

CHAPTER ONE

If Peter Lanchester had any notion of appearing incongruous as he strode down the Reeperbahn, it did not show, while he was also self-possessed enough to ignore the looks he was getting from the inhabitants of the city of Hamburg. No strangers to eccentricity, they nevertheless rarely saw a man dressed in a bowler hat, let alone a thick beige overcoat called a 'British Warm', standard dress for off-duty British Army officers and perfect protection against a biting north-east wind.

The tightly rolled umbrella would be seen as sensible in a port that sat in the broad funnel of the River Elbe, which frequently brought in foul weather from the North Sea. If not that, a Baltic tempest could come racing across the flatlands of Holstein, either to drench the city or scar the flesh with a Siberian wind. As Lanchester made his way, a careful ear would have noted some symmetry in the tattoo of the brass ferrule striking the pavement in rhythm with the heels of his

highly polished black Oxfords; sensed, perhaps, this fellow, wearing a striped military tie, was either a serving or an ex-soldier.

The bar he was seeking looked dingy from the outside, and entry into the dim interior did little to elevate the first impression. Hat off now – Lanchester was, after all, an officer and a gentleman – he ignored the slobbish fellow who sought to guide him to a table and made his way to a point where he could survey the far-from-spacious room, to peer through eyes stung by the smoke-laden atmosphere, the product of numerous cigarettes and too many cheap cigars.

Most of the tables were occupied, but having identified the man he was looking for, and observing he was in deep conversation with another, Lanchester chose a table for himself. He took the precaution of flapping a lazy hand across the chair before sitting down, and even more care not to put any part of him, including his calfskin gloves, on the little round table, much scratched and sticky with dried alcohol. His hat he placed on his upright brolly.

The champagne bottle, two glasses and a bill appeared before his bottom hit the velvet-covered, gilt-painted chair; the overweight and overmade-up whore was sitting opposite him a second after, leering with a mouth full of misshapen teeth, elbows on the table and her cavernous cleavage pushed forward, trying in German to sound seductive while wafting in his direction a mixture of bad breath and cheap perfume.

The temptation to rake his brolly across the table and remove the bottle and glasses was one he had to resist, but the presence of the prostitute he could not abide, being too fastidious a fellow for her type. So, sure she would understand a modicum of English in one of the world's busiest trading ports, he told her, in his very clipped tones, to 'fuck off!'.

That she reacted so badly was unfortunate, producing a stream of loud German invective, which drew unwelcome attention, in particular that of the man he had come to see. The eyes flicked over him and he knew he had been recognised: when you have fought in battle alongside a fellow his features never fade. But Lanchester was pleased Cal Jardine did not react in any special way; he looked over and then looked away with an unhurried turn of the head.

Picking up the open champagne bottle Lanchester perused the label, which told him it was a non-vintage Ruinart, which, if true, would indicate a decent brew. Curiosity, and a conviction it was false, had him pour a drop and hold it up to one of the dim wall lights, wondering if he would see any bubbles, his suspicions confirmed when none appeared. He waved to the man who had served it and he came waddling over, his hands clasped before him.

‘*Sprechen Sie English?*’

‘*Ja*, a leetle.’

‘Good,’ Lanchester said, lifting the champagne bottle. ‘Take away this rubbish and bring me something decent to drink.’

‘Is fine champagne, *mein Herr*.’

‘It is shit, old boy, and most certainly not champagne. Now, be a good chap and do as I bid. Dish me up a Moselle of the quality Herr Jardine over there might drink. Oh, and when you bring it, make sure it is unopened, *verstehen Sie?*’

The waiter, who was either naturally greasy or inclined to excessive perspiration – Lanchester had mentally named him ‘the slob’ – looked him up and down; he was a fellow accustomed to a rougher clientele: merchant seamen, local riff-raff and the like, but it was impossible to equate the elegance of the man he was observing with them. Everything about him, from the toe of his gleaming shoes,

through the sharp crease on his trousers, to the neat, swept-back and barbered black hair, marked him out as very different. The face, with its somewhat severe features – well-defined nose, high cheekbones and direct, black eyes – merely added to the overall impression of one who was accustomed to getting his way.

‘And please do not try to cheat me, old son, or you’ll find yourself occupying a cell in Davidstraße.’

The eyes of the slob narrowed, trying to figure out, Lanchester supposed, if in mentioning the St Pauli police station he was bluffing. The slight smile he wore was designed to hint at assurance and it worked; the man nodded and went to do as he was asked.

