breath on a freezing cold ear caused Rossett to stiffen.

Just as suddenly as he had grabbed Rossett, the old man pushed him away and stepped back into the freight car as if falling from a cliff.

"Sergeant?" called the German from the bottom of the ramp. Rossett came to, the spell broken. He looked first at the German and then back into the gloom of the freight truck. Ghostly faces with blackened eyes stared back and he found himself taking a half step back, still looking for old Galkoff who had disappeared into the darkness.

"I have a timetable!" called the German again.

Rossett finally turned and walked back down the ramp, glancing over his shoulder into the freight car, where eighty four pairs of eyes watched him go. At the foot of the ramp, the German proffered the clipboard which Rossett signed without checking. From nowhere, the two railway-men had the ramp rising and the freight door already swinging shut with a solid clang of a heavy iron hasp and the final screeching slide of a rusty bolt to hold it fast.

Rossett looked up at the locked door as the German pulled the clipboard from his hand. The train jolted as the distant engine took up the slack. From inside, Rossett heard some cries as the shock of the movement hit home.

Rossett felt as if he were in a dream. Galkoff's whispering so close to his ear had unsettled him, more real, less clockwork, more human. He felt that he could still hear the old man, feel his panicked breath on his cheek. Rossett touched his face where the old man's stubble had brushed and looked around to see if anyone else was affected by what had just happened.

They weren't.

Behind him the HDT and police were already boarding their trucks. He saw that the German officer was making his way back to the guards' van. A whistle sounded somewhere, and the train suddenly jerked again, like a circus elephant against a chain, and then slowly, so slowly, the car in front of him started to move along the track.

He took another step back and looked from one end of the train to the other, first the engine and then the guards' van, where the German was hopping up onto the ladder before it started to move too quickly. The train picked up speed and as the guards' van passed him, the German waved from the still open door and shouted something about seeing Rossett next month.

Wind blew drizzle into his face, and he wiped it with the back of his hand, realising he was still holding his sap. He watched the red lights at the back of the train move away for a moment and then turned towards his car. He put the sap back into his pocket, embarrassed that he'd almost used it on an old man, aware that the hand that was holding it was shaking a little.

He wanted a drink but instead he walked back to his car and got in.

The windows had misted and he had to use the back of his hand to clear a four-inch wide smear on the windscreen. It distorted the view of the world outside and the lamps of the yard became exaggerated stars. The train was already heading out of sight on its way to the docks, and he thought about Galkoff and what the old man had said, and shuddered again. The little car coughed into life as the troop wagons, their cabs shiny with rain, bounced past him across the rough freight yard to the exit.

Rossett lit another cigarette, suddenly realising how many he smoked on mornings like this and made a decision to try to ease up. He checked his watch, seven thirty, bang on schedule, just as usual.

On the train, amidst the crying and the clanging Israel Galkoff leant his head against the coarse wood of the doors and said a little prayer that his treasure would be safe; it was all he had.

His only hope.

CHAPTER FOUR

By the time he got back to the house, light was breaking through the early morning cloud and the streets were starting to fill with commuters. The drive across town had taken longer than expected, but Rossett was glad for the traffic; it had given him some time to settle his nerves. The encounter with the old man had shaken him, made that morning's work seem more personal.

He thought about the old man's shop when he was a boy, non descript, just like all the other shops he had followed his mother in and out of when he was on his school holidays. He'd never given Galkoff a second thought back then. He wondered why he was such a threat to society now? The old man hadn't changed, thought Rossett, as he sat at a traffic light and looked at the banner of the Führer shaking hands with King Edward that covered half of the building across the road.

"The old man hasn't changed, we have," he said softly to himself, as the traffic light changed and he moved on.

When he arrived back at Caroline Street, the two bobbies at the front door of the house straightened up and took their hands out of their pockets when they saw him.

"Has anyone been in?" he asked as he slammed the door of the Austen.

"No, Sarge," said the younger one.

"You, come with me," said Rossett, pushing open the door. "What's your name?" he said over his shoulder as they marched up the stairs.

"Baker, Sarge."

"Is your notebook up to date, Baker?"

"Yes, sarge."

"Good."

He'd normally have left the search of the house to the removal team that would turn up a few hours after the Jews had left. The team, usually led by a retired bobby or a German civil servant, would inventory the house, take anything valuable and then lock up the property until there were workers or labourers who needed accommodation. Any landlord would receive a peppercorn rent and a warning about renting his houses to Jews in the future.

Often, the best case scenario was that the building was owned by one of the Jews in the first place, in which case the property would have already been signed over to the state on the grounds that since the Jewish Acts in Parliament, Jews were no longer allowed to own property. Rossett knew it was an unfair system, but excused it on the grounds that it stopped them sleeping rough, and having to be cleared up if they died in the cold on the streets.

"Don't we normally wait for the removal lads, Sarge?" Baker said, taking off his helmet to prevent its hitting the low ceiling on the stairs.

"Not this morning. I want you to witness something."

"Witness something?"

"There are only two things that will get you sacked in this job, son, women and property. You need a witness when you handle either of them; never forget."

"Yes, Sarge," replied Baker, now a little nervous.

Rossett didn't know if anyone else had heard Galkoff talking about "treasure" when they had been on the ramp but he didn't want to take the risk of word getting to the cleanup team and someone getting sticky fingers. He also didn't want anyone accusing him of taking whatever was behind the fireplace. Theft from the state carried a death penalty, and whatever was up there belonged to the state and Rossett intended to see that the state got its due.

They entered the room, and Rossett noted the upturned chair and bedding thrown across the floor, a broken water jug lying on the bed and the lock of the door splintered on the inside. The old man hadn't gone quietly.

Against the far wall stood a wooden bookcase. It was a heavy and old and must have taken four men to carry it to the third floor. Its shelves were less than half full and Rossett wondered whether the books had been the straw that broke the camel's back, causing them to be left downstairs.

"They must have burnt the books to keep warm," Baker said, reading his mind and filling in the gaps.

Rossett nodded, it was a fair deduction except for one thing.

There wasn't a fireplace in the room.

"Give me a hand; they might have hidden something behind it."

They both took a hold on the same side, looking to lift one corner away from the wall and pivot it around,

"What if it's a booby trap, Sarge? I heard one house up north was rigged with explosives by a load of communist Jews."

"Just lift it."

The bookcase creaked but moved easily on the bare floorboards. Rossett realised the old man had planned it that way; he'd have known they'd be coming eventually, and had chosen the last room they'd get to so as to have time to hide his secrets from the initial search.

Behind the bookcase, Rossett could see a hole in the wall where the fireplace had once been. He lifted the bookcase further out and then squeezed into the gap, bending from the waist and twisting himself to peer into the darkness.

"Fetch me a candle; I can't see a thing," he said, arm reaching behind him, fingers snapping.

Baker grabbed a candle from the floor next to the bed and lit it quickly. He passed it to Rossett, who, holding it next to his face pushed further into the gap. At the back of the surprisingly large void lay some sacking and a small brown suitcase, maybe eighteen inches long and nine high.

Rossett reached for the case and pulled it towards him, aware that he was getting soot on his raincoat. He was keen to get out of the space and started to back out before stopping.

It was no good going to all this trouble and then only doing half a job.

He set the case to his side and cursed as he banged his head on a jagged brick before stretching into the gap again. Some old soot dropped from the chimney above and he rested his hand on it, feeling it crunch under his palm. He took hold of the sacking and pulled it towards him to look underneath.

Sooty black curly hair and pale white face emerged.

A child, a young boy, maybe seven years old, blinked at him.

The boy didn't move, he sat, back to the wall, big brown eyes staring and lips clamped tight.