Cal Jardine, having finished his conversation, was now showing his companion out of the club, passing by Lanchester’s table as he did so, but he avoided looking at him until the fellow was through the door and he was coming back, this coinciding with the arrival of a long-necked, brown wine bottle, taken from the slob by Jardine, who looked at the label. He rattled off a stream of German, sending the waiter scurrying away once more.

‘I’ve ordered something better, Peter, something you will enjoy.’

‘I have to say, Cal, the old German sounds very proper.’

‘Just back in the groove, Peter; remember, I was partly raised in Germany.’

‘As well as most other places on the bally Continent, I seem to recall. Happy to stay here, are we, with what is going on, Nazis and all that?’

‘I have commitments that keep me here.’

‘Are you going to sit down, Cal? I do so hate looking up at people, it makes me feel as if I’m back at school.’

Jardine sat down as the slob returned, with a bottle poking out

of an ice bucket, two glasses, one of which was picked up to see if it was clean, that followed by a sharp nod which sent the man away. While that was happening, Peter Lanchester, in the way of a man who has not seen someone for years, examined Jardine, still a handsome bugger he thought, with the build of the rugby back row he had once been, a hard man who lived a testing life, the face lean, with the scars to prove it faintly evident on brow and jaw.

Then the piercing blue eyes, under those pale eyebrows and lashes, were on him. 'Let's leave it to chill, Peter, shall we, and while it does perhaps you will tell me what the hell you are doing here in Hamburg?'

'Why, Cal, old boy, I have come to find you. I was told this was where you did business and it seems I was correctly informed, though I have to say it is not the most salubrious emporium I have ever been in.'

'I prefer discretion to decor, Peter, and this is very discreet.'

'As is the whole area, Cal. Working out of the red-light district seems to suit you. Still smuggling out the Yids?'

'Don't you mean the Jews?'

'Same difference.'

'No, Peter, one is a race, the other an insult.'

'Odd, I thought it was halfway to being a language.'

'Peter, I don't have much time.'

'Business is brisk, then?'

'More truthful to say it is looming. So?'

'Simple, Cal. Certain worthy people at home require a disreputable character to do an honourable thing, and I advised them you rather fit the bill, you being a multilinguist and something of an adventurer. It also has to be a chap with certain military skills, which you also possess.'

‘I no longer serve His Majesty’s Government. I sent in my papers, remember, several years ago.’

‘It’s not HMG, Cal, which makes you perfect for what we have in mind. I believe the word is “deniable”, which sounds like one of those dreadful new Americanisms to me. But you are still a soldier at heart.’

‘I left the army a while back, Peter.’

‘In a fit of pique I seem to recall.’

‘I prefer to see it as righteous anger.’

‘Do you think that wine is chilled yet?’

Jardine took a waiter’s friend from his pocket and cut through the seal with the small blade, before inserting the corkscrew and easing out the cork, which he sniffed at, then nodded. A drop was poured into the glass closest to him to be swirled and examined before his nose went into the top and took several sniffs. He tasted it with a sort of sucking sound before swallowing. Satisfied, he filled Lanchester’s glass, then his own.

‘Cheers,’ Lanchester said, lifting his glass high.

‘*Slange*.’

‘Still the model Caledonian, Cal.’ Lanchester also sniffed the wine before swirling it once more to take a sip. ‘I say, old boy, this is rather fine.’

‘I have to tell you that, whatever you have come to see me about, I am very busy.’

‘Too busy, old boy – I’m afraid Herr Hitler’s minions are on to you.’

‘I’m not doing anything illegal.’

‘When did that ever matter in a fascist dictatorship? And, if my reading of these recently promulgated Nuremberg laws is correct, you are sailing very close to the wind.’

‘All I am doing is helping Jews to get out of Germany.’

‘With everything they possess, Callum, which will not please the Finance Ministry. They prefer that when the Yids . . . sorry, the Jews, decamp to safer climes, they leave behind most of their worldly goods. Also, the idea that you are making pots of money from it . . .’

‘Who told you I was making pots of money?’

‘Little birds twitter, old boy.’

Cal Jardine looked around the dingy club. ‘Then why am I operating out of this dump? If I had any money, Peter, I would have a cavernous office overlooking the Binnenalster.’

‘This wine was not cheap.’

‘This wine was a gift from a grateful client. There are some things even I decline to get out of the country unseen.’

‘So you’re Robin Hood?’

‘No, but neither am I the Sheriff of Nottingham. I do charge a fee out of principle, also because I have to live, and as well as that I have to make payments to certain people, like the fellow you saw me talking to when you came in.’

‘Shipping agent or ship’s captain?’

‘None of your business, Peter, and if you don’t mind me asking, what are you up to these days?’

‘This and that, Cal, but I was asked to do this little errand because we are friends.’

‘Never really friends, Peter.’

‘Soldiers together, then, and fighting the good fight. It was felt that, since you know me, you might listen to what I have to say; not, I am sure you will agree, something for which you have a sterling reputation.’

‘I always listen, Peter, it’s just that I so often disagree with what

is being proposed, like dropping bombs on women and children in undefended Arab villages to pacify them.'

'Let's not get into that, Cal,' Lanchester insisted wearily, as the phone behind the bar began to ring. 'It is now so sterile. Britannia has departed Iraq, so they are now happily murdering each other instead of engaging us to do it for them.'

'We left the Iraqis with a deep and justifiable bitterness.'

'You see everything as black and white – Manichean, in fact.'

'While you, Peter, and your like, don't see human when you see black, brown or anyone who does not ascribe to the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican faith.'

'Look, Cal, there are things about which you and I will never agree; let us just accept that, shall we? But I have come to tell you that you are in some danger, and also that I carry a proposal for a certain task, which given your well-known prejudices, or as you choose to call them, your principles, will be right up your street. Besides, your name and activities are so well known you are going to have to get out of Germany.'

The slob finally picked up the ringing phone.

'You think they are planning to deport me?'

'No, Cal, our information is that they are planning to arrest and incarcerate you.'

The phone was jammed down and the slob moved with surprising speed to whisper in Jardine's ear. If he had a sense of urgency, the man he communicated with showed none.

'That, Peter, was my contact at the local Nazi Party office.' That got a high-raised eyebrow. 'Money well spent.'

'And there's me thinking the Party members were pure and honest.'

‘Purity and poverty find it hard to coexist, especially for a widow with three children.’

‘An attractive widow, I suppose?’

‘Ravishing! Apparently there is a squad of Brownshirts on their way to pick me up, though not, it seems, to hand me in to the authorities.’

‘I have to say, old boy, I thought you had more time.’

‘It wasn’t you that put the Germans on to me, was it?’

‘Perish the thought.’

‘We have to leave, now.’

‘Correction, Cal, it is you who has to leave. I have done nothing.’

‘How little you know the country, Peter. There could be someone in this bar watching us, and since you were the last person to speak to the man who has now disappeared . . .’

‘Are you going to disappear?’

‘Without haste, yes. You coming, or are you going to wait to be interrogated?’

‘Probably best, pity to leave the wine, though.’

‘Let’s take the bottle,’ Jardine said, with that seductive, lopsided grin Lanchester remembered so well: the one, and he resented this, that seemed to weaken women’s knees more readily than his own biting wit.

Jardine stood up in a way that ensured the bottle was hidden behind his back. Peter Lanchester, taking his pace from his fellow countryman, rose slowly, hat and broly in hand, and followed Jardine as he sauntered towards the back of the room. As soon as he was seen to move in that direction, a brutish-looking type, with a square head and a flattened nose under a narrow forehead, rose to cut across his path.

Cal approached him in a casual manner and, as soon as he was close enough, he swung hard, hitting the thug with the bottle, taking him across the upper cheek, where it broke and cut him; then, bottle dropped, he kicked him in the groin before, as he fell forward, swiping him with a haymaker on the side of the ear to fell him. Behind the two Britons, the rest of the clientele was getting out fast.

‘I say, old boy,’ said Lanchester, this while Jardine put the boot in until the fellow lay bleeding and comatose. ‘You have not lost your barbarian touch.’

‘It a rough old town, Hamburg,’ Callum said, as he stepped over the body, carrying on until they came to the foot of a set of steep stairs by a closed door.

‘Just your sort of place, then.’

‘Wait here, Peter, I have one or two things to collect.’

Callum Jardine took the stairs two at a time, with Lanchester calling after him, ‘I hope it’s not one of those ugly tarts that use the upstairs rooms, old boy.’