The only movement was the shadow cast by the flicker of the candle.

Eventually, Rossett spoke.

"Come here."

The child's eyes stayed fixed. Rossett knew the boy was willing him to go away, and Rossett wished that he could.

But he couldn't.

"Is that a kid?" Baker leant over his shoulder, straining to see what was going on.

Rossett knew then that the little boy's wish wasn't going to come true; he wasn't going away.

He'd been found.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Boy, come.” Rossett flicked an impatient finger towards the boy and the child gave the slightest of jumps in response.

Rossett leaned in and grabbed the sacking and pulled it clean away from the boy, who he saw now was wearing a duffel coat and wellington boots that trapped his calves like flower stems in oversize flowerpots.

“Come on, now, out.” Rossett grabbed a leg and the boy slithered back further into the corner, eyes now shut, lips trembling and hands pulling the coat up as far as it would go. Rossett was about to shout when Baker spoke softly behind him,

“Come on, sausage, we’re the police, we won’t hurt you.”

The words hurt Rossett. The child opened his eyes and looked at the young bobby, “Come on, son, come out, please?”

Rossett realised he was crowding the space and he nodded his head motioning that he wanted to get out of the gap and into the room.

“Maybe he doesn’t speak English, Sarge? Some of them refugees haven’t had time to pick it up yet,” said Baker once they had straightened up.

“My grandfather told me to wait for him.” A tiny voice from the fireplace.

“We are the police, sunshine, you can trust us,” replied Baker, bending forward to look into the gap. The young bobby made Rossett feel impotent and unable to communicate and he wiped his sooty hands together to clear off the dust. “Come on out and we’ll clean you up and get you a cup of tea. How does that sound?”

“Is my grandfather there?” said the mouse, and the two policemen looked at each other, unable to lie to a child, but able to put him on a train to an uncertain future. “Can I see my grandfather?”

“He’s gone ahead.” Finally Rossett found his voice, but he was unable to look at the boy when he spoke.

“Gone where?”

“Ahead.”

“Where?”

“Please, come out.”

“I want my grandfather first.”

Rossett turned to the window and looked out. In the street below he could see the inventory squad had arrived; they were unloading boxes from the back of the lorry as they waited for their supervisor.

He turned to the young bobby and nodded toward the fireplace.

“Drag him out.”

Baker nodded and got down on all fours before disappearing into the gap. A moment later the child squealed, as the bobby backed out dragging the boy by the leg above his wellington. Rossett bent down to help pull the child, who was by now silent, further out of the space and on his feet.

Baker stood up and wiped down his uniform, then silently stood by the door, blocking any chance of a darting run by the child.

“What’s your name?” Rossett asked, crouching down and wiping soot from the coat of the child, who didn’t reply.

“Boy. What is your name?” Again, this time firmer.

The child stood, silent, head bowed, eyes closed with the slightest tremble playing on his lips.

Rossett stood and turned to the tiny suitcase for clues. Faded initials were printed on its front.

“J.G.” said Rossett out loud. “The G must be for Galfkoff. I wonder what the J stands for?” He looked at the boy for a clue but none was forthcoming.

“Maybe it’s John?” Ventured Baker from the doorway.

Rossett turned back to the child again, leaning down.

“I knew your grandfather when I was your age,” he said softly. “Me and my mother used to visit his shop.” Rossett glanced at the bobby, who was diplomatically studying the palms of his hands and scratching at the soot. “He was a nice man, I liked him.” Rossett whispered.

The child didn’t look up, and Rossett sighed and wished he was better with children; it had been so long since he’d had to try, so long since he’d had to talk to a child, he’d forgotten how to.

He turned back to the case and tried the catch; it was locked.

“Do you have a key for this?” The child didn’t respond, so he fished in his coat and produced his pen knife. It took him less than five seconds to release the flimsy lock. He lifted the lid and found a dirty shirt that had once been white, some vests and underpants and a couple of pairs of well darned socks.

At the bottom of the case were a few envelopes, written in an educated hand postmarked Amsterdam. Rossett took them out and opened one, glancing at the boy as he did so.

The boy stared back, indignant at the invasion of his privacy, his bottom lip jutting slightly.

Rossett unfolded one of the letters and turned it over, smelling it before reading the first page.

“My dearest, darling little Jacob.” Without looking, he felt the boy stiffen, another secret exposed, another layer peeled away.

He didn’t read on, he placed the letters into his pocket, but as he was about to close the case, he noticed it felt heavier at one end. He rummaged through the clothes again until his hands brushed against something solid, chunky and weighted. His hand closed around it, and, on pulling it free, he saw it was a sock with something stuffed inside. He tipped it out into the palm of his hand and a red suede pouch dropped out. He discarded the sock and, loosening the strings on the pouch, emptied some of its contents into the palm of his hand.

Gold sovereigns. The noise they made caused Baker to step forward from the door and look. He whistled softly as he watched the shiny coins drop from Rossett’s palm onto the folded clothes in the case.

“Cor blimey, must be a few bob there, Sarge.” Rossett glanced back at Baker, who nodded and tilted his head towards the bounty. “We could have us a fine time with them lot.”

Rossett picked up the coins and placed them back into the pouch, he fastened it tight and then stood, slipping the pouch into his pocket and taking the boy by the arm whilst picking up the small case with his other hand.

Suddenly back on duty.

“We could have a fine old time, Constable, but we aren’t going to, because they aren’t ours. Write up exactly what has happened here and then bring your notebook to me later so I can sign it and you can sign mine. I’m going to book this stuff into the found property system back at the nick.”

“I was only joking, Sarge?” Baker looked even younger than he was, exposed by the stickler everyone at the nick said Rossett was. “And what about the kid?”

“What about him?”

"Is he found property, too?"

Rossett looked at the young boy, who stared back, still angry over the letters.

"I suppose he is," said Rossett in a voice that sounded colder than he'd expected.

He pushed past Baker and led the boy down the stairs. At the front door he found the inventory team waiting for him. The other bobby he'd assigned to guard the property was blocking their entry and he glanced back at Rossett and then down to the boy, as they walked along the hallway towards him.

"Who's this, then? Have you caught a tiddler?" The bobby ruffled Jacobs's hair, but the child didn't respond.

"Let them in now, you're cleared to leave. Make sure you tell the lads around the back," replied Rossett. Looking outside to see who was leading the inventory team, his heart sank when he saw Gruber, the German civil servant who was often the lead man in these clearances.

Gruber was known for being a jobs worth. The story went he'd been banished from Berlin for a minor clerical error, and that he was determined to never slip up again, in case his next posting took him closer to a front line and further from any chance of getting back to the Fatherland.

"Sergeant, we are running late, it is gone eight thirty o'clock!" The little German stuttered in broken English, as he folded the heavy ledger he was carrying and rushed towards the front door while pulling out a pocket watch and holding it up for Rossett to see. "My team have much of work to do today, this really won't do!" By now, Gruber was no longer looking at Rossett, but staring at the child.

Rossett noticed everyone was.

"I'm sorry, Herr Gruber, I had to make sure the house was completely clear, for your safety."

"What is this?" Gruber pointed at the child.

"He was hiding; it's nothing to worry about it."

"Hiding? How many others are hiding?" Gruber stared past Rossett at the house and then back at the child.

"Nobody else is hiding, the house is clear now."

"The suitcase, is that the child's?" Gruber pointed again.

"It's just some spare clothes."

"It should be on the inventory, if it was in the house it should be on the inventory." Gruber held up the ledger as proof of his statement.

"It's just some clothes; it has no value."

"You found it in the house, it goes in the inventory. No exceptions," replied Gruber, holding out his hand for the case.