Lanchester opened the door and, bending forward, looked out before exiting into a narrow alleyway, where he donned his bowler. He was still there when Cal Jardine reappeared wearing a Burberry trench coat and carrying a large Gladstone bag. With a gesture he indicated that Lanchester should follow him and they made their way down the alley and out onto the wide avenue of the Reeperbahn.

‘Cab rank, over there.’

‘You armed?’

Jardine patted a bulging trench coat pocket. ‘Just a precaution, Peter.’

They were crossing the street when the open-topped truck appeared, loaded with burly SA Brownshirts, the street-fighting thugs

of the Third Reich. Cal turned his face away until they got into a cab, then with the door closed and a hand shielding his face, he watched as the Brownshirts jumped down and ran into the dingy bar, each one carrying a club or a cosh.

‘Where are you staying, Peter?’

‘Kaiserhof.’

‘*Altona Bahnhof, bitte,*’ Callum said to the driver. ‘Might I suggest you ring and request them to send your luggage back to England? Ask how much the bill is, including carriage, and say you will send a cheque.’

‘Why the train?’

Callum Jardine just smiled. ‘So what is this honourable job?’

‘Abyssinia. The Italians are gearing themselves up to invade and the poor fuzzy-wuzzies will struggle to boot them out.’

‘They did it before.’

‘The Battle of Adowa was forty years ago, Cal, and Mussolini is a different kettle of fish altogether. Officially HMG’s policy is to work through the League of Nations, and before you say what a lot of good that will do, I will say the folk I represent wholeheartedly agree with you. The League is a toothless tiger, but Stanley Baldwin knows the British electorate will not tolerate anything that smells of war, quite apart from the fact that challenging Italy might drive Il Duce into the arms of Hitler, which is inimical to British foreign policy.’

‘I seem to remember the British Foreign Office to be a murderous beast, Peter.’

‘They believe in *realpolitik*, Cal, as the Huns are wont to say, but there are others less concerned with that who are prepared to act. We need to get some modern weaponry into Abyssinia and damned

quick, and we would like you to both buy it and deliver it.'

'You seem very sure I can do this.'

'Don't be modest, Cal, you've run guns in the past.'

The taxi pulled up outside the railway station and they both got out, Jardine paying the driver and giving him an overly lavish tip. Entering the concourse, walking quickly, he made straight for a side exit, calling to Lanchester to pass his bowler, which he did. Callum Jardine then dropped it into the first litter bin they passed.

'I say, Callum old boy, I bought that in Jermyn Street at no little cost.'

'Too distinctive and Messrs Bates and Company will happily sell you a replacement. That taxi driver, who I tipped excessively, will be questioned and he will not only recall two Englishmen, one of them wearing a very distinctive hat, but will tell them we came here. They, I hope, will then assume we have made for somewhere like Copenhagen, given the trains to there run from Altona.'

'And we're not.'

'No.'

'You have a safe route out?'

Jardine had opened his Gladstone bag to produce a woollen muffler, which he handed to a companion who did not have to be told to put it on. 'I wouldn't be much of a Scarlet Pimpernel if I had no way to save myself, Peter – more than one, in fact.' Jardine then put a couple of pfennigs into his hand and indicated a phone booth. 'Now, you have just time to make that call to your hotel.'

'And then?'

'Certain things have to be brought forward.'

'Your Jews?'

'That fellow you saw me talking to when you came in is, if all

goes to plan, going to take us all to Rotterdam. You might just get a chance to learn a little Yiddish in the next few days.'

Lanchester was on his way to the phone when he stopped and turned back, his look curious. 'What about your paramour, Cal, the widow, your contact in the party office – is she to be left to her own fate after tipping you off?'

'The call she made will have been from a public phone, Peter, and Lette always knew this was possible. She will find another man to comfort her, and if you'd ever seen her you would know it will not be long in the coming.'

'A little callous perhaps?'

'Make your call.'

CHAPTER TWO

Hamburg was a great, bustling city and also an international trading port full of seamen from all over the world. It was therefore a perfect place to avoid detection: even if rendered curious, no one overreacted to a strange face, a different voice or odd clothing, so there was little risk in travelling to wherever Jardine was headed. He bought a newspaper, a copy of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, flicking quickly through the pages before handing it to Lanchester.

‘It’s unlikely anyone in Hamburg will trouble you if you’re reading that rag. Old Adolf is not held in high esteem hereabouts.’

‘And here we are in England, convinced the entire German nation adores him.’

‘What you have to worry about, Peter, is all the idiots in England who admire him and his mode of governance.’

‘Where are we going?’

‘It would do no good for me to say, since you don’t know the city, and let us stop speaking in English, shall we?’

They travelled by bus, crowded given it was the end of the working day, boarding separately and sitting apart. Lanchester was at the rear, the newspaper held open to hide his face, though he kept a watch out of the corner of his eye, while trying simultaneously to decipher the stories in the Nazi Party’s daily house journal, the banner headlines screaming abuse at the ‘International Jewish Conspiracy’ being the easiest to unravel.

The bus wended its way through various streets of Altona – wide boulevards of tall buildings, deep pavements lined with trees – until Jardine stood up. Lanchester waited a few seconds before doing likewise and joining him on the step, staying separate still as they alighted, though heading in the same direction along an avenue lined with small shops. Jardine stopped by a public phone while Lanchester moved past to idly examine a pillar plastered with posters full of warnings and exhortations from the Propaganda Ministry, vaguely aware that his companion had dialled more than once; in fact he did so three times.

‘Code was it?’ he asked, once Jardine joined him.

‘A simple method, using the stories in the newspaper. Pick one on a page, refer to it and that page number is the key to the meeting place, one of half a dozen. You have to assume every *Judenhaus* is being watched, even if only by a nosy neighbour. Maybe a phone is being tapped, so no names either. My contact will come to meet me at a coffee bar, which is the designated number.’

‘Might he not be followed?’

‘He’s good at avoidance.’

The coffee house in question was cramped and had no chairs,

just a series of small, high, round tables at which a customer could stand, a commonplace in Germany, which Lanchester, in a whisper, condemned as comparing unfavourably with a Lyons Corner House.

‘I agree, Peter, but the coffee is so much better.’

‘Too strong for me, old boy, and no pretty Nippies to serve us and tickle our fancy with thoughts of illicit carnality, quite apart from the fact that I prefer tea.’

Two cups were consumed before Jardine’s contact arrived, his appearance – slim, athletic, with blond, near-white hair and blue eyes – giving Lanchester cause to wonder, not helped by the loud and very obvious way he greeted Jardine, returned without the use of a name by either. Another round of coffee was procured and then the two heads came together over the top of the table while Lanchester made a show of once more trying to read his paper. After a few minutes the contact left and at a nod from Jardine they exited a few paces behind to follow him.

‘Your chum looks the perfect Aryan, I must say.’

‘One hundred per cent Jewish, Peter; they’re not all ginger hair and ringlets.’

‘And he is taking us to?’

‘A safe house, where there is a family waiting to be helped to leave the country.’

‘I assume they are Jews and filthy rich?’

‘Wealthy, yes, but not as well off now as they ought to be. They are members of a family that have been in Germany for nearly three hundred years, since the time of Fredrick the Great; in fact, the Ephraims were his bankers during the Seven Years’ War. If we were in Berlin I could show you the house they were allowed to build, the first of its kind in the city and quite famous. Over time the family have

bred and spread. This branch owned the department store and several other businesses in Königsberg.'

'Owned?'

'The local Nazis kicked them out of it without so much as a pfennig in compensation, but that's East Prussia for you. The further east you go the worse the anti-Semitism gets.'

'It's the way of the world, Cal.'

'Is it? Papa Ephraim has an Iron Cross, First Class, which he got fighting us at Third Ypres. He was a major in the Imperial German Army and now he's a sort of non-person.'

'One is sorry for the Jews, of course, but they have brought some of it on themselves.'

'Have they? By being prudent when others were blind? By being strong families and good neighbours, a community who looked after each other when times were hard? Does it not occur to you they might have a superior way of living their lives than us?'

'Have you converted, old boy?'

'You know me, Peter, I don't believe in anybody's God. It's about the only thing I share with Adolf Hitler. Have you read *Mein Kampf*?'

'Good Lord, no!'

'I suggest you do, because it will tell you what the next twenty years are going to be like and, if we don't stop these bastards, the next thousand years. The Kaiser was bad enough but this bugger is worse. He's a criminal leader running a criminal government and they will kill anyone who they do not like. I am doing my little bit to thwart him.'

While listening to this Lanchester had been casting his eyes about, across to the other side of the street and behind, his attention being taken by two men in dark double-breasted suits and big hats whose pace and route matched theirs.