"It is my father's case; he brought it with him when he came to this country." The boy spoke loudly and both men turned to look at the waif with no small degree of surprise. "It is not yours, it is mine."

Gruber stared for a moment, dumbfounded, then held out his hand again.

"Sergeant, give me the case now."

Rossett sighed and held out the case to the German who reached for it with a smile on his face. The boy suddenly pulled against Rossett and made a grab for the case.

"No! It is my father's! No!"

Gruber leapt back as if a dog had suddenly snapped at him. He blushed then stepped forward and struck the boy across the face in one fluid movement.

"Juden shichzer!" He reached for the case from an open mouthed Rossett who still held the boy by the arm, and once again made to strike the boy with his open hand. Rossett turned slightly and pulled the boy behind him, shielding him from Gruber who was still angling to hit the boy.

Rossett held up the case towards the German and glanced over his shoulder at the twelve man inventory team, some of whom had taken a few paces forward, no doubt disturbed by their boss's assaulting a child, or maybe by Rossett's stopping him.

"Take the case, Herr Gruber. Of course, you are correct; it should go on the inventory." Rossett spoke quickly, trying to defuse the situation.

Gruber paused and looked at Rossett, slow realisation that his behaviour was drawing attention. He smoothed his jacket front and then took the case.

"Thank you, Sergeant, we must do these things in the correct manner. It is important, always very important." The German took a step back, glancing at his team, most of whom

turned away or looked at the floor. "My men should really get to work, if you are finished here?"

Rossett nodded and stepped aside, being careful to hold the boy away from the German in case the child saw fit to kick out.

Gruber entered the property and his men slowly followed him inside, some nodding to the boy who once again looked downwards. Rossett watched them file into the house and then led the boy to the Austin and sat him on the back seat before taking his place behind the wheel. He felt in his pocket for his notebook and realised he still had the sovereigns; he took the pouch out and thought about handing them to Gruber.

It would make his life easier to just get rid of them now. No chance of their going missing from the police safe if the German entered them into his inventory. A sharp tap on the window caused him to start, and for some reason he couldn't explain, his hand thrust the sovereigns out of sight into his coat. He looked across to the passenger window, where one of the inventory team was gesturing to him urgently to open the window.

Rossett leant across and opened the door. As soon as there was space, the man thrust the case through the gap and onto the front seat.

"For the lad, Gruber won't notice. He tossed it onto a pile of stuff in the kitchen, 'ere, take it."

Before Rossett could speak, the door was closing, and the man was jogging back to the house. The boy leant forward and took the case, pulled it over the seats and held it close to his chest.

Rossett turned to look at him, and the boy said,

"It was my grandfather's. He gave it to me."

"If he gave it to you, it's yours now" Rossett replied, turning back to look out the windscreen.

"Where are you taking me?"

"I don't know."

"I want to go with my Grandfather."

"You can't."

"Why?"

“Because he is gone. Maybe you can catch up with him.”

“Where has he gone?”

“I don’t know.”

“How do I know where I can catch up with him?”

“You don’t.”

“Who took him away?”

“I did.”

“Where did you take him?”

“To catch a train.”

“Where was the train going?”

“I don’t know.”

The boy sat silent for a while, confused by the conundrum of his missing Grandfather.

Rossett started the car and crunched it into gear,

“Where are we going?” asked the boy, silent tears drowning his eyes.

“To the station.”

“Where Grandfather got the train?” A little hope almost lost in his voice.

“Not that kind of station, a police station.”

Rossett waited for the next question, but it didn’t come, so he eased out the clutch and pulled away. The only sound from the back was the snuffle of tears that embarrassed them both.

CHAPTER SIX

Rossett parked the Austin at the front of Wapping Police station and looked up with some trepidation at the old building that faced onto the Thames. Since moving to Charing Cross he had been an infrequent visitor to his old nick. He'd retained a barely used office, and Brewer, his liaison inspector was based there, but Rossett never felt welcome when he called.

He felt like an outsider, unwanted, an embarrassment. And, although he'd never say it out loud, that hurt him. He was banking on the Brits welcoming the child, and treating him more fairly than the Germans in Charing Cross, with its German sentries and swastikas.

Even he wouldn't subject the boy to that.

He opened the door and stepped out onto the kerb before turning to grab the child by the hand and dragging him out of the back seat of the car. He led him up the steps and into the busy enquiry office where the sergeant on duty was arguing with an Irish man. Rossett stood waiting at the locked door that would grant him access into the Police staff only area.

The sergeant on duty glanced across and then carried on with his argument, deliberately causing Rossett to wait, something Rossett noticed had started to happen more and more since he'd been working with the Germans. He sighed, allowed the sergeant his little victory for a moment or two, and then impatiently rapped on the door with his free hand.

"Any chance someone can open this door, please?" shouted Rossett, interrupting the dispute, which had turned out to be about a stolen bicycle. The desk sergeant ambled across and disappeared momentarily, Rossett heard a click and the door swung open.

"Apologies, detective sergeant, I never saw you hiding there." Rossett ignored the sergeant and pushed past. "New recruit to your department?" The enquiry sergeant scrubbed the boy's hair but Jacob ignored him as he trailed behind Rossett.

The sergeant chuckled as he watched them pass and said to their retreating backs,

“He’ll fit right in with you, Rossett, he doesn’t say much either.”

On entering his office Rossett took off his raincoat and inspected it for soot. It was showing the signs of age, and the marks he’d picked up in the fireplace merely blended in with already present scuffs and stains. He hung it on the back of his door and then reached into the pocket and removed the pouch of sovereigns. He took out his keys and unlocked his desk, tossing the pouch into the drawer and locking the desk again.

He put the keys into his inside suit pocket, the one without the hole in it, and turned to face the boy, who was standing in the centre of the office still looking down at the floor, suitcase clutched tight to his chest.

“Have you eaten?”

Jacob shook his head,

“Are you hungry?”

Jacob shook his head.

“When did you last eat?”

“Tuesday.”

“Tuesday?” Rossett looked at his watch, even though it didn’t have a date function and then back at the boy. “You last ate two days ago?”

Jacob nodded.

“You must be starving.”

Jacob just stared at the floor.

Rossett sat down behind his desk and studied the child. The old duffel coat he was wearing was slightly too big, but it was of good quality and probably bought for him to grow into. It was buttoned to the neck and, peeking out from the collar, Rossett could see a bright green hand knitted scarf. It was the kind of coat any boy in London would have worn to go to school, except for the fact that it had a crudely stitched Star of David on its breast, almost hidden behind the clutched cardboard suitcase.

Jacob was wearing grey shorts that stopped short of the wellington boots by four inches or so. Rossett guessed him four foot six and could see that he was well underweight for his height and age.

The boy's thick brown hair was shorn crudely at the back and sides and his grey little face, all cheekbones and almond eyes, could almost have been that of an old man.

He made a sorry picture, and Rossett was aware that the boy smelt of damp.

"Look at me,"

The boy looked up.

"How old are you?"

"I'm seven, nearly eight."

Rossett raised an eyebrow; he'd guessed the boy to be much younger.

"My grandfather says I will shoot up to be big and tall like my father soon."

"Where is your father?" Rossett asked, guessing he already knew the answer to the question.

"I don't know." The boy looked at the floor again.

"Look at me, boy,"

Up came the little head again.

"Your Mother, where is she?"

"I don't know. Men came one morning, men like you, and took them."

"When?"

"Some time ago, I don't know." The boy bit his lip.

"You lived with your grandfather?"

"I do."