‘You always were destined for sainthood, Cal, but I must tell you I think we are being followed, or maybe it’s your blond chum.’

‘We are and he is, Peter, by people who are there to make sure no one else is doing the same. If they speed up and pass us that is a signal to disperse, so we will take the next turning and make contact later.’

‘And your blue-eyed boy up ahead?’

‘Can take care of himself.’

‘How organised is this?’

‘Well enough to work, but they will need to find someone who is not Jewish to replace me.’ Jardine grinned. ‘Perhaps HMG will send someone.’

‘No fear,’ Lanchester replied, doing nothing to keep the distaste out of his voice. ‘I hope your charges are not headed for Blighty.’

‘Where else would they go but to the Mother of Democracy?’

‘We’ve got quite enough bloody refugees already. I don’t suppose you will take my advice to quit while you are still ahead, Cal. Don’t hang about, just go.’

‘No, when what you’re saying, Peter, is leave these people to their fate.’

‘Why did I say “sainthood” when I meant “martyrdom”?’

That made Jardine laugh, which he was still doing as the blue-eyed boy turned and entered a recessed doorway in a long mansion block, the front door open still when the two Brits got to the bottom step. Lanchester followed as his companion skipped up and into a dark oak-floored hallway, smelling strongly of polish.

He was then led towards the rear of the block to where a slightly ajar door took them into a well-appointed apartment full of good, heavy furniture, the seats of which were occupied by a middle-aged couple and four children of various ages. As they entered, the man

stood up, his face carrying an anxious look of uncertainty, while the mother wrung her hands, clearly very frightened.

‘Herr Jardine?’ he enquired, in the way one does, Lanchester registered, when one is meeting someone for the first time.

The subsequent conversation, in rapid German, left him isolated, so he occupied himself in examining the furnishings, dark, ponderous and of the imperial age. He was aware that, on entering, there had not been that thing on the door lintel containing a prayer, the name of which he could not recall, which he had been told graced the home of every Jew.

This was not a Yiddish household, and as if to underline that, there was a large portrait on the wall of old Paul von Hindenburg, Reich Chancellor of Germany before Hitler, as usual in his medal-bedecked field marshal’s uniform, and looking so bulge-eyed and ferocious it was as if someone had a tight hold on his ancient balls.

Interest turned to the family: the father, talking to Cal, was grey-haired, with soft eyes and pale skin, the rather plump, fair-haired woman and her handsome children listening intently. The eldest, a girl, was strikingly beautiful, with dark eyes, flawless skin, clad in an elegant grey suit, and he guessed her to be of marriageable age, which earned her a smile intended to be disarming. In reply he received a glare and a dismissive toss of her head. Then she looked back to Jardine and that look softened considerably.

Has a soft spot for the lad, Lanchester thought, and on first sight! That was not an entirely happy reflection, given he had always seemed to play second fiddle in the lady-chasing stakes to the bugger.

Of the three boys, two were in their mid teens, while the last looked about twelve. All were well dressed and groomed, with that carefully barbered look that comes from wealth and an abundance of servants,

leaving Lanchester with the general impression that they did not look overtly Levantine. He was also aware he was being introduced into the conversation and his presence explained.

What followed was more disputative, and from what words could be picked up it had to do with what Jardine thought they could safely carry, the young girl entering the fray being especially upset at what she was being told, eyes flashing under pretty lashes and the long fingers of her pale white hands used to emphasise her disagreements, with one of her brothers telling her, in words and gestures Lanchester did comprehend, to cease being so selfish.

‘Having a spot of bother, old boy?’

‘I’ve told them we must cut down on what they can take with them,’ Cal replied.

‘I rather gathered the drift of that. What’s the normal drill?’

‘A small vanload is usual, but I have said anything except what can be carried has to be left and that does not run to trunks full of clothing. We dare not expose others to potential arrest, given we have no idea what the police or the Gestapo know.’

The word ‘Gestapo’ made the mother put a hand to her mouth. ‘And it is not going down well?’

There was no need for Cal to answer that, while Lanchester was aware the girl was glaring at him as though he was the cause of the change, so he deliberately looked at her legs in a wolfish way that had her pushing her skirt forward to ensure the knees were fully covered.

‘We are going to have to get into the docks without being seen,’ Cal insisted, ‘which means we can’t go through the main gates as planned, pretending to be normal passengers.’