The mix up in tenses caused Rossett to take his turn at looking down. He guessed the boy's parents had been professionals, maybe doctors or solicitors. They'd been the first to be cleared, especially if, as the boy had indicated, they had been young and fit. It occurred to him that it may not have been men "like" Rossett; it may well have been Rossett himself who'd come calling that morning.

It puzzled him that the boy hadn't been on the inventory; the old man had hidden him well.

“Do you want something to eat?” Rossett broke the silence between them.

Jacob nodded, and Rossett stood and took him by the arm and led him through the station to the canteen.

As usual, space was cleared for him as he made his way through the nick. The only difference was that heads popped out of doorways once he had passed. People curious to see the little boy with the Star of David on his lapel clomping through the shiny floored corridors in his oversized wellingtons, holding the “Jew catcher’s” hand.

They entered the canteen to find it half full of breakfasting coppers and civilians. It was noisy with chatter and the crash of cups and plates, and Rossett felt the boy shrink slightly in his grasp.

There were rows of long tables with a few smaller square wooden four-seater tables for Sergeants and Inspectors who didn’t want to sit amongst the ranks.

Rossett normally sat alone at one of the square tables, facing out onto the benches so as to be able to see the comings and goings of the canteen. That would also give him some protection from the whispering that would take place behind his back. He sat the boy down at a small table and leant down in front of him so as to speak face to face.

“I am going to the counter over there; do not move from this seat. Do not think about running away. If you do all of those policemen over there will catch you. And when they do, I will throw you in a dark cell with bad men until I can think of something really evil to do with you. Do you understand?”

The boy nodded and chewed his bottom lip.

“Say it; say ‘I understand,’”

“I understand, I won’t run away.”

Rossett stared at the boy for a moment, ramming home the point, and then nodded. He turned and walked to the nearby counter and ordered two teas and two breakfasts. While he waited he glanced across to the child who, true to his word, was sitting still and staring intently at the table top, suitcase held like a shield across his chest. Rossett pondered what to do with him and silently cursed old Galkoff for putting him in this situation.

“Two teas.” The lady behind the counter crashed the teas onto the worktop, managing to spill half of them in the process. Rossett nodded and made to pick them up “If you want my advice, you give ‘im some milk as well, good for the little bones, see,” she said, looking across to Jacob.

“I’ll take some milk as well then.”

The woman poured a glass and passed it across the counter.

“Some of ‘em don’t get enough now, what with it being rationed, bless ‘em.” Rossett offered some coins and she waved him away and said “I’ll fetch the breakfast over when it’s done, Sergeant.” Rossett placed the money on the counter, ignoring her dismissal, and placed the drinks on a small tray and walked across to the boy.

He set the drinks down and slid the milk across first.

“Drink that, it’s good for you.”

The boy took the glass in both hands and drank the milk down quickly in almost one gulp. Rossett almost smiled when he saw the white moustache on the boy’s top lip but instead he slid a napkin across for him to wipe it way. The boy ignored the napkin, and licked his finger and wiped it across his top lip and then licked it clean.

“Do you want some more?”

The boy didn’t reply, he merely looked down at the table top again, ashamed by his greed.

Rossett turned to glance around the canteen and saw the usual sudden turn of heads from people afraid to meet his gaze.

“Thank you.”

Rossett turned to look at the boy.

“What?”

“Thank you for the milk.”

“Uh, yes, well it wasn’t me; it was the lady behind the counter. She suggested it.”

The boy nodded, face down to the table the top of his head bobbing. Rossett turned back to the canteen again.

“Thank you for helping me.” Rossett turned to look at the boy and this time found Jacob to be staring at him. Rossett nearly fell into his almond eyes.

“I... I’m... just doing my job.”

The boy carried on staring until Rossett turned away, this time it was he who was avoiding someone's gaze in the canteen, a strange feeling and one that he didn't like.

The server arrived at the table with the breakfasts and another glass of milk.

"Here we go!" she said brightly. "Some growing up juice and a lovely breakfast to warm you up!" She slid the plates off the tray and plonked the glass down in front of Jacob, who was shyly looking back down at the table. "Come on now, eat up! 'Ere, give me that case so the dog can see the rabbit!" She took the case from the boy who gave it up more easily than he had done earlier that morning.

"Now then, would you like some hot buttered toast and, oh!" She stopped, frozen in mid air as she was reaching for some butter to offer the boy. Rossett glanced at her and then back to the boy, confused by her shock.

"What is it?" he asked, looking down at the boy's plate and then his own.

"He's a Jew." This time she spoke quietly, conscious of the others in the canteen. "He shouldn't be here, Mr Rossett. You of all people should know that." She looked around nervously and twisted the tea towel that was hooked into her apron.

"He's a child."

"I could get into so much trouble, Mr Rossett. He'll have to go, I'm sorry." She paused. "I'm so sorry." This time she spoke to the boy, who looked from her to Rossett and then back again.

"Nobody is going to say anything about a child eating for ten minutes. Who are you going to get into trouble with?" Rossett leant back in his chair, the frustration of an already stressful day becoming difficult to contain and his head starting to throb. He took out his cigarettes and slid them onto the table, a conscious statement declaring his intent to stay.

"Please, Mr Rossett, I don't want to end up losing this job. People can cause such a fuss about these things; I have to be very careful now."

"Who is going to cause a problem for your serving food to a child? Who? Tell me who?" Rossett snatched the cigarette pack back up into his hands as he looked around the canteen, desperate for someone to point a finger at.

"You."

The accusation hung in the air between them; Rossett looked from the canteen-lady to the boy, who was sitting, open mouthed, staring right back at him.

"I wouldn't cause you a problem about something like this," he said, quietly, confused.

The canteen-lady twisted her apron some more and eventually shook her head and turned back to the counter.

Rossett watched her go and then turned to the boy who was still staring back at him,

"Eat." Rossett gestured to the plate as he fumbled the cigarette packet open, his own appetite quickly defeated by his twisted stomach and his banging head.

The boy's head dropped again, but Rossett was relieved to see him pick up some toast and slide a tomato onto it. Rossett turned away from the table and scanned the room again; this time a few dared to look him in the eye for a moment, so he turned back to the boy and lit a cigarette. He watched the boy for a while as he nibbled at the tomato and toast, and considered his options.

He needed to get rid of the child as soon as possible. There was no hope of catching the train, he wasn't even certain where it would be unloading. He'd always just assumed it was Dover, but even if he found that out for certain, he'd have to establish if there was some sort of holding camp or whether the boat was waiting and ready to sail straight away.

He checked his watch nine forty. Maybe he could drive the boy to Dover and reunite him with old Galkoff, but it didn't take him long to dismiss that option. It was a long journey that might prove fruitless. He drew deep on his cigarette, watched the boy and then imagined staring the old man in the face as he pushed the child towards him.

He then shook his head and picked up his mug of tea, rubbing his forehead with the hand that held the cigarette.

"I wonder when I became a coward?" Rossett thought to himself as he watched the boy eat mushrooms one by one with his fork, chewing them carefully while staring straight down at the plate, as if he was scared to look away in case the food ran off.

"The boy shouldn't be eating that." A voice from behind. Rossett swivelled angrily in his chair to confront this latest busy-body, only to find Koehler. The German stepped closer to the table and reached across and picked up the boy's plate. Jacob looked up, watching it go.

"This is pig," Koehler held up a thin sausage with his fingers and studied it, wrinkling his nose. "Well, at least some of it is. The boy is Jewish; he shouldn't be eating this."

"I wasn't going to eat it; I was eating the other things, not the sausage," Jacob said, staring longingly at the plate and then at Koehler who smiled and took a bite out of the sausage and put the plate back down.

“Eat the egg,” said Koehler, softly, like a father as he pulled a seat from an adjacent table and sat down opposite Rossett immediately to the boy's right. Rossett watched as Koehler dipped the sausage into the egg and took another bite. He then looked back at Rossett and shook his head,

“You’ve got yourself a problem, John.” Koehler spoke softly, certain to keep his voice down as he chewed.

“The boy was hidden, his grandfather told me where he was as he got onto the train. By the time I’d found him the train had gone. How did you...?”

“Gruber telephoned me. That prick isn’t going to let anything happen without letting me know,” Koehler replied. He looked towards Rossett’s uneaten breakfast and, taking the cue, Rossett slid the plate towards him. Koehler picked up the sausage and placed the plate between himself and the boy, gesturing for the boy to help himself.

“What are we going to do about you, little piggy?” Koehler turned to the boy “What is your name?”

“Jacob.” The boy replied brightly to his new friend, and Rossett blushed, realising that he hadn’t used the boy's name once.

“What are we going to do about Jacob?” Koehler took another bite of sausage and looked again at Rossett.

“I haven’t decided; I thought maybe downstairs?” Rossett didn’t want to mention the cells by name. He was certain Koehler would understand what he meant and would realise he didn’t want to scare the child further.

Rossett took another drag on his cigarette and then tapped it against the ashtray, even though it didn’t need it.

Koehler nodded. “It’s an idea. There is another train due on Sunday; it wasn’t scheduled for a collection, but it will be refuelling. I can arrange for the boy to be on it.”

“Will I get to see my grandfather then?” said Jacob, his mouth full, staring up at Koehler.

“Of course, you will,” Koehler replied, lying smoothly without the slightest hint of deceit in his voice. “Sergeant Rossett will arrange everything for you. He can even drive you to the station if you would like?”

Jacob nodded and Koehler looked across to Rossett. “It is the least the sergeant can do for you, isn’t it?”

Rossett nodded dumbly at the boy before stubbing his cigarette out into the ashtray.

“Yes.”

“You see little piggy? Uncle John has solved all your problems!” Koehler spoke to Jacob but looked at Rossett, he dipped again at the egg and leant forward, resting his elbow on the table and beckoning Rossett in closer. “Is everything alright John?”

Rossett suddenly regretted stubbing out the cigarette and looked at it before shrugging.

“Yes.”

“Are you sure? You look tired.”

“I am tired.”

“This is hard work we do; it can drain you if you’re not careful.”

Rossett nodded but didn’t speak.

“If there was a problem you’d tell me wouldn’t you? As well as being your boss, I like to think we are friends. We are friends aren’t we?”

“Yes... we are.”

Koehler stared at Rossett, letting the silence run long and do its job.

“I have dreams.” Rossett heard himself saying.

“Dreams?” Koehler replied quietly.

“Nightmares.”

“About what?”

Rossett shifted in his chair and pulled his tie slightly before picking up the cigarettes again. He noticed Jacob was watching him, slowly chewing, curious. Rossett pulled at his tie knot again and then opened the cigarettes and took one out.

“They are... they... they stop me sleeping.”

Koehler nodded, “All soldiers have nightmares John.”

“I sometimes see faces, the faces of the people we send away.” Rossett looked at Jacob and then back to Koehler, who leant back in his chair and folded his arms. “They crowd me.”

Koehler rubbed his mouth with one hand and frowned, looking for words, before leaning forward again.

“Our job is...difficult. What we do has to be done, we don’t have to like it but we have to do it. Because, if we don’t...well...I think you understand?” Koehler whispered and tilted his head at the end of the sentence, checking Rossett realised what he was saying. “I don’t want to treat these people like this, they aren’t animals, but if we falter, if we lose our drive, others will take our place and that won’t be good for anyone involved. Not you, not me and not the Jews.” Koehler’s voice was barely a breath.

Rossett nodded and put an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

“I understand.” He said, making the cigarette bob.

“Good. Try not to think too much John, it isn’t good for you.”

“No.”

“Is there anything else?”

“No.”

“Good. That is all arranged then.” Koehler brightened and slapped his thighs then stood up. He buttoned his coat whilst looking around the room. “Make sure you eat all of your breakfast, Jacob, I want that plate to be clean, yes?”

Jacob nodded and picked up some toast. Koehler smiled back at him and made to walk away from the table. As he passed Rossett, he paused and placed his hand on his shoulder, bowing slightly as he spoke softly.

“Oh, by the way, there was nothing else left in the house, was there?”

“No, just the boy.” Rossett stared up at Koehler who was still looking around the canteen. His heart pounded and he was certain the German must have felt its percussion through his shoulder.

“And his suitcase of course.”

“Yeah, the boy and his case, that was all.”

“Gruber mentioned he had taken the case from the boy.”

“He did.”

"But Jacob has it here?" Koehler looked down at Rossett now, his hand still in place on his shoulder.

"The boy needed it, it has his clothes."

"Of course, Gruber is such a... what is the word?" Koehler carried on looking around the room as he searched, "Jobs-worth. Gruber is such a jobs-worth. Every detail has to be checked and double checked."

Rossett nodded, unsure of what to say.

"Men like me and you fight to create empires; men like Gruber, they make sure we keep them."

"Yes."

"Well, as long as there is nothing else you need to tell me?"

"No, there is nothing else."

"Good. I'll be on my way then." Koehler tapped Rossett on the shoulder and smiled at Jacob. "Goodbye, Jacob."

"Goodbye, sir."

"Goodbye, Sergeant."

"Bye."

Koehler walked away, his shoes clicking on the lino floor as he made his way through the benches on his way to the door. Rossett listened to the sound fade away and eventually realised he was holding his breath. He sighed and leant back into the chair and picked up the cigarettes again, twisting and turning the packet in his hand on the table.

He blew out his cheeks and put the packet down again, drumming his fingers on it, thinking about the coins in his desk. The moment had passed for him to enter them into the property system. He'd had two chances to mention them to the Germans and both times he'd shied away from it, for reasons he wasn't entirely sure of himself.

"I can book them as found property next week; I'll make up a story about their being found in a pub or something." It was flimsy, but it would ensure that they didn't have to stay in his desk for longer than was necessary.

Problem solved.

His stomach lurched and his fingers started to drum again, as he remembered Baker, the young bobby he'd been with when he'd found the boy. He sighed out loud and rested his head into his hand, the boy stopped eating and looked at him.

"Are you all right?"

Rossett looked up at the little face through his fingers and nodded.

"I've just remembered something I had to do."

"Was it important?"

"Very."

"Maybe we can do it now?"

"It's too late now."

"Will you get into trouble?"

This time Rossett didn't reply, he just stared at the boy and sighed once more.

"My grandfather says that if you do something wrong it is best to just be honest and tell someone what you have done. He says that if you are always honest, you will not be punished."

"What your grandfather tells you is true, most of the time."

"But not this time."

"No, not this time."

CHAPTER SEVEN

By the time Jacob had finished eating Rossett had smoked two more cigarettes and drunk another cup of tea. He had taken the boy by the hand and walked him through the station aware that even more people were watching as they passed. Word must have got around that the boy was a Jew and had sat eating in the canteen with the men who were supposed to be making sure he wasn't seen again. Once Koehler had visited it would have flashed through the whole station like wildfire.

He'd originally planned to take the him straight down to the gaol but had decided to put it off for as long as possible. Rossett knew what it was like to sit on your own in a cell, how long it took for time to pass as you stared at the four walls. It was Thursday, so that meant Jacob had three days of staring at those walls if all went to plan, he figured the longer he could put it off the better it would be for the boy.