‘False documents, I take it?’

‘Yes, but if they are on a special alert they might not pass muster,

and our friends, when seeking out Jews, have a very simple method of establishing their religion.'

The girl was still arguing with her father, though in a hushed, assertive tone, so Lanchester said, 'I should tell Bonny Lass what will happen to her if the Gestapo get their hands on her. Never mind them examining her father's cock, I doubt the interracial sex laws will hold when they see her in her smalls. I have to say I wouldn't mind interrogating her myself.'

'It's my job to help them, Peter, not terrify them.'

'I was thinking of getting the sods to behave, on the very good grounds that we, I suspect, will be going out by the same route as they.'

'Correct.'

The argument was not swift and it was not without raised voices, which reminded Callum Jardine of the aperçu that two Jews in an argument were always good for at least three opinions, but eventually what he was insisting on seemed to be reluctantly accepted. A time was arranged and he signalled to Lanchester they could leave by the mere act of lifting his Gladstone bag. They exited to the sound of raised voices.

'Now they can argue about who has to give up what!'

The next bus journey was longer and involved a change, taking them over the wide River Elbe to the endless warehouses and docks of Germany's premier port, running along a series of high walls that enclosed the whole area until they alighted at what looked like a set of main gates. As soon as the bus disappeared Jardine spun round and led Lanchester away, walking quickly.

'Even you can't get through those main gates without papers, Peter.'

‘A British passport generally does the trick, old boy.’

‘Not without a seaman’s discharge book or a valid passenger ticket, and you must have realised by now how strict the Germans are about one having the right papers.’

‘Bloody nightmare, they behave as if everyone is an enemy of the state.’

‘In Hitler’s world everyone is.’

They walked a fair distance, all the while keeping to the dockyard wall until they came to a long street, dead straight and full of muddled, grimy warehouses, with Jardine slipping into the doorway of one, dropping his Gladstone, telling Lanchester to wait as he went ahead.

‘If anyone approaches me, whatever they are dressed in, take that bag and make yourself scarce.’

‘And then?’

‘British consulate’s your best bet; I take it you know where that is?’

‘I’ll find it.’

‘As I said before, I have no idea what the Gestapo know about me and my activities.’ That was followed by a very direct look. ‘You might know more about that than I do.’

‘Bits and bobs, Cal, that’s all I have.’

‘You knew enough to warn me I was about to be raided and I am curious as to how you got that information.’

‘A chap in the Berlin embassy, I was at school with him, passed on the stuff about you, but I hardly think this is the place to enquire about such things.’

‘So?’

‘As far as I know, you are under suspicion, Cal, but how deep that goes . . .’ Lanchester shrugged. ‘My chum did not expect you to be

fingered so soon, but he intimated it would not be weeks before you were arrested and that I should warn you to scarper.'

'Perhaps you were the cause.'

'Can't think why.'

'Perhaps they thought you were a Jew, Peter.'

'Me?'

Amused by the shock, Jardine added, 'If I am not intercepted I will go in a doorway about fifty yards along. Wait a few minutes before following me and call out your name when you arrive.'

Jardine's shoes echoed off the street cobbles and the high buildings as he walked along the street. About a hundred yards on some people were still working, well past the usual hour, loading a lorry, while the other warehouses seemed to have shut up shop for the day, giving the street a deserted air.

He knew that could be false and mentally he was working out the odds: those Brownshirts in the Reeperbahn did not matter – they tended to be dense thugs – but if the Gestapo was on his trail, and it would be wise to assume they were, then they would not want to take just him, they would want to catch him in the act of smuggling out Jews. Cue a diplomatic protest to HMG about British nationals interfering in Germany's internal affairs and embarrassment all round.

The Ephraim family would be coming by car within the hour, and if this place were being watched, the Gestapo would wait and try to take them as well, giving them a banner headline locally about treacherous Jews being aided by outsiders. Common sense told Jardine that Peter Lanchester was right: he should walk away; the risk to him came from being here when they arrived. The Dutch captain he had already paid and he would not care if his passengers were two people or eight.

‘Why is it,’ he murmured to himself, as he pulled out a set of door keys, ‘I have never had any common sense?’