As he walked towards his office his heart sank to see his door was open. He knew he'd closed it, and the sudden thought that Koehler was in there and had opened the desk and found the coins filled him with a sickening dread. His step faltered, and Jacob glanced up as Rossett patted his jacket feeling for his desk keys. He felt them rattle but took little solace from the sound. How hard would it be to open the desk? He could do it with a spoon if he put his mind to it.

He guessed the German wouldn't be so subtle.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," replied Rossett, disappointed that he'd given away his feelings so easily to the child again.

"Is it the thing you forgot to do?"

"Yes."

They entered his office and Rossett found Inspector Brewer seated at his desk. Rossett's eyes flicked to his drawer and saw it was closed. Brewer got to his feet as soon as Rossett entered and charged around the desk past Rossett to the door.

"What the hell do you think you are doing, Sergeant?"

"Sir?" Rossett watched as Brewer stuck his head out and checked the corridor before slamming the door shut and turning to face him.

"You know what." He pointed at Jacob. "This! What do you think you are playing at? Bringing a bloody Jew here?"

"I wasn't sure what else to do with him."

"Do what you always do, man! Stick him on the bloody train and wash your hands of him! Christ all-bloody-mighty Rossett, this job is already sensitive enough without you bringing bloody Jews here!"

"The train had gone, sir." Rossett was uncomfortable with Jacob holding his hand; he gestured for the boy to take a seat in the corner on a small wooden chair.

"Don't make him bloody comfortable, man! Get him in the bloody cells! You've already fed and watered him from what I've heard."

"I need to arrange a cell for him, sir; I was going to call down to speak to the gaol first, as a courtesy."

"A gaol?" It was Jacob, his eyes confused, looking up at Rossett. "Are you putting me into prison? I haven't been naughty." The bottom lip trembled again.

"No, well yes, but not like you think, it's just somewhere to sleep until..."

"I don't want to go to prison." Jacobs's words tailed off, like feathers falling to the floor. Rossett put his hand onto the boys shoulder and knelt in front of him.

"It will be okay, it's not really a prison it's..."

"For Christ's sake, Rossett!" Brewer exploded. "Just bang him up and get on with your job!"

A shadow appeared through the frosted glass of the office door followed by a polite tap. All in the room fell silent and looked nervously at the shadow like three conspirators caught in a trap.

Eventually, Rossett stood and opened the door to find PC Baker. Rossett stared at the bobby who stared back, notebook in hand.

"Sorry to bother you, Sarge," he glanced over Rossett's shoulder at Brewer, who was standing red faced behind him, "I can come back later if needs be."

"No, erm..." Rossett searched for his name.

"Baker, Sarge"

“Of course, of course, Baker, what do you want?”

“My notebook, Sarge, you wanted to sign it, so as to confirm what we found when we searched...”

“Of course, yes, give it here,” Rossett spoke quickly, panicked, interrupting Baker who found his notebook snatched out of his hand.

“Sergeant, can’t this wait?” Brewer sputtered, barely able to contain himself, but anxious not to have a bobby gossiping about him and Rossett.

“I can come back, Sarge, if it suits?”

Rossett ignored them both, scanning the pages of densely written copperplate. He inwardly cursed Baker’s thoroughness when he reached the part about the coins.

“I witnessed Det Sgt Rossett remove some gold coloured coins from a green pouch and let them fall into the case, the DS then collected the fallen money and placed it back into the pouch, which he then put in his coat. I do not know the exact amount of coins, which looked like golden sovereigns, but I would estimate that the pouch was five inches long and it appeared to be almost full. I did not see the coins again after the Sergeant took them.”

Rossett read the notes again. On paper it looked as if he had pocketed the pouch. Had he been alone with Baker he would have taken some time to explain that this made him look bad and that maybe another paragraph should be added explaining that he’d asked Baker to make a detailed pocket notebook entry. He dared not mention this while Brewer was there; those coins were quickly becoming a curse, and he was aware that it was now three people he’d hidden them from.

“It would have been easier to split them at the scene,” thought Rossett as he fumbled for a pen.

It appeared being a bent copper was easier than being a straight one.

“That’s fine, Baker.” Rossett signed the notebook entry; his signature sealed his fate if it was later asked where the coins had gone. He just had to hope that Baker would keep his nose out and not mention them to anyone. He passed the notebook back to Baker who hesitated before leaving; he cast a glance at Jacob and then Brewer before saying,

“I enjoyed working with you, Sarg, if there is ever anything else I can help you with, just say. It makes a change from walking the beat.”

"I will, thank you." Rossett took hold of the door handle and gestured for Baker to leave. The bobby nodded then turned and as he passed, and Rossett noticed him glance to Jacob and wink.

Rossett closed the door and turned to face the Inspector who appeared to have calmed slightly.

"Just get this whole thing sorted out Rossett; I don't want any of this coming back to land on my toes. Do you understand?"

"It won't, sir, I've already spoken to Koehler; he..."

"Koehler knows?"

"He was just in the canteen, sir."

"I don't want to hear anymore. Just get rid of the Jew before anyone else becomes involved."

"I will, sir."

"We'll have bloody Hitler here next." Brewer stepped past him and opened the door; he turned to look at Jacob. "Your lot are more trouble than they are worth." Jacob didn't look up, so Brewer looked at Rossett. "You've done a good job keeping me out of these matters in the past, Sergeant, make sure you keep doing that, understand?"

"Sir."

Brewer left the room, and Rossett sat down on the edge of his desk.

"I don't want to go to prison, said Jacob, causing Rossett to look up. "I could have stayed in the fireplace."

"I know, replied Rossett shaking his head, "But it's too late to put you back there now."

"Because of your job?"

"Yes."

Jacob played with his finger tips a while and then looked up at Rossett.

"I have bad dreams too."

"What?" Rossett roused himself again.

“I have bad dreams, like you.”

Rossett looked at the door and then back toward Jacob, unsure what he was supposed to say.

“I can’t find my mother. I’m lost and I don’t know where she is, I can hear voices but I don’t remember what she sounds like so I don’t know if it is her.”

“They’re just dreams.”

“That’s what grandfather says.”

“He’s right.”

“It’s just...”

“What?”

“When I wake up, I still can’t find her.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

“What’s he done?” The custody sergeant leant over his high counter and peered down at Jacob who was craning his neck up to return the gaze.

“Nothing, I’ve told you, he hasn’t done anything.”

“Well, he’s not going in my cells then.”

“Bernie, please, I have to lodge him somewhere, and at least here I can keep an eye on him.”

“If he hasn’t done anything he isn’t going in my cells.”

“It’s just till Sunday, Bernie, come on, help out an old pal?”

Bernard Clark leant back from the counter and crossed his arms over his fat stomach. Rossett didn’t speak. He’d let the old man have his moment of power and hope the big old Sergeant would give in and let Jacob be lodged in one of the two youth cells behind the counter.

Clark leant back once more, folding his arms high up on his chest,

“Why can’t you take him home with you?”

“You know why.”

“No, I don’t.”

“You do.” Rossett didn’t want to point out the obvious, although he couldn’t understand if that was for Jacob’s benefit or his own.

“I don’t.”

Rossett leant forward onto the counter and beckoned for the Sergeant to come forward so he could whisper; his heart sank when Clark merely raised an eyebrow and cocked his head.

Rossett was regretting this idea more and more as time went on.

“Bernie, look, as a favour to an old mate, just let him sleep here a few days; I’ll sort out his food and exercise. If you want, I’ll take him out of a day and keep him in my office. Just let him stay here of a night; I can’t have him all of the time.”

“Why can’t he go home with you?”

Finally, Rossett's patience gave way. "Because he's a Jew." He immediately regretted what he'd said, he quickly looked around him. A few heads of passing bobbies turned to look at him and he, in turn, looked down to Jacob who shamed him by staring back and tilting his head.

"If he is a Jew, why don't you ask your mates in the SS to let him stay in their cells over at Charing Cross?"

"They aren't *'my mates'* and you know they aren't."

"Are you sure?" Clark eyed the tiny Nazi party badge on Rossett's lapel, and Rossett, subconsciously reached his right hand up to touch it and then smoothed down his suit jacket front.

"You know it wouldn't be right sending him to Charing Cross, Bernie; it's no place for a child."

"You've sent enough people there, Rossett, one more won't make a difference. Besides, wherever he is being sent on Sunday will be worse, I'll wager." The Custody Sergeant picked up his mug again and this time risked a sip.

Rossett stared up at Clark and swallowed hard.

"I could make life very difficult for you, Bernie," he said, aware now that quite a few people had gathered to witness his humiliation. His cheeks burned, not with embarrassment but with anger. "You are making this hard for the child, not for me; I hope you are proud of yourself?"

Clark stood up, collected a clipboard off his desk and theatrically pulled a pen out of his tunic pocket before stepping down from behind the high counter. He walked around to stand, side on to Rossett, who hadn't moved. Clark leant in close to Rossett's ear and for the first time during their exchange, lowered his voice so that only Rossett could hear him.

"I'm not making it hard for the child, mate." Then a little closer. "You are, you bastard."

Rossett turned his head to look at Clark; he'd known the man the best part of ten years. All that was forgotten right at that moment, none of it mattered.

He tried to think of a reply, looking into the face of Clark, who waited, expectantly, rocking on his toes.

Nothing came.

Clark shook his head and walked off to the cells to carry out his rounds, leaving Rossett and Jacob standing before an empty desk.

Rossett looked down at Jacob, who, was also watching Clark walk away, his tiny suitcase resting at his feet. After a moment, Jacob turned to look up at Rossett.

“What did he mean, it’ll be worse for me on Sunday?” Said Jacob, with that furrowed brow again.

“Pick up your case and come with me,” Rossett replied, already turning and leaving the gaol.

CHAPTER NINE

When the SS had arrived in London back at the start of the occupation they had immediately chosen several stations that suited their purposes and evicted the local Met Police within hours. Over time they had fortified these stations and some had become small self contained garrisons and gaols rolled into one.

Charing Cross was one such place; situated on Agar Street, the station had been ideal because of the narrowness of the road outside the front entrance, which allowed them to set up barriers and sentry points at either end. The rear of the station containing a small triangular court yard also ensured privacy for the loading and unloading of prisoners.

It was a perfect location for the SS and Gestapo HQ in London.

Most useful of all had been the small cell complex situated in the basement of the building, far enough from prying eyes or ears to provide discretion, but close enough to central London for convenience.

The buildings that backed onto the courtyard had all been requisitioned as admin offices, and most of the back windows that overlooked the yard had been either blacked out or boarded up to ensure that privacy was maintained.

Occasional rumours of volleys of gunfire coming from the yard on Sunday mornings were mostly dismissed as resistance propaganda by those who found their wage packet carrying the imprint of the Nazi eagle.

The times required the judicious use of the blind eye and the shut mouth.

Koehler had offices on the third floor of Charing Cross, and Rossett had had cause to visit on many occasions to attend briefings and meetings. "A little piece of Germany," Koehler had once said as they had walked out into Agar Street one morning, and Rossett had had to agree. As he had looked up at the Red Swastika banners that hung from the building's eaves to the ground floor windows, with black clad sentries springing to attention, rifle butts cracking on the pavement and German staff cars blocking the narrow road, it felt closer to Berlin than Brixton.

Today, as he pulled up at the sentry point in the Austin, it felt more like Germany than ever. A military brass band had formed up outside the station entrance and the barrier guards were in full dress uniform, a contrast from their normal caps and battledress. Rossett would

down his window and cursed as it reached halfway, and then fell at an angle into the door panel, dislodged from its runner again.

The young SS man leant down, smirked at the crooked window's position, and then frowned at Rossett as he looked into the car. Rossett showed his warrant card and the sentry flicked a cursory eye at it, and then looked across at Jacob who was craning to look at the band.

"What do you want?" He was asking Rossett but looking at Jacob.

"I need to see Major Koehler; it's about the boy."

"Today is a bad day; it's the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch, that's why the band's here. You'll have to park somewhere else and walk back if you want to go in." The German turned away in that time honoured fashion favoured by guards who only dealt in black and white with no questions asked.

Rossett swore, jabbed the little car into reverse and backed out onto Chandos Place, looking for a space amongst the Mercedes staff cars that were parked all around. The Austin found a home, and, after wrestling with his window, Rossett finally alighted and, taking Jacob by the hand, walked back to the sentry post.

He waved his warrant card at the sentry, who merely stared at him as he ducked under the barrier and walked towards the front entrance to the HQ.

As they walked, the band struck up a tune he didn't recognise, and a group of uniformed and non-uniformed dignitaries walked out of the building and took up their places on the steps, blocking the entrance.

To avoid pushing through, Rossett decided to wait. He led the boy some distance from the door and found a place amongst the assembled office workers and SS men who had come out to listen to the band and, Rossett guessed, the long speeches that were bound to follow.

A group of secretaries parted to let them stand near to the railings away from the front of the crowd. Jacob leant forward to look at the band, twisting on the end of Rossett's arm. The boy's head bobbed as he tried to see through the adults gathered around him. Eventually, one of the secretaries glanced down and then, smiling at Rossett, took the boy's hand and led him to the kerbside so he could better see what was going on.

Rossett thought about protesting but instead took out another cigarette and cadged a light from a blond who smiled and allowed her gaze to linger a little longer than was polite before looking downwards with a flicker of eyelash. He drew on the cigarette and studied the blond out of the corner of his eye. She looked familiar, and he remembered seeing her in

Koehler's office. He wondered for a moment if he still was attractive to women. He was only thirty-five, still lean, a little over six foot and his face, aside from an old scar under his left eye, uncreased.

On the surface.

It seldom occurred to him that he missed a woman's company; he had Mrs Ward for his household needs, such as they were. There were times when he had thought about another relationship, some nights, long nights, lonely nights of drinking, when he'd wished he had someone who loved him to tell him to stop.

But he didn't, so he hadn't.

He just drank alone with his pain, his memories and his loss.

He shivered and dragged on the cigarette before taking it out of his mouth and studying it. He noticed the yellowing of his fingers from the nicotine and wondered when that had started to happen; he was smoking too much again.

The band was in full swing, or as close to swinging as a brass band could get. He sighed and looked at his watch, almost midday, this was taking too long. He had work to do, a report to write regarding the morning's raid, then a meeting in the East End with a Rabbi about some resettlement plans.

He didn't have time for this. He looked towards the band impatiently.

"We still have the speeches to come; you've picked a bad day." Rossett turned to find the blond had made her way to stand closer to him, her voice husky after too many cigarettes with the barest hint of a northern accent hovering around the edges. She smiled, having to shout over the noise of the band bouncing off the buildings opposite. "Unless you like brass bands and boring speeches, that is."

"I didn't know there was a parade on today, I would have waited," Rossett replied, ignoring her joke.

"Are you here to see Sturmbannführer Koehler?"

"I am." Rossett was unused to hearing Koehler described by his full title. The German favoured a less formal approach in conversation and was also fond of using the Army rank of major instead of the slightly more ostentatious SS rank.

He'd once told Rossett his title "*scared the English into silence*," and Rossett had nodded, silently agreeing.