It was an office of sorts, dirty walls in need of fresh whitewash, a ceiling with holes big enough to show the naked wooden laths, a desk and a chair set against the back wall alongside a battered wooden filing cabinet and an excessively large cupboard, all sitting on plain floorboards. Once inside he checked for signs of entry: an oil lamp just behind the door, so that if it was opened too wide oil would leak onto the boards to create a stain impossible to remove; little scraps of folded paper in odd places; a hair spat on, then stuck to a filing cabinet drawer, and inside that an open ink bottle, precariously balanced, that required his inserted fingers to keep in place.

Lanchester saw Jardine disappear, which made more acute his examination of the street: he too could see those loading that lorry in a desultory fashion, but they had not paused or looked in Jardine’s direction. No one had emerged from any of the other buildings along the way, these observations being made as he was harbouring the same notions as the man he had come to Hamburg to find.

He could just go and leave Jardine to it, the danger to him if he left was minimal – how could he be arrested for merely talking to a fellow countryman? That was until he recalled this was Hitler’s Germany, a country where the rule of law did not apply. Besides, he had a job to do, so after the required interval, he picked up the Gladstone bag and made his way to the doorway, heart in mouth, croaking his name at the panelling.

‘What is this place?’ he asked as soon as he was inside, the act of brushing his sleeves in such a grubby location an automatic one.

The smell was of musty and disturbed dust, made worse as Jardine

lifted a worn blind to reveal a grimy window from which he could watch the street.

‘The way out of Germany, Peter. There’s a tunnel under the dockyard wall that we have kept as our exit in an emergency. Smugglers built it during the last war to get contraband in from Sweden and they brought it back into use when the Nazis banned certain imports. Being kindly disposed, they have given us the use of it as a one-off way out.’

‘Black marketeers?’ Jardine nodded. ‘They would not be Jewish by any chance?’

‘There are plenty of Aryans up to the same tricks.’

‘Except Aryans, even criminal ones, are less likely to be watched.’

Jardine looked at his watch. ‘We have a little time to chat now, Peter, so why don’t you tell me what it is you came to Hamburg to propose?’

‘I told you.’

‘You told me what you wanted, but not who wanted it done.’

‘I think that is better left till we are safely out of here.’

‘Don’t prevaricate, Peter,’ Jardine snapped, going to his Gladstone bag and, on opening it, producing a Mauser pistol, which he passed to Lanchester, followed by a clip of bullets. ‘I take it you still know how to use one of these.’

‘I do, but I have a strong disinclination to employ them in the situation in which we find ourselves.’

‘Last resort, Peter; best to leave a couple of dead secret policemen behind us than end up in somewhere like Dachau.’

‘Where and what is Dachau?’

‘It’s a special prison for enemies of the state, but just be satisfied it’s not a place you would want to visit.’ Jardine pushed the chair

towards Lanchester and sat on the edge of the desk. 'Now please answer my question.'

Lanchester clicked in the clip of bullets, having first checked the safety was on. 'The idea was that I would take you back to Blighty to meet a group of people who share your concerns.'

'And you, Peter?' That got a raised eyebrow. 'You don't strike me as a knight in shining armour. Quite the reverse, in fact.'

'I am a messenger, Cal, what I believe is irrelevant.'

'Funny that, Peter, I always had you down as someone who lacked beliefs.'

'It makes for a contented life.'

Jardine went to stand by the window, far enough back from it to not be observed. 'My question?'

'I represent a group of people who think that unchecked fascism is a danger to our national security.'

'Can't fault that.'

'But they are not in government.'

'Churchill?'

'Most folk think he's just a mad old warmonger.'

'That's not an answer.'

'It will do for now, old boy.'

'You said a group of people?'

'An eclectic mix who think if we back Ethiopia and put a stopper on Mussolini it will make Hitler think twice about disturbing the peace.'

'It won't, but I need names.'

'Not yet, Cal, just take my word for it they exist and that the funds are available to aid the world's underdogs.'

'Most people I know think Fatso Mussolini is a genius for making

the Italian trains run on time, especially those with a few quid and no brains. They are the same ones who admire Adolf and think Britain would be better off with someone like him in charge. You know the type, shoot a few miners and the world will be safe.'

'Shall we leave politics out of it for now?'

'If you insist, but guns cost a lot of money and they are not easy to come by without everyone knowing about it, the arms trade being somewhat incestuous by nature.'

As he was speaking, Jardine went to the door and, opening it, peered out just enough to look along the street. When he looked back at Lanchester it was with a less than happy face.

'What's wrong?'

'That lorry, they are taking far too long to load it.'