"I've seen you come and go a few times, I manage his outer office. You're Detective Sergeant Rossett, aren't you?" She smiled and Rossett found himself awkwardly smiling back, surprised that the girl was flirting with him, and not really sure of how to deal with it.

"I am."

"I'm Kate; we've spoken on the phone." Kate had grown tired of shouting and was leaning closer to Rossett, her hand touching his arm, Rossett looked down at her hand and then back into her eyes. She looked puzzled a moment and then added "I'm Major Koehler's personal secretary. You remember me?"

Rossett noticed one of the other secretaries turn and wink at Kate who smiled back. He had a sudden feeling he was being ambushed. A man in a suit shushed Kate with a finger to his lips. Rossett felt a curious bubble of irritation at the man rise and then subside. Kate frowned and placed her hand onto Rossett's shoulder and stood on tip toe as she spoke, lips close to his ear, pulling him toward her.

"I was wondering, maybe you could show me around London some time? I don't get to see much of it, so much work and being a single girl working for Jerry and all." She dropped back and smiled, waiting for Rossett's reply.

Rossett had felt a butterfly flit across his stomach as her lips brushed his ear, and he looked down at the girl. It was the second time that day someone had been that close, and he knew which occasion he had preferred.

"I er..." was all he could manage initially and Kate tilted her head as she waited for him to find his voice. "I suppose I could, I'm not really the best at..."

Kate smiled, deal done, and turned to look at the band and then back to Rossett, fishing in her handbag and producing a card like a magician.

"My number." Rossett looked down at the card, unsure if he should take it. He looked up to see Kate frowning,

"If you don't want to?" This time she looked small and sad, and Rossett marvelled at the woman's charms. "if there is someone else..."

"No, it'll be a pleasure," he replied, doubting any such meeting would ever take place but too much of a coward to say it out loud.

"Excellent!" She reached up inside Rossett's raincoat and placed the card into the outside breast pocket of his suit jacket, patting the pocket as she closed his raincoat. She smiled at him, her hand intimately on his chest and then she suddenly broke away and pointed to the

kerb side where Jacob was standing; the other secretary was crouching behind him, one hand on his shoulder and pointing to the band whilst she whispered in his ear. The little boy was smiling and Rossett noticed that the suitcase was swinging in time with the music.

“Your little boy is enjoying himself. Have you brought him to have a look around the HQ?”

Rossett didn’t know what to say. He looked first at Kate and then back to Jacob. His eyes were then drawn to two men watching him, on the far side of the road.

Gestapo. He vaguely remembered them from a briefing a few months back. One of them had travelled with Koehler to a clearance job out in Romford. They’d never spoken but he suddenly had the feeling they were about to.

“He’s not my little boy.” Rossett turned to Kate, “I shouldn’t have brought him, I’d better go. Can you tell Major Koehler I’ll call him later today?”

“Of course, but you will call me as well won’t you?” She smiled and Rossett felt himself blush. He looked across the road and was dismayed to see the Gestapo walking towards him; they must have realised he was about to leave.

“Of course, soon.”

“Do you promise?”

“Yes.” Another glance to the Gestapo.

“What is your first name? Everyone just calls you Rossett; I don’t know your first name.”

“I have to go.” Rossett looked at her blue eyes and found that was all he could say. He started to push his way forward to get to Jacob to take him back to the car, looking back to Kate with a smile of apology, already regretting leaving the conversation on such an awkward note. Kate looked confused and she tilted her head and looked past his shoulder to where Jacob was standing. Rossett followed her gaze and saw the secretary and Jacob being spoken to by the Gestapo. Rossett approached them and produced his warrant card.

“Is there a problem?” he said as the first Gestapo officer looked at the card and then turned back to the secretary, dismissing him without a word.

“Sie haben einen Jude hierher gebracht? “ *“You’ve brought a Jew here?”*

The secretary looked surprised and then a little frightened. Rossett leant in to try to take Jacob.

"Ich wusste nicht, daß er Jude war." The girl seemed panicked and her hand withdrew from Jacob's shoulder in a flash, as if the boy was suddenly hot to the touch.

Rossett understood what she was saying in her clumsy English accented German, "*I didn't know he was a Jew.*"

The secret policeman pulled Jacob towards him and pointed at the Star of David on his breast pocket.

"Sind Sie blind? Haben Sie nicht sehen?" "*Are you blind? Did you not see?*" The Gestapo man jabbed his finger into the star and Jacob looked scared, almost close to tears. The secretary looked across to Rossett and pointed.

"Er hat ihn gebracht, hat mit mir nichts zu tun!"

"*He brought him; it is nothing to do with me!*" She said in broken German that Rossett could barely understand.

The small crowd, who were watching the incident with more interest than they were giving the band, turned towards Rossett who took another step forward to put his hand on Jacob's shoulder, pulling the boy towards him defensively. He showed his warrant card again with his other hand, like a matador attempting to distract a bull.

"Wer zum Teufel sind Sie?" "*Who the hell are you?*"

The other man pulled back at Jacob, yanking the child from Rossett's grasp. Jacob cried out and looked at Rossett with frightened eyes. Rossett found himself taking another step forward. He gripped the Gestapo officer's coat lapel and started to ease him back with his fist pushing firmly into the other man's collar bone. Rossett's other hand twisted into Jacob's duffel coat hood, and he almost lifted the boy off his feet as he pulled him behind him, away from the Gestapo's grasp.

"He's with me, nothing to do with you, he's my prisoner," Rossett said flatly, sounding matter of fact even though his mind was racing.

The German tried to pull away from Rossett but was unable to. He yanked on Rossett's forearm but found it to be like an iron bar, unbending and ensuring that he couldn't reach the boy. The German then tried to reach with his right hand into his pocket. Rossett, seeing this, yanked down on the leather collar of the coat, forcing the German to fold sideways and fumble, off balance, reaching for Rossett's arm again. The second Gestapo officer tried to move around his colleague to reach Rossett, but struggled to get past, mostly because of Rossett's pulling and

twisting the first German as a shield, in much the same way a rugby player would use a defender to push his way through a maul.

"Lassen Sie mich los! " *"Let go of me!"* the German shouted as Rossett took a few more steps backward, trying to get through the crowd and back to the railings, Jacob still held in his other hand.

The people on the pavement seemed to part as he moved. Rossett heard raised voices and a women scream as he dragged the struggling Gestapo along. Rossett's face remained calm, a policeman's professionalism masking the creeping realisation that he had hold of a Gestapo collar in front of SS headquarters slowly hitting home.

This day was getting worse and worse, and Rossett wasn't expecting the situation to improve in the near future.

It didn't; the air swooshed out of his lungs as the German sentry he'd spoken to earlier smashed a rifle butt into his kidneys from behind. Rossett's brain started to shut down as he tried to turn to face the source of the blow to his back and also keep hold of the Gestapo man.

Bang!

The rifle butt slammed in again, and this time his legs crumpled and he sank to his knees. The Gestapo officer pulled free and produced a pistol from his pocket which he levelled at Rossett's head. The thought crossed Rossett's mind for the briefest of moments that he was about to be shot as around him the crowd were yelping and pushing each other to get as far away as they could.

He realised he'd lost his grip on Jacob, and he searched, head spinning, tunnel vision setting in, trying to rise up from where he crouched on all fours on the pavement, trying to swallow down the pain in his kidneys and, most importantly, trying not to get shot.

He looked back to the Gestapo man, who was regaining some composure now that he had a pistol in his hand.

"Nehmen Sie diesen Mann fest."

"I don't speak German." Rossett was blowing hard, the air slowly returning to his lungs. "I'm fucking English, you Kraut